

jnanadeepa

Pune Journal of Religious Studies

Pope Francis Relevance for Today

Volume 22/1

January-June 2018

Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune

www.jdv.edu.in

Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies

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Jnanadeepa (= "Light of Wisdom" pronounced as *Gyanadeepa*) is a biannual interdisciplinary journal of religious studies from an Indian Christian perspective. It is closely associated With Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth: Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Religion, Pune 411 014, India.

Jnanadeepa is published biannually, in January and July. Views expressed by the writers are not necessarily those of the editors. Manuscripts submitted for publication should be original and cannot be returned (writers' style sheet is available on request); they could be sent (preferably as a Word or RTF and PDF files) or through E-mail as file attachment.

All **correspondence** (requests for subscriptions, manuscripts, books for review-two copies, please exchange copies of journals, advertisements, etc.) to:

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Subscriptions could be sent from India either by Money Order or demand Draft. From foreign countries International Money Order or Crossed Cheque is preferred. From Commonwealth countries British Postal Order is preferred. All payments (Cheque, drafts, etc. are to be made in the name of *Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth*.

Typeset & Print: JDV Computer Centre

Publisher: Kuruvilla Pandikattu for Jnana Deepa Publications.

Subscription Rates

Country	One Year	Three Years
India	₹ 150	₹ 400
SAARC Countries	₹ 240	₹ 650
Other Countries (Air Mail)	\$ 25 (€ 25)	\$ 55 (€ 55)
Institutional Rate	\$ 50 (€ 45)	\$ 110 (€ 110)

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Editorial: Pope Francis: Relevance for Today

Pope Francis has become the conscience of the world. No wonder then, he is the most talked about person in the world today. Wherever he goes he draws a large crowd of people who recognize in him a spiritual leader who epitomizes in his life and articulates in his words to a great extent Jesus' vision of being a human in this world. He believes that human beings can experience the true meaning of human existence and be joyful witnesses of the gospel values of love, justice, freedom, compassion, equality, reconciliation in a society that discriminates humans on the basis of their religion, class, caste, gender and nationalities. He pleads with all people of good will to embrace a life of compassion and care for one another and nature trusting in a God who embraces everyone with infinite love and compassion.

When the world recognizes Pope Francis as a man of God and a religious leader with great authority to inspire, challenge, exhort everyone to live a life worthy of their human vocation and demand justice and fairness from governments and political leaders especially in dealing with the poor, the marginalized, the refugees and the migrants what impact has he on the Church? Certainly, his pastoral approach to the vexing problems of the Church is recognized and appreciated by a large majority of the members of the Church. His encyclicals, apostolic letters and exhortations breathe fresh air of pastoral

concern, simplicity and intelligibility that ordinary Christians and even people of other religions can easily comprehend. His universally acclaimed and widely discussed encyclical *Laudato Si'* is the best example of his clear and lucid articulation of the right relationship of humans with nature and the responsibility each human being has in caring for the earth. In matters dealing with faith and morals Pope Francis seems to have adopted a style of articulating his teaching using easily comprehensible theological terminologies and avoiding theological jargons as far as possible. He is trying to liberate the Church from an ecclesiastical Nestorianism which sees the Church dichotomized as an institution and as a spiritual reality as also from an ecclesiastical monophysitism which considers the Church only a spiritual reality.

The Vatican II Council's openness of the Church to the modern world and the post-Vatican II struggles to make the Church relevant to the world were finding road-blocks in the recent past as they found resistance from those who were alarmed with the changes that were taking place in the Church. In fact, those who resist any reform are said to be those who have some benefits from the existing system that they want to preserve. It is very clear that those who would resist any structural changes in the Vatican curia are probably not moved by any spiritual considerations but they fear the loss of their power with all its benefits. Those who resist any liturgical reforms, ecumenical efforts for unity in doctrinal and sacramental matters or inter-religious dialogue etc., are those who are afraid to lose their security and identity in exclusivism, arrogant absolutism and a static understanding of tradition. They resist growing up from their infantile faith to adult faith. Such groups of people including priests, bishops and even cardinals find it difficult to agree with the move of Pope Francis in reforming the Church as envisioned by the Vatican II Council. Resistance to any reform is understandable as some people are afraid to let go of something in which they

found certain security and certainty in the past even if it does not have the same significance any longer.

Trained in the school of Ignatian spirituality it is very important for Pope Francis to use the discernment of the spirits in every decision that he takes that affects the entire life of the Church. The objective criteria of discernment being the christological and ecclesiological congruity of the decisions that whether the decisions make the members of the Church become more identified with Jesus Christ and make the Church grow in communion find expression in Pope Francis' decisions and his vision of the Church. While concerned about living, safe-guarding and teaching the living tradition of the Church he exemplifies the human Jesus in his attitude, life-style and relationships. He recaptures and reaffirms the early Church's Christian identity as 'a community of believers with one heart and one soul' whose life-witness reveals that Jesus is still alive.

The overwhelmingly positive impact of Pope Francis on the Church's life is seen in his promotion of inclusivity, openness to dialogue with all humans of good will, compassionate pastoral approach to those who are marginalized in the Church and in the society, willingness to listen to all including those who oppose his views making it clear that the Church a true home for all who seek meaning in their lives. He has the courage and conviction that he can authoritatively speak to the leaders of the nations reminding of their bounden duty to care for the poor, the needy, the refugees and the migrants as well as for the nature. He walks the talk and makes the prophetic mission of Jesus alive even to those virulent critics of the Church who see the Church only an institution with enormous power, riches and world-wide influence. Pope Francis reveals the human face of the Church in which one can discover the human face of Christ.

The present issue of *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies* focuses on the life of Pope Francis and the impact of his papacy on the Church and the world. No other leadership in the world is as much discussed as the papal leadership of Pope Francis. With him the world has been once again awakened to look at the Church positively as a community that promotes life and humanizing values. A profile of Pope Francis is sketched in the first article of this issue of *Jnanadeepa* followed by an article that shows clearly the impact of Pope Francis on the world from the reports about the world-wide reception of Pope Francis and his views on the life and mission of the Church in the world of today. This is followed by the prophetic nature of Pope Francis' life and mission.

The next article of this issue, "Gazing at Our World with God's Eyes of Mercy: Pope Francis's Theological Vision" discusses the theological vision of Pope Francis emerging from his striking similarities with St. Francis of Assisi's love of poverty, enthusiasm to renew the Church, his love for nature and his willingness to dialogue with Muslims built on three pillars, namely, community, identity and mission. It is Trinitarian in its origin and end. The fifth article, "Pope Francis: Making a New History of Church Leadership" explains how Pope Francis' style of leadership is different from that of his predecessors, how it makes the Church credible in our times. Reading the signs of the times this paradigm-shift in exercising the ministry of papal leadership expresses the spirit and vision of the ecclesiology of Vatican II.

The next five articles of this issue deal with the themes discussed in the three important encyclicals of Pope Francis, namely, *Amoris Laetitia*, *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si'*. The article "Pope Francis' Moral and Pastoral Approach in *Amoris Laetitia*" highlights the significant evolutionary changes in Pope Francis' moral and pastoral outlook and how he challenges some widespread attitudes that everything is

solved by applying general rules or deriving undue conclusions from particular theological considerations without sufficient reflection or grounding. The article “Role of Laity in the Vision of Pope Francis” describes the new vision of the Church, as projected by Pope Francis through signs and symbols and words and actions and as expounded in his *Evangelii Gaudium*. Against the background of that vision, the laity’s role is spelt out on the basis of a study of Francis’ writings, interviews, homilies, messages, and discourses.

The article, “The Trinitarian and Christological Dimensions of Ecology in *Laudato Si* ’” explains how Pope Francis develops his theological vision on the essential relationship of humans with God and other humans and its implications for human’s relationship with nature based on the Trinitarian and Christic experience of God. The following article, “The Philosophical Foundations of the Encyclical *Laudato Si* ’ of Pope Francis” discusses the indirect influence of thinkers like Martin Buber, Martin Heidegger and Max Scheler on the encyclical *Laudato Si* ’ through Romano Guardini. The foundational philosophical vision of *Laudato Si* ’ is influenced by the critique of Martin Heidegger on the “machinational” interpretation of beings that subjugates humans and commodifies nature as well as Heidegger’s philosophical insights into the way of overcoming it. The last article of this issue, “Pope Francis and Science: A Healthy and Necessary Amalgamation for the 21st Century” discusses Pope Francis’ involvement with the world of science to show how he is open to learn from science and at the same time challenges it when it fails in its commitment to the total welfare of humanity and nature. The article also presents some of the insights from the encyclical *Laudato Si* ’ underlining the need to be responsible in protecting nature and realize the urgent need for integrating Science and Faith.

In the midst of various crises faced by the Church in the recent past God has raised up Pope Francis, a prophet for our

times, to make the Church a credible witness to the compassionate love of God. His life-style and theological vision, his pastoral heart for those who feel abandoned by the Church though its laws and regulations, his openness to everything human and his challenge to the entire Church to make itself the home for the marginalized make him an authentic vicar of Christ. Pope Francis's ministry of leadership with true authority challenges and devalues all forms of power and power structures that enslaves and dehumanizes. His life is his mission. Indeed a credible witness to Jesus Christ and his Kingdom values!

Jacob Parappally MSFS
Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ



Making of Pope Francis

Jacob Naluparayil MCBS

Smart Companion, Kochi

Abstract: Jorge Mario Bergoglio known as Pope Francis today is a unique gift to God. He stepped in at a moment when the Church was feeling very low with a dwindling self-esteem, fragile and defenseless, her moral authority challenged from within and out. He was chosen by God to guide his Church as a sacrament of God's mercy and forgiving love and to rejuvenate the Church to be powerful witness of God's kingdom. A brief life sketch of Pope Francis and an analysis of the events and experiences that molded and formed Pope Francis, a leader of unprecedented courage and qualities would show that this person is gifted to the Church by the Lord to renew the Church and re-awaken its mission to be the light and the salt of the earth. His self-awareness of his weaknesses and strengths, his complete trust in the providential care of the Lord and renewing power of the Spirit, his lived experience of Ignatian spirituality help him to guide the Church through dialogue, discernment and de-centralization. Pope Francis has brought in revolutionary change in Church, attitudes, approach and style in relating with those within the Church as well as outside the Church. In spite of considerable resistance, such attitudinal and stylistic changes have evoked greater confidence, hope and enthusiasm in the ordinary believers and a greater acceptance of Pope's spiritual and moral leadership by the entire world.

Keywords: Mercy, Dark Night of Soul, Dialogue, Discernment, De-centralisation

Introduction

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected the 266th Pope of the Catholic Church on 13 March 2013, following the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI. Bergoglio has opted to be called Pope Francis, in honour of Saint Francis of Assisi. He is the first Jesuit Pope, the first from the Southern Hemisphere, and the first non-European Pope since Pope Gregory III, 1272 years earlier.

Pope Francis is God's unique gift to the Church, in our times. In order to understand the 'surprise' that he is, we need to look back at the past four and a half years of his pontificate and the tremendous impact he has made on the various facets of the Church and on the world. What was the situation in the Church just before Jorge Bergoglio assumed the Chair of Peter? The scene was marred with growing unrest against the priests accused of pedophilia, the Curia in the shadow of blame regarding homosexuality, and to crown it all, the Vatileaks, which challenged the Church's moral power, and created a feeling of 'fence eating the crop.' Thus the Argentinean Pope stepped in at a moment when the Church was feeling very low with a dwindling self-esteem, fragile and defenseless, her moral authority challenged from within and out. However, within a short span of 4 ½ years he has succeeded to conquer the hearts of many, not only among the Catholics or Christians but globally, arousing assurances of hope in all categories of people. Pope Francis' language has been one of mercy and forgiveness, joy and welcome. As a result, the table has been turned over. As of now, the whole world keeps tuned to the moral voice of Pope Francis, especially at the wake of each fresh issue that has global implications. He is perceived as a leader who courageously yet compassionately and wisely analyses and delves into the moral dilemmas and humanitarian problems across the world.

The basic reason for such an amazing paradigm shift in the life of the Church has been due to the unique personality of Pope Francis and its unusual expressions, his extra-ordinary administrative talent and watchfulness. That is why this article is intent on understanding the making of this person called Pope Francis.

The article is comprised of two parts. The first considers in brief, the life sketch of Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the native of Buenos Aires, who later became Pope Francis. The second part is an analysis. We explore the events and experiences that molded and formed Pope Francis, a leader of unprecedented courage and qualities. Thus we concentrate on the ‘making of Pope Francis’, running through the significant turns and experiences in his life.

A Brief Life Sketch of Pope Francis

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on 17 December, 1936.¹ He was the eldest of the five children born to Mario José Bergoglio and Regina María Sívori. José was an Italian immigrant, employed as an accountant by the railways; his wife, a house-wife and a native of Buenos Aires belonged to a family of north Italian origin. In the sixth grade, Bergoglio attended Wilfrid Barón de los Santos Ángeles, a school run by the Salesians of Don Bosco, in Buenos Aires. He further attended the technical secondary school Escuela Nacional de Educación Técnica and graduated with a chemical technician’s diploma. He worked for a few years in the foods section at Hickethier-Bachmann Laboratory.² At the age of 21 he suffered from a life-threatening pneumonia and part of a lung was excised shortly afterwards, to do away with cysts.

1. Call to Priesthood

At first, Bergoglio entered the archdiocesan seminary, 'Immaculada Concepción,' in Villa Devoto, Buenos Aires City. Three years later, on 11 March 1958, he joined the Society of Jesus. At the conclusion of his novitiate on 12 March 1960, Bergoglio officially became a Jesuit, when he made the temporary religious profession of the vows.

During 1961-63, he studied Philosophy, graduating from the 'Colegio de San José' in San Miguel. From 1964 to 1965 he engaged a teacher of literature and psychology at The Immaculate Conception College in Santa Fé and in 1966 he taught the same subjects at the 'Colegio del Salvatore' in Buenos Aires. He studied Theology during the years 1967 to 70 graduating from the 'Colegio del San José'. He was ordained a priest on 13 December 1969, by the Archbishop Ramón José Castellano.

A Jesuit

Bergoglio completed his final stage of his spiritual formation as a Jesuit, the tertianship, at Alcalá de Henares, Spain during 1970-71, and took his perpetual vows in the Society of Jesus on 22 April 1973. Back in Argentina during 1971-72, he was appointed the novice master at 'Villa Barilari,' San Miguel and Professor at the Faculty of Theology of San Miguel.

He served as Provincial Superior of the Society of Jesus in Argentina from 31 July 1973 to 1979. After the completion of this term, in 1980, he was named the Rector of the Philosophical and Theological Faculty of 'San Miguel.' Before taking up this new appointment, he spent the first three months of 1980 in Dublin, Ireland, to learn English. He continued as Rector at 'San Miguel,' until 1986.³

He also spent few months at the Sankt Georgen Graduate School of Philosophy and Theology in Frankfurt, Germany,

considering possible dissertation topics. In Germany he saw the painting of ‘Mary Untier of Knots’ in Augsburg and brought a copy of the painting to Argentina where it has become a popular Marian devotion. After three months of intense study in Germany, Bergoglio opted to return to Argentina, where he was assigned to teach at the seminary in Buenos Aires. In 1990, he was transferred to the Jesuit house in Cordova, 500 miles from Buenos Aires. In many timelines of Pope Francis’ life, the years of 1990-1992 remain an unexplained gap.⁴

Bergoglio as a Bishop

Cardinal Antonio Quarracino, Archbishop of Buenos Aires, who recognized his real mettle, wanted him to be his close collaborator.⁵ Thus on 20 May 1992, Bergoglio was named the auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires. He chose his Episcopal motto as ‘Miserando atque eligendo.’ It has been drawn from the homily of Venerable Bede on Matthew 9:9 -13: “...he saw him through the eyes of mercy and chose him.”

On 3 June 1997, Bergoglio was further appointed Coadjutor Archbishop of Buenos Aires, with the right of automatic succession. In February 1998, he became the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, succeeding Antonio Quarracino. One of Bergoglio’s major initiatives as Archbishop was to increase the Church’s presence in the slums of Buenos Aires. Under his leadership, the number of priests assigned to work in the slums doubled. On 6 November 1998, he was named ordinary for the Eastern Catholics in Argentina who lacked a prelate of their own rite.

Cardinal Bergoglio and Pope Francis

Three years later, in February 2001, he was elevated as cardinal by Pope John Paul II. On 8 November 2005, Bergoglio was elected president of the Argentine Episcopal Conference

for a three-year term (2005-08). He was reelected to another three-year term on 11 November 2008. While head of the Argentine Catholic Bishops' Conference, Bergoglio issued a collective apology for his Church's failure to protect the people from the *Junta* during the Dirty War. When he turned 75, in December 2011, Archbishop Bergoglio, as required by Canon Law, submitted his resignation to Pope Benedict XVI. But Divine Providence designed that Bergoglio be elected to the Chair of St. Peter succeeding Benedict XVI.

2. Making of Pope Francis

What exactly are the unique personality traits of Bergoglio, who is engaged to bring about such tangible transformation in the Church and the world scenario? How did the little Jorge transform into today's world acclaimed spiritual leader, Pope Francis? How can one decipher his journey of formation and transformation? One can guess beyond doubt that it was not just his life experiences, but more, his specific responses to them that shaped his life and personality. The modest attempt of this article is to decipher the key experiences and persons who contributed to the nurture of his unique personality.

I am a Sinner

Fr. Antonio Spadaro, in his first interview with Pope Francis on 19 Aug. 2013, put an abrupt question to Pope Francis, "Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?"⁶ The reply came after a reflective silence: "I do not know what might be the most fitting description.... I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner... I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon."⁷

The Pope further said, "Yes, perhaps I can say that I am a bit astute, that I can adapt to circumstances, but it is also true that I am a bit naïve. Yes, but the best summary, the one that

comes more from the inside and I feel most true is this is me, a sinner on whom the Lord has turned his gaze.”⁸

When asked about his unique experience of God’s mercy he said: “I don’t have any particular memories of mercy as a young child. But I do as a young man.”⁹ It was on September 21, 1953. He was on his way to meet his girlfriend together with the Catholic Action and school friends to celebrate National Student’s Day. As he was walking past the Basilica of St. Joseph, he felt an urge to go inside and he went in. Explaining this to Father Isasmendi, he said: “I looked, it was dark, it was a morning, may be 9.00 a.m. and I saw a priest walking, I don’t know him, he wasn’t one of the parish clergy. And he sits down in one of the confessionals... I don’t quite know what happened next, I felt like someone grabbed me from inside and took me to the confessional. Obviously I told him my things, I confessed... but I don’t know what happened... Right there I knew I had to be a priest; I was totally certain. Instead of going out with the others I went back home because I was overwhelmed.”¹⁰

When Bergoglio was appointed bishop, he placed mercy of God at the heart of his motto. He explains it: “I always felt my motto, *Miserando atque Eligendo* [Having Mercy and Choosing Him], was very true for me.” The motto is taken from the Homilies of Bede the Venerable, who writes in his comments on the Gospel story of the calling of Matthew: ‘Jesus saw a publican, and since he looked at him with feelings of love and chose him, he said to him, ‘Follow me.’” The Pope adds: “I think it is impossible to translate the Latin gerund ‘miserando’ both in Italian and Spanish. I like to translate it with another gerund that does not exist: ‘misericiordiando’ [‘mercy-ing’].”¹¹

His ministry as a bishop has always been one of constant remembrance and reflection of the great mercy of God he experienced in his life. He discloses some of his habits of

recollecting God's mercy in his life: "...but when I had to come to Rome, I always stayed in (the neighborhood of) Via della Scrofa. From there, I often visited the Church of St. Louis of France, and I went there to contemplate the painting of 'The Calling of St. Matthew' by Caravaggio... That finger of Jesus, pointing at Matthew...that's me. I feel like him... like Matthew. It is the gesture of Matthew that strikes me: he holds on to his money as if to say, 'No, not me! No, this money is mine.' Here, this is me, a sinner on whom the Lord has turned his gaze. And this is what I said when they asked me if I would accept my election as pontiff." Then the Pope whispers in Latin: "I am a sinner, but I trust in the infinite mercy and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ, and I accept in a spirit of penance."¹²

We can guess for sure why the words and deeds of Pope Francis are mercy-laden. He is a man who always keeps alive his personal history of God's mercy on him. That is why he is capable of relating with merciful words and actions to every person who comes before him. That is why he could, without a moment's hesitation, draw closer to Vinicio Riva from Vicenza, who had a deformed and frightening face due to Neurofibromatosis, and embrace him warmly. As Pope he took the initiative to declare a special year of mercy and led it with his own examples of mercy to all categories of needy and distressed people. Yes, the intimate experience of divine mercy in his own life is the reason why he could enthrone mercy in the heart of Christian life, of ecclesial life.

Dark Night of the Soul

When Pope Francis was the Cardinal of Buenos Aires, a political leader who was forced to resign, came to visit him. He was seeking strength and comfort from the Cardinal to be able to face his loneliness and defeat. After a significant silence Bergoglio spoke to him: "Manuel, you've got to live

your exile. I did. And afterward you'll be back. And when you do come back you will be more merciful, kinder, and you're going to want to serve your people more."¹³

While he gave this advice to this man, his mind must have been ruminating on his own experiences at Cordoba, during 1990-92. This was just before his becoming the Auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires. He had completed his term as the Provincial of Argentinean Jesuit Province and had also served as rector for six years. He was just back from Germany after an aborted thesis plan. Many depict this period as the "dark night of his soul". We hardly know much about this period of his life in Cordoba.¹⁴ After Bergoglio became the Pope, CNN Editor Daniel Burke undertook a journey to the Jesuit residence in Cordoba to meet and converse with the confreres of Bergoglio during the period of his life in 'darkness.'¹⁵

One of them, Brother Louis Rausch had this to say: "Bergoglio spent many hours in solitude. He understood that he had to remain silent and obedient because he was being punished... When he arrived in room no. 5 in Cordoba, Bergoglio was a priest without a portfolio... His official duty was to hear confessions, listening in his room for the buzz of the doorbell to tell him that some guilt-wracked soul wanted to unburden itself of sin... Occasionally, Bergoglio would say Mass, filling in for the head priest of the Iglesia de la Compania."¹⁶

Ricardo Spinacci was the housekeeper at the residencia, when Bergoglio lived there. Now he has reached his good old age. He describes his old friend as a creature of habit. "He began each day with the same chore, washing one of his two pairs of socks, and ate the same meal for lunch every day - vegetables and chicken. In the early morning hours, he prayed in the Jesuits' domestic chapel, alone with the bones of the Jesuit saints. He knew he was being punished. He prayed like a saint."¹⁷

Juan Carlos Scannone, an elderly Jesuit who has known Bergoglio since the 1950s said that casting him out to Cordoba was clearly a punishment and that he was truly suffering. “I saw it in his face. I could see he was going through a spiritual purification, a dark night.”¹⁸

Javier Camara, a Catholic journalist who spoke to Bergoglio about this period said that Bergoglio was well aware of the ‘darkness’ of this period. He told Camara: “It was a time of purification. In darkness one can’t see things clearly. So I prayed much, read a lot, wrote even more and lived my life. What I did in Cordoba had more to do with my inner life.”¹⁹

Anyone can easily grasp the significance of this ‘dark period’ in the formation of the future Pope. Bergoglio was a person who handled the unpleasant experiences and the oppositions in his life with an attitude of prayerful and humble dependence on God. The antagonism towards him was the strongest in the Argentinean Jesuit Province, just after his term as the Provincial (1973-78) and rector (1980-86). His exile in Cordoba marked the climax of such opposition (1990-92). The state of his inner self in those ‘dark’ days had been transcribed in his writings of the time, which definitely held a mirror to his mind. One can conclude that the ‘failures’ and pains of his yonder days did have a significant role in his formation as today’s Pope Francis.

Provincial and the Dirty War

At the backdrop of this dark period one could see is the time he was the Provincial of the Argentinean Jesuit Province. He was then a young Jesuit of 36. At that time Argentina was under the Military Regime of Jose Rafael Videla. Human rights violations and atrocities were rampant under the Videla regime. Anyone who dissented would disappear and about 30,000 people were reported missing during this period. Leftist

Guerilla movements like the Montoneros (MPM) and the Marxist People's Revolutionary Army (ERP) fought against the Military rule.²⁰ Their policy was one of 'tit for tat' - fight violence with violence; fighting state terrorism with organized terrorism. These movements naturally had deep roots among the poor who were suffering in fear and distress.²¹

After the Vatican II with its thrust on renewal and openness to the world, Liberation Theology found a fertile soil in Argentina. These trends created at least two categories of people within the Church there. While one group silently supported the government, ignoring the pathetic state of the people, the other resorted to violence in order to free the people from the Army outrages.

The Jesuits at large stood for the cause of the people. Bergoglio kept a low profile, neither praising nor condoning the Military rule. As Provincial, his prime aim was to protect the priests under his care.²² But the activities of two Jesuits in particular made his ministry very difficult. Inspired by the Liberation Theology, Franz Jalics and Orlando Yorio organized a 'base community' in a Buenos Aires barrio. Bergoglio allowed the priests to engage but warned them to be wary of the military.²³ Eventually as the situation turned risky for their life, they were asked to choose either the *barrio* or the Society of Jesus.²⁴ They preferred to choose the *barrio*. A few days later, the military arrested both of them and took them away. After two months they were left in a farmland, drugged and half naked.²⁵

Bergoglio had to face a lot of criticism on account of the arrest and torture of these young priests. Yorio, for years, blamed the Provincial for their kidnapping, accusing him of leaving them unprotected, and even of pointing them out to the military. Instead, Jalics said he would not blame Bergoglio for his capture.²⁶

Although this was a major issue during Bergolio's provincialship, what led him to Cordoba may not have only been this. The Jesuits in Buenos Aires had serious differences of opinion regarding his style of functioning and his priorities.²⁷ He has spoken about his style of performance at this time and the shortcomings he perceived in himself: "In my experience as a superior in the Society, to be honest, I have not always done the necessary consultation. And this was not a good thing. My style of government as a Jesuit at the beginning had many faults. That was a difficult time for the Society: an entire generation of Jesuits had disappeared. Because of this I found myself provincial when I was still very young. I was only 36 years old. That was crazy. I had to deal with difficult situations, and I made my decisions abruptly and by myself. Yes, but I must add one thing: when I entrust something to someone, I totally trust that person... But despite this, eventually people get tired of authoritarianism."²⁸

One could not be more candid in acknowledging one's drawbacks as when he said, "My authoritarian and quick manner of making decisions led me to have serious problems and to be accused of being ultraconservative. I lived a time of great interior crisis when I was in Cordoba. It was my authoritarian way of making decisions that created problems."²⁹ Obviously, young Bergoglio, who as Provincial led the Argentinean Jesuits in a very critical historical period, learned some extremely hard lessons for life, from his own sufferings. It brought about solid changes in his life and behaviour. He said, "History and time has taught me many lessons. The Lord allowed me to grow in my administrative skills through my own sins and liabilities."³⁰ One can see how Bergoglio took life's lessons wisely and learnt from his mistakes with openness and humility - specific characteristics we see in him now as he goes through the many tensions of being a Pope in difficult times.

After the ‘dark night’ of Cordoba, we next see Bergoglio as the Auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires. Later he was made the Archbishop. We can easily observe a U-turn in the style of his functioning in the new service. He was making a conscious effort to make decision-making more participative. He observes, “As Archbishop of Buenos Aires, I had a meeting with the six auxiliary bishops every two weeks, and several times a year with the council of priests. They asked questions and we opened the floor for discussion. This greatly helped me to make the best decisions.”³¹

Dialogue, Discernment, Decentralisation

It was the person of Bergoglio who had been fashioned in the crucible of time, turmoil and grace, who stood as Pope Francis in the balcony of the St. Peter’s Basilica, on 13 March, 2013, waving at the huge crowd gathered down square. After five days of his election as the Supreme Pontiff, he spoke to Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez about the formation of a consultative body to assist him in the new governance. Thus was formed a consultative body with eight cardinals. The number rose to nine when later Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Secretary of State, was brought in. The first sitting of the consultants was in October 2013. Ever since, Francis has convened the body of consultants 20 times, the last being on 6-8 June, 2017.

Pope Francis is very committed to this consultative body and faithfully follows up every detail. His perception about the advisory group is significant: “The consultation group of eight cardinals, this ‘outsider’ advisory group, is not only my decision, but it is the result of the will of the cardinals, as it was expressed in the general congregations before the conclave. And I want to see that this is a real, not ceremonial consultation.”³² The shift from his old authoritarian style to the new consultative style is obvious. This consultative and

decentralized style is yielding good results in his ministry as Pope.

In fact, decentralization of power in the Church is a dream in his mind, and is often explicated in his discourses about a participatory Church. He writes: “Like the ancient patriarchal Churches, Episcopal conferences are in a position ‘to contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realization of the collegial spirit’. Yet this desire has not been fully realized, since a juridical status of Episcopal conferences which would see them as subjects of specific attributions, including genuine doctrinal authority, has not yet been sufficiently elaborated. Excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church’s life and her missionary outreach.”³³

He has very clear vision about the National/Regional bishops’ conferences and their specific role in the life of the Church. He specifies the orientation regarding the authority and mission of these Conferences as follows: “I would make it clear that not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium. Unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in the Church, but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it... Each country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs.”³⁴

To peak it all, one can see that the utmost influence and motivation in his multifarious interventions, probably, is the Ignatian Spirituality. He seems to be rooted in it. To the question “Which aspect of Ignatian Spirituality does help you the most in the papal mission?” he responds with hardly any hesitation: “Discernment... It is one of the things that worked inside St. Ignatius. For him it is an instrument of struggle in order to know the Lord and follow him more closely.”³⁵

Pope Francis explains: “This discernment takes time. For example, many think that changes and reforms can take place in a short time. I believe that we always need time to lay the foundations for real, effective change. And this is the time of discernment... Discernment is always done in the presence of the Lord, looking at the signs, listening to the things that happen, the feeling of the people, especially the poor... Discernment in the Lord guides me in my way of governing.”³⁶

The Ignatian spirituality did play a definite role in the formation of this great spiritual leader. Not only during the period of 34 years from 1958 to 1992, but also, throughout his life and ministry, it was Jesuit formation and the spirituality of St. Ignatius, their Founder, that stood by him through thick and thin.³⁷

Grandmother, Parents

On the occasion of the homily on a Palm Sunday, Francis drifted from the pre-prepared text and switched over to his spontaneous style: “My grandmother used to tell us children, ‘A funeral shroud has no pockets!’ As a child, I did not fully grasp the meaning of what she said. When I grew up I understood that a dead body does not need to carry a pocket full of things. Its journey is differently destined”.³⁸ This is not the only occasion when Francis made references to his grandmother Rosa. It is obvious that she has had the greatest influence on young Bergoglio. Responding to a question, he said “...I feel a special devotion to my grandmother for all that she gave me in the first years of my life.”³⁹

Bergoglio recalled: “My strongest childhood memory is that of the life shared between my parents’ house and my grandparents’ house. The first part of my childhood, from the age of one, I spent with my grandmother.” Rosa began taking

care of Jorge after his brother Oscar was born, collecting him each morning and dropping him back in the afternoon.⁴⁰

Again, it was his grandmother Rosa, who introduced him to Jesus and taught him to pray. She was a wonderful transmitter of faith. “On Good Friday she took her grandchildren to see the crucified Christ and told them how he was dead but would rise on Sunday.”⁴¹ When she was widowed and frail, Rosa was looked after by the Italian nuns in San Miguel. As she lay dying, Jorge kept vigil by her bed, holding her body until life left it. Sister Catalina, one of the sisters, recalls: “He told us: ‘At this moment my grandmother is at the most important point of her existence. She is being judged by God... A few minutes later, he got up and left, as serene as ever.’”⁴²

It was from her mother that Jorge learned a simple and thrifty life style. María Elena, sister of Bergoglio recalled: “We were poor, but with dignity... Mama succeeded in salvaging some article of clothing for us, even from our father’s things: a ripped shirt or fraying pants got repaired and sewn up, became ours. May be the extreme frugality of my brother and mine comes from this.”⁴³

When Rubin and Ambrogetti asked about his culinary skills, Jorge said: “My mother became paralyzed after giving birth to her fifth child, although she recovered over time. But during that period, when we got home from school we’d find her seated, peeling potatoes, with all the other ingredients laid out. Then she’d tell us how to mix and cook them, because we didn’t have any clue. ‘Now put this in the pot and that in the pan...’ she’d explain. That’s how we learned to cook.”⁴⁴

Bergoglio recalls with great gratitude the positive influence his father had in his life: “I’m so grateful to my father for making me work. The work I did was one of the best things I’ve done in my life. In particular, in the laboratory I got to see the good and bad of all human endeavour.”⁴⁵ It was when he

finished elementary school, barely thirteen years old, his father asked him to take up a part-time job. Thus he started working in a hosiery factory, where his father worked for. For the first two years, he worked as a cleaner, and then he was shifted to administrative work. When he attended a technical school, he managed to find work in a laboratory, where he would work from 7a.m. to 1p.m. Thereafter he attended classes until 8 p.m.⁴⁶

One of the three key women in his childhood was Sister Dolores Tortolo, a Mercy nun. She was the one who prepared him for his First Holy Communion at the age of eight. Later, when he was seriously sick as a young seminarian, she was there at his sick bed as a source of strength. As a priest and later archbishop, he used to visit her in the convent. When she died in 2006, he spent the whole night in prayer next to her body in the convent chapel.⁴⁷

The childhood experiences and the persons whom he associated with in his younger years of life had tremendous influence in molding and forming Jorge Bergoglio: especially his grandmother Rosa, his parents and Sister Dolores.

3. Conclusion

Some say that the changes in the Church during the past four and a half years are more than what happened in last four centuries. While there has been absolutely no change in the dogmatic teachings of the Church, there has been a revolutionary change in her attitudes, approach and style. In spite of considerable resistance, such attitudinal and stylistic changes have evoked greater confidence, hope and enthusiasm in the ordinary believers. This shift has come about due to Pope Francis, his approach to the world, humanity and the environment.

As for everyone else, Bergoglio's life in the family and his childhood experiences definitely had a major share in his formation as a person. However, what made him the magnetic, charismatic, humble and trusting person he is today is his incomparable capacity to be open to his own experiences, to accept his failures and learn new lessons from them all. He was willing to 'walk humbly before his God' and to make desirable changes in his life, learning from the hard lessons, life taught him. Thus we have today Pope Francis, whose unparalleled brilliance and truth-based humility take him closer to humanity.

Notes

- 1 For an official life sketch of Pope Francis, see <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/biography/documents/papa-francesco-biografia-bergoglio.html>
- 2 For details, see Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer. Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2014, 33.
- 3 For a brief description on that period, see Paul Vallely, *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots*, Bloomsbury, 2013, last part of chapter 3. Also Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 205-209.
- 4 <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/biography/documents/papa-francesco-biografia-bergoglio.html>
- 5 The interview of Father Antonio Spadaro S.J., the editor of the Jesuit Journal *Civiltà Cattolica*, published under the title, "A Big Heart Open to God." It was a very significant and unprecedented papal interview and was simultaneously published in 15 Jesuit journals across the world. Cf. Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 167-168. For the full text of the interview, see <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>.
- 6 <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>
- 7 <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>. See also Sergio Rubin - Francesca Ambrogetti, *Pope Francis: Conversations with Jorge Bergoglio: His Life in His Own Words*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2013, in Chapter 4.

- 8 Pope Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy*, Random House, New York, 2016, 11.
- 9 Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 35-36. <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>.
- 10 <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>. Pope Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy*, 11-12.
- 11 <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>. Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 207.
- 12 Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 207.
- 13 For a brief description on that period, see Valley, *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots*, final part of chapter 3.
- 14 Daniel Burke, *The Pope's Dark Night of the Soul*, See <http://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2015/09/specials/pope-dark-night-of-the-soul/>
- 15 <http://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2015/09/specials/pope-dark-night-of-the-soul/>
- 16 <http://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2015/09/specials/pope-dark-night-of-the-soul/>
- 17 <http://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2015/09/specials/pope-dark-night-of-the-soul/>; For a brief presentation of his life in Cordoba, see Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 205-209.
- 18 <http://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2015/09/specials/pope-dark-night-of-the-soul/>
- 19 Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 98.
- 20 The political scenario of Argentina was more complex at that time. To have a summary description on that, see Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 96-99.
- 21 In his conversations with Rubin and Ambrogetti, Jorge Bergoglio opens his heart on this issue. See Rubin-Ambrogetti, *Pope Francis: Conversations*, Chapter 14.
- 22 On this see, Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 129-131, 151-164.
- 23 When asked on this, Jorge Bergoglio responds: "To answer that I must start by saying that they were planning to set up a religious

congregation and they gave the first draft of the Rules to Monsignors Eduardo Pironio, Vicente Zazpe, and Mario José Serra. I still have the copy they gave me. The superior general of the Jesuits, who then was Father Pedro Arrupe, told them they had to choose between the community they were living in and the Company of Jesus, and ordered them to move to a different community. As they persisted in their project and the group broke up, they were asked to leave the Company. It was a long internal process that lasted more than a year. It was not a hasty decision of mine. When Yorio's resignation was accepted, along with that of Father Luis Dourrón, who was working with them. Jalics's couldn't be accepted, as he had taken the solemn vow; only the Pope could accede to the request - it was March 1976, the nineteenth, to be exact, that is five days before the government of Isabel Perón was overthrown. In view of the rumors of an imminent coup d'état, I told them to be very careful. I remember I offered them the chance to come and live in the Company's provincial house, in the interests of their safety." See Rubin-Ambrogetti, *Pope Francis: Conversations*, Chapter 14.

- 24 Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 161.
- 25 Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 164. To read the version of Pope Francis on this incident, see Rubin-Ambrogetti, *Pope Francis: Conversations*, Chapter 14.
- 26 To read more about the rift originated in the Jesuit province around the personality of Bergoglio, see Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 106-164. Valley, *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots*, in Chapter 3: "The tension which was to grow between what developed into Bergogliano and anti-Bergogliano factions divided the province in two. There were two main areas of conflict. One was religious, the other political."
- 27 <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>
- 28 <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>.
- 29 <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>.
- 30 <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>.

- 31 <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>.
- 32 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)*. Apostolic Exhortation, 2013, 32.
- 33 Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love)*. Apostolic Exhortation, 2016, 3.
- 34 <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>. See also, Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 170. Explaining ‘discernment,’ Pope Francis put it as “the Jesuit means of distinguishing good and bad spirits as the ‘instrument of struggle in order to know the Lord and follow him more closely.’ Discernment, he said, ‘guides me in my way of governing.’”
- 35 <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>
- 36 To read more on this, see Alejandro Bermúdez, *Pope Francis: Our Brother, Our Friend. Personal Reflections about the Man who Became Pope*, Igantius, 2013.
- 37 <http://www.catholicworldreport.com/2013/03/24/the-palm-sunday-homily-of-pope-francis/>
- 38 Rubin - Ambrogetti, *Pope Francis: Conversations*, in Chapter 1.
- 39 Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 13. Rubin- Ambrogetti, *Pope Francis: Conversations*, in Chapter 1.
- 40 Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 14.
- 41 Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 16.
- 42 Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 17.
- 43 Rubin- Ambrogetti, *Pope Francis: Conversations*, in Chapter 1. Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 25.
- 44 Rubin- Ambrogetti, *Pope Francis: Conversations*, Chapter 2.
- 45 Rubin- Ambrogetti, *Pope Francis: Conversations*, Chapter 2. See also, Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 33.
- 46 Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 12.
- 47 Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 35-36 See also <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>.

Article received: Feb 7, 2017
Article approved: Sept 12, 2017
No of words: 6282



“Guided by Prayer and Humility:” A Case Study on the Comments on a Provocative Article on Pope Francis

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Abstract: This article is a critical analysis of provocative OpEd article, “Pope Francis’ Next Act” published in *The New York Times*, paying special attention to the comments of the readers.

The newspaper is a secular, liberal paper and the writer is a conservative catholic. The readers, especially the commenters, are educated. Then we catalogue the different comments and opinions of the readers into two broad categories: those unfavourable to the Pope and those favourable to him. The final conclusion from the analysis is that The Pope cannot be judged as liberal or conservative. He is a moderate, with conservative and liberal tendencies. On the whole, roughly 85% of the comments are appreciative of the Pope, some even going to defend his position. They believe that the Pope is truly “guided by prayer and humility.”

Keywords: Pope Francis, humility, prayer, compassion, forgiveness, openness to the Spirit.

Introduction

How does Pope appear to the general public? What are the impressions ordinary people have of Pope Francis? In order to gauge the mood of the people on the Pope, I selected one provocative OpEd article, “Pope Francis’ Next Act” published

in *The New York Times* and tried to analyse both the article and the comments to it.¹

The newspaper is a secular, liberal paper and the writer is a conservative catholic. The readers, especially the commenters, are educated. In the article, the writer criticises the liberal allies of Pope first and then insinuates that the Pope himself is a liberal, a position I do not agree with.

Then we catalogue the different comments and opinions of the readers into two broad categories: those unfavourable to the Pope and those favourable to him. I realise that obviously such a classification implies oversimplification.

Since it is a general newspaper, we cannot expect theological positions. Nor can we expect the reverential attitude that is normally assumed for a religious leader of Pope's stature. The informal views and impersonal nature of the comments are to be respected.

The aim of this article is to indicate where Pope Francis stands in the minds of ordinary educated people, not only limited to USA.

1. Pope Francis' Next Act?

Before analysing the article it will be good to introduce its author and the Newspaper in which it appeared.

a. The Author: "Ross Douthat's Fantasy World"

According to the journalist Oppenheimer we know that Ross Douthat (November 28, 1979) is "the devoutly Catholic, anti-porn, pro-abstinence, pro-life prodigy of punditry."

His path from agnosticism to Pentecostalism to Catholicism was rather an intellectual journey. "I was 17, a socially awkward teenager, and I was relieved to join a church where

no one asked you to pray spontaneously,” he told me. His reading had prepared him well: “You start reading C.S. Lewis, then you’re reading G.K. Chesterton, then you’re a Catholic. I knew a lot of people who did that in their 20s—I just did it earlier, and with a different incentive structure.”

A certain kind of “cerebral Christian” will recognize the young Douthat’s reading list, especially the prominence of English apologetic writers like Lewis, the mid-20th-century Anglican who penned *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and Chesterton, an English Catholic who, prior to his death in 1936, promoted an agrarian, anti-modern agenda and is now beloved by fantasy writers like Neil Gaiman. Douthat was also a huge fan of J.R.R. Tolkien, another anti-modern conservative Catholic.

He graduated from Harvard College in 2002 and spent some time as a researcher, editor, and blogger for *The Atlantic*, he joined The New York Times in 2009 at the young age of 30. He became the *youngest* regular op-ed *writer* in the history of the New York Times and writes on “politics, religion, moral values and higher education.” Mother Jones calls him The New York Times’ wunderkind columnist “on a quest to save intellectual conservatism,”² who lives in his “fantasy world.” Thus, Douthat comes across as a committed, convinced, conservative Catholic.

The New York Times (NYT), in which this article appears, is a liberal and secular American daily newspaper, it is founded and continuously published in New York City since September 18, 1851, by The New York Times Company. The New York Times has won 122 Pulitzer Prizes, more than any other newspaper. Nicknamed “The Gray Lady”, *The New York Times* has long been regarded within the industry as a national “newspaper of record”.³ The paper’s motto, “All the News That’s Fit to Print”, is instructive. People who read *BuzzFeed*,

Politico, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* all tend to be liberal.

b. *The Article: The Ambition of the Pope and Anxiety of Allies*

The article begins by asserting that “By the standards of the Francis papacy, things were rather quiet in Rome for much of 2017.” Some of the controversy of the previous years, including the debate over communion for the divorced and remarried, had entered a kind of stalemate, “with bishops the world over disagreeing and the pope himself keeping a deliberate silence.”⁴ The article assumes that one long era of the pontificate seemed finished. So the question raised by the author is natural: how much drama there is still to come? As part of the unfolding drama, the month of June 2017 brought in fresh incidents in rapid succession. He mentions the removal of four powerful cardinals.

The first, George Pell, was both in charge of the pope’s financial reforms and a leading opponent of communion for the remarried. He had to return to Australia to face charges of sexual abuse — charges that either represent a culminating revelation in the church’s grim stance on the issue, or else a “sign that the abuse scandal has become a license for prosecutorial witch hunts.”

The second cardinal, Gerhard Mueller, was the head of the powerful Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the office charged with safeguarding Catholic doctrine. Often sidelined by Francis, he had performed a careful walk on the pope’s marriage document, *Amoris Laetitia*,⁵ when he emphasizes that it did not alter church’s teaching on remarriage and the sacraments while “downplaying the signals that the pope himself thought otherwise.” After his first term was expired, he

was shown the door “in a manner so brusque that the usually circumspect German publicly complained.”

The third cardinal, Joachim Mein was a retired archbishop of Cologne and a longtime friend of Pope Benedict XVI. He was one of the signatories of the dubia — the public questions four cardinals posed last year to Francis about *Amoris Laetitia*, effectively questioning its orthodoxy.⁶ He died in his sleep at 83 — shortly after Mueller, his fellow countryman, had called him to report the news that he himself has been removed from his office.

The fourth, Angelo Scola, was another confidant of Benedict XVI and a leading contender for the papacy at the last conclave. He retired as archbishop of Milan retired five days after Mueller’s departure.

These four departures come from different backgrounds. But they have a combined effect, according to Douthat: “They weaken resistance to Francis in the highest reaches of the hierarchy.” So the question facing the remainder of his pontificate: So the title of the article: “The Next Act of Pope!”

With the opposition thinned out and the vision of Pope John Paul II and Benedict in eclipse, how far does the pope intend to push?

It is clear enough that Francis has friends and allies “who want him to go forward in a hurry.” They regard the ambiguous shift on divorce and remarriage as a proof-of-concept for how the church can change on a wider range of issues, where they have lately made forays and appeals: intercommunion Protestants, married priests, same-sex relationships, euthanasia, female deacons, artificial birth control, and more.

The author argues that in politics too the friends of Pope are making sweeping critique of all Catholic engagement with the political right in America, and especially the American Catholic alliance with evangelical Protestants.

In the liturgical issues also the Pope's friends are pushing forward. The interesting and convoluted argument runs thus: Pope has reached out to the Society of Saint Pius X, "the semi-schismatic group that celebrates the Latin Mass." This could first to this group's reintegration. The Pope will use this traditional group to quarantine all traditionalism and then the suppression of the pre-Vatican II liturgy for everyone else. A difficult argument to understand!

The author admits that the pope himself remains both more cautious than his friends. The new people he has appointed to succeed Mueller and Scola are moderate, not radical and "also perhaps more unpredictable."

His more liberal appointees can get ahead of him, as in the case of Charlie Gard, the dying English baby whose doctors and government won't let his parents pay for an unlikely-to-succeed treatment.⁷ The pope's refashioned Pontifical Academy for Life, "which now accepts pro-choice and euthanasia-friendly members, issued a statement that seemed to support the government over the parents." The author notes that Pope Francis intervened personally supporting the parents' rights, "creating a somewhat defensive scramble by his allies."

Then the author makes a larger and somehow confusing remark: "We know that Francis is a liberal pope, but apart from the remarriage debate we don't know what priority he places on any given liberal-Catholic goal."

The author goes on criticize the friends of the Pope, who are liberals: "Among many liberals there is a palpable ambition, a sense that a sweeping opportunity to rout conservative Catholicism might finally be at hand. But there is also a palpable anxiety, since the church's long-term future is not obviously progressive — not with a growing African church and a shrinking European one, priesthood those younger ranks are

often quite conservative, and little evidence that the Francis era has brought any sudden renewal.”

So the article ends with another provoking question: “How much does Francis himself share either sentiment — the ambition, the anxiety? The next act of this papacy still tell.”

I find it extremely sad that the article concludes using the catchwords ambition and anxiety. The ambition of the Pope? The anxiety of his allies? To caricature the three years of the Pope in these terms may be journalistically clever, but definitely not historically or theologically sound.

2. The Trends in General

Within eight hours of its publication, the article has received 229 comments. Of these 180 are recommended by other readers (reader’s picks) and nine NYT’s picks. Now the comments are closed. We highlight first the Newspaper’s own picks and reproduce the first five verbatim, so that we gain an overall view of the responses from the readers.⁸

a. *NYT Picks*

Dan Welch from East Lyme writes:

Ross, your evaluation of Francis is misguided. You are bringing the secularized viewpoint of a political pundit (I guess you cannot help (yourself) on his papacy.

He is not president, he is a pastor. He is not simply the head of a government, he is someone seeking to bring consolation and hope to people. He is not preserving protecting and defending a constitution, he is seeking to live out a religiously motivated message.

PG Sydney is of the opinion:

Ross I agree with all of that but we can't ignore Frances' first shot across the conservative bow when he sacked Cardinal Raymond Burke from the Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, in 2014. Elevated from the Archdiocese of St. Louis by Ratzinger, Burke was the Vatican's leading conservative whose special hate was reserved for homosexuality. Not just marriage, its physical and emotional state. Given his distaste for rabid conservatives It was surprising that he elevated George Pell but his motive quickly became clear. Practicality. Pell was a Vatican outsider who had the management skills to detect and remove the financial corruption that was rife at the Vatican.

Greg from Savannah.ga comments:

Mr. Douthat's column is highly instructive but I think not in the way intended. This is a discussion of the politics of the Roman Church and what it will mean for the future of the Church. The loud take away from this column is that the politics matter more than the faith. This frightening trend seems ascendant in all of the major religions and points toward theocracy and zealotry

Nancy Fleming from Shaker Heights Ohio was pointed and precise:

What would Jesus Change? Signed an agnostic!

WMK York City perceives the empathy of Pope Francis for the poor and destitute. His comments:

Pope Francis has not made any sweeping changes to the Catholic Church and Will probably refrain from

doing so. His views on traditional marriage and pro life will remain within the frame of Catholic teaching. They are still quite conservative and he feels a strong amity bond is important to the Church and society. He does not want to weaken the family structure which is often at odds with our liberal culture. The one area where Pope Francis has been very vocal is in helping the poor and destitute. Most Catholics are in full support of his views and feel we need to assist those who are living in poverty. Much is expected of those who have been given great wealth. There are areas of the world where people are starving and we need to assist them in alleviating their suffering and pain. This is what the Church has preached for centuries. This will never change nor should it. He shows great empathy for those less fortunate and is a wonderful role model for the world. We must all do our part and help those less fortunate than us. This is what Catholicism is all about.

b. Reader's Picks

Here we follow up the picks or recommendations of the comments by other readers. It may be noted that some of the comments may be sarcastic.

We can perceive sarcasm in Gemli's comments:

Heaven forbid! Mingling with Protestants, married priests, same-sex relationships, euthanasia, females breaking into the Church's male hierarchy and contraception! Man the lifeboats! The Church is sinking into the 21st century!

Pope Francis was put in power not by God, but by a Church that kicked out the complicit Ratzinger. The church was hemorrhaging believers in the wake of a

scandal of pedophilia, which would have destroyed any other institution, and sent its participants and their apologists to jail. Ratzinger was a reminder of the abuse that had flourished under his hob' oversight, and for very earthly reasons that involved gold more than God, He was replaced by the kindly and forgiving Francis.

The self-flagellating crowd who are drawn to religion because of insecurity and a sense of unworthiness are furious. How can they enjoy the restrictions and the punishments that the Church once reliably doled out, keeping couples in loveless or abusive marriages, making unwanted children a consequence of sexual pleasure or ensuring that only men who had no interest in adult women were welcomed into the priesthood?

The connection between conservatism and religion is no coincidence. They revere hierarchy above human freedom. Pleasure is suspect, and must be controlled. There is no one so vulnerable that they will not be sacrificed on the altar of false piety.

Francis is popular because he's less religious. Catholic scolds are furious.

Meh, it's about time

KJ, Tennessee is highly impressed by Pope Francis.

I'm not a Catholic but I admire Pope Francis for his goodness, kindness, and willingness to accept and forgive normal human failings. The world is full of preachers, but his man leads by example.

Robert Steward from Chantilly, VA writes:

Douhthat, "We know that Francis is a liberal pope...."

Although you continue to portray Pope Francis as "liberal," I would argue that Francis is no more a liberal

than Jesus, who took on the religious authorities of his time by asserting such “heresies” as “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”

Francis, I would say, is in good company, i.e., in solidarity with the “founder of the firm,” who taught that the purpose of rules and laws is something more than unquestioning observance of such. In this case, observance of the Sabbath was not abrogated, but properly interpreted in terms of how a law was intended to serve the human person—the human person is primary.

You obviously see “communion for the divorced and remarried” as a closed issue because there is a church rule that prohibits those in that group from ever having a “place at the table.” Francis obviously is not in agreement with your understanding of religious legislation just as Jesus was in disagreement with his adversaries. The focus of Jesus, as is that of Francis, is on how does a religious rule serve the human person.

Because Francis understands the church in terms of a “field hospital” that is present to heal and care for wounded humanity, he does not, as you do, see “communion” simply as a “reward” for those not wounded.

Robert Stewart Chantilly further elaborates:

In his opening address at Vatican Council II on October 11, 1962, Pope (Saint) John XXIII said: “The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another... Frequently she (the church) has condemned them (errors) With the greatest severity. Nowadays, however, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity.” Like John XXIII, Pope Francis prefers the “medicine

of mercy rather than that of severity,” which is evident from his use of the image of the church as that of a “field hospital” and his insistence that the clergy need to be pastors with the ‘smell of the sheep’ on them.

Douthat, in this column and in prior ones, faults Pope Francis for his pastoral approach, an approach that applies the “medicine of mercy for addressing and healing the wounds and suffering of humanity. Ross apparently prefers the law enforcement (policeman) model of church leadership, a model of leadership intent on that enforcing rules and laws, rather than the model of the healer or the good shepherd.

Which model reflects a continuation of the ministry of the man who said he had been “anointed to bring good news to the poor...to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go.

Christine McM from Massachusetts sees Pope Francis as a “groundbreaker:”

I’m not sure where you’re going, Ross. Are you relieved the Pope really hasn’t done that much (we know you’re a conservative and a traditionalist) or are you’re disappointed he hasn’t done more to trigger an even bigger revolt from the chastened conservative wing?

And, why would the long-term future of progressive Catholicism be stymied by a growing African church? In Africa, there are clergy in high places given waivers from chastity if they already were found to have families, or needed to condone specific cultural and historical mores of their congregations, including, I believe, polygamy in remote areas.

I personally believe the impact of Francis has been far greater on issues that don't concern western obsessions such as communion for the divorced. This pontiff has raised grave concerns about the future of the planet, the rise of oligarchies, and lack of adherence to Jesus's admonitions to care for the vulnerable (feed the hungry, etc.)

I see Francis less as groundbreaker than as a most welcome "back to basics" Pope, focused more on how well people treat each other and the environment than on political smoke signals—who's in, who's out. Just as his creator taught him.

3. Taking an Unfavourable Stand

a. *Against Ross Douthat*

Expectedly, some of the comments are critical of the author. We start on a positive note. Hugo Furst comments:

Ross, thanks for your insightful article. You are a uniquely thoughtful and well-informed writer.

The other comments are not so favorable. For example from Windsor expresses his feelings thus:

So the Pope removed a prelate who rightly, or wrongly is accused of heinous behavior in a democratic society with a fair legal system.

He then didn't re-appoint a man who publicly disputed his position as stated in an encyclical, after which a man won agreed with the opposition died in his sleep at 83 years of age.

And finally another man retired for the Archbishopric at an age you 'forgot' to share.

My response....and then the sun rose in the east.

Aha you say but no it is all an evil plot to move on from the blind (but oh so satisfying) intolerance you seem to revel in, and embrace the lepers, love the sinner, emulate the good Samaritan, or move on to what Pat Robinson seems to think is the Tao of Jesus.

Tony Zito from Poughkeepsie. NY relates Pope to President Trump:

Of the many revolting aspects of Ross Douthat's writings here, the most revolting to me is his selective reverence for a Pope with conservative politics.

Pope Francis does not meet the test in that regard, and thus we have musings that a Cardinal may have been removed by the Pope as part of a "prosecutorial witch hunt" and rumblings about thinning of the political opposition. I would suggest that Douthat is engaged in the standard acts of right wing projection onto their antagonists - projection of the conservative proclivity to see everything in terms of winning and losing and nothing in terms of the actual progress of civilization. Indeed, any expression of faith in the latter is evidence in the eyes of cynics like Douthat that one is hiding his real agenda, which can only be to win something or other at all costs

That is, you can be devious like them or devious like yourself, but you can only be devious. There is something faithless about his treatment of issues of faith that only adds to the despair of Trumpian nihilism. Dare I say Heaven help.

NI Westchester is against Douthat and is favourable to the Pope:

Ross, ever since his inception as the Pope, you have never been a fan of pragmatic Papacy. I remember in your earlier op-eds you even denounced him because he was more human than dogmatic. You even had the temerity to understand catechism more than your Pope himself. George Pell - a felon, Gerhard Muller sitting on the wall, Joachim Meisner - died, Angelo Scola - old who was to retire anyway, who happened to be Pope Benedict XVI confidante.

Are you telling us that Pope Francis is playing dirty to get his agenda through? And Joachim Meisner died in his sleep! What are you implying here? I am no Catholic but I have great Faith in Pope Francis. He is what the Catholic Church needs - more humanity and compassion for the less fortunate.

Here it is not surprising that one of the comments goes against NYT itself.

Martin Daly writes:

Surprise that such articles occur NY Times. I suppose this means that many of us had taken for granted not only the mainly secular identity of most readers but also that liberal Protestantism's victory had been so complete that the mere publication. In "the newspaper of record" of a regular op-ed writer's views on Catholic doctrine seemed oddly quaint: This realization - frankly of slight embarrassment - may resonate with more than one reader as more than an echo, like a sermon that doesn't begin with, "In today's Gospel we see...."

b. *Against Pope*

One knowledgeable reader called “MP” compares Pope Francis to President Trump and is particularly harsh on the Pope.

The pontificate of PF is not unlike the Presidency of Donald Trump. Unpredictable and often incoherent PE’s early program to reform the Curia and update its operations and finances has stalled. He shows no inclination to press preferring, apparently, to advance progressive doctrinal and pastoral initiatives. These too have met with surprising--and notably Vatican II-- push back by orthodox bishops and lay leaders. PF demonstrates s personal harshness that was manifested in his treatment of Cardinal Burke and others, the ‘hostile takeover’ of the Order of Malta, and his rude walking out on Cardinal Mueller following PE’s abrupt notice that his term would not extended. Progressives appear to adore him. despite his decidedly pre-Vatican II and Argentinian autocratic leadership style. demonstrating that “it’s about the agenda”. PF conceded that he may cause a schism. It may already be happening as orthodox Catholics build intra-Church and para-church networks and linkages, amounting to a ‘shadow Church’ that will live in parallel with the institutional Vatican-sponsored Church, collaborating when possible with the official Church end silently attending to the preservation Of the Catholic orthodoxy through prayer, fellowship, catechesis and liturgy. And yes, PF’s eagerness to mend ties with the SSPX is s very obvious effort to blunt the continuing growth of the TLM, the Anglican Ordinariate, and other forms of traditional and liturgical orthodoxy.

c. *Against the Church: Hopeless Situation for Church*

Some others lament the situation of the Church. One reader “John” comments thus:

As a long term liberal Catholic in my 60s I still hope that Francis will accept divorced and remarried Catholics, married male and female priests, gay people, and birth control, and stronger laity control, but he does not seem to be doing much.

My three adult children are not Catholics nor my 7 grandchildren, and my children raised in the Catholic faith have turned to other faiths or no faith.,

Same is true with many of my parish friends adult children--something that means Catholicism will shrink greatly no matter what. I hold onto my faith but am realistic that the American church will shrink greatly and become more irrelevant even if Francis does the reforms mentioned above. The U.S. like most of the developed world has become a nation of non-church members.

ILL writes in a similar vein, (quoting the author John):

“Catholicism will shrink greatly, no matter what”.

Yes, in the United States, but the world is bigger than the United States (something I think we In the United States forget, especially Trump). Catholicism is alive and growing in many parts of the world and it’s growing more conservative.

And it’s the conservative led faiths in the United States that are growing, not the mainstream liberal churches.

And that conservatism is what has allowed us, sadly to have a president named Trump.

4. Taking a Favorable Stand

a. *Beyond Labeling the Pope*

Many of the readers do not appreciate Pope Francis being labelled a liberal.

One “Teresa” comments:

The continual, often inaccurate “labeling” being applied in today’s world is reflective of the divisiveness and only continues to fuel division. Furthermore, pigeonholing human beings into liberal vs. conservative, republican vs. democrat is futile. To me, Francis continues to send a powerful message.

Follow Christ’s teachings and be like Christ. Jesus didn’t label people, but included everyone. He didn’t mention the “rules” of communion, which were man-made by the Catholic Church. He didn’t mention abortion, homosexuality, marriage among priests (which was certainly allowed in the early Church), euthanasia, birth control, mass in Latin vs. native language, etc. I am a proud Catholic but I am far more about Jesus Christ than about the man-made rules of the Church. We are given free will by God. Follow Christ and that is all need to make good choices. Pope Francis exemplifies this but Ross and other doctrinal Catholics just don’t seem to get it.

Another reader “Alex” from Atlanta adds on to this discussion.

Ross Douthat’s discussions of “conservative “ and “liberal” Catholicism will remain murky until he recognizes that the divisions within the Church are marked not only by differences on matters of the degree of sexual/procreational regulation but also by dif-

ferences regarding the salience of Biblical literalism and Christian charity.

“Dominic from Minneapolis” emphatically claims Pope Francis is not a liberal Pope:

If we consider the actual teachings of Jesus at all seriously, our current Pope is the true conservative— he is trying his best to keep those teachings alive in the tumultuous present. You, Mr. Douthat, make clear in your writing that you are a liberal, or even more, a radical Christian. The Core teachings mean very little to you, it IS the organizational gloss on those teachings you seek to defend, beginning with those of St. Paul. As Will Durant so tersely put it, “Protestantism is the victory of Paul over Peter. Fundamentalism is the victory of Paul over Christ”. You, sir, are no conservative when it comes to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

“Patricia from CO” agrees that the Pope is not liberal for different reasons.

What I recall from my 8 years of Catholic grade school is that God speaks through the pope. And I believe that is what God is doing - expressing his desire to get back to the basics- for the Church to bring all his children in, show compassion, mercy, forgiveness, charity. As said below by Hla3542, getting closer to God and loving God and each other are more important than doctrine. Let’s stop our bickering about whether or not divorced people can receive communion and let’s listen to God and welcome people back.

And as others have said, Pope Francis is not that liberal; he seems pretty middle of the road to me. still waiting for women priests.

Another reader “Douglas” notes the radicality of the Gospel.

You label Pope Francis a “Liberal.” The only people who can say that are those who have completely forgotten how radical the Gospel can be.

The bishops of Vatican II were not “liberals.” But they listened and acted.

Archbishop Romero was profoundly conservative – but he was martyred for his defence of the poor. Francis has a history of conservatism

Maybe, Ross, you’ll be liberal too, if you took your faith and founder seriously.

“Dan Styer” has clear and logical argument to show that Pope Francis is not liberal.

We know that Francis is a liberal pope” writes Douthat. Does Francis support the ordination of women? No. Does Francis support local control of church property? No. Does Francis support the marriage of priests? No.

And even if Francis did answer “yes” to any of these questions, that wouldn’t make him liberal: Many conservative faiths have been able to answer “yes” to ALL THREE of these questions for centuries.

My conclusions: (1) Francis is not a liberal pope. (2) Douthat is not a trustworthy columnist.

The last comment on “liberal Pope” by Cheryl perceives the humility of Pope Francis. So four old men, resistant to change of any kind and deeply protective of their own, are gone.

Pope Francis, I always remind myself as a former Catholic, does believe in the basic tenets of Catholi-

cism. “Liberal” applied to him has come to mean love for all of humanity, and an understanding of the difference between good and the impossible adherence to strictures set down by an isolated - not quite celibate - bunch of powerful men which set up large numbers of humanity as unacceptable in the eyes of God as they framed him.

The official Church has done so much damage over time - in the obvious ways - the unending sexual abuse in every corner of the world - and not quite so obvious - rejection of people for divorce and remarriage (oh, yes, but acceptance thru annulment for those with reality big bucks) or for who they are, in terms of sexual identity. He does seem more Christ-like in his humility and that is as radical as he can get.

b. *Personal Charisma*

Many of the readers admire the personal charism of Pope Francis, as are evident from the following comments. “After-virtue” writes:

Reinhold Niebuhr chose not to force integration on his Detroit congregation, not because he was a segregationist, but rather because he recognized integration at the time would cause a schism from which the church was not likely to recover. Francis likewise treads thoughtfully and like Niebuhr recognizes that seismic changes sometimes do more harm than good. The time may perhaps be right to ease away from certain orthodoxies which have lost relevance and not quite right to throw the baby out with the bath water, so to speak. I’m not even a little religious, but given the choice between Bill Maher’s self-assured progressive fanaticism and the Pope’s center left version of

the Church, I'd eagerly choose the latter as the less scary.⁹

EEE, another reader has a simple message:

Francis' impact for most of us is motivated by His public persona, and that is a clear message; Love Your Neighbor. Ah.... the power of positive leadership. So refreshing . We need not see how sausage is made though,

Ross, I appreciate your insights and efforts.

But from our God it's enough to see the finished products.... the Stars, The Fishes, the Heavens.... without seeing the gore and the cataclysms of the 7 days.

“Frustrated Elite and Stupid,” reader elaborates on the Jesuit mold of Pope Francis.

As s gay catholic in my 50s I have been attending a parish that recently was handed over by the Archbishop to the Jesuits. Before we had a very old Irishman pastor who was hardliner in the mold of B16. I personally didn't mind the old man's railing about abortion or his passing references to evil lifestyles, presumably mine as that is how he interpreted catholic doctrine.

Admittedly living in Georgia the old man had quite s financial following with the older parishioners. Now the Jesuits have filled the parish with numerous young people, young families and the sacramental life of the church is enriching our worship. Of course, the Jesuits, being in the mold of Francis, transformed the parish by actually instituting reforms of Vatican II, among other changes. We have lost our financial health because apparently the old folks who were big givers couldn't handle the Jesuits' changes. While we have many more people, young people understandably are

not as generous. I am not sure why we have to politicize every aspect of our lives, Ross.

Furthermore, Francis as Vicar rightly should concerned shut the future of who will do the work of the Gospel. Western Catholicism been reeling and desperately needs a future flock. Somehow that future under JP2 and B16 was hardly bright nor robust and the clergy it was refashioned by Ratzinger was not healthy either. I think Francis is making needed reforms. It's not simple as the petty politics we practice in the USA.

A Jesuit priest, Joseph A. Brown SJ, holds that Pope Francis provokes only because he consistently tries to witness to “servant leadership.” His comments:

Having been a Jesuit for just a few years short of Pope Francis, I must ask a very simple question, “Just what constitutes a ‘liberal Pope’”? Some might the risk of confounding themselves in trying to apply a label that has never been all that adhesive to singular, prophetic witnesses to “servant leadership.”

Some days he is; some days he isn't. And then on other days he is and isn't, all within hours. I marvel at the how consistent Pope Francis is, and how provocative that consistency seems to be for those who study him.
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c. Compassion and Forgiveness

Bill perceives the “compassion and forgiveness” that Pope Francis personifies:

The Pope seems to be a kindly man who speaks of compassion and forgiveness for mankind. However, he has not been constructive in changing the most egregious of the failings of the Church in current times.

Married priest, both male and female, would be a boon to a modern Catholic Church. I would allow an infusion of persons of intellect and compassion into a priesthood that is lacking in those qualities. Further, it would help prevent the situation that has come to light in the past 20 years that has caused such embarrassment and loss of many faithful. Recognize divorce as a common necessity. People make mistakes and people change. And end the complete and embarrassing sham of Annulment.

Most importantly, sanction the reality of artificial birth control. The vast majority of Catholics believe in it as do the majority of philosophers and theologians within the church. It would be the single most important step in helping rid the world of hunger and poverty and making abortion a rare event.

Finally, recognize that sexual orientation is not a choice. It is a human condition.

The Church needs to prove its relevance to the humans of the 21st century.

Another admirer of Pope Francis, Joseph C Bickford, comments succinctly:

As a non-Catholic I find it easy to admire Pope Francis. He has energy and good will and seems to believe in many of the things I believe in and hope for in a church I respect and admire. The church is the longest living complex organization on earth and its strength serves many human and social needs. Nonetheless for me the key is to make permanent changes to improve the church: more power to the laity, ordination of women, a more realistic attitude towards divorce, homosexuality, and abortion. So far it seems there is

good feeling, good personnel moves, but not much which will last

“Hia3452 from Tulsa” relates Pope Francis’ healthy connection to politics in bringing “fresh air and clean water” to the people of the word.

Francis is not about politics, although he has a voice and opinion about them.

I believe he is about spirituality and faith, not about religious doctrine. I think he is trying to see what separates us from God and what brings us closer. If men or religion or politics separate us from the love of God and one another, then there is the evil, call it the devil or darkness or whatever. And he wants to bring light and fresh air, clean water and food and shelter to eliminate the shadows.

Many readers, including John McDonald from Vancouver, Washington perceives the humility of Pope Francis and are captivated by the mercy of God. His comments are perceptive:

Ross Douthat mistakenly routes Pope Francis’ attempts to bring his Church closer to its people as a political effort rather than what it really is, the work of a person who believes that humility and mercy should characterize this institution of vast wealth, influence, and more than a billion congregants worldwide.

Attempts to create a liberal or progressive, or conservative political profile for Francis confuses his motives by attaching a political ideology to it and trivializes both his closeness to the needs of ordinary people and his desire to lift them up. It minimizes his single-minded effort to bring back to Catholic worship former congregants who frankly have been humiliated by the Church, or even Church sanctions, because they are divorced, or made a personal choice that does not

comport with what some describe as arbitrary and capricious doctrine.

I agree as some have commented that he is today a genuinely kind and forgiving person whose foremost desire is to cast this institution in the ways and lessons of the founder, and his actions carry meaning. His motives may include the restoration of the Church's influence in making secular governments more attentive to the needs of the people they govern. Is this a bad thing? I think not. I would not allow myself to be fooled by the subtleties of his actions, either. Starting with changes made at the Vatican Bank, he has support from his caucus of cardinals, and more importantly, from the membership.

Finally, another reader "Tom J" puts it succinctly:

It seems not to occur to you that the Pope's actions are guided by prayer and humility rather than political maneuvering. Your belief is an example of the problem.

It may be noted that when "Tom j" speaks of "guided by prayer and humility," he is referring to discernment of the spirit, which Pope Francis has ardently been advocating.

5. The Analysis: "Guided by Prayer and Humility"

From the above select comments, it is obvious that the reaction to the article has been mixed. As indicated in the outline, there are some negative criticism against the author and even against the Newspaper for having published this piece. Furthermore, there are couple of comments hostile to the Pope and the Church.

But the general sense of the comments, as evident especially from the Reader's Picks and the Newspaper's picks, is positive. To highlight some of the comments:

- The Pope cannot be judged as liberal or conservative. He is a moderate, with conservative and liberal tendencies.
- There is praise for the Pope for his effort to bring in compassion in a spirit of humility and openness. "More humanity and compassion for the less fortunate."
- There is high regard for going beyond the confines of the institutional Church and addressing the larger issues facing the world: poverty, nuclear disarmament and ecological concerns.
- On the whole, roughly 85% of the comments are appreciative of the Pope, some even going to defend his position. They believe that the Pope is truly "guided by prayer and humility."

It may be noted most of the respondents are secular people who may not be Christians. As far as the designation of the commentators are concerned, there is only one comment by a Jesuit priest. What is interesting is that this motley group of people, who can criticise or correct the Pope, and who are not bound by Catholic loyalty, is on the whole highly appreciative of the Pope's words and actions.

Conclusion

In spite of some reservations and unfavourable views, the study on the article and on its comments find that the readers have a highly favourable opinion on the Pope. It is remarkable that more than 80% of 229 comments reflect a remarkably good impression of the Pope.

“Guided by prayer and humility” could be the catchword to describe Pope Francis’s years as a Pope, which necessarily demands continuous discernment.

Notes

- 1 Douthat, Ross. 2017. “Pope Francis’ Next Act.” *The New York Times*. July 15. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/15/opinion/sunday/pope-francis-next-act.html>. It may also be noted that I have not strictly followed the qualitative research methodology of social sciences, but have drawn valuable insights from this research methodology. I want to thank Dr Dinesh Braganza for his helpful suggestions.
- 2 Oppenheimer, Mark. 2010. “Ross Douthat’s Fantasy World – Mother Jones.” February. <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2010/01/ross-douthat-new-york-times-conservatism/>.
- 3 *The New York Times*. (2017, July 29). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 23:26, July 29, 2017, from https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_New_York_Times&oldid=792969085
- 4 Douthat, Ross. 2017. “Pope Francis’ Next Act.” *The New York Times*. July 15. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/15/opinion/sunday/pope-francis-next-act.html>.
- 5 Catholic Church and Francis, Pope. *Amoris laetitia = The joy of love: on love in the family* - Post-synodal Apostolic exhortation. Vatican City: Vatican Press. 2016. Dated 19 March 2016, and released on 8 April 2016. See also Pentin, Edward. 2017. “Pope Francis Thanks Maltese Bishops for ‘Amoris Laetitia’ Guidelines | Ncregister.Com.” April 6. <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/edward-pentin/pope-francis-thanks-maltese-bishops-for-amoris-laetitia-guidelines>.
- 6 For understanding the issues related to the dubia, please see Alt, Scott Eric. 2017. “The Incoherence of ‘Just Clarify Amoris! Answer the Dubia!’” *Patheos*. April 24. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/scottericalt/incoherence-just-clarify-amoris-answer-dubia/>.
- 7 For the tragic story of the child Charlie Gard, who is supported by both Pope Francis and President Trump, see Rawlinson, Kevin. 2017. “Charlie Gard: Pope and Trump Biggest Help in Keeping Him Alive, Says Mother | UK News | The Guardian.” July 10.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jul/10/charlie-gard-pope-and-trump-biggest-help-in-keeping-him-alive-says-mother>.

- 8 It may be noted that as far as possible, I have not corrected the spelling mistakes or capitalisation, to respect the informal nature of the comments.
- 9 William (Bill) Maher is an American comedian, political commentator, and television host. For some of the controversies connected with this liberal political activist, see Itzkoff, Dave. 2017. "Bill Maher Apologizes for Use of Racial Slur on 'Real Time' - The New York Times." *The New York Times*. June 3. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/03/arts/television/bill-maher-n-word.html>.

Article received: Aug 17, 2017

Article approved: Sept 23, 2017

No of words: 7320



Pope Francis' Prophetic Mission

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Abstract: In spite of the opposition and the objection he is facing from some of his fellow-Christians, Pope Francis continues to make a difference and send out waves of positive energy through his *uncomplicated faith* in the Gospel, through his *unassuming attitude towards others*, through his *simple life*, through his *insightful perception of reality* with its problems and chances, and through the *simple, direct and distinct language* he uses to preach the Good News to everyone.

His life-style represents a new way of living faith, hope and charity as did the prophetic figures of the Old Testament, challenging the powerful both inside and outside the Church to care for the neglected and the underprivileged. What he says and does is so surprising and disturbing that one begins to ask oneself whether he is the Pope or a Prophet of God who has been sent to warn us and call us all to return to the Lord.

Through his life and ministry the Pope seems to direct the Church towards this goal of being transparent and credible. "Pope Francis' courage coupled with humility and firmness offers great hope that he will lead the church like Jesus who was a great agent of change."

The main reasons for this hope and positive energy which he instils in the hearts and minds of the poor are the following: how proves

his solidarity with the poor again and again, the pastoral concern he has for the people of God and which he attempts to instil into the hearts and minds of his fellow clergymen by asking them to move to the peripheries, the joy and happiness he discharges both in his faith life and in his relationship with fellow human beings and above all his conviction about God's mercy and compassion which he tries to translate into everyday life. His life and mission are truly prophetic.

Keywords: Pope Francis, prophet, simple life, uncomplicated faith, unassuming attitude towards others, *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Misericordiae Vultus*, *Laudato Si.* '

In the parishes of the diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart, Germany a signature-campaign called *Pro Concilio* was initiated in early 2017 in support of making a request to the Holy See to get the so called *virii probati* ordained as ministers for the different parish communities. This and many other such initiatives are happening in the Catholic Church today under the leadership of Pope Francis, though not all members of the Church including a few of those who play the leading roles agree with him in every point.¹ In spite of the opposition and the objection he is facing from some of his fellow-Christians, Pope Francis continues to make a difference and send out waves of positive energy through his *uncomplicated faith* in the Gospel, through his *unassuming attitude towards others*, through his *simple life*, through his *insightful perception of reality* with its problems and chances, and through the *simple, direct and distinct language* he uses to preach the Good News to everyone.

His life-style represents a new way of living faith, hope and charity as did the prophetic figures of the Old Testament, challenging the powerful both inside and outside the Church to care for the neglected and the underprivileged. What he says and does is so surprising and disturbing that one begins to ask oneself whether he is the Pope or a Prophet of God who has been sent to warn us and call us all to return to the Lord. In spite of the many dissenting voices which consider him as ambiguous and confusing and request him to 'behave himself' as a Pope and guard the traditional faith of the Church, he goes about his business with much conviction and certainty advocating and promoting more radical ways of living the faith.

It is not easy for an ordained minister to integrate the demands of the sanctification, leadership and prophetic ministries especially when a conflicting situation arises. Further in the life of every minister one of the three functions stands out though the other two are not neglected. When we observe the way Pope Francis carries out his holy office, what stands out, in my opinion, is the ‘prophetic’ aspect, though as a Pope he does not neglect his sanctifying and leading responsibilities. This short essay attempts to focus on the prophetic dimension of the ministry of Pope Francis. Since our understanding of what is ‘prophetic’ is based on the biblical understanding of prophet and prophetic ministry, let us first make a few clarifying observations on this matter.

Biblical Prophets and the Word of God

The most fundamental thing about the biblical prophets is that God’s word was personally made known to them (cf. Jer 11:18) whereby the Spirit of the Lord played a central role (cf. Hos 9:7; Mic 3:8; 2 Sam 23:2; Ezech 3:12-14). The primary function of the biblical prophets is not *foretelling* or *predicting*, something which is popularly expected of a prophet, but *forth-telling*, that is, proclaiming what has been received from the Lord and doing it in his name.² In fact, the Greek term *prophets* contains the verbal stem *phe* meaning to ‘say’ or to ‘speak’ and the prefix *pro* meaning both ‘forth’ and ‘fore.’³ Its Hebrew equivalent *nabi*⁴ refers both to a “speaker” or “proclaimer” and to the “one called” or “appointed”⁵ (cf. Amos 7:14-16; Is 6:1-13; Jer 1:2-10; Ezech 1:2-3.11). In any case, every biblical prophet is a called proclaimer as is attested to by the call narratives in which God is the one who calls⁶ the prophets and commissions them with a specific mission. However, the Bible also contains a number of instances of prophets ‘foretelling’ or ‘predicting’ which serve as a sign of prophetic authority (cf. Deut 18:22; Is 41:22; 43:9). Such proclamation of prophets took different forms like judgements and assurances of salvation (Hos 4:1-5; 2 Kg 1:6; 20:6; Is 66:7-15), oracles of woe or of assurance (Is 5:8-24; Jer 30:10-11), admonitions (Amos 4:4-5) and prophetic symbolic acts (Is 20:2-4; Jer 28:10).⁷ Texts like Deut 18:18-22 and Jer 28:8-9 also make a distinction between true and false prophets.⁸

Though it is the Old Testament which has a separate section on prophetic literature, we also find a number of occurrences of this term in the New Testament having the same meaning as declaring an inspired or revealed statement (Mt 7:22; 13:14; 1 Cor 14:6; Acts 2:17), or predicting something that is hidden (Mt 26:68; Lk 22:64) or lies in the future (Mk 7:6; 1 Pet 1:10). Apart from calling John the Baptist (Lk 1:76) and Jesus (Jn 4:19) as prophets, the New Testament also speaks of Early Christian missionaries as prophets (cf. Mt 10:41; 23:34; Lk 11:49).⁹ Today as was in the biblical times, we are faced with the difficulty of identifying and assessing authentic prophets. We are faced with the questions: Does God continue to inspire or speak to certain men and women even today? Does what is called prophecy today really communicate God's word? The Bible instructs its readers to 'test' (1 Thess 5:20-21) prophets and their prophecies.

The Manner the Prophets Spoke

The prophets of the Old Testament appear to "make much ado about paltry things, lavishing excessive language upon trifling subjects" and "even a minor injustice assumes cosmic proportions" and they were breathlessly impatient with injustice (cf. Amos 8:4-8).¹⁰ Indifference and incapacity to sense the depth of misery caused by the plight of human beings is a matter of serious concern for them. Their language is not charged with harmony but with agitation, anguish and a spirit of non-acceptance, but also with firmness and compassion. They are impatient of excuse and contemptuous of pretence and self-pity. The mouth of a prophet is "a sharp sword" and a "polished arrow" taken out of the quiver of God (Is 49:2).¹¹

The prophets were not faithfully defending the traditionally cherished beliefs and institutions such as sacrifices, priesthood and temple but questioned their scandalous pretensions (cf. Amos 6:8; Jer 6:20; 7:4.8.9-15.21-23). They even called the enemies of the Israelite people like Assyria (cf. Is 10:5; 5:26; 7:18, 8:7; 13:5) and Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Jer 25:9; 27:6; 43:10) as God's 'instruments' which he would use against his own people.¹² The prophets preferred to speak the truth even though it appeared to go against their own people of Israel.¹³ Not modesty, compromise, satiety, tolerance

and understanding but honesty, critique and challenge were the values predominant in the lives of the biblical prophets, though sometimes they exaggerated the guilt of the people and made them appear hard to believe (e.g. Jer 8:10; cf. Jer 5:1.5; 6:6.13).

The prophets also emphasize the mercy and love of God for the people. For example, the prophets present God as the Good Shepherd (cf. Ezech 34) and as a loving parent (cf. Hos 11:1; Is 42:1-9; 46:3; 49:15; 66:13). A number of prophetic texts bear witness to this mercy of God. For example we read in Is 54:10: *For the mountains may go away and the hills may totter, but my faithful love will never leave you, my covenant of peace will never totter, says Yahweh who takes pity on you* (Cf. Is 54:7-8; 55:3; 63:7; Jer 31:3; 33:11; Mic 7:20).

And finally the prophets of the Bible had to face threats and challenges from the people and had to suffer a lot. The best example of such sufferings of a prophet is found in Jer 11:18-12:6 which is one of the so called confessions of Jeremiah¹⁴ where Jeremiah laments over the betrayal of his friends and family in Anathoth. Amos is also hated for reproving the people on behalf of God (cf. Amos 5:10). Loneliness, misery and frustration were part of the prophetic ministry and they had to go on even though the people would not listen to them (cf. Ezech 2:4-5).

Thus we see that the biblical prophets were “extra-institutional charismatic leaders” who were called by God “through a special call experience” and they were sent to “recall” the people of Israel and its leadership, namely the kings and priests, “from the errant ways” into which they had strayed, and to “re-new” their God experience.¹⁵ They, in turn, “lived the faith with radical example. Embracing poverty, extreme religious vows and calling for renewed commitment, they spoke out against injustice” of the powerful and “defended the poor.”¹⁶ They were not defenders of the institution against all odds but went to the extent of questioning the institutional structures in order to re-establish justice and harmony among the people and to renew the covenantal relationship between God and the people.

Pope Francis' Prophetic Mission

When Pope Benedict XVI stunned the world by resigning from his Papal office he honestly admitted that it was due to his lack of strength of mind and body. Such an honest admittance of one's dwindling energies also speaks volumes about the seriousness of the difficulties and problems the Church was facing, both internally and externally, and about the radical response such a crisis moment demanded from the Papal Chair. Declining number of vocations, increasing examples of scandalous behaviour from clergy and religious including accusations of sex abuse against Church leaders, reports of corruption inside Vatican itself, issues of abortion, contraception, same-sex marriages, communion to the divorced, ecumenical and inter-religious relations, ruthless killing of the innocents and the growing misery of the migrants and the profit-oriented market economy which epitomizes money as the almighty are only a few of the challenges inherited by Pope Francis, the successor to Pope Benedict XVI. In the following we make an attempt to understand the 'prophetic' response of the present Pontiff.

Through Simplicity in Life

The popularity of Pope Francis derives from the simplicity of his life. The plastic watch, iron cross, frayed cassock, black shoes and socks instead of the expensive handmade scarlet silk slippers, ring of the fisherman in silver, Ford Focus instead of the Papal Limousine, the missing traditional shoulder-cape and the gold-embroidered ceremonial stole are the loud *signs* of his simplicity which attract the ordinary person. When Pope Francis saw the Papal Apartment after his election to Papacy in March 2013 he commented saying "the entrance is so narrow that people could enter only in debris and drabs."¹⁷ Since he wanted to live with the people, he chose to live in the Papal guest house Casa Santa Maria. This was not a strategy adopted by him after he was elected Pope but had practiced it in his years of ministry in the *villas miseria*, the teeming slums of his native city, Buenos Aires.¹⁸ "A church of the poor, for the poor" is the motto of his Papacy he made on the day of his election. He never likes to be portrayed as a 'superman' or as a star but prefers rather to be considered a normal man who laughs, cries and has friends like

everyone. To a question asked by Mathilde Imberty on question of the Pope being a star, he answered, “Stars are beautiful ... But the Pope must be, must be the servant of the servants of God.”¹⁹

His simplicity is not limited to how he lives his personal life but is extended in the concern he has for the poor and the afflicted. In his address to the bishops of Brazil the Pope clarified saying “Without the grammar of simplicity, the Church loses the very conditions which make it possible ‘to fish’ for God in the deep waters of his Mystery.”²⁰ He is convinced that the poor have a special place in God’s people. This is what he says about the poor in *Evangelii Gaudium* 197:²¹ “God’s heart has a special place for the poor, so much so that he himself “became poor” (2 Cor 8:9; cf. Lk 2:24; Lev 5:7); ... He made himself one of them: “I was hungry and you gave me food to eat”, and he taught them that mercy towards all of these is the key to heaven (cf. Mt 25:5ff.).”

According to him it is the poor teach us “the *sensus fidei*,” and we need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. Our commitment to them should not consist exclusively in activities or programmes of promotion and assistance but in loving attentiveness which considers the other “in a certain sense as one with ourselves” (EG 199). The worst discrimination the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care and therefore our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care (EG 200). Whatever be our lifestyle no one can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice (EG 201).

The Pope expressed his option for the poor already during his first pastoral visit of his Papacy outside Rome which he made to Lampedusa in South Italy on 8 July 2013 which is indicative of his special concern for the dislocated refugees and migrants who are on a permanent search for a place to live in. When he went there he threw a wreath of flowers into the sea and wore purple colour mass vestments (which is usually worn during the time of fasting in the Church) in remembrance of those who had drowned in the Mediterranean while attempting to cross over to Europe. In his homily he also came down heavily upon the indifference of the powerful and the rich to the plight of the poor and called for a “reawakening of consciences” to counter the “globalization of indifferences” being shown to the migrants. Inspired by the appeal made by him,

a wealthy Italian American couple that now lives in Malta, Regina Catrambone and her husband Christopher, founded an association named Migrant Offshore Aid Station and bought a 131 foot rescue boat, the *Phoenix* spending their own money of 3.7 million UD dollars.²²

Pope Francis calls every Christian to care for the vulnerable and help the slow, the weak or the less talented to find opportunities in life (EG 209). He identifies the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly, and particularly the migrants as belonging to this group of vulnerable (EG 210). He exhorts that on the face of human trafficking we should not look the other way like Cain (EG 211). Special attention should be paid to women who are doubly poor and the unborn children who are the most defenceless (EG 212-213) by accompanying women in difficult situations, even when abortion appears to be the only way (EG 214).

Through Deep Faith in the Gospel

In his Encyclical *Lumen Fidei*²³ (LF) the Pope refers to Jn 12:46 and 2 Cor 4:6 and asserts that faith is *light brought by Christ* and it illuminates the entire journey of the believers (LF 1) and every aspect of human existence (LF 4). This faith is in a living God who calls us and loves us through Jesus Christ who demonstrates God's love for us through his death (LF 4). The death and resurrection of Christ is the proof of utter reliability God's love for us (LF 16-17). This faith is transmitted by those who have seen God's light and heard his voice from generation to generation through an unbroken chain of witnesses. It is the lived memory of the life bringing act of Jesus' love kept alive in the Church and taught under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26) that makes the believers contemporaries of Jesus (LF 37-38). This faith is absorbed and deepened in the family (LF 52-54).

Without this faith in God our mutual trust would be weakened, we would remain united only by fear and our stability would be threatened (LF 55). This faith involves painful testing, trials, suffering and weakness which can become an act of love and entrustment into the hands of God (LF 56). It is *a lamp which guides our steps in*

the night. God's response to those who suffer is that of *an accompanying presence*,... *Christ is the one who, having endured suffering, is "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith"* (Heb 12:2; LF 57). Suffering reminds us that ... only from God, ... can our society find solid and lasting foundations. The dynamic of faith, hope and charity (cf. 1 Th 1:3; 1 Cor 13:13) thus leads us to embrace the concerns of all men and women on our journey ... *Let us refuse to be robbed of hope*, or to allow our hope to be dimmed by facile answers and solutions which block our progress (LF 57).

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* in which the focus is on the *Joy* of the Gospel, the Pope identifies consumerism, desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience as the danger of the world today makes the believers callous to the joy of God's love (EG 2). This joy can be regained through a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ (EG 3). This regained joy urges (2 Cor 5:14) and obliges (1 Cor 9:16) everyone to share with others (EG 10) the message that God has *revealed his immense love in the crucified and risen Christ* (EG 11). The Church must carry on this proclamation (EG 169).

Thus he sees faith as a challenge calling for changing the human predicament. He posed the same challenge to the priests in his homily during the Chrism mass at St. Peter's Basilica on 28 March 2013 admonishing them "to go out to the *outskirts* where there is suffering, bloodshed, blindness that longs for sight." He also said that the priest who seldom goes out of himself, ends up as sad priests instead of being shepherds living with *the odour of the sheep*. Finally he asked the priests to "be shepherds, with the *odour of the sheep*" and so be "fishers of men."²⁴

The depth of his faith can be understood from the very title of his Encyclical, *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) which discloses his fundamental attitude of joy for the Gospel message. That he is immersed and filled with this joy finds its expression in his address to the Jesuits during their General Congregation on 24 October 2016 in which he warned them not to allow the enemy of human nature²⁵ to rob oneself among other things of the joy of evangelizing, because joy is constitutive of the Gospel message and one cannot give a good

piece of news with a sad face.²⁶ It looks as if the Gospel message alone is sufficient for him to be happy in life.

According to Pope Francis the Gospel continues to be a vital source of eternal newness for the Church, against all those who would “indoctrinate” it in dead stones to be hurled at others”.²⁷ In his opinion one of the three temptations against missionary discipleship is to “transform the Gospel message into an ideology” which refers to “the attempt to interpret the Gospel apart from the Gospel itself and apart from the Church.”²⁸

In one of his informal letters to the German youth admonishing them to remain faithful to reading and living the Bible, the Pope narrates his own association with his ‘old, well-worn’ copy of the Bible. All that he tries to explain in the contents of this letter is how the Bible contains words God wishes to speak to every human being and how it can be read on all occasions and in every circumstance. In lieu of a ‘theological introduction’ to and critical questions on the Bible, he is evoke interest for Bible in the young people by describing his own personal experience of and attachment to his Bible which is naturally the source of his faith.

As he understands his faith in an uncomplicated manner, so also is his view on prayer and meditation as tools for daily life and as acts of speaking and listening by which humility has to be the governing attitude. The only way one could grow in relationship with God is to pray with humility.²⁹ For him prayer is when he makes his decisions and it should be an experience of giving way, of surrendering, where our entire being enters into the presence of God. Further he believes that prayer is the place where dialogue, listening and transformation occur, looking at God, but above all sensing that we are being watched by him.³⁰ It is inspiring to recall that on the first day of his office as the Bishop of Rome one of the first things he did was to go to the Mary Major Basilica to pray.³¹

Through Insightful Perception of Contemporary Reality

Like the prophets who saw what the others failed to see and who always had an insight into the reality and called for a renewed rela-

tionship with it, Pope Francis too proves himself again and again to be creative and innovative. Already in the pre-conclave meeting before his election to Pope when he spoke forcefully to the Cardinals that the Church “must go to the peripheries” in both a geographic and existential sense and must beware of “theological narcissism.”³² Narcissists are those who are blinded by the radiant glow of their self-perceived greatness and they don’t see what havoc they create or what misery they inflict on others.³³ He repeats the same clarion call in EG 20: “Each Christian and every community must discern the path ... to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel.” This reflects his vision of the Church as a ‘centrifugal Church.’³⁴ Such a vision of the Pope was also reflected in his warning to the Vatican diplomats-in-training that careerism is leprosy and in his invitation to his fellow bishops to be men who love poverty, simplicity and austerity of life.³⁵

Twenty months later into his Papal office four days before Christmas 2014 he presented the Roman Curia with a list of fifteen ailments from which the Curia had to heal itself. This list voiced the prophetic call for conversion from the sicknesses of “leading double life,” “of teaching others with severity and leading a hidden, sometimes dissolute life,” “of gossiping,” “of rivalry and vain glory,” and “of worldly profit and exhibitionism” among the other things.³⁶ In order to arrive at a fairer representation at the Vatican he first created a council of eight (later nine) cardinals from across the world to reform the Roman Curia, and has started appointing new Cardinals to the College of Cardinals more and more from countries like Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Haiti, Nicaragua, New Zealand, Vietnam, Myanmar and Thailand. Such actions reveal the direction of correcting Eurocentric imbalance in the College of Cardinals by adding a number of curial Cardinals from poorer countries.

Through Doing Justice to Women

His concern for including women in the Church activities is also evidenced by a number of activities. On 4 May 2015 he welcomed the female head of Sweden’s Lutheran Church Archbishop Antje

Jackelen of Uppsala on an official visit to Vatican.³⁷ On 5 December 2014 when he appointed new members Vatican's International Theological Commission, for the first time seven female theologians were included as part of the twenty member commission. He has also spoken repeatedly of the need for the Church to develop a deeper theology of women and of his determination to promote women to senior positions in Rome. Though he has no intention of modifying the Church teaching on ordination of women priests still he intends to promote the participation of women in Church life. On 11 May 2017 he told the Canadian bishops that it is "vital" that more women be involved, including in decision making, and that we need to "bring the voice of women into the responsibility structures of the church."³⁸ And a number of people all over the world believe that a radical decision with regard to ordination of women priests cannot be ruled out with the ever-surprising Pope Francis at the helm.³⁹

Through Putting Own House in Order

The dragging and nagging corruptions at the Vatican bank is known to many of us under the headword *Vatileaks*. Pope Francis has not hesitated to invite a number of agencies consisting of renowned lay financial experts to review the operations of the Vatican bank. Though it is suspected by some Vatican Cardinals that such external scrutiny might amount to voluntary renouncement of Papal sovereignty and might lead to attack from outside to destabilize the Holy See, Pope Francis goes ahead with the reforms. In February 2014 he handed over the authority for running the Vatican finances to Cardinal George Pell one of the so called "Group of Eight" who since 2014 releases the balance sheets about the Vatican financial situation with facts and figures and who since January 2015 has introduced draconian new accounting rules for every Vatican headquarters department. Total financial transparency is the order given by Pope Francis.⁴⁰

Through Discerning Mercy as Foundational

The great jubilee year of mercy lasting from 8 December 2015

to 20 November 2016 which was declared by Pope Francis on the fourth Sunday of Lent in 2015 was a seminal idea that was born out of a deep conviction that the Church and the world today are very badly in need of becoming ‘merciful’ towards fellow humans and towards nature. The official document *Misericordiae Vultus* which contained the message of the Pope on this theme of mercy is founded on the principle that God is rich in mercy (Eph 2:4) and he is “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ex 34:6).

This declaration created a ‘hype’ about mercy and at least in the ecclesial circles to say the least, it initiated a renewed awareness and a reawakening about nature of God and the nature and the mission of the Church. In a situation of indecisiveness, ambiguity, indifference, profit-oriented market, achievement based entrepreneurs, conformity promoting education and political systems which reduces the human beings as instruments of usefulness and leaves behind anxiety and uncertainty, it was highly necessary to remind humanity of the God of the Bible who has revealed himself as someone cares, loves and is merciful. The call for a year of mercy was a prompt and appropriate response of Pope Francis to the situation humanity is in at the moment. In EG 114 the Pope has also invited the Church to be a place of mercy, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel. Thus the Church is supposed to become a ‘mother’ and a ‘shepherdess.’⁴¹

Quoting the *Summa Theologica* (I-II, q. 66, a. 4-6; q. 108, a.1) in EG 37, Pope Francis makes the following assertion: “... as far as external works are concerned, mercy is the greatest of all the virtues.”⁴² It becomes clear from the context of the Exhortation that mercy is considered to be the same as the ‘works of love’ mentioned by Paul in Gal 5:6.⁴³ By equating mercy with the works of love, the Pope is actually qualifying mercy as *the* ‘Christian’ way of relating to one’s neighbor. He also referred to this mercy in his address to the Jesuits on the occasion of their General Congregation describing that this mercy is not an abstract word but a lifestyle of concrete gestures and an expansion of the colloquy with the Lord placed on the cross.⁴⁴ In the same address he also states that the “Lord who looks at us with mercy and chooses us, sends us to bring with all its

effectiveness, that same mercy to the poorest, to sinners, to those discarded people, and those crucified in the present world, who suffer injustice and violence.⁴⁵

The visit of Pope Francis to the migrant camp in the Greek island Lesbos on 16 April 2016 to highlight the humanitarian crisis was a concretization of this message of mercy the Pope intends to drive home in the hearts of his contemporaries. The Pope spent five hours on Lesbos with Bartholomew I, the spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians and with the Archbishop of Athens and on his return journey he took with himself twelve refugees to Vatican all of whom were Syrian Muslims. It was indeed a symbolic gesture from the Pontiff to tell the people in plight that they are not alone in their struggle. He also appreciated the efforts made by Greece to take care of them. At the same time it also posed challenge to the international community to become more sensitive to the issue of migrants and refugees.

Through Hearing the Cry of Mother Earth

Much acclaimed is also the concern of the Pope for creation. Already in EG he has expressed this concern pointing out that creation as a whole is 'frequently at the mercy of economic interests or indiscriminate exploitation' (EG 215) and that desertification of the soil and extinction of species is a painful disfigurement and has invited all Christians to watch over and protect the fragile world following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi (EG 215).

Further his Encyclical *Laudato Si'* (LS) came as a pointed expression of his concern for creation and nature. First of all it must be said that this Encyclical is a timely response to the international situation when the countries of the world are discussing climate change and environmental protection. His calling the earth as 'common home' for human beings is very surprising, because here is a Pope who calls not the heaven but the earth which is usually considered as 'banished' in the Christian theology as common home. Of the twenty nine occurrences of the word "home" in this Encyclical, sixteen of them are used to call the earth as the common home of humanity. He rightly identifies that this common home

is falling into serious disrepair (LS 61) and it is the human beings who have “hurt and mistreated” the common home in the last two hundred years (LS 53). The Encyclical also attests to the discoveries of science and technology (LS 102-136), appreciates the efforts made by the international community to save the earth and calls for more serious and committed action (LS 164-198) and calls for a dialogue between religions and science (LS 199-201).

Through Identifying Family as the Nucleus

The Pope has rightly and prophetically identified that the future of the Church lies actually in the ‘family’ the most fundamental unit of the society where the making or the breaking of the society begins and ends. Realizing its importance for the Church he decided to call a synod on family this time using a new method of first consulting the local Churches followed by a discussion among the Cardinals on the results of the consultation and then a first synod (in October 2014) to formulate the questions and another one (in October 2015) to vote on concrete proposals. His aim in the synods has not been to change the doctrines of the Church on the sacraments or indissolubility of marriage but find ways of integrating those alienated from Church life due to some tragic personal situations.⁴⁶ The Church has the responsibility, in his opinion, ‘not to lose the saved’ and ‘to save the lost.’

The post-synodal document ‘*Amoris Laetitia*’ *On Love in the Family*, moves in the direction of caring for the alienated ones, especially in chapter eight which actually addresses the concern the Pope had before the council, namely, integrating those who are alienated from the Church. The chapter begins by articulating the desire of the Church to show mercy and to help those who are struggling to live according to God’s plan for marriage and family because of moral weakness (AL 291). The pastors must lead those living without proper marriages to live according to the Gospel and motivate them to live according to the law helped by grace (AL 293-295). Following Jesus the Church must show mercy (AL 296) by first understanding those who are into ‘irregular’ scenarios (AL 298) and then discerning ways of integrating the “divorced and civilly remarried” into the community, without compromising the faith or

causing scandal (AL 299). Instead of condemning people based on general laws, pastors should seek to bring those people out of their disordered state regardless of their culpability (AL 305).

Through Remaining Open

Another important concern the Pope has is to relate with other denominations and religions. Speaking to the leaders of the Protestant Salvation Army he mentioned to them that he learned the spirit of ecumenism from his grandmother way back in 1940 when she commented about two Salvation Army women walking on the other side of the road saying, ‘they are good Protestants!’⁴⁷ The joint-declaration “From Conflict to Communion” made by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) to commemorate the 500 years of Reformation, is a significant milestone in the ecumenical history of the Church. This document calls for mutual positive appraisal of the Reformation movement and the Catholic response and engages itself in the theological discussion instead of a political conflict to promote further encounter among the Christians.

Pope Francis is also emerging as a model of dialogue both in word and deed.⁴⁸ The Pope looks at truth and love as intimately related and as caught up in the dynamism of life, relationships and history rather than in abstract speculation.⁴⁹ Such a perception of reality could help as a common platform for a dialogue with other religions.

The insightful perceptions of Pope Francis can be summarized in his six foundational commitments as formulated by Chris Lowney: Know yourself deeply, live to serve others, immerse yourself in the world, withdraw from the world daily, live in the present and revere tradition and create the future.⁵⁰ As he himself mentioned in his homily on the inauguration of his ministry as the Bishop of Rome, every leader must follow the example of Joseph in exercising the role of the protector “discreetly, humbly and silently, but with an unfailing presence and utter fidelity, even when he finds it hard to understand” and “By being constantly attentive to God, open to the signs of God’s presence and receptive to God’s plans, which calls for

... “a capacity for concern, for compassion, for genuine openness to others, for love.”⁵¹ According to him “authentic power is service, and that the Pope too, when exercising power, must enter ever more fully into that service ... and must open his arms to protect ... the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison (cf. *Mt* 25:31-46). Only those who serve with love are able to protect!”⁵²

Through Unassuming Attitude towards Others

Pope Francis is a person who approaches other human beings in an unassuming manner. This was evident already when he, as twenty eight years old young priest at Immaculate Conception College in Buenos Aires, went out of his way to help the young boys to form a musical band because they wanted. His desire to bring human beings together finds its expression in his address to the Jesuits on 24 October 2016 calling for “harmonizing the tensions brought about by the diversity of men.”⁵³

One of the main accusations made against Pope Francis is that he behaved in a conservative and authoritarian way when he was the provincial superior of the Argentinian Jesuits when he had banned guitar-songs, insisted on clerical dress and discouraged the Jesuits from learning subjects like politics, sociology and engineering in order to prevent them from becoming involved in political activities. He is also accused of not having protected the Jesuits Francesco Jalics and Orlando Yorio who were among the kidnapped during the military regime.⁵⁴ It was even said that Bergoglio even gave ‘green light’ to arrest them.⁵⁵

When we consider all this, it appears today odd to imagine that such an unassuming Pope was so authoritarian then. However, one should consider the context in which all this happened. It was a situation of a deep economic crisis in Argentine⁵⁶ which led the country into a military dictatorship that ruthlessly killed even priests and nuns. It was in this context that the then Jesuit provincial warned the two above mentioned Jesuits to leave *Bajo Flores* where they were working for the poor. When they refused to comply with his instruction, thereby also defying the obedience vow of the Jesuits,

he withdrew their religious license in order save their life from the military dictatorship. Evidently, the two Jesuits refused to obey because of their ‘preferential option for the poor’ as one of the serious follow-up actions of the then much acclaimed ‘liberation theology.’⁵⁷ One can understand that the efforts of the provincial only helped to prevent victimization of the Jesuits by the then military regime. Later on one of the two Jesuits Francesco Jalics clarified a statement saying, “The fact is: Orlando Yorio and I were not denounced by Father Begoglio.”⁵⁸

The Pope’s unassuming attitude towards life becomes vivid from a few instances such as celebrating his first mass as Pope in a surplice and greeting the congregation one by one as they came out, kissing the Argentinian President Cristina Kirchner thereby abandoning the tradition that popes never kiss or receive kisses, rejoicing at a small boy taking over his Papal seat on an occasion, washing and kissing the feet of prisoners on Maundy Thursday and hugging and kissing the face of a disfigured poor man the photo of which went viral in the social media. These and many other things which he does express the joy he finds in accepting and relating to the underprivileged and the unfortunate people.

Through Simple, Direct and Distinct Language

About himself the Pope has said that he is a sinner upon whom the Lord has looked. About the Church he says that it ‘is a field hospital after battle.’ About following the principle of collegiality and moving towards a synodal Church he says, “Periphery shapes the centre.”⁵⁹ He does not hesitate to name the difficulties of the Church such as ‘functionalism’ and ‘clericalism.’ ‘Who am I to judge?’ was his answer, when he was asked about his opinion on homosexuality. He is sensitive to the difficulties and challenges that people go through. He does not judge but understands their struggle.⁶⁰ One can make an endless list such concise but vivid statements made by the Pope which are examples of his direct and distinct language.

Conclusion

Prophetic character demands transparency and credibility. The

important question to be asked is: ‘Are the institutions of the Church transparent and credible?’⁶¹ Through his life and ministry the Pope seems to direct the Church towards this goal of being transparent and credible. “Pope Francis’ courage coupled with humility and firmness offers great hope that he will lead the church like Jesus who was a great agent of change.”⁶² The main reasons for this hope and positive energy which he instils in the hearts and minds of the poor as well as in all human beings of good will who dream of establishing the Kingdom of love, peace and justice which Jesus preached are the following: how proves his solidarity with the poor again and again, the pastoral concern he has for the people of God and which he attempts to instil into the hearts and minds of his fellow clergymen by asking them to move to the peripheries, the joy and happiness he discharges both in his faith life and in his relationship with fellow human beings and above all his conviction about God’s mercy and compassion which he tries to translate into everyday life. May all who see him also perceive his prophetic invitation and commit themselves to cause of God!

Notes

- 1 It is not an unknown fact that four Cardinals wrote the so called ‘dubia’ a letter on 19 September 2016 to the Pope with five questions seeking clarification on the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* and on 23 September 2017 a document “formal correction” to the alleged errors in the above said Exhortation has been published on blogs and online newspapers which accuse the Pope of seven heresies.
- 2 D J McCarthy, “Prophecy in the Bible,” in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* 11 (1967), 861.
- 3 Helmut Krämer, *Profh,thj ktl.*, in: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 6, 784. The understanding of a prophet as one who “foretells” is usually derived from the practice of considering the Old Testament prophets as ‘foretellers’ of Jesus the Messiah. However, it must also be noted that such messianic proclamations are relatively few in number in the Old Testament. Cf. Erich Zenger, “Die Bücher der Prophetie,” in: Erich Zenger (ed.), *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (Stuttgart: W. Kohnhaller, 2008), 417.

- 4 Cf. Hatch Edwin, Redpath A Henry, *A Concordance to the Septuagint and the Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament Including the Apocryphal Books* (Grand Rapids – Michigan: Baker Academic, 1998), 1231-1233.
- 5 In the recent times the passive meaning is preferred to the active one. Cf. R Rendtorff, **aybn** in the Old Testament, in: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 6, 796.
- 6 C Brown, **profh,thj**, in: *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* 3 (1986), 77.
- 7 Cf. Ake Viberg, *Prophets in Action: An Analysis of Prophetic Symbolic Acts in the OT* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 2007), 27-45. In this book we find a definition and a list of such prophetic symbolic acts.
- 8 Cf. Willem A. VanGemenen, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 63-66. On page 63 of this book the author is making a table comparing the characteristics of false and true prophets.
- 9 For more info on the origin and development of early Christian prophecy kindly see Ulrich Luz, “Stages if Early Christian Prophetism,” in *Prophets and Prophecy in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*, ed. Joseph Verheyden et. al. (WUNT 2.286, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 57-75. Further see David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 189-232.
- 10 Cf. Abraham J. Heschel, *Prophets* (Peabody: Prince Press, 2000), 3-4.
- 11 Cf. Abraham J. Heschel, *Prophets*, 5-7.
- 12 Abraham J. Heschel, *Prophets*, 8-12.
- 13 We read in Jer 38:3 where the prophet prophesies saying that the city of Jerusalem will certainly be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon, and he will capture it. Such prophecies were very much displeasing to the people and the kings who ruled over them.
- 14 Traditionally five such confessions are identified in the Book of Jeremiah: Jer 11:18-12:6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-21 and 20:7-13. See Georg Fischer, Knut Backhaus, *Beten – Die Neue Echter Bibel Themen 14* (Würzburg: Echter, 2009), 41-42.

- 15 G.M. Soares Prabhu, "The Dharma of the Biblical Prophet," in Scaria Kuthirakkattel (ed), *Biblical Spirituality of Liberative Action: Collected Works of George M. Soares Prabhu*, vol 3, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theological Series, Pune 2000, 110.
- 16 Dwight Longenecker, "Francis is a great prophet, but he also needs to be pope," accessed on 12.05.2017 from: <https://cruxnow.com/commentary/2016/12/08/francis-great-prophet-also-needs-pope/>.
- 17 Pope Francis interview by Fr. Antonio Spadaro, "A Big Heart Opens to God," in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, September 2013.
- 18 David Willey, *The Promise of Francis: the Man, the Pope and the Challenge of Change* (New York: Gallery Books, 2015), 23-50.
- 19 Radio Vatican Asia Newsletter, vol. 3, no. Spl 4, Sept 29, 2015
- 20 Pope Francis Address to the bishops of Brazil in Rio De Janeiro on July 27, 2013 (Zenit.org).
- 21 Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel* (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2013). All the subsequent references to *Evangelii Gaudium* is taken from this volume and will be referred to by the abbreviation EG with the respective number referred to.
- 22 Ibid, 135-136.
- 23 All subsequent references to this document are made to an on-line version of the document downloaded from http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html on 10.10.2017.
- 24 Pope Francis' homily at the Chrism Mass at Saint Peter's Basilica Holy Thursday, 8 March 2013 accessed on 12.10.2017 from http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130328_messa-crismale.html
- 25 The 'enemy of human nature' is the way Ignatius calls the force of evil in human beings in his Spiritual Exercises 140.
- 26 Pope Francis' Address to the Jesuits, in Asian Journal of Religious Studies, 62/1-2 (January-April 2017): 9-10.
- 27 From the Address of His Holiness Pope Francis on 24 October 2015 on the occasion of the Conclusion of the Family Synod, accessed on 15.08.2016, from: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151024_sinodo-conclusionione-lavori.html.

- 28 Pope Francis' address to the coordinating committee of CELAM in Rio De Janeiro on 29 July 2013 (zenit.org).
- 29 Cf. Mario Escobar, *Francis: Man of Prayer* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 165-167.
- 30 Paul Valley, *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 144.
- 31 Cf. Chris Lowney, *Pope Francis: Why He Leads the Way He Leads* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2013), 79-80.
- 32 David Willey, *The Promise of Francis*, 12.
- 33 Cf. Chris Lowney, *Pope Francis: Why He Leads the Way He Leads*, 2.
- 34 Alphonse Arockiaswamy, *Decoding Pope Francis: the Man, the Pastor and the Missionary* (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 2016), 43.
- 35 The statements of this sentence are taken from Chris Lowney who has collected them from different news agencies in Chris Lowney, *Pope Francis: Why He Leads the Way He Leads*, 7.
- 36 David Willey, *The Promise of Francis*, 17-18.
- 37 Ibid, 73.
- 38 Cindy Wooden, "Go out now, share the Gospel, get messy, pope tells Quebec bishops," in *Crux. Taking the Catholic Pulse*, accessed on 12.05.2017 from: <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2017/05/12/go-now-share-gospel-get-messy-pope-tells-quebec-bishops/>.
- 39 Cristina Odone, "For the Sake of the Priesthood's Future, Catholics Need to Talk about Women Priests," *Daily Telegraph*, January 21, 2015.
- 40 David Willey, *The Promise of Francis*, 50-71.
- 41 Paulraj Mariapushpam, "God Who is Rich in Mercy (Eph 2:4): Mercy in the Bible," *Asian Journal of Religious Studies* 64/1 (July-August 2016), 18-20.
- 42 Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel* (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2013), 36.
- 43 This verse Gal 5:6 expresses, in my opinion, Paul's most complete understanding of religion, namely as 'faith working through love.'
- 44 Pope Francis' Address to the Jesuits, 11.
- 45 Pope Francis' Address to the Jesuits, 12.

- 46 Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2014), 374-375.
- 47 Cf. David Willey, *The Promise of Francis*, 28-29.
- 48 Michael Amaladoss, "Pope Francis and Dialogue," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 79 (March, 2015), 165.
- 49 Ibid, 181.
- 50 Chris Lowney, *Pope Francis: Why He Leads the Way He Leads*, 9-10.
- 51 "Homily of Pope Francis for the Beginning of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome," 19 March 2013 accessed on 11.10.2017 from https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130319_omelia-inizio-pontificato.html.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Pope Francis' Address to the Jesuits, 7.
- 54 Cf. Mario I Aguilar, *Pope Francis: His Life and Thoughts* (Cambridge: The Luther Worth Press, 2014), 72-77.
- 55 Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 130.
- 56 Cf. Mario I Aguilar, *Pope Francis*, 63-65.
- 57 Cf. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis, Maryknoll, 1971).
- 58 Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 130.
- 59 Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 374.
- 60 Michael Amaladoss, "Pope Francis and Dialogue," 166.
- 61 Michael Amaladoss, "Is Prophecy Still Alive?: Institution and Charism in the Christian Community in India," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 69 (Feb – 2005), 94-96.
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Article received: Sept 7, 2017;

Article approved: Sept 22, 2017

No of words 8232



Gazing at Our World with God's Eyes of Mercy: Pope Francis' Theological Vision

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Abstract: In this article an attempt is made to examine the well-springs of Pope Francis's life to provide a framework for understanding his theological vision. One can find four striking similarities between the life and mission of St Francis of Assisi and Pope Francis who assumed the name Francis immediately after he was elected Pope. St Francis of Assisi embraced a life of poverty, attempted to renew the Church, loved everything in nature as his brothers and sisters and entered into inter-religious dialogue with Muslims. These four traits can be seen in large measure in the life and mission of Pope Francis. Pope's recognition of his self-identity as mission finds expression in his life and his vision of the Church and his leadership of the universal Church. Pope Francis is a 'poor pastor' in the image and likeness of God's Poor Son, Jesus and he is deeply humble and aware of his own sinfulness against the light of God's overwhelming mercy. His theological vision can be summarized in his own words, "God does not provide arguments which explain everything; rather, his response is that of an accompanying presence, a history of goodness which touches every story of suffering and opens up a ray of light." Pope Francis "*experiences* the love of the Most Holy Trinity" with his eyes fixed on "the most merciful gaze of Jesus."

Keywords: Identity, Mission, Communion, Open Church, Dialogue, Going to Periphery

Introduction

In the short span of the first four years of his papacy, Pope Francis has made a profound and lasting impact not only on Christians, but also on our world's citizens, at large. Many might not agree with everything that the pope says and does;¹ yet, few will contest the fact that he has voiced radical and revolutionary opinions on the world stage, loud and clear. Whether he is addressing world bodies like the UN General Assembly, the US Congress or eminent global leaders and religionists, Pope Francis does not mince words. He astutely addresses problems, analyzes issues, builds bridges, critiques evil in all its avatars and maps pathways for making this world a better place. In all his endeavours there is a refreshing newness and a Spirit-powered dynamism that makes people yearn to follow what he says; and even more, to do what he does. Indeed, Pope Francis 'walks the talk', so to say. That is why people listen and learn from him.

This article examines the wellsprings of Pope Francis's life to provide a framework for understanding his theological vision. To achieve this end, while drawing inspiration mainly from Pope Francis's writings, it will also tap relevant fragments from the pope's personal life, pastoral praxis, Jesuit training, daily homilies and the witness of his works, which often preach even louder than his words. Before entering into details of what I hold to be Pope Francis's theological vision, I provide a framework—which could be called a 'Peter Paradigm'—that could help us to comprehend his theological vision.

1. A 'Peter Paradigm' Integrating Identity, Community and Mission

Simon Peter is considered as the 'First Pope' of Christian history. His life could be a model for church leaders who desire to follow Jesus faithfully and lead his flock fruitfully. In a engaging encounter with his apostles (Mt 16:13-20), Jesus gives Simon, son of Jonah, a new identity, entrusts him with a community and commissions him on a mission. In identifying Jesus as the Christ, God's Anointed One, Jesus gives Simon an identity as *Petros* (Greek) or *Cepha* (Hebrew),

the Rock, entrusting him with shepherding a Christic/Messianic community, commissioning him for the ministry of reconciliation.

The Bible positively uses ‘rock’ for no one else except God. David sings: “The Lord is my rock, my fortress, my deliverer; my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge” (2 Sam 22:2-4). On the one hand, the psalms have rich references to God as Rock (18:2; 31:3; 62:2; 78:35; 95:1, etc.), for in God the Israelites experience safety and security; but, on the other, if people seek security in creatures rather than in their Creator, then God can become “a rock one stumbles over—a trap and a snare for the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Isa 8:14-15). After being identified as the ‘Christ/Messiah’ Jesus renames Simon as *Petros* or *Cepha*, i.e., Rock, thereby giving him a positive identity as one who will be the cornerstone for his new community, the church. Sadly, soon after Simon is renamed and given a leadership role in the church, he becomes a stumbling block to Jesus’ journey towards Jerusalem. Here, Jesus sternly reprimands him with the negative nuance attached to *Petros*: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a *stumbling block* to me...” (Mt 16:23). By placing obstacles in Jesus’ pathway to his passion and death, Peter seemingly partners Satan who tempts Jesus at the start of his ministry (Mt 4:1-11). Nonetheless, later, a repentant and renewed Peter will use both, the positive and negative nuances of rock imagery in his writings to describe Christ and the new Christic community.²

It is beyond the scope of this article to enter into Biblical details of these passages. Suffice it to say that the awareness of one’s identity leads to conception and construction of a particular community, and consequent involvement in mission. Community, identity and mission, therefore, are interlinked and interpenetrate to mutually influence each other. Put in theological terms one can say that a *Christology/theological anthropology* (i.e., ‘who’ one understands oneself to be vis-à-vis ‘who’ one understands Christ to be) influences one’s *ecclesiology* (one’s concept of church/community), and determines one’s *missiology* (‘what’ one’s mission is). We will examine the life and the mission of Pope Francis within this framework of Community, Identity and Mission.

2. Interrogating the Identity of Pope Francis

After the 2013 papal conclave, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio's assuming the name 'Francis'—after St. Francis of Assisi—coming after 23 Johns, 16 Benedicts, 14 Clements, 6 Pauls and 2 John Paul's is strikingly singular, selective and suggestive. Among other virtues, Francis of Assisi is universally loved even today, because he: (a) embraced poverty with unprecedented ardour, (b) sought relentlessly to renew the church of his times when he heard a voice from a crucifix at San Damiano saying, "Go and repair my house which is falling into ruin!"³ (c) loved nature and all living creatures as his sisters and brothers, and, (d) journeyed to Egypt to meet a Muslim sultan and can, by extension, be regarded as a pioneer in what today we call interfaith dialogue.⁴ These four traits can be seen in large measure in the life and mission of Pope Francis.

The personal poverty of Pope Francis can be perceived in his lifestyle already when he was a pastor in a poor parish in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He would travel by public transport or walk around frequently to visit the poorest of poor in his parish. Interestingly, soon after being elected as pope, he refused the pompous paraphernalia of the papacy—cape of fur, gold ring and cross, new shoes, special papal vehicle, etc., and travelled together with fellow cardinals to his residence, queuing up to pay his bills.

Pope Francis treasures poverty not because poverty is good in itself [it is not!]; but, since, in the poor and the sick, one meets God. In one of his homilies, he said, "To encounter the living God it is necessary to tenderly kiss Jesus' wounds in our hungry, poor, sick and incarcerated brothers and sisters."⁵ He added, "The path to our encounter with Jesus-God are his wounds. There is no other."⁶ According to Pope Francis, all Christians derive their identity from the poor Christ. In his Lenten Reflection for the year 2014, he wrote: "In imitation of our Master, we Christians are called to confront the poverty of our brothers and sisters, to touch it, to make it our own and to take practical steps to alleviate it."⁷

Pope Francis is humble and self-effacing to the core. In one of his first interviews after being elected pope, he openly confessed, "I am a sinner, but I trust in the infinite mercy and patience of our

Lord Jesus Christ.”⁸ This has led him to stress not only his need for God’s mercy, but also to create much-needed awareness that all of us, Christians, are sinners in need of God’s mercy. This ‘stamp of sinfulness’, so to say, and need for God’s mercy, will run throughout the papacy of Francis since the theme of mercy figures prominently in his papal motto: “*miserando atque eligendo*,” literally meaning, “by having mercy, by choosing him.”⁹ This motto was not something he cleverly crafted on being elected pope; but it was already his catch-line during his tenure as bishop.

Among many outstanding virtues that characterize Pope Francis, we highlight but three, which we have hinted at. First, Pope Francis is a ‘poor pastor’ in the image and likeness of God’s Poor Son, Jesus. Second, Pope Francis is deeply humble and aware of his own sinfulness against the light of God’s overwhelming mercy. Third, Pope Francis “*experiences* the love of the Most Holy Trinity” with his eyes fixed on “the most merciful gaze of Jesus.”¹⁰ By experiencing and identifying Jesus as ‘The Merciful One’ Francis, in turn, sees himself as a disciple of Jesus and a ‘chosen one’ for a Trinity-given mission of mercy. This tripod seems to be the bedrock upon which Pope Francis builds community (church and world), and maps out the church’s mission in our times and places.

3. Pope Francis’s Conception of a Poor and Open Church

In his dual dynamic of: (a) identifying Christ as the poor, humble, merciful Son of God, and, (b) identifying himself as a Francis-of-Assisi type apostle of the ‘good news’ of this same Christ, Pope Francis provides pointers of ‘what’ this church-body ought to be and ‘who’ ought to be its prime organs and privileged beneficiaries. A few days after being elected pope, in a BBC interview, Francis spoke of his dreams to have “a poor church for the poor.”¹¹ This theme finds initial mention in *Lumen Fidei*, his first encyclical released in July 2013. Pope Francis writes:¹²

Nor does the light of faith make us forget the sufferings of this world. How many men and women of faith have found mediators of light in those who suffer! So it was with Saint Francis of Assisi and the

leper, or with Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta and her poor. They understood the mystery at work in them. . . . To those who suffer, God does not provide arguments which explain everything; rather, his response is that of an accompanying presence, a history of goodness which touches every story of suffering and opens up a ray of light.

Mention of the poor and the image of a poor church features more forcefully in *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis's November 2013 Apostolic Exhortation on the 'Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World'. Notably, he does not see the poor as mere beneficiaries of Christian charity, but as subjects who have taught him valuable lessons about Christian joy. He writes, "I can say that the most beautiful and natural expressions of joy which I have seen in my life were in poor people who had little to hold on to."¹³ It is to these that all Christians and the church must "go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel."¹⁴

Francis wants a *poor church* to go the *peripheries* not as a macho conquistador but as a loving mother nursing sick, wounded children, even if it means apparent defilement.¹⁵

I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures. If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life

The church that goes forth to love and serve the poor, needy, sick, suffering, peripheral peoples, etc., must comprise of joyful evangelizers, not mournful "sourpusses" and "disillusioned pessimists"¹⁶ obsessed with "a business mentality, caught up with management, statistics, plans and evaluations whose principal beneficiary is not God's people but the Church as an institution."¹⁷ Pope Francis prays: "God save us from a worldly Church with superficial spiritual and pastoral trappings! This stifling worldliness

can only be healed by breathing in the pure air of the Holy Spirit who frees us from self-centredness cloaked in an outward religiosity bereft of God.”¹⁸ Thus, we see him pleading for a church nourished with a deep spirituality rather than depending on human intelligence and competence to accomplish God’s will.

Being in the echelons of ecclesial power, concomitant with his episcopal and cardinal engagements, Pope Francis wisely seeks to turn the church’s pyramidal hierarchy topsy-turvy by what seems to be a three-pronged strategy aimed at greater equality and wider participation: First, in ironic ‘Christmas wishes’ to members of the Vatican Curia, he enumerated 15 ‘ailments’ that paralyze church functioning. His diagnosing of these ills as *Martha-ism*, Spiritual Alzheimer’s, Existential Schizophrenia, Exhibitionism, Funereal Face, etc., conveyed an unequivocal message that the messy Vatican bureaucracy needed trimming and cleansing.¹⁹ Second, while being rightly critical of a rigid, legalistic and Roma-centric Vatican Curia, a month after his election to the papacy, Pope Francis appointed a ‘Council of Cardinals’ with 8 members from all the continents to advise him on church matters, worldwide. Third, to offset the grave dangers of clericalism and to restore to the lay faithful their rightful roles and responsibilities in the church, he organized two ‘Synods of the Family’, the outcome of which was his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *‘Amoris Laetitia’* on love in the family on March 19, 2016.

While constantly speaking about the important and indispensable role of the ‘domestic church’, the family, in fostering the peace and prosperity of church and world, Pope Francis once again echoes a clear ‘option for the poor’ (i.e., the economically poor as well as unwed mothers and single-parent families), for whom he pleads that: “In such difficult situations of need, the Church must be particularly concerned to offer understanding, comfort and acceptance, rather than imposing straightaway a set of rules that only lead people to feel judged and abandoned by the very Mother called to show them God’s mercy.”²⁰ In this regard, should one think of Pope Francis as just another social worker striving to solve sociopolitical and economic problems of families, one must note the many times that his visions for family, church and global community are solidly

based on his contemplation of the Holy Family of Nazareth and the Triune God. He writes: “Every family should look to the icon of the Holy Family of Nazareth.”²¹ Moreover: “In the human family, gathered by Christ, ‘the image and likeness’ of the Most Holy Trinity (cf. Gen 1:26) has been restored, the mystery from which all true love flows. Through the Church, marriage and the family receive the grace of the Holy Spirit from Christ, in order to bear witness to the Gospel of God’s love.”²²

By desiring an ‘open church’ with open doors and windows, Pope Francis combats all forms of ‘*Churchianity*’, clericalism, legalism and sterile institutionalization, while endorsing a ‘*Regnocentrism*’: a focus on ushering in God’s Reign—that ‘Kingdom of God’ which Jesus lived and died for. This inclusive ecclesial endeavour comes with consciousness of our own sinfulness and limitations, coupled with an unfaltering faith that the Triune God directs our history. This also makes us humbly aware of the ‘already’ and the ‘not-yet’. In a climactic conclusion to *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis writes:²³

No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love. This is a never-ending vocation born of the full communion of the Trinity, the profound unity between Christ and his Church, the loving community which is the Holy Family of Nazareth, and the pure fraternity existing among the saints of heaven. Our contemplation of the fulfilment which we have yet to attain also allows us to see in proper perspective the historical journey which we make as families, and in this way to stop demanding of our interpersonal relationships a perfection, a purity of intentions and a consistency which we will only encounter in the Kingdom to come.

Rooted in our kenotic Christic identity and in the Triune God’s revealed intent for the blossoming of God’s Reign with the church as its seed, servant and sacrament, Pope Francis draws designs for mission—not as some triumphalist conquest of church-planting to the ends of the earth, but as a collaborative ‘*com-mission*’—sowing the seeds and inviting peoples of goodwill to co-operate *with* God in establishing God’s Reign, today.

4. Pope Francis’ Vision for Mission: I, You, and We on

Divine ‘Com-mission’

Just as Pope Francis’s vision of family, church and world overflow from his own identity and the identity that he imputes to Christ, so does his vision of mission depend on his conception of the poor and open church. Indeed, though theoretically and theologically distinct, the triptych of community-identity-mission is inseparable since each influences the other two, and, in turn, is moulded by the other two. Nitpicking on which comes first: community? identity? mission? is like haranguing about which comes first: chicken or egg? One should rather see Pope Francis’s mission mapping as a series of concentric circles beginning with ‘I’, then overflowing to ‘You’ [singular and plural], and culminating with a ‘We’ (embracing church, society, world and cosmos).

“*I am a mission on this earth*” is one of the finest and most cryptic of lines penned by Pope Francis.²⁴ This pithy phrase is sandwiched between two others, i.e., “My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not an ‘extra’ or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self”; and: “We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing.” We normally think of mission at the level of ‘doing’. By contrast, Francis situates mission at the level of ‘*being*’. Mission *is* my DNA, my deepest identity. Mission is “*in my heart*” and unfailingly leads me “*in the heart of people.*” I must confess that I have not been able to fully comprehend the depth-height-width-breadth of this statement no matter how much I’ve tried. It always takes me to the ‘beyond’, the ‘more’; or, what, as a Jesuit, my namesake, Pope Francis, and I, would call the ‘*magis*’.

I might, at best, sound presumptuous, or, at worst, be woefully wrong, by suggesting that the ‘Francis’ that our pope sought to emulate was, yes, *consciously* Francis of Assisi, but *unconsciously* also Spanish Jesuit Francis Xavier. Doesn’t one see and sense that in his persistence on poor pastors, going forth, [from] open churches, [to] crucified peoples, [for] peripheral missions, Pope Francis is also revealing his inner ‘*Jesuitness*’ animated by the glowing example of Jesuit saints like Francis Xavier? To substantiate my claim, I can

only mention Chris Lowney's book "Pope Francis: Why He Leads the Way He Leads" that unearths the Jesuit wellsprings from which Pope Francis draws inspiration.²⁵ Be that as it may, the 'discernment' woven into Pope Francis's missionary style is indubitably part of the Jesuit legacy.²⁶ He writes: "It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the *discernment* of every issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound 'decentralization'."²⁷ Also, "The kingdom, already present and growing in our midst, engages us at every level of our being and reminds us of the principle of *discernment* which Pope Paul VI applied to true development: it must be directed to 'all men and the whole man'."²⁸

Through prayer and discernment, the "I" must venture out to find some suitable "You" (individuals and groups of people of goodwill) to cooperate in the divine *com*-mission. I purposefully break up the word 'commission' into '*com*-mission', referring to a 'mission *with*' [God] since Pope Francis is always and everywhere mindful that God is the Alpha and Omega of all our missionary stirrings and strivings. The church, therefore, does not work for God in isolation, but partners all peoples who can also be seen as 'missionaries'. Thus, in part IV entitled 'Social Dialogue as a Contribution to Peace' of the larger chapter 4 of *Evangelii Gaudium* entitled: 'The Social Dimension of Evangelization', Pope Francis goes beyond the confines of church to call upon all peoples of goodwill to dialogue and cooperate with each other to construct a more just and peaceful world for all.²⁹ This style of first making an appeal to Christians, and then amplifying his appeal to all people of goodwill, is conspicuously evident in what can be considered the most distinctive encyclical of Pope Francis: *Laudato Si'* on the care for our common home. Here, in chapter V entitled, 'Lines of Approach and Action', Pope Francis draws up an integral, extra-ecclesial and global plan for tackling the massive ecological problems of our day.³⁰ Ultimately, are not 'You' and 'I' inseparably bound together as a global, familial 'We'—all God's children irrespective of manmade divisions of creed, colour, class, culture, caste and country?

Community, for Pope Francis, does not only mean a community of human beings, but, like his patron, Francis of Assisi, refers to

all God's creatures in our cosmic 'common home'. Hence, he denounces as 'sin' our abuses of nature. He writes: "Nor can we overlook the social degeneration brought about by *sin*, as, for example, when human beings tyrannize nature, selfishly and even brutally ravaging it. This leads to the desertification of the earth (cf. Gen 3:17-19) and those social and economic imbalances denounced by the prophets, beginning with Elijah (cf. 1 Kg 21) and culminating in Jesus' own words against injustice (cf. Lk 12:13; 16:1-31)."³¹ This sin must be purged by joint action of human effort and God's grace. Recently, Pope Francis gave a surprising TED talk on the theme: '*The Future 'You'—Why the Only Future Worth Building Includes Everyone*',³² wherein he says that the future of each and every one of us is interlinked and interdependent. Therefore, each and every one of us is responsible for ensuring a better future, and building a better world. He says, "I ... and you ... and you ... and you ... become a 'We' to begin a 'revolution of tenderness' that can transform the world."

Conclusion

Having examined the three pillars—community, identity, mission—upon which Pope Francis's theological vision is built, one might summarize it as an integral and 'circular' theology born in the Triune God and finding its fulfillment in the same Triune God. The story of Simon Peter gives us a clue that, first, it is God who identifies and calls everyone personally and uniquely. Then, it is also God who assembles and anoints those whom God calls and consecrates. Finally, the calling and consecrating in church-community is for a '*com-mission*' to carry back everything '*with God*' and to God at the end of times when God will be "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28). Thus, we can summarize Pope Francis's theological vision in one line: 'Gazing with God and Going Back to God'.

Notes

- 1 Recently, an Indian, Catholic priest in Italy said in a homily: "In four years Pope Francis has only been bad for the church." See <http://www.ucanindia.in/news/indian-priest-criticizes-pope-peo->

ple-walk-out-of-mass-in-italy/34576/daily. Interestingly, the congregation walked out in protest!

- 2 See, for instance, 1 Pet 2:4-8, which reads as follows: “So as you come to him, a living *stone* rejected by men but chosen and priceless in God’s sight, you yourselves, as living *stones*, are built up as a spiritual house.... For it says in scripture, ‘Look, I lay in Zion a *stone*, a chosen and priceless *cornerstone*, and whoever believes in him will never be put to shame.’ So you who believe see his value, but for those who do not believe, the *stone* that the builders rejected has become the *cornerstone*, and a *stumbling-stone* and a *rock* to trip over.” Italics added.
- 3 John V. Taylor, “Telling the Stories – The Story of St. Francis,” in *Joy in All Things*, ed. D. Kirkpatrick et al., (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2002), 6.
- 4 See Michael F. Cusato, “From Damietta to La Verna: The Impact on Francis of His Experience in Egypt,” in “Daring to Embrace the Other—Franciscans and Muslims in Dialogue,” *Spirit and Life* 2 (2008): 81-112.
- 5 See his homily on <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-francis-encounter-the-living-god-through-christ> on the feast of St. Thomas on July 3, 2013. Web-link accessed on May 11, 2017.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/lent/documents/papafrancesco_2013122_messaggio-quaresima2014.html.
- 8 See Stephen Bullivant, “‘I am a Sinner’: The Deep Humility of Pope Francis,” in *America* (September 25, 2013). Accessible at <http://www.americamagazine.org/issue/%E2%80%98i-am-sinner%E2%80%99>.
- 9 See Vatican Radio’s web-link <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-francis-miserando-atque-eligendo> of March 22, 2013. This finds mention in no. 8 of *Misericordiae Vultus*, Pope Francis’s ‘Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, 2015.
- 10 See *Misericordiae Vultus*, nn.6-9, for God’s infinite attributes of mercy and compassion. Quote from n.8.
- 11 See BBC Internet-TV news of March 16, 2013, entitled “Pope Francis wants ‘poor Church for the poor’” on website <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-21812545>.

- 12 *Lumen Fidei*, n.57.
- 13 *Evangelii Gaudium*, n.7.
- 14 *Evangelii Gaudium*, n.20.
- 15 *Evangelii Gaudium*, n.49. See also nn.46-48 for the image of church as mother, forgiving father, etc.
- 16 *Evangelii Gaudium*, n.85.
- 17 *Evangelii Gaudium*, n.95.
- 18 *Evangelii Gaudium*, n.97.
- 19 See Abby Ohlheiser, "The 15 Ailments of the Vatican Curia, according to Pope Francis," in *The Washington Post* (Dec. 22, 2014); at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/world/wp/2014/12/22/the-15-ailments-of-the-vatican-curia-according-to-pope-francis/?utm_term=.1b46edca94ab.
- 20 See *Amoris Laetitia*: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on love in the family (March 19, 2016), n.49.
- 21 *Amoris Laetitia*, n.30.
- 22 *Amoris Laetitia*, n.71. See also nn.11,63, for this same Trinitarian vision, the foundation of family life.
- 23 *Amoris Laetitia*, n.325.
- 24 *Evangelii Gaudium*, n.273.
- 25 I write this article in an adivasi mission-station, Dadwada, south Gujarat, with no access to books but only the materials saved in my laptop. This explains the non-availability of details for this book.
- 26 Pope Francis mentions 'discernment' in his writings many times. For instance, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, nn. 16,30,33,43,50,64,77,133,154,166 & 181, with regard to church and mission; and in *Amoris Laetitia*, nn. 6,37,77,79,242,243,249,293,297,298,300,301,303,304,305 & 312, with regard to marriage and family life.
- 27 *Evangelii Gaudium*, n.16. Italics added.
- 28 *Evangelii Gaudium*, n.181.
- 29 In this section of *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis discusses the possibilities dialogue between faith, reason and science [nn.242-243], ecumenical dialogue [nn.244-246], relations with Judaism

[nn.247-249], interreligious dialogue [nn.250-254], and, social dialogue in a context of religious freedom [nn.255-258]

- 30 In this section of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis deals with: (1) dialogue on the environment in the international community [nn.164-175], (2) dialogue for new national and local policies [nn.176-181], (3) dialogue and transparency in decision-making [nn.182-188], (4) politics and economy in dialogue for human fulfilment [nn.189-197], and (5) religions in dialogue with science [nn.198-201].
- 31 *Amoris Laetitia*, n.26.
- 32 This talk is accessible on 'You Tube' with the same title.

Article received: Mar 8, 2017
Article approved: Aug 14, 2017
No of words: 4632



Pope Francis: Making of a New History of Church Leadership

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Abstract: The self-understanding of the Church and its leadership has gone through evolutionary changes and paradigm-shifts. For Robert Bellarmine of seventeenth century the Church was a pyramid-structure with the power of the papacy supreme within the Church. His ecclesiology stressed the institutional structure of the Church where the pope was seen primarily as an administration. The challenges of the 16th century Reformation and the 18th century Enlightenment did not change the static ecclesiology of the Catholic Church. The risk of change and new beginnings was avoided and the Catholic Church remained linked to a past age and became increasingly irrelevant to the present. It was Vatican II that changed the self-understanding of the Church and attempted to make the Church relevant to the present day challenges. Imbibing the spirit and vision of the ecclesiology of Vatican II, Pope Francis began his mission of recasting the role of the papacy and, in the process, the image of the Church. Pope Francis has put into effect the practice of consultation with his fellow bishops in mapping out policies and guidelines for the Church. This quasi-synodal mode of governing the Church does not mean that Francis abdicates his own responsibility as the final authority in the Church; it means that an informed authority has greater credibility and that decisions from the centre are made in dialogue with the periphery.

Keywords: Papacy, Self-understanding of the Church, Dicasteries, Magisterium, Periphery.

Introduction

When Vatican One (1869-1870) referred to the Catholic Church, the image it drew on was of a pope exercising universal and immediate jurisdiction over each baptized person. This image was influenced by the account of the Church given by St. Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621). He elaborated an ecclesiology that saw the Church in terms of a pyramid-structure with the power of the papacy supreme within the Church. Such an ecclesiology stressed the institutional structure of the Church where the pope was seen primarily as an administrator rather than one called to exercise the Petrine Ministry.¹ Peter's role was to strengthen his brother bishops by speaking in their name, overseeing the activities of the Church, preserving the apostolic faith and inspiring the Church through his words and actions. Bellarmine's ecclesiology supported a Church that was juridically structured, and where centralized authority was exercised less as service and more as power to command obedience. Bellarmine stressed the visible aspect of the church community by comparing it with a secular state. Just as the secular state needed offices/organs to perform its manifold functions, so too the Church needed its institutional and administrative structures to function in the world.

During the papacy of Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590), a reorganized Roman Curia continued its task of providing the papacy with secretarial functions.² As head of the Vatican State, the pope ordered the affairs of the Church through the Curia so that every diocese in the world would be well administered; there would be appointments made and directives given for the successful running of the Church. However, the papacy itself was enveloped in a history that had absorbed customs and practices which gave it a settled form. For instance, the pope was expected to live in the papal apartments in the Vatican, follow protocols in dress, travel and interaction with the laity, and present himself as a head of state to the nations of the

world. Changes in the Church were seen as signs of instability and imperfection especially as the Church was considered a *societas perfecta* having within itself the necessary means to attain its goal.

The 16th century Reformation and the 18th century Enlightenment fostered a deep fear in the Church of responding to an evolving rather than a static world. This was seen very strikingly during the pontificate of Pope Pius IX that lasted 32 years.³ The lifestyle of the popes was seen to be unchanging and their teaching and governance in a fast-changing world affected the common life of the Catholic marginally. The risk of change and new beginnings was avoided but the Catholic Church remained linked to a past age and became increasingly irrelevant to the present. And then Vatican II was announced by Pope John XXIII (1881-1963) a few months after he was elected pope. When Vatican II (1962-65) happened, it was a gift and a task: a gift of the Spirit that enabled the Church to have a new self-understanding, and the challenging task of updating itself in a changing world (*aggiornamento*).

1. A New Self-understanding of the Church and Pope Francis

The new self-understanding of the Church was spelt out in the sixteen documents promulgated by the council but especially in the four constitutions: *Sacrosanctum Concilium* suggested far-reaching changes in the celebration of the liturgy; *Lumen Gentium* spoke of the Church primarily as the People of God and not as hierarchy; *Dei Verbum* saw divine revelation as a continuing action of God in dialogue with humankind, and not merely a sum of truths making up the deposit of faith; and *Gaudium et Spes* envisaged the Church as sharing hope centred in Jesus Christ with the secular world. Much was expected in the aftermath of Vatican II. Some decades later,

elected as the 266th pope on March 13, 2013 Francis began his mission of recasting the role of the papacy and, in the process, the image of the Church.

The mind of Pope Francis in his effort to recast the Church is well reflected in the following:

1. How I would like a poor Church for the poor,
2. Mercy is the Lord's most powerful message,
3. Authentic power is service,
4. Tell priests they must be shepherds who 'smell of their sheep'.⁴

(1) How I would like a poor Church for the poor

As pope, Francis enjoys being with people, especially the poor and neglected. He draws inspiration from them and he looks to learn from them in their life of faith. His contact with the poor led him to theologize from their concrete actions. He wrote the following in an article entitled *Criteria of Apostolic Action* in 1980:

Walking patiently and humbly with the poor, we shall learn how we can help them, after first having accepted that we receive from them. Without this slow walk with them, action in favour of the poor and oppressed would contradict our intentions and impede the poor from making their aspirations heard and acquiring for themselves the tools they need for an effective assumption of their personal and collective destiny.⁵

His compassion for the poor was very apparent already-when he was the bishop of Buenos Aires, even though he retained his convictions about what he wanted to pursue. In his life as a Jesuit superior, novice master and provincial, Francis had encouraged those in his care to reach out to and spend time with people by responding to their needs. He harboured suspicions about Liberation Theology and when appointed

provincial sought to enforce a conservative stance in living out religious life. He wanted liberation theology activists to cease their activities on behalf of the poor. His priorities were: mass, catechesis and the alleviation of poverty.⁶ To some in the province, the future pope appeared authoritarian; consultation was not something that came to him easily. To others, he was doing the right thing. The result was a division among the members of the province.

In 1971 he had become Novice Master; in 1973 Provincial; and in 1979 the Rector of its ceremony [seminary]. From 1971 to 1986 he had been the most influential figure in the [Jesuit] religious order but by the end of that period Argentina's Jesuits were deeply riven between those who loved him and those who loathed him.⁷

A major change was in store for the future pope and it took place when he was sent to Cordoba. Before that, he had led the Jesuits in Argentina for fifteen years. Cordoba gave the future pope time for deep reflection, introspection and prayer. He could look at his past, assess it with searing honesty and experience the change that God's action made in him.

He took full responsibility for his actions which caused harm, especially those that injured his Jesuit brethren: "...I made hundreds of errors. Errors and sins. It would be wrong for me to say that these days I ask forgiveness for sins and offences that I might have committed. Today I ask forgiveness for the sins and offences that I did indeed commit."⁸

After he was elected pope, Francis gave his first interview to Fr. Antonio Spadaro where he spoke of the change that had been effected in him. The interlocutor began by asking Francis: "Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?" and after a moment of silence, the answer came: "I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner."⁹

As pope, Francis lost no time in sharing the fruits of his newfound convictions. He made the Casa Santa Marta (a guest house) his residence; he kept on using his old black shoes, carried his own brief case and made people aware that they could phone him directly. He had already requested his friends in Argentina not to spend money to attend his inauguration as the ‘Bishop of Rome’—that is how he continually referred himself in his new position—but to spend it on helping the poor. Pope Francis had assumed a new lifestyle and the universal Church began to follow suit! A series of concrete actions like washing the feet of women and the non-baptized, his meeting with and chatting with people during his outings, his refusal to leave the Vatican for summer holidays, etc., announced to the world that imitating the spirit of the man from Nazareth could rejuvenate the papacy and the Catholic Church. The head of the Roman Catholic Church found his inspiration for governing the Church from the very persons who formed the Church, the People of God.

At his first press conference after his election as pope, Francis announced the main idea that would guide the acts and events of his papacy: “How I would like a poor church for the poor,” a refrain to which he would return often.

(2) Mercy is the lord’s most powerful message

In *Misericordiae vultus*, the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis has spelt out some of his deepest convictions concerning the mercy of God.¹⁰ In its second paragraph, there is a profound consideration: “Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.” There must be a just order in the world and efforts to make justice available to all are necessary, but mercy is that which defines God best since it is unfathomable, unconditional and

eternal. While returning from the World Youth Day in Brazil, Francis said the following in an impromptu press conference:

I believe this is the time for mercy. The Church... must go down the path of mercy. It must find mercy for everyone. When the Prodigal Son returned home, his father didn't say: "But you, listen, sit down. What did you do with the money?" No, he held a party. Then, maybe, when the son wanted to talk, he talked. The Church must do the same... I believe that is a *Kairos* of mercy.¹¹

Just before the beginning of the conclave that elected Bergoglio pope, Cardinal Walter Kasper gave him a copy of his latest book *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*. Seeing the title, he exclaimed: "This is the name of our God."¹² Since the time of St. John Paul II, Kasper had wanted the ban lifted on remarried Catholics receiving communion, even if their first marriage had not been annulled. Kasper was suggesting a change in pastoral practice, not a change in the Church's teaching on marriage. He was opposed by the then head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), Joseph Ratzinger. The CDF's view prevailed.

Pope Francis' deep concern for mercy in the different and often difficult situations of marriage inspired him to promulgate *Amoris Laetitia*, Love in the Family.¹³ To imitate God in showing mercy calls for an inclusive society according to Francis. Not only those who followed Church teaching on Christian Marriage, but also those in irregular unions, civil unions and even those cohabitating, were to be seen as part of the Church and deserved the Church's pastoral care unconditionally. Pope Francis questions applying a law to a situation without discerning the context in the light of mercy. He did not claim that what was wrong had now become right! Instead, he looked to find in each situation the merciful hand of God bringing out the positive that was present. Francis was basing himself on theological roots that had been part of authentic Catholic Tradition.¹⁴ Hence he could justifiably assert:

For this reason, a pastor cannot feel that it is enough simply to apply moral laws to those living in “irregular” situations, as if they were stones to throw at people’s lives. This would bespeak the closed heart of one used to hiding behind the Church’s teachings, “sitting on the chair of Moses and judging at times with superiority and superficiality difficult cases and wounded families”. Along these same lines, the International Theological Commission has noted that “natural law could not be presented as an already established set of rules that impose themselves a priori on the moral subject; rather, it is a source of objective inspiration for the deeply personal process of making decisions”.¹⁵

Moral insight is not the result of rational logic alone but of admitting in the first place that human actions and decisions are the outcome of complex factors. Pastoral concern should be exercised while taking these complex factors into account. Canon law and magisterial diktats alone are insufficient to respond to problematic situations. Pope Francis was retrieving a holistic way of relating to persons and dealing with situations that are presumed “sinful”. God’s mercy is unconditional and has no limit. The Church, as the enduring, public witness to God’s active presence in the world is called to celebrate this unconditional and limitless love of God when serving God’s people. Discernment and accompaniment should be included in pastoral care.

(3) *Authentic Power is Service*

Earlier in this article, Bellarmine’s description of the Church stressed authority as the ability to command obedience. Usually it is the magisterium of the Church that makes known official teaching which includes the setting down of directions, policies and rules by which the People of God are to be governed. The dicasteries (Congregations) in Rome had overseen formulating and sending out directives to the different dioceses in the world. Whereas the dicasteries were meant to work as the secretarial agents of the pope, they were creating and fixing norms to guide the Church, tasks that clearly belong to the bishops, the teaching church, *Ecclesia docens*.

This was already seen at the time of Vatican II. At the council, one of the charges made against the dicasteries was that they did not represent sufficiently the international character of the Church. Persons from other countries were inducted in the dicasteries in response to the charge. But the deeper malaise remained. The dicasteries were in effect overseeing the day to day running of the entire Church.

It is a moot point whether the issues taken up by the dicasteries are issues that affect the whole Church or only part of it; perhaps they affected the European Churches. How does one justify their action of sending out instructions and rulings to be followed by the entire Church as though the languages, cultures and customs were the same for whole world? Many examples can be given of dicasteries sending communications to all the dioceses in the world without awareness of different contexts due to languages, cultures and customs. For instance, the dicastery in charge of divine worship decided that many abuses were being committed in the celebration of the Eucharist.¹⁶ For the Latin Church, one of those abuses was the pouring of consecrated wine from one vessel into another at communion time; yet the same practice followed by the Syro-Malabar Church did not constitute an abuse! On September 16, 2016, the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CBCI) published *Directives for the Celebration of the Liturgy*.¹⁷ Frequently, in the publication, the General Instructions of the Roman Missal (GIRM) are referred to as supplying norms to be followed. Should not there have been a greater effort to indicate norms for eucharistic celebration that considered cultures and customs and usage that flow from the way of life in India?

Pope Francis has put into effect the practice of consultation with his fellow bishops in mapping out policies and guidelines for the Church. This quasi-synodal mode of governing the Church does not mean that that Francis abdicates his own

responsibility as the final authority in the Church; it means that an informed authority has greater credibility and that decisions from the centre are made in dialogue with the periphery.

Pope Francis has had to steer a path that questioned a merely doctrinal approach but he is also aware that crossing swords with the incumbents in the Vatican could produce unnecessary turmoil. In the case concerning the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) in the United States, he waited for the ‘right’ moment to intervene. In April 2008, Cardinal William Levada was the CDF head. He told the nuns that the Vatican would conduct a doctrinal assessment. They were also told that some of their attitudes to women priests and homosexuality were contrary to those in the Vatican, and that they should articulate the classic Catholic position more clearly in matters of birth control and especially abortion. There seemed to be no common ground between the Vatican and the Sisters for dialogue. Worse still, Pope Francis supported the investigation against the Sisters. However, in 2014 when the final document was published, it contained the following:

Since the early days of the Catholic church in their country, women religious have courageously been in the forefront of her evangelizing mission, selflessly tending to the spiritual, moral, educational, physical and social needs of countless individuals, especially the poor and marginalized. Throughout the nation’s history, the educational apostolate of women religious in Catholic schools has fostered the personal development and nourished the faith of countless young people and helped the Church community in the US to flourish.¹⁸

In this episode, Pope Francis allowed the dicastery in question to fulfil its given task but he also saw to it that the persons who presided over the dicastery were objectively well-disposed to what the LCWR stood for.

II One can accept that the authority of the magisterium is constitutive of the Church—in so far as it indicates God’s concrete providential care guiding the Church, but must the mag-

isterium in its teaching role always appear as one commanding obedience? Teaching (*ecclesia docens*) can be communicated also by example, inspiration, emulation and evocation. When the magisterium is restricted to dealing with doctrine and its imposition on the faithful, is it really exercising itself in the spirit of the gospel? "...the Son of man came...to serve ..." (Matt 20/28) Through his actions that are self-explanatory and answers that acknowledge the complexity of life, Francis suggests a pattern of living in the world that seeks to serve one's neighbour. His image of priests muddying their shoes while caring for their people aptly describes authentic power as service.

(4) *'Tell Priests they must be Shepherds who 'smell of their Sheep'*

Over the years, the efforts to distinguish the specific aspects of priestly life from those characterizing the lay Catholic has often resulted in the ordained minister becoming distant from the very persons he is called to serve. Worse still, the culture of clericalism made out that the ordained ministers belonged more properly to the Church than did the laity. In stressing the closeness of priests to the people, Francis is asking for a simpler life style, a humbler demeanor, an attitude of learning from the poor that should characterize the ministerial priest as envisaged by Vatican II. It was with this understanding that Francis spoke about the diseases that the Curia suffered from. One can be a true shepherd only if one walks with the flock under his care. To be a pastor one must bring solace to those who are needy and celebrate the saving presence of God among the poor and suffering.

After his council of 8 cardinals had been appointed to assist the pope in his ministry, the pope asked that the norms for the Roman Curia be written anew.¹⁹ Cardinal Sean O'Malley, one of the eight, explained the pope's mind as follows:

The Curia [was] to be at the service of the universal Church and that means great efficiency, greater transparency, collaboration among the different departments, a great focus on collegiality and involvement with the bishops through the world and the local churches.²⁰

To smell like the sheep includes first consulting the people one serves and cares for. Whether in sacramental celebration, counselling, rendering aid to others or building the flock more completely into the People of God, one should start not with doctrinaire reflection but from the praxis of a believing people who are centred on Jesus Christ.²¹ In the spirit of *Gaudium et Spes*, the priest representing the Church must make “the joy and hope, the grief and anguish” (no. 1) of the people his own, thus establishing a deep solidarity with his flock.

2. A New History of Church Leadership

It is now time to put together the elements that contribute to a new history of Church leadership as symbolized by Pope Francis.

First, Francis has recognized that the history of the Catholic Church until the present is mostly the effect of a Top-Down movement. This movement used the deductive method where the truths of the faith contained in scripture and in the tradition of the Church (statements of Councils, papal proclamations and magisterial teaching) were the premises from which conclusions could be drawn. These conclusions were presented to the faithful as teachings of the Church. Francis has inserted dialogue into this method, dialogue with the People of God before the Church presents its teaching.

Second, contextual reflection means that a Catholic theology is constructed by conducting a dialogue between sacred scripture, Christian tradition and the context of the living community today. Each age must rethink its theology; if it does not, the Church will be repeating answers made in response to questions of an age gone by. Pope Francis has taken *aggior-*

namento seriously especially since this was one of the reasons adduced by St. Pope John XXIII for calling Vatican II.

Third, “establishment theology” tends to suppose that most, if not all, important questions concerning living a Christian life have been answered. Pope Francis is willing to address questions that many persons ask today; he is willing to concede that the Church has still to find adequate responses to the issues of the modern age. This may call for a re-examination of Church doctrine and practice. He also knows that structures in the Church may need changing so that the witness to Jesus Christ may be preserved. Introspection by the official church as well as its members will be part of such a re-examination.

Finally, Pope Francis prefers to view the Church as inclusive since *Lumen Gentium* no. 1 sees the Church as sacramentally expressing the action of God in the world. For him, it is important to recognize what God has already done in every person. One builds up relationship on this premise. This understanding calls the Church to serve the world in a new way and build a world community.

Notes

- 1 Richard McBrien (General Editor): *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, New York, 1995. Jean-M. R. Tillard “Petrine Ministry”, 995: to witness to the faith, to preserve it and hand it over with integrity, to assist fellow bishops in defending the content of faith, to coordinate the activities of the local churches, to declare solemnly the true faith of the church when required.
- 2 The next reorganization of the Curia took place with Vatican II.
- 3 Calling himself “the prisoner of the Vatican” he refused to negotiate with the Italian nationalists who wanted to include the papal states in a future united Italy.

- 4 Paul Vellely: *Pope Francis untying the Knots*, The Struggle for the Soul of Catholicism, Bloomsbury Continuum, Revised and expanded, London and New York, 2015, 434.
- 5 Paul Vellely, 135.
- 6 Paul Vellely, 40.
- 7 Paul Vellely, 111.
- 8 Vallely, 84.
- 9 Vallely, 84.
- 10 April 11, 2015, given at St. Peter's, Rome.
- 11 Vallely, 184.
- 12 Vallely, 333.
- 13 St. Peter's, Rome, March 19, 2016.
- 14 That tradition includes discernment, the mystery of God, proportionality and *epikeia*.
- 15 *Amoris Laetitia*.
- 16 *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (Instruction from the offices of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Rome, on the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, 25 March 2004.)
- 17 Published by the Deputy Secretary General of the CBCI after being approved by the 28th Plenary Assembly of the CBCI on March 6, 2016.
- 18 Vallely, 382.
- 19 Vallely, 283.
- 20 Vallely, 293.
- 21 This was clearly seen in the two sessions of the Family Synod where the pope wanted the understanding of lay persons concerning marriage to be heard.

Article received: Feb 23, 2017

Article approved: Sept 12, 2017

No of words: 4266



Pope Francis' Moral and Pastoral Approach in *Amoris Laetitia*

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Abstract: The article highlights the significant evolutionary changes in Pope Francis' moral and pastoral approach. All the doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues in marriage and sexuality need not be settled by interventions of the Magisterium. Though unity of teaching and practice is necessary in the Church, it does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it taking into account the concrete contexts, struggles and complexities of their lives. The Pope challenges some widespread attitudes that everything is solved by applying general rules or deriving undue conclusions from particular theological considerations without sufficient reflection or grounding. Pope sticks to some essential moral and pastoral aspects of the magisterial teaching on marriage, family and sexuality but interprets them in the changed contexts today inviting Christian families to value the gifts of marriage and the family, and to persevere in a love strengthened by the virtues of generosity, commitment, fidelity and patience, and emphasizes God's mercy and pastoral discernment in situations that fall short of what the Lord demand, so as to encourage everyone to be a sign of mercy and closeness wherever family life remains imperfect or lacks peace and joy.

Keywords: *Moral Discernment, Magisterial and Moral Teaching on Marriage, Admission to Eucharist of Remarried.*

Introduction

In the introductory paragraphs of the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Love and Family, *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis plainly sets out his moral and pastoral approach.¹ He asks the Church to meet people where they are - to accept them in the concrete circumstances and complexities of their lives. He pleads the Church to respect people's consciences and their discernment in moral decisions and underscores the importance of considering norms and mitigating circumstances in pastoral discernment.

The Apostolic Exhortation is mainly a document that reflects on family life and encourages family persons in their struggle to be faithful to the Lord. But it is also the Pope's reminder that the Church should avoid simply judging people and imposing rules on them without considering their struggles. The goal of the Exhortation is to help families—in fact, everyone—experience being touched by an unmerited, unconditional, gratuitous mercy of God and know that they are welcome in the Church.

In the introduction of the Exhortation itself Pope Francis makes it clear that although unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary for the Church, it does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it. Each country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs.² In his address at the end of the Synod of the 2015, he also drew attention to different contexts where what is lawful in one place is deemed outside the law in another. “What seems normal for a bishop on one continent is considered strange and almost scandalous – almost! – for a bishop from another; what is considered a violation of a right in one society is an evident and inviolable

rule in another; what for some is freedom of conscience is for others simply confusion.”³

Stating this, the Pope referred to declarations of his predecessors, included the contributions of Synods on the family held in 2014 and 2015 and also quoted a number of declarations of bishops’ conferences of various countries for references.⁴ Using insights from the Synod of Bishops on the Family and from Bishops’ Conferences from around the world, Pope Francis affirms Church teaching on family life and marriage and strongly emphasizes the role of personal conscience and pastoral discernment, urging the Church to appreciate the context of people’s lives when helping them make good decisions”⁵

Though much of AL incorporated “the propositions voted upon by the Bishops at both 2014 and 2015 Synods as much as possible, as we see from the abundant references he makes to them in the footnotes of AL”,⁶ Pope Francis calls his pastoral and moral approach as something new with regard to the pastoral practice in the way pastoral care is to be extended as help and encouragement to those in difficult marital situations or in irregular unions and to families in their daily commitments and challenges.⁷ The Pope asks for a compassionate pastoral concern to such persons since they continue to be members of the Church and brothers and sisters of God’s household. In addition he encourages everyone to be a sign of mercy and closeness wherever family life remains imperfect or lacks peace and joy.⁸ In addition to these, the introductory section of *Amoris Laetitia*’s significant account and vision of conscience and communal discernment (including more input and collaboration from the laity) on moral matters that is consistent with the exhortation’s pastoral practice mentioned above. Further, Pope Francis’ call in his *Evangelii Gaudium* for “a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on

the streets,” suggest that the moral and pastoral practice of the Church should be more attentive to the realities and complexities of life in the concrete rather than in the abstract.⁹ “The result is a challenging reappraisal that expects moral theologians to promote a genuine culture of discernment in the church.”¹⁰

Details of Pope Francis’ new moral and pastoral approach can be seen especially in Chapters Six and Eight of *Amoris Laetitia*. In Chapter Six one can see the Pope’s pastoral perspectives (AL199-258) and in Chapter Eight he writes about the need of accompanying, discerning and integrating weakness (AL 291-312).

1. Pastoral Perspectives

In the sixth chapter Pope Francis treats various pastoral perspectives that are aimed at forming solid and fruitful families according to God’s plan. Stating about the pastoral perspectives, the Pope affirms that it is not enough to present a set of moral rules, but present values that are clearly needed today.... In practice is to be determined, he writes, not by “a new set of general rules, canonical in nature and applicable to all cases,” but by “a responsible personal and pastoral discernment of particular cases.”¹¹

Thus, in family planning, though the decisions should be reached in dialogue and respect for the other and considerations proceeding from *Humanae Vitae* and *Familiaris Consortio* are in place as also the role of a formed conscience as taught by *Gaudium et Spes* (n. 50)¹², people undergoing a crisis in their married life or people in difficult or critical situations do not seek pastoral assistance, since they do not find in them, a sympathetic, realistic and ‘individual-case-by-case-concerned’ approach.¹³ This follows from Pope’s Francis’ different approach from that of *Familiaris consortio* of John Paul II and *Humanae Vitae* of Paul VI: “... the final report

does not follow John Paul II in going further and repeating like him, Paul VI's insistence that "each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life."¹⁴

Further, *The Final Report* spells out "generative responsibility" in a way that echoes but without citing an examination of conscience for married people proposed in 1977.¹⁵ It put three questions to married couples: "In agreement with my spouse, have I given a clear and Conscientious answer to the problem of birth control? Have I prevented a conception for egotistic motives? Have I brought a life into the world without a sense of responsibility? These questions tested the loving and responsible decision of the two spouses. But nothing was asked about the methods used to prevent what they together judge would be an "irresponsible" pregnancy. Such a decision was left to their conscientious agreement.¹⁶ Pope Francis spends a whole chapter on married love being made fruitful through responsible parenthood.¹⁷ In the name of "Natural Law", while Pope Paul VI's *Huanae vitae* based its opposition to contraception on a largely biological "Physicalist," moral viewpoint, *Familiaris Consortio* in John Paul II's theology of body states that sexuality is "an interpersonal language wherein the other is taken seriously in his or her sacred and inviolable dignity", Pope Francis does not follow their "Natural Law" approach. Pope Francis takes as his starting point the actual experience of married life – an approach that resembles the experiential method that Vat II adopted in *Gaudium et Spes*.

Pope Francis is nothing if not realistic about "current realities" that confront and condition married and family life today.¹⁸ Care and respect need to be shown for those suffering, especially the poor, from unjustly endured separation, divorce or abandonment, or those maltreated by a husband or wife to interrupt their life together. Those, who are divorced and have entered into new unions, must also be made to feel as part of

the Church¹⁹. Mixed marriages, with disparity of cults, need special pastoral care since those marriages provide occasions for inter-religious dialogue²⁰. While those with homosexual orientation are to be shown pastoral concern, homosexual marriages have no grounds to be seen as analogous to God's plan for marriages and the family.²¹ All these persons remain, the Pope insists "part of the ecclesial community," and "should be made to feel part" of it, and should be encouraged to participate in the life of the community".²² This requires that the whole Church, and not just her official pastors, become open to discerning a great variety of irregular situations and ready to "help each person [In such irregular situations] find his or her proper way of participating in the ecclesial community".²³

Regarding the norms of sexual morality, Pope Francis certainly sees the need for a humane and ethical analysis of the state of sexual intimacy, personal commitment, erotic longing, and gender rights and encourages the young people to be sexually responsible, especially since the mature use of contraceptives could avoid a later choice about abortion. He solves this dilemma with the so-called pastoral solution, which allows us to quietly defy Vatican dogma when the situation seemed to call for it. In the confessional booth or in the Parish priest's parlour, the parish priest could encourage his parishioners to decide for themselves, by helping them to examine their own consciences, whether the doctrine of the Church applied to them in their particular circumstance. (*Gaudium et Spes* of Second Vatican Council, taking up the theme of responsible parenthood, had said, "The parents themselves, and no one else, should ultimately make this judgment in the sight of God.")

"Who am I to judge?" With those five words, in reply to a reporter's question about the status of gay priests in the Church, Pope Francis stepped away from the disapproving

tone, the explicit moralizing typical of Popes and bishops. The phenomenon of same sex orientation cannot simply be dismissed as an aberration of individuals. The biological and social causes that are alleged to be behind this have to be seriously looked into. If the persons concerned are differently sexually oriented from birth or due to social upbringing and if they are not to be blamed for this, what does the Great Mystery expect us to do? Even if they have personally contributed to this and are not able to get out of it what do we do with them? What provisions have we made for the transgender, who may be a microscopic minority, but are still people created in God's image?²⁴ What are we to say to voices of science that say sexual orientation is neither a personal choice nor a matter of social conditioning but rests in the deepest ontological make-up of the individual and thus forms part of the mystery of human nature which is good?²⁵

Pope Francis elaborated his thinking about homosexuals in an interview.²⁶ Pope Benedict had defended the "dignity" of all peoples, including homosexuals, but called homosexual acts "an intrinsic moral evil." Saying that "the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder," he barred the admission of gay men to seminaries, even if they were celibate, and denounced the idea of gay marriage. Pope Francis has not altered the impossibility of gay marriage in the Church, but his tone is very different. "A person once asked me, in a provocative manner, if I approved of homosexuality," he said. "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."²⁷

Pope Francis makes quite clear his two central convictions. On the one hand, he insists that the Church must continue to propose the full ideal of marriage and clearly express her objective teaching. The integrity of the Church's moral

teaching requires nothing less than that. On the other hand, to those who press for a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion, the pope responds that if we put so many conditions on [God's] mercy that we empty it of its concrete meaning and real significance, we will be indulging in the worst way of watering down the Gospel.²⁸

Repeatedly, Pope Francis argues that the Church's purpose was more to proclaim God's merciful love for all people than to condemn sinners for having fallen short of ideal, especially those having to do with gender and sexual orientation. His break from his immediate predecessors—John Paul II, and Benedict XVI, is less ideological than intuitive, an inclusive vision of the Church centred on an identification with the poor. From this vision, theological and organizational innovations can follow.

Pope John Paul and Pope Benedict XVI used the Catholic tradition as a bulwark against the triple threat of liberalism, relativism, and secularism. But Pope Francis views the Church as a field hospital after a battle.²⁹ “The thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful,” he said. “It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds.”³⁰

Pope Francis violated a set code of Catholic ethical and philosophical discourse when, in an open letter to the prominent Italian journalist and atheist Eugenio Scalfari, in September, he wrote, “I would not speak about ‘absolute’ truths, even for believers ... Truth is a relationship. As such, each one of us receives the truth and expresses it from within, that is to say, according to one's own circumstances, culture, and situation in life.” When Spadaro asked Francis about “the great changes in society, as well as the way human beings are reinterpreting

themselves,” Francis got up to retrieve his well-thumbed breviary. He read from a fifth-century saint’s writings on the laws governing progress: “Even the dogma of the Christian religion must proceed from these laws. It progresses, solidifying with years, growing over time.” Then Francis commented, “So we grow in the understanding of the truth. . . . There are ecclesiastical rules and precepts that were once effective, but now they have lost value or meaning. The view of the Church’s teaching as a monolith to defend without nuance or different understanding is wrong.”³¹

Pope Francis has not overthrown the traditional teachings of the Church, as many Catholics had either hoped or feared that he would, in this post-Synod exhortation. Instead he has sought to carve out ample room for a flexible pastoral interpretation of those teachings, encouraging pastors to help couples apply general moral principles to their specific circumstances.

2. Accompanying, Discerning and Integrating Weakness

The eighth chapter of Pope Francis’ Exhortation is an invitation to mercy and responsible personal and pastoral discernment in situations that do not fully match what the Lord proposes. Pope Francis begins the eighth Chapter on irregular situations by saying, “The way of the Church is not to condemn anyone for ever; it is to pour out the balm of God’s mercy on all those who ask for it with a sincere heart...No one can be condemned for ever, because that is not the logic of the Gospel!”³² Pope Francis goes on to talk about accompanying and integrating into the life of the Church the baptized who are divorced and civilly remarried.

According to me, the eighth Chapter of *Amoris Laetitia* is very sensitive. It is an invitation to mercy and pastoral discernment in particular cases, one which would recognize

that, since ‘the degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases;’ the consequences or effects of a rule need not necessarily always be the same.³³ Pope Francis’s emphasis on mercy toward the divorced and remarried does not only mean that those people will more freely partake of Communion. It also means that the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage, however much it is still held up as an ideal, will not grip the moral imagination of the Church as it once did.³⁴ Such a progression has already occurred in Catholic attitudes about contraception. Once the vast majority of the faithful took for granted their right and duty to weigh situation against principle—and decided, mostly, that the principle did not apply—it was only a matter of time before the hierarchy itself did the same. That is the significance of Pope Francis’ own conclusion, offered in February on his flight back from Mexico, that the Zika-virus pandemic requires a change in the Church’s policies on contraception. In that drastic situation, the principle of “*Humanae Vitae*” simply does not apply. As has happened before, the private forum had become public. Official Church teaching on birth control may never change, but its meaning will never be the same. Moral discernment belongs to the people.

In addressing the fragile, complex or irregular situations, Pope Francis emphasizes three important fundamental tasks in Church’s pastoral praxis: guiding or accompanying, discerning and integrating weakness. Here the Pope himself identifies as the core of his message. Pope Francis shows his true character as a pastor: encouraging, guiding, questioning, cajoling, sympathizing, instructing, helping readers to gain a deeper appreciation for the Church’s understanding of sacramental marriage. He upholds the ideal of Christian marriage, recognizes that no fallen human lives up to that ideal, and offers the support of the Church to all those who are willing to continue the lifelong struggle to grow in love.

Moreover, the Pope recognizes, and clearly states, that the Christian understanding of marriage is the only reliable antidote to a host of ills that plague contemporary society, especially in the West. Particularly in the second chapter of *Amoris Laetitia*, he rightly insists that at a time when marital breakdown has reached epidemic proportions, Catholics must not allow themselves to be deterred from delivering the message that our society needs to hear—even while he recognizes that the message is unpopular, and those who proclaim it may face mounting hostility. It is a matter accompanying those who have breached the marriage bond; he compares the Church's task to that of a field hospital. (AL 291). It is a matter of reaching to everyone, of needing to help each person find his/her proper way of participating in the ecclesial community, and thus to experience being touched by an unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous mercy of God.³⁵

Quoting the synod Fathers, Pope Francis states that the Church does not disregard the constructive elements in those situations which do not yet or no longer correspond to her teaching on marriage, which is a sacrament that unites a man and wife and grants them the grace to become a 'domestic church' and a leaven of new life for society.³⁶ Marriage unions that are *de facto* irregular are to be dealt with as Jesus dealt with the Samaritan woman, with mercy and reinstatement. Pope Francis here follows the 'law of gradualness' in pastoral care as proposed by John Paul II.³⁷ "In making his call in *Amoris laetitia* to practice a responsible discernment of particular cases – a discernment which involves not only the couples themselves but also their bishop, parish priest, and /or other spiritual guides – the pope appeals at length to passages from Thomas Aquinas, *Familiaris Consortio*, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the International Theological Commission, and other sources. They all provide help towards discerning, on an individual basis, appropriate access to the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist for the divorced and civilly

remarried (AL 300-312). The key theological argument for accepting such an access comes from ancient Christian teaching about forgiving, healing and nourishing power of the Eucharist”.³⁸ Pope Francis never says in so many words that “in some, justifiable circumstances, those in a second marriage may receive the sacrament of reconciliation and Eucharist.” To say that would clash with his refusal, in the light of “the immense variety of concrete circumstances,” to produce “a new set of general rules”.³⁹ He would need to spell out those circumstances and produce detailed legislation that took account of reasons for the collapse of the first marriage, length of time since the second marriage was civilly contracted, the number of children involved, and so forth. He leaves such “discernment” to the local authorities.⁴⁰

3. Pastoral Discernment

As far as pastoral discernment with regard to “irregular” situations is concerned the Pope states: “There is a need ‘to avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of various situations’ and to be ‘attentive, by necessity to how people experience distress because of their condition.’”⁴¹ The pastoral solution of Pope Francis lies in this realm of “particular situations,” where, as the Pope insists, “constant love” must prevail over judgmentalism. Every situation and mitigating factors or circumstances may be different, and so a subtle pastoral and moral discernment is required to see how general principles apply to it. For centuries, the assumption of the Catholic hierarchy was that lay people were not capable of such discernment, but, with Francis, that is no longer true. “The Joy of Love” is directly addressed to the laity, who is encouraged to pursue conscientious moral discernment by consulting not only pastors but one another. The married people know the ins and outs of married life better than married people.

What Pope Francis proposes about discerning and mercifully helping those in “irregular” married situations invites us to remember past changes in church teaching and practice and open to new ones. Any list of such developments and even reversals (which do not encompass the essentials of faith professed in the Creed) concern, for instance, what happened to official teaching about slavery, torture, death penalty, religious freedom, sharing prayer with other Christians and with followers of other faiths (*communicatio in sacris*), and the anointing of the sick.... Pope Francis has done something similar, albeit not identical, by opening the door for the divorced and civilly remarried, after due discernment and in appropriate circumstances, to receive the sacrament of reconciliation and Eucharist.⁴²

The change that Pope Francis has wrought on the Catholic imagination is one that moral theologians never imagined would come from a Pope. Pope Francis says: “I understand those who prefer a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion.” But Pope Francis’ approach is different. He “sincerely believes that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness.” The point, of course, is that the Church, too, is marked by human weakness, as this halting progress toward reform so clearly shows. But here, again, the goodness is what counts. Pope Francis is inviting the Church to leave behind the tidy moralism of the pulpit and the sacristy in order to do “what good she can, even if in the process, her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street.”⁴³ He has taken to heart the significant warning of Jesus, “It is not those who are well who need the physician, but those who are sick” (Lk 5:31). He obviously hopes that others who minister in the Church—bishops, priests, moral theologians, confessors and pastoral counsellors—will follow Jesus’ example. Pope Francis cites the 2014 Synod, saying, “the Church must accompany with attention and care the weakest of her children,”

who show signs of a wounded and troubled love, by restoring in them hope and confidence”. To this extent the synod was a success as the entire community of the Church was “directly or indirectly involved in the discerning and decision-making process, listening and dialoguing and trying to understand the different viewpoints emerging from diverse cultures and contexts, challenging and being challenged, being faithful to the tradition and being open to the challenges of the present day self-understanding of humans, discovering the limitations of yesterday’s solutions for today’s problems, searching for what the Spirit is saying to the Church today.” ⁴⁴

[The next sections on “Conscience” and “Moral Discernment” are omitted, due to lack of space. It will be published in the forthcoming book.]

Conclusion

In fine, Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* is profound reflection on the mission of families to embrace God’s vision for marriage and on how the Church can offer healing for those who are struggling in their journey of faith. It is a pastoral triumph. It asks the Church to meet people where they are, to consider and take into account families and individuals in all their complexity of various situations, to respect their consciences when it comes to moral decisions. It offers rich resources for the creation of a culture of dynamic moral discernment to practise ‘discernment’ that implies prayerful decision making.⁴⁵

When we evaluate Pope Francis’ pastoral and moral approach in *Amoris Laetitia*, we can say that he “has treaded the sound and sane middle path (*via media*) in applying Church doctrine to present day realities. It has not changed the doctrine but applied that doctrine to pastoral realities using the traditional Catholic moral concepts/principles of the Church... has highlighted and brought back some of the basic, common

sense gospel doctrines... such as ‘no one can be condemned for ever, because that is not the logic of the Gospel’ (AL, No:297); we cannot think everything to be black or/and white (AL, No:305)”.⁴⁶ And though baseless criticisms and allegations have been hurled at it even by ecclesiastics of the highest rank in *Amoris Laetitia*’s efforts to link doctrine to pastoral needs, “in the last analysis, a conscientious Christian cannot forget that all doctrines are for persons and not persons for doctrines as their Master so prophetically taught them long ago (Mk.2:27).”⁴⁷

Pope Francis’ pastoral and moral approach in *Amoris Laetitia* is not strictly *revolutionary*, it is certainly *evolutionary*. It does prod this pilgrim church, which has been sitting in way-side for 35 years, forward. With this Exhortation, Pope Francis continues to shift the structure of authority in the Church. His repeated message is: Don’t look to Rome and rule books for all the answers. (“Not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium.”) Find answers that fit your tradition and your local situation. (“Each country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs.”) Trust yourselves. (“The Spirit guides us towards the entire truth.”) Francis is again calling *for an adult Church*.

Overall, Pope Francis’ moral and pastoral approach in *Amoris Laetitia* is one of understanding, compassion and accompaniment. It is no different from that of Jesus whose Vicar, he is on earth. Jesus proposed a demanding ideal “but never failed to show compassion and closeness to the frailty of individuals like the Samaritan woman or the woman taken in adultery”.⁴⁸ The details his moral and approach, as we have seen in the Exhortation derives from his vision of a pastoral and merciful Church, “the fertile Mother and Teacher, who is not

afraid to roll up her sleeves to pour oil and wine on people's wound; who doesn't see humanity as a house of glass to judge or categorize people. This is the Church, One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, and composed of sinners, needful of God's mercy... It is the Church that is not afraid to eat and drink with prostitutes and publicans. The Church that has doors wide open to receive the needy, the penitent and not only the just or those who believe they are perfect! The Church that is not ashamed of the fallen brother and pretends not see him, but on the contrary feels involved and almost obliged to lift him up and encourage him to take up the journey again and accompany him toward a definitive encounter with her Spouse, in the heavenly Jerusalem".⁴⁹ All this comes from the Pope's vision of a pastoral and merciful Church that encourages everyone to experience the "joy of love".⁵⁰

Such a compassionate pastoral concern to those in difficult and struggling situations may not solve all moral problems, but Pope Francis with his Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* has heralded a new moral and pastoral vision, approach and praxis in the Church that certainly would witness to a God who loves unconditionally and whose mercy has no limits.⁵¹ But such an approach would certainly move the entire discipline of moral theology out of the confines of a static approach to a dynamic one to grapple with conflict situations and moral dilemmas in our life, because it is open to and dialogue with the concrete human situations and historicity.

In conclusion, Pope Francis' moral approach and "logic of pastoral mercy" of listening with sensitivity and compassion confirms the phenomenological and existential reflection on our existence and the Scriptural understanding of moral life as responding to the unbounded and unconditional mercy God in the many, complex happenings of our existence rather than adhering to a pre-determined pattern. It shows that we are not

only responsible in the sense that we are answerable for our actions but also and pre-eminently in the sense that we are persons who respond in a conscientious way to the demands laid upon us by God and our fellowmen and the world in concrete situations. It deciphers a lifestyle for us based on the compassionate love and praxes of Jesus and offers us a fresh vision of Gospel values and principles. It provides a kind of “framework within which we can make moral judgments as compassionate and responsible persons so that our lives becomes best possible mediations of the Gospel values to the temporal realities and relations and guides us in establishing a pattern of moral life as authentic disciples of Jesus.”⁵²

Notes

- 1 *Amoris Laetitia* (hereafter AL) AL 3
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 Pope Francis’ Address at the end of the Synod of Bishops 2015.
- 4 Episcopal conferences of Spain, Korea, Argentina, Mexico, Columbia, Chile, Australia, Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, Italy and Kenya.
- 5 AL 199.
- 6 Vimal Tirimanna, “Two Critical Questions Frequently Asked About *Amoris Laetitia*” in *VJTR*, 80, 2016, pp. 919-920.
- 7 AL 4.
- 8 AL 5.
- 9 AL 3.
- 10 Conor M. Kelly, “The Role of the Moral Theologian in the Church: A Proposal in Light of *Amoris Laetitia*” in *Theological Studies*, 2016, Vol.77(4), p.923.
- 11 AL 201.
- 12 AL 222.
- 13 AL 234.

- 14 Gerald O'Collins , "The joy of love (*Amoris Laetitia*): The Papal Exhortation in its Context" in *Theological studies*, vol.77, no.4 December 2016, p. 912.
- 15 Final Report (hereafter FR) no.63.
- 16 Gerald O'Collins, *Art.cit.*, p.912.
- 17 AL 165-198.
- 18 AL 31-57.
- 19 AL 242-3.
- 20 AL 248.
- 21 AL 251.
- 22 AL 243, 246.
- 23 AL 297.
- 24 George Therukaattil, "Desired Norms v/s Absolute Norms" in *Light of Truth*, December 1-15, 2015, p .11.
- 25 *From the Statement of Indian Theological Association of 2015*
- 26 Interview with Antonio Spadaro, S.J., of the Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica*, in August,2013 (later published in English in the magazine *America*)
- 27 Interview with *America Magazine*, **Sept. 30, 2013**
- 28 Gerald O'Collins, *Art.cit.*, p.920, cf. AL 307-311
- 29 AL 291
- 30 The Pope Francis Interview: "A New Balance" for the Church in *The New Yorker*, Sept. 19, 2013
- 31 Gerald O'Collins, *Art.cit.*, p.920,
- 32 AL 291
- 33 AL 300
- 34 George Therukaattil, "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*" in *Light of Truth*, May 1-15, p.11
- 35 AL 297
- 36 AL 292
- 37 *Familiaris Consortio*, n.34. This is not a 'gradualness of law' but gradualness in the prudential exercises of free acts on the part of

subjects who are not in a position to understand, appreciate or fully carry out the objective of the law.

- 38 Gerald O'Collins, *Art.cit.*, p.919.
- 39 AL 300
- 40 EG 16
- 41 AL 296
- 42 Gerald O'Collins, *Art.cit.*, p.920
- 43 Interview with Pope Francis by La Croix by Guillaume Gubet and Sebastien Maillard, Vatican city December 26, 2016
- 44 George Therukaattil, "Desired Norms v/s Absolute Norms" in *Light of Truth*, December 1-15, 2015, p .11.
- 45 George Therukaattil, "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia" in *Light of Truth*, May 1-15, p.11.
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- 47 Ibid. P.943
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Article received: Feb 17, 2017

Article approved: Sept 30, 2017

No of words: 5442



Pope Francis' Renewed Vision of the Church

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Abstract: Pope Francis is determined to change the deformed and sick Church with a radical vision. As against the institutional, clergy-centered, self-referential and self-glorifying Church, Francis envisions the Church to be an authentic People of God who are correlative in attitude, collaborative in action, collegial in spirit, radiating the light of Christ, going to the existential peripheries and becoming an 'evangelizing Church'.

This article first attempts at describing the new vision of the Church, as projected by Pope Francis through signs and symbols and words and actions and as expounded in his *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Keywords: Pope Francis, Church, *Evangelii Gaudium*, God's Reign

Introduction

Pope Francis has undoubtedly captured a unique position in the history of papacy. This can be indicated with reference to various counts. But for the purpose of this article it is sufficient to indicate some of those symbols that he sent out at the very beginning of his papacy to signify the new vision for the Church. And he has been consistently harping upon the important role of the laity. Once we grasp his radical vision of

the Church then we can easily draw out his views on the role of laity in the ‘new’ Church that he has envisioned. Hence, in the first part of this article, an attempt is made to describe the new vision of the Church by Pope Francis. Against the background of that vision, Part 2 tries to bring out the specific role the laity can play.

1. The Radical Vision of the Church by Pope Francis

In this section a modest attempt is made to portray the changed vision of the Church as projected by Pope Francis. This is done at three levels. First by picking up some signals that he sent out already at the time of his election as the Pope. Then by recalling the brief intervention Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio made just before the election. Thirdly by analyzing the clear cut vision that he has enunciated in his first major document released by him as Pope: *Evangelii Gaudium*.

1.1 The Distinctive Signals of Pope-elect for his New Vision of the Church

No one can propose a vision of anything in vacuum. Nor does any vision mushroom from one’s imagination purely, and all of a sudden. It is indeed an offshoot of the whole of the one’s personality. Often enough it is the pile of perceptions and other experiences one has accumulated over the years as well as the ideals and goals of life one cherishes that contribute to emergence of a particular vision. It is the ‘apperception’¹ of an individual that has a major say in the evolution of a vision. No doubt a particular occasion serves as a triggering point for spelling out the vision. But before articulating the vision in clear contours, one is bound to send out certain signals that indicate the salient features of his/her apperception. Hence there is a need to take note of the unusual symbols one emits at one’s critical point of life.

Viewed from this standpoint, it is quite interesting to recount some of the distinctive responses given by Cardinal Bergoglio immediately after the election as Pope. They are significant for understanding his unique convictions regarding Christ our Lord, the Church in general, and his own personal commitment in particular. It must be noted they were all spontaneous in the sense that they did not arise from deliberate attempts to do them in that way. In fact there was no time at all for the pope-elect to sit and to reflect upon what type of name one has to choose, which type of dress one wants, and which colour of the shoes one has to wear etc. Even then, if his gestures and postures, words and actions were unique, it only proves that the man was already filled with radical and revolutionary ideas and projections about the Church. They are all symbolic of the radical vision of the Church which he had been treasuring for quite some time and which he would clearly describe after assuming his office as Pope. It is significant to note that he hinted at it already during the pre-Conclave meeting. Let me mention some of the symbolic responses he gave just at the time of his election as a Pope.

- 1) On the fifth ballot, on 13 March 2013, when Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio secured 77 votes, it was decisively clear in the conclave that he is now the Pope. But after reading out the final vote (90 out of the 115) the one in charge approaches him to get his consent with this question: "Do you accept your canonical election as Supreme Pontiff?" The expected response would normally be: "I accept". But his answer was: "Although I am a sinner, I accept it, trusting in the mercy and patience of God in suffering." It is a clear sign of his extraordinary humility and trust in the providential care of the Father.
- 2) The next question is: "What name do you take?" Swiftly he replies: "I will be called Francis". This name is quite unusual down the line. This was a clear indication that he would make a radical break with the past. No doubt his neighbour Cardinal in the conclave had whispered to him

‘to think of the poor’ which has inspired the new Pope to choose St. Francis of Assisi. But he had already described St. Francis of Assisi in his book of dialogue with Rabbi Abraham Skorka: “He brought to Christianity an entire new concept about poverty in the face of the luxury, ride and vanity of the civil and ecclesial powers of the time. He changed history.”²

- 3) Then, the Cardinal is led to the sacristy of the Sistine Chapel to be presented with Papal dress. While changing his scarlet robes into white, he is offered red *mozzetta*, the short elbow-length vestment that covers the shoulders and is buttoned over the frontal breast, usually worn by the Roman pontiff. But quietly he declines the offer. Here the message is clear: “He doesn’t like the trappings of monarchy that surrounded the papacy”.³
- 4) Now he is presented with the gold-jewelled pectoral cross. However, as a sign of his preference for utter simplicity of life style, he reaches out for his old silver metal cross which he has been wearing since he became a bishop in Argentina. Next the boxes of red leather shoes of different sizes are shown to him so that he would choose among them his proper size. But he calmly looks down at his battered black shoes and says: “These are fine with me”. Again it is clearly a break from the papal practice that goes back to the Byzantine era, when only three individuals were allowed to wear red footgear: the Emperor, the Empress and the Pope.
- 5) Meanwhile, the fellow-cardinals have lined up in the *Sala Clementina* to offer their congratulations and pledges to the new pontiff. In the traditional manner, the new pope was to sit on the papal throne. But, this pope is determined to drop the centuries-old symbol of the past in which the papacy saw itself as the equal of imperial power. He does not even stand on an elevated platform. But, on equal footing, he offers to greet them all one by one with a hug. When somebody insisted on bending to kiss his ring, he too bent to kiss the ring of the one who pays such a hom-

age. It is definitely a symbol of his rejection of the past notion that Pope was the Prince in the pyramid model of autocratic feudal monarchy. It was a clear sign that he will recover the authentic concept of collegiality in which pope would be seen merely as the first among equals. In fact he addressed them as ‘brother cardinals’ rather than ‘Lord Cardinals’.

- 6) It is time now for the new Pope to appear on the balcony to bless the people *urbi et orbi* (city and the world). However he prefers to call himself as the Bishop of Rome to the people of his diocese. Besides, he speaks in Italian, the language of the people. He even begins with informal and intimate, for this momentous of occasions: “*Buona Sera*” (Good evening). He also initiates the crowd to pray for his predecessor with the prayers best known to them: “the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Glory be”. It is quite significant that he referred to his predecessor not as ‘Pope Emeritus’, but as the ‘Emeritus Bishop of Rome’. Again it is important to note his utterance: “Now let’s begin this journey, bishop and people, this journey of the Church of Rome, which is one that **presides in charity** over all the churches—a journey of brotherhood, love and trust among us.” Here the phrase “presides in charity” is actually taken from the first century bishop Ignatius of Antioch, indicating a radical shift in the understanding of the Church: the community in which Pope is put back in the college, to **preside in love**.
- 7) While he was about to give the papal blessing, *urbi et orbi* (to the city and the world), he recognizes the extraordinary mutuality of the pope and the people: “Let us pray for one another. I will bless you, but I will ask you a favour, for your prayers to bless me as your bishop. Let’s pray silently”. It is remarkable that he could evoke a perfect silence even in such a big crowd of people counting more than a million in the piazza below. This is itself a clear manifestation of the power of spiritual aura of a great personality.
- 8) At the end of the blessing he tells them: “Brothers and

sisters, I'll leave you. Thank you so much for the welcome. Pray for me. We'll see each other soon. Good night and sleep well". It is again a wonderful sign of the loving concern of a good shepherd with his sheep. After the dinner the Pope is guided to the black Mercedes. Yet, he chooses to travel in the minibus that took the cardinals to return to their residence. At the residence, over there, when all the cardinals had retired to their beds, he asks the officials whether an ordinary Italian car was available. When the driver was found, the Pope who styled himself as the bishop of Rome goes for a drive into streets of the city of Rome, watching the people amused from the inside of a small, unmarked car. A clear sign of the new Pope being really the pastor of the people.

On the following morning, he is off to the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, in an ordinary car, not the papal limousine, to pray before an icon of the Virgin Mary, *Salus Populi Romani*, the Protectress of the Romans. The security officers try to close the basilica to the public, he waives them away telling them: "Leave them alone. I am a pilgrim too". Are they not extraordinary signs of revealing himself a true shepherd of the people, identifying with them?

- 9) On returning from the Basilica, the Pope-elect goes to collect his luggage at the hostel. There at the porter's desk he asks for a new bulb, because he remembers that bulb for the bedside lamp had blown. So it needs to be replaced. The surprised official gives him one. A short while later he comes down with his luggage, pays the bill, salutes everyone and returns to the Vatican, with a joy that 'the bulb had been changed' ⁴ This is truly a symbolism unparalleled in history except perhaps that of St. John XXIII. Just as the 'good pope' opened the window to indicate the need of letting fresh breeze into the 'ghetto minded' Church before Vat.II, so also the present pope by changing the fused bulb, signified that the present church, which he is going to preside and guide, is in need of glowing the light of

Christ.

In sum,

The very beginning of Francis' papacy, packed with symbolism of so many kinds, signposts a new vision for the Church, signalling "that things were going to be rather different from now on."⁵ All the nine symbolic responses, put together, suggest a new vision of the Church, the head of which would be a humble pastor fully conscious of his frailties and wholly dependent on God's Providence, keeping the poor and the least in mind, entirely breaking away from the monarchical traces, totally collegial with the fellow bishops, and integrally related with the people at large, mutually praying for one another, even sharing in their popular religiosity, particularly devoted to Mother Mary and above all determined to change its blown bulb with the real light of Christ.

1.2 The New Vision Already Envisaged

Far beyond the symbolisms, Pope Francis had marked his uniqueness in respect of the vision for the Church in the brief intervention he made in the Cardinal's meeting two days before his election. In the pre-conclave period, *sede vacante*, the cardinals of the Church gathered in a series of meetings that are known 'general congregation of cardinals'. In order to prepare themselves for electing a worthy pope, each cardinal was supposed to make a brief intervention for five minutes. Those interventions were meant to shed light on the problems they feel need to be addressed in the Church and type of personality who could lead the Church appropriately.

The intervention by Cardinal Bergoglio lasted less than four minutes.⁶ But it was so impressive that Cardinal Jaime Ortega, Archbishop of Havana, Cuba, asked him a copy of his speech. But the speech had been given off the cuff, just with the help of a few hints jotted in a chit of paper. Anyway that night he got

a hand-written note from Cardinal Bergoglio, and circulated it as *aide memoir*, evidently hoping to influence his fellow cardinals. Later he also obtained Pope Francis's permission to share the small document, and to get it published too. It provides us with a valuable Preamble to his manifesto and a key to understand the vision of the Church which Cardinal Bergoglio had in mind. It reads as follows: ⁷

1. Evangelizing pre-supposes a desire in the Church to **come out of herself**. The Church is called to come out of herself and to go **to the peripheries**, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery.
2. When the Church does not come out of herself to evangelize, she **becomes self-referential and then gets sick**. (cf. the deformed woman of the Gospel (Lk. 13:10-17). The evils that, over time, happen in ecclesial institutions have their root in self-referentiality and a kind of theological narcissism. In Revelation, Jesus says that he is at the door and knocks (Rev. 3:20). Obviously, the text refers to his knocking from the outside in order to enter but I think about the times in which Jesus knocks from within so that we will let him come out. The self-referential Church keeps Jesus Christ within herself and **does not let him out**.
3. When the Church is self-referential, inadvertently, she believes she has her own light; she ceases to be the *mysterium lunae* (Latin, "mystery of the moon," i.e., **reflecting the light of Christ** the way the moon reflects the light of the sun) and gives way to that very serious evil, spiritual worldliness (which according to de Lubac, is the worst evil that can befall the Church). It lives to give glory only to one another.

Put simply, there are two images of the Church: Church which evangelizes and comes out of herself, the *Dei Verbum religiose audiens et fidente proclamans* (Latin, “Hearing the word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with faith”); and the worldly Church, living within herself, of herself, for herself. This should shed light on the possible changes and reforms which must be done for the salvation of souls.

4. Thinking of the next pope: He must be a man who, from the contemplation and adoration of Jesus Christ, helps the Church to **go out to the existential peripheries** that helps her to be the fruitful mother, who gains life from “the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing.”

In short, the predicted vision of the Church that Cardinal Jorge Brogoglio had before becoming Pope, may be formulated thus:

As against ‘the worldly Church’ which is self-referential and self-glorifying, we should think of an ‘evangelizing Church’ which, by getting back authentically to the Master, should reflect the light of Christ, go to the existential peripheries and prove thereby to be a fruitful mother who gains life from joy of evangelizing. That alone will save her from continuing to be sick and deformed.

True to this vision Pope Francis showed in words and actions that he was resolute to bring about changes in a big way. To begin with, he decided not to move to the Apostolic Palace, but to remain in the Casa Santa Marta. This was indeed a powerful signal to the world indicating that his papacy was not to be in the path of monarchic tradition but that it was clearly a poor Church for the poor.⁸ His appointment of the C9⁹, with commission to draw up a new apostolic constitution for the Vatican, incorporating the long awaited reform of the Roman curia was a further sign of his firmness to change the distorted image of the Church. It also indicated clearly that

the new Pope's focus was more on a decentralized Church. Subsequently in many of the Interviews Pope was candid in his remarks about the present state of the Church and the lines of change he wanted to bring about. The most important of such Interview was the one he gave to his fellow Jesuit, Rev. Fr. Antonio Spadaro S.J., editor in chief of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the Italian Jesuit journal, in August 2013. Moreover, the radical ideas he expressed in public during his visit to USA were so impressive that the media over there came out with such headlines as "The remarkable new vision Pope has for Catholic Church". There also he gave an interview to "*America Magazine*," in which he made it clear that the "Church must not be obsessed with issues related to gay marriage or contraceptives. He called for new balance. He even warned that "if the Catholic Church doesn't make changes, it could fall like a house of cards."¹⁰

Finally, with the release of his Apostolic Exhortation ¹¹ which was indeed his manifesto, Pope Francis elaborated the details of his vision for the Church. It was ingenious of Pope Francis to have projected his own vision in and through the deliberations of the XIII Synod of Bishops¹² on the theme "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith." Now it is necessary to glean some of the insights from it.

1.3 The Vision of the Church in *Evangelii Gaudium*

In pursuance of the vision prefigured in his intervention in the pre-conclave meeting, Pope Francis in his first major document, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), elaborates that vision, chalking out even his agenda for Church reform and pastoral provisions. It engages the Church-world relationship in multiple constructive ways. It unveils Pope Francis's "blueprint for a de-centralized and more pastoral Church that is focused on the needs of those

within and outside it rather than preoccupied with its own prestige.”¹³

The document starts with a call for the Church to embrace the new evangelization with joy. In this connection it distinguishes between the real joy and pleasure. Moreover it points out that there is a great danger in today’s world in so far as it is suffering from various ills: “desolation and anguish, born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience” (EG 2). On the one hand it points out that today’s world, pervaded by consumerism, suffers from the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience, and is caught up in its own interests and concerns, with no place for others and the poor, with not much scope for hearing God’s voice, or feeling the quiet joy of his love, and even the desire to do good fading away. This is a very real danger for believers too. Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry and listless. Worse still, the very same situation prevails in the Church because she too has been self-complacent, self-glorifying and hierarchical, and giving way to such serious evils like spiritual worldliness (EG 93).

Precisely as an antidote to this dangerous image of the Church, the *Evangelii Gaudium* affirms that the real source of joy lies in a *determination to a renewed* personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter us unfailingly each day (EG 3). The Lord never disappoints. Whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Time and time again he bears us on his shoulders. He is always capable of restoring our joy, because he is risen. “The Gospel, radiant with the glory of Christ’s cross, constantly invites us to rejoice” (EG 5). Thus, it is only by returning to Jesus that the Church can really prove to be the *mysterium*

lunae (mystery of the moon), i.e., reflecting the light of Christ just as the moon reflects the light of the sun).

This joy is not to be individualistic. “Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. In fact the law of reality is that “life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up for giving life to others” (*EG 10*). And, those who **enjoy life most** are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others. Moreover, “Goodness always tends to spread. Every **authentic experience** of truth and goodness seeks by its very nature to grow within us, and any person who has **experienced a profound liberation** becomes more **sensitive to the needs of others**” (*EG 9*). In other words, the Church needs to go in search of the “existential peripheries.” Rightly therefore Pope Francis is rightly called the “Pope of the Peripheries.”¹⁴

So too is his vision of the Church!, because in this Pope suggests way forward to the existing Church. By connecting the necessary reform to the task of evangelization, he says that “would recall the Church to its purpose and the source of its life.”¹⁵ He is clear that the wellsprings of the Church are to be found precisely in the existential peripheries. The term ‘periphery’, in the Latin American vocabulary, means “outskirts” or “margins.” So by this phrase Pope Francis wants to convey that the Church must reach out to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed. Within the Church, also, there are the existential peripheries, namely the laity, “God’s holy people,” including the women and young. That is why he calls for “a more incisive female presence” (*EG 103*) and opportunities for young Catholics to exercise greater leadership (*EG 106*). Even those who have been considered as the ostracized such as the gay people, divorcees and the so called ‘sinners’ are included in the new vision of Church. Regarding access to the sacraments, the document says the

doors of the sacraments should not be closed for “simply any reason”. (They) are “not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak,” (EG 47). It is these peripheries who bring back the Church to its first mission—to offer them the Gospel of hope and redemption even before they ask for it, and, in so doing, to rekindle the joy and the passion that comes with the sharing of one’s faith.

Francis’ vision of the Church calls for a “sound decentralization” in the way the Church is run. The conciliar vision of the “collegial spirit” is to be visibly found, whereby local bishops would take a greater share in decision-making (EG 32). The universal head of the Church openly declaring: “It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory” (EG 16).

Francis also called for greater cultural diversity within the Church (EG 117), which he said should be tied to “modes of expression which European nations developed at a particular moment of their history” (EG 118). Missionaries should not “impose a specific cultural form” when reaching new peoples with the Gospel.

In fact, the different ideas of Pope Francis’ vision of the Church were all built on the image of the Church as ‘People of God’, already defined in Vat. II. It is not merely the clergy, bishops and religious that constitute the Church, but the whole people of God. To quote his own words he expressed in his Interview with Antonio Spadaro:

The image of the church I like is that of the faithful, holy people of God. This is the definition I often use, and then there is that image from the Second Vatican Council’s ‘Dogmatic Constitution on the Church’ (No. 12). Belonging to a people has a strong theological value. In the history of salvation, God has saved a people. There is no full identity without belonging to a people. No one is saved alone, as an isolated individual, but

God attracts us looking at the complex web of relationships that take place in the human community. God enters into this dynamic, this participation in the web of human relationships.¹⁶

Mission, therefore, never means to be self-complacent or self-boasting, neither to be dejected or discouraged, but **authentically experiencing** the joy of the risen Christ, and **spontaneously sharing** it with others, and deepening our enthusiasm and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow,” and becoming “ministers of the Gospel whose lives **glow with fervour**, who have first received the joy of Christ” (EG 10).

In this connection Pope Francis urges Catholics to guard against twofold dangers: on the one hand it may be a feeling of “defeatism which turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, ‘sourpusses’ (EG 85)” and on the other hand it maybe the feeling of superiority some people cherish “because they observe certain rules or remain intransigently faithful to a particular Catholic style from the past”. Here the Pope points out that “a supposed soundness of doctrine or discipline leads one to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyzes and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying,...In neither case is one really concerned about Jesus Christ or others ... It is impossible to think that a genuine evangelizing thrust could emerge from these adulterated forms of Christianity.” (EG 94).

How fittingly does John Thavis¹⁷ remark about the newness of the vision Pope Francis: “ He’s laying down some real markers about the kinds of reforms he expects to preside over, including greater decentralization, openness to diversity in the church, and a greater emphasis on the gospel message of salvation as opposed to church doctrines and rules.”¹⁸

In sum, the vision of the Church by Pope Francis is

determined to change the present image of deformed Church which is self-referent, self-complacent, self-glorifying and clerical-centered into an authentic spouse of the Master, concerned with recovering of the original Christ-experience and reflecting his light to the world, enthusiastic about sharing that joy with all, especially the existential peripheries, respecting decentralized structures, diversity of cultural forms so that she would be really a fruitful mother who gains life from joy of evangelizing Church.

[The next part, “Unique Place of Unity” has been omitted due to space constraints. It will be published in a separate boo.)

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion it is evident that Pope Francis has a new vision for the Church and is determined to change the existing sick and deformed Church into a healthy and glowing Church. He is convinced that the main cause of the distortion is the wrong understanding of the Church, as an institution of clergy and the religious, ignoring their basic call to be people of God, and forgetting the identity and potentiality of laity and that it has failed to shine owing to its self-referent and self-glorifying and clergy-centered approach. Hence Pope Francis envisions a new Church in which the role of the laity, including the women and the young, will decisively be the central, and focal subject. In this vision, the laity’s call and mission, arising out of the baptismal vocation, determines even the role of the hierarchy.

So the need of the hour is a double pronged change of mind-set, required of both clergy and the laity. On the one hand there is urgency to evoke among the laity realization of their vocation and mission to be carried out on their own, and get themselves immersed in the struggle of transforming the world into the reign of God in the light of the Gospels. On the other

hand the clergy ought to accompany the laity, encourage them and work in their midst, far from separating themselves from the laity, and reflecting on the laity's problems independently of involvement in laity's struggles, still worse 'using them' for their own designs and according to their abstract reflections which are often cut off from their actual involvement.

Would that the whole Church cherish Francis' vision of Church as a correlative, cooperative, collaborative, collegial, and co-inclusive People of God with its task of 'mystery of moon," and really radiating the light of her Master, outgoing and evangelizing the world. It is in realization of this vision that the laity play the key role. They are the basic, central and focal point. Hence Pope Francis proposes this dictum: "To evoke the faithful, holy people of God is to evoke the horizon to which they are invited to look and from whence to reflect."¹⁹ Moreover, Pope Francis is challenging all sections of laity: men, women, the young, the elderly, and the family as a whole, in season and out of season, while at the same time taking all efforts to reform the church structures! Not that there is no opposition to this visionary and a pastoral minded Pope²⁰. This impels the authentic faithful to pray that his Copernican revolution in the Church is accepted by all and that the laity pay heed to his call, and wake up from slumber and begin to play their rightful role effectively.

Notes

- 1 In Behavioural Psychology the term 'apperception' is used to mean "the process by which new experience is assimilated to and transformed by the residuum of past experience to form a new whole".
- 2 Paul Valley, *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 160, emphasis added.
- 3 Paul Valley, *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 162

- 4 Michael Collins, *Francis Bishop of Rome, A Short Biography*, (Bangalore: Claretian Publication, 2013) 90-99.
- 5 Paul Valley, *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 167
- 6 See http://en.radiovaticana.va/storico/2013/03/27/bergoglios_intervention_a_diagnosis_of_the_problems_in_the_church/en1-677269, accessed 27 June 2017
- 7 See http://en.radiovaticana.va/storico/2013/03/27/bergoglios_intervention_a_diagnosis_of_the_problems_in_the_church/en1-677269, accessed 27 June 2017.
- 8 Paul Valley, *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 177
- 9 After a month he assumed the office, Pope Francis appointed a group of eight cardinals “to help him reform the Roman Curia and to help him govern the Catholic Church”. A few months later, the group of eight cardinals welcomed a new member, the new Secretariat of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin. Hence, they become known as the C9. The first group of eight cardinals consists of (1) Cardinal Oscar Andres Rodriguez Maradiaga of Honduras (2) Cardinal Francisco Javier Errázuriz, Chile (3) Cardinal Sean Patrick O’Malley of Boston (4) Cardinal Reinhard Marx, of Munich, (5) Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (6) Cardinal Oswald Gracias of Bombay (7) Cardinal George Pell, secretary for Economy and the Governor of Vatican, Giuseppe Bertello (8) Italian Bishop Marcello Semeraro acts as the coordinator and secretary.
- 10 As reported by Anne Thompson, NBC (National Broadcasting Company) The Nightly News, Sept. 19, 2013, <http://www.nbc-news.com/video/nightly-news/53056224/#53056224>, accessed 14th June, 2017.
- 11 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium : Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World* (Nov. 2013)
- 12 The XIII Synod of Bishops gathered from 7-28 October 2012.
- 13 Abigail Frymann Rouch “Pope Francis publishes radical vision for Church”, in *The Tablet: The International Catholic News Weekly*, 26 November 2013, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/145/1/pope-francis-publishes-radical-vision-for-church>, accessed 6.6. 2017.

- 14 Randy David, "The pope of the peripheries", in *Philippine Daily Inquirer* January 15, 2015, accessed 17.6.2017. See <http://opinion.inquirer.net/81724/the-pope-of-the-peripheries#ixzz4kgyhOXB6>, accessed 17.6. 2017.
- 15 Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, (New York: Holt, Henry & Company, Inc.2014).
- 16 Antonio Spadaro, "A Big Heart Open to God", in *Thinking Faith*, the online journal of the Jesuits in Britain 19th September 2013. http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20130919_1.htm accessed 10.11.2016.
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Article received: Feb 14, 2017

Article approved: Sept 12, 2017

No of words: 5613



The Trinitarian and Christological Dimensions of Ecology in *Laudato Si'*

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Abstract: The foundational Christian experience of God as Trinity in and through Jesus Christ, the Logos, refers immediately to the revelation of the inter-relationship between God, humans and the entire creation. Based on this faith-experience Pope Francis develops further the understanding of the essential relationship of humans and its implications for human's relationship with nature in his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. Human's responsibility to preserve, nurture nature and develop a contemplative attitude towards nature flow from the very essence of humans as communion since as all humans are created in the image and likeness of God, the Trinity or Absolute Communion. So there is a Trinitarian dimension to ecology. The cosmic Christology of Paul expressed in Col 1:15-17 summarizes the biblical revelation about the relationship of the creation with God revealed through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Alpha and the Omega of creation, the beginning and the end and indeed, the meaning of the universe. In Jesus Christ God reveals not only what humans are and what they can become but also what the world is. The world too has its origin and end in Christ. The Logos Christology of John further emphasizes that the revelation of the hominization of the Word is also the revelation of the meaning of the entire cosmos. The encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, of Pope Francis ends with the hymns to the Holy Trinity and to Jesus Christ, re-affirming that our right relationship God cannot be separated from our right relationship with nature.

Keywords: Environment, Triune God, Ecology, Christ, Religion, God's Presence.

Introduction

What has the Trinity to do with ecology? The same question can be raised about the relation between Jesus Christ and the ecological issues of our times. What has Jesus Christ to do with ecology? Everything! This may surprise us because in the past the Christian faith has very systematically separated itself from the concerns of the environment or ecology. Living in the midst of people who worship nature in general and the forces of nature like winds, fire, thunder, etc., as gods, Christianity insulated itself from any form of pantheism which says that everything is god. Pantheism grew in the primitive societies and pantheistic ideas were integrated into the belief systems of the people of the Greco-Roman and Mediterranean world as well as of the eastern religions. The God-experience of the Old Testament times as articulated in the bible challenged the worship of the powers of the nature as gods and secularized them as created by God through his word. However, the attraction to pantheism was a real temptation even to those who had faith in One God. The other extreme of considering nature as mere objects to be conquered, subordinated and manipulated to satisfy human greed has brought in irreparable damage to nature and eco-system causing danger to all living creatures including humans. A deeper understanding of the inter-relationship between humans and the entire creation based on the foundational Christian experience of God as Trinity and Jesus Christ, the Logos or, God became human as the link between God and the world gives us a comprehensive, integral and liberative vision of the entire creation. In fact, Pope Francis, in his encyclical, *Laudato si* has already attempted to show the relation between God and creation especially in the last two prayers found in the encyclical.

What is environment? Environment is the external surroundings in which we humans, animals and plants live and it affects the development of everyone and everything that lives and grows in that

environment. Ecology tries to study by analyzing and understanding the complex net-work of relationships and interdependencies in a given environment. It all boils down to how to the understanding of relationships among living beings and their relation to non-living or *a-biotic* realities in the entire creation. In fact, religion is all about relationships: relationship with oneself, God, others and creation.

The term ‘religion’, according to many is derived from the Latin word, *religare* which means ‘to bind together’. Therefore, any religion that divides and separates people from people, people from the Absolute or God and people from the entire creation is a not a religion and even if it has a semblance of a religion. For the Cosmic religions like Hinduism and many of the ancient religions of the Near East relationship with the world and all in it was easy as it was an essential part of their religion. But they perverted it according to Paul. He says, “Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles” (Rom 1:22). While Cosmic religions have a predilection for everything in nature and believe it as divinized supported by a cyclic view of time derived from the course of nature, the Judeo-Christian tradition believes that everything is created by God and it has beginning and an end. Therefore, this religious tradition has a linear view of time which emphasizes history. When the cosmic religious traditions went to the extreme of making the organic and inorganic things and powers of nature as gods, the prophetic religious traditions went to the extreme of absolutely separating the entire cosmos or creation from God emphasizing God’s transcendence neglecting the immanence of God. However, the biblical experience of God and the world as articulated in the different books of the bible, Jesus’ own relation to creation, the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, the Magisterium and the recent Popes present an integral and balanced understanding of the relation between God, human beings and the created world.

Nowhere in the Bible it is unambiguously stated that God is absolutely separated from the world though God is supreme creator, ruler, controller, protector and provider of the needs of the world. God is related to the world as its creator. This relationship between God and the world need to be affirmed in order to understand

the mysteries of creation, incarnation and resurrection and the sacraments and God's presence in human communion. We have to say, God is distinct from the creation but not separate from the creation. They are not one and they are not two either! This is not a philosophical or theological puzzle but the meaning of our existence and the existence of the world founded on the Trinitarian and Christic experience of God. This faith-experience can lead us to an understanding of our integral and liberating relationship with God and the creation and to develop a responsible attitude towards our environment and eco-system.

In this paper I am attempting to show how our Christian experience of God as Trinity and our relationship with God in Jesus Christ is the foundation of our right relationship with the entire creation and the demands it makes to care for the creation as well as to respond to the ecological crisis we face today based on the Encyclical *Laudato Si* by Pope Francis.

1. The Trinitarian Dimension of Ecology

It is the Christian experience of God that God is a communion of three Persons, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Church's experience of God as Trinity from its originary experience of Jesus Christ as Lord and God after his resurrection, the experience of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the experience of the apostles that Jesus called God as Abba, Father. They expressed this faith-experience by baptizing those who believed in the name of the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit, confessed the Triune God in their creeds and prayers etc. It is this foundational faith that has entered into the Christian understanding of humans and the world in their relation to the Trinitarian God. The later theological reflections on the Trinitarian God would explain that humans are created in the image and likeness of God, but God the Trinity. So every human being is an image of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Every human being has a Father dimension, that is transcendence, the Son dimension that is transience, and the Spirit-dimension that is immanence. Therefore, all humans are by nature communitarian as they are the images of the Trinity or the Absolute communion. They are inter-

related and inter-connected as persons. What is the relation of the rest of the creation other than humans with the Trinity?

According to the Christian tradition the vestige or dress of the Trinity is in the creation (*vestigia trinitatis in creatura*).¹ John Paul II says, St. Augustine wrote: “It is necessary that we, viewing the Creator through the works of his hands, raise up our minds to the contemplation of the Trinity, of which creation bears the mark in a certain and due proportion”.²

Pope Francis has expressed the similar understanding of the relation between the Triune God and the creation in the Christian prayer in union with the creation in his encyclical *Laudato si*. “Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love, teaches us to contemplate you in the beauty of the universe, for all things speak of you. Awaken our praise and thankfulness for every being that you have made. Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined to everything that is.”³ The relation between the Trinity and the creation is not mere presence of God in the creation or creation revealing the beauty and grandeur of the Trinity. It is more than a mere reflection but a deeper relationship that can be explained only in relation through the Son who became human and thus became a part of creation.

The Trinity is the source and model of the entire creation. The Trinity is the source because everything is created by the Triune God. Irenaeus of Lyons says that God has created the world with his two hands, the Logos and the Pneuma or the Word and the Spirit. The stamp of the Trinitarian God can be discovered in the creation. According to John Paul II, “It is a truth of faith that the world has its beginning in the creator, who is the Triune God. Although the work of creation is attributed especially to God the Father-this we profess in the creeds of the faith (“I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth”)-it is also a truth of faith that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are the unique and indivisible “principle” of creation.⁴ The Trinity is the model of creation because everything in the world are distinct and are inter-related, both living and non-living. Everything in this universe is unique. The marvelous plurality of everything that exists, every

plant and every animal , every bird in the sky and every fish in the sea reveal the plurality and distinctiveness of everything that exists.

How can we explain the meaning of this plurality? They are all modeled after their maker, the Triune God. In the absolute communion of the Trinity one person is not the other. The Father is not the Son or the Spirit. The same could be said of the Son and the Spirit. Yet there is only One God. The unity in the diversity of the creation is modeled after the Trinity. What Tertullian says the Trinity explains the difference and communion among them. He says that in the Trinity there is difference without division, there is distinction without separation. Such a great plurality and unity we can find in the creation. Therefore, any contemplation of the creation leads us to the contemplation of the eternal communion of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Therefore, everything in the creation must be approached with a contemplative attitude not with a pragmatic attitude. If we have a contemplative attitude to Nature or Creation everything in the universe becomes a symbol or a sacrament for us, raising our minds to God and filling our hearts with love and thankfulness to God like the Psalmist who sang, “when I see the heavens, the work of your hand...(Ps 8).

At the conclusion of his general audience speaking about the creation John Paul II said, “Creation is the work of the Triune God. The world “created” in the Word-Son, is “restored” together with the Son to the Father, through that Uncreated Gift, the Holy Spirit, consubstantial with both. In this way the world is created in that Love, which is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. This universe embraced by eternal Love begins to exist in the instant chosen by the Trinity as the beginning of time.”⁵

The ecological crisis today is created by our pragmatic attitude towards creation. We relate to the things in the universe for their usefulness. How a thing is useful to us is our concern. So the world as a sacrament is manipulated, used and abused for the selfish greed of humans. Thus we not only disfigure the creation but also disfigure the Triune God who created the world. Therefore it is a tremendous responsibility placed on to treat the things of creation with certain reverence due to it because everything in the universe is reflecting the glory of God.

2. Christological Dimensions of Ecology

It is easier for us to understand how Jesus Christ is related to the entire creation. We have not only the witness of the Gospel but also the Fathers of the Church and the teaching of the Magisterium about the Christic dimension of the creation because everything created ‘through him’ and ‘for him’ (Col 1:15f). John would say, the Word was God and the world was made through him (Jn 1:10). In fact, all things were made through him and without him nothing was made (Jn 1:3). The Letter to the Hebrews affirms the same when it says that God through the Son “also created the world” (Heb 1:2). It is true that everything created through the Son but is he related to the universe only as its creator? It would have been a relation between the creator and the creature if the Word or the Logos had not become human. The incarnation or the hominization of the Word made the entire creation a new creation. After the incarnation the universe or the cosmos is no more the same. Every mighty star to the tiniest atom, every non-living and the living being was transformed by humanity’s unity with divinity. The world has become sacred. The world has become a sacrament.

Paul expresses this intimate union of the Logos with the creation in the Christological hymn in Colossians. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Co 1:15-16). This hymn summarizes the biblical revelation about the relationship of the creation with God revealed through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Alpha and the Omega of creation, the beginning and the end and indeed, the meaning of the universe. In Jesus Christ God reveals not only what humans are and what they can become but also what the world is. The world too has its origin and end in Christ. When one encounters Jesus Christ as the beginning and the end or source and final destiny of one’s life, she or he will find meaning in life. The hominization of the Word, or God becoming human and thus becoming a part of this worldly reality gives meaning also to this universe. John expresses this revelation by synthesizing the Greek philosophical

term Logos which means word, reason or meaning and the Hebrew term *dabar* or word. In the Hellenistic or Greek world-view logos is the beginning and the end of the world or the meaning of the world and for the Hebrews *dabar* Yahweh or God's word is God's presence and action in history. Therefore, when John combines these two world-views to reveal who Jesus is, he uses the term Logos which means that Jesus Christ is the meaning of the universe and God's presence and action in history. According to Athanasius, a great Father of the Church before incarnation the Logos was the governing principle of the universe from outside but after the incarnation he is the governing principle of the universe from within the universe. So we can legitimately affirm that everything living and non-living has its beginning and end in Christ, indeed, its meaning is Christ. In other words, there is no-thing outside the reality of Christ. After the incarnation or hominization of the word, everything and everyone is a Christophany, a manifestation of Christ in its own unique way.

The incarnated Son of God or Jesus the human lived a life in right relationship with the entire creation. He did not run away from the world considering it evil. Everything created by the Father who makes the sun shine and rain fall on everyone without any discrimination was found to be revealing his Father's care and love. Pope Francis affirms this in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*. He says: "Jesus lived in full harmony with creation, and others were amazed: 'What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?'" (*Mt* 8:27). His appearance was not that of an ascetic set apart from the world, nor of an enemy to the pleasant things of life. Of himself he said: "The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard!'" (*Mt* 11:19). ⁶ Further he says, "He [Jesus] was far removed from philosophies which despised the body, matter and the things of the world. Such unhealthy dualisms, nonetheless, left a mark on certain Christian thinkers in the course of history and disfigured the Gospel. Jesus worked with his hands, in daily contact with the matter created by God, to which he gave form by his craftsmanship. ⁷ What a harmonious relationship with the creation!

In the during the apostolic times when the NT was taking shape and during the post-apostolic times heretical schools like that of the

Gnostics and Docetics taught that matter was evil and the spirit was good. They would not accept that God became truly human because God cannot assume evil matter. Docetics said Jesus appeared to be human but not really human. The Fathers of the Church like Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus and others fought against such heresies and affirmed that whatever God has created was good and God became truly human. However, their heretical doctrine had a negative influence on the Christian understanding of the world and on the Christian spirituality. The slogan of some spiritual masters was “*fuga mundi*” or run away from this world. The Christian vocation is not to run away from the world but remain in it with a contemplative attitude and transform it with a prophetic commitment empowered by the Holy Spirit who makes everything new.

In the resurrection of Christ, the humanity of Christ is glorified and through the glorified body of Christ the entire creation is transformed and glorified. Therefore, the material reality can be transformed to become the medium of God’s presence. The sacraments, especially the Eucharist, which we celebrate is a celebration not only of our communion with God and one another but also our communion with the entire universe. In a single piece of bread we use at the Eucharistic celebration the entire universe is at work, the sun, the earth, water, the wheat plant, the seed, the farmer, the baker and finally those who receive it. The universe plays its role in the miracle of the Eucharist, along with Christ, the priest and the community.

Conclusion

It is the Son of God who made this creation new with his incarnation and resurrection and it is the Holy Spirit guides the creation to its final destiny as willed by the Father. I would like to conclude my paper with the prayer of Pope Francis presented at the conclusion of the his encyclical *Laudato Si*’, “Son of God, Jesus, through you all things were made. You were formed in the womb of Mary our Mother, you became part of this earth, and you gazed upon this world with human eyes. Today you are alive in every creature in your risen glory. Praise be to you!

Notes

- 1 *De Trinitate*, VI, 10, 12
- 2 John Paul II, *Creation is the Work of the Trinity*, General Audience, 5 March, 1986 *Laudato si*, No.98
- 3 Pope Francis, *Laudato si*’, No. 246
- 4 John Paul II, *Creation is the Work of the Trinity*, General Audience, 5 March, 1986
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 *Laudato si*’, No.98
- 7 *Laudato si*’, No.98

Article received: Apr 24, 2017

Article approved: Oct 32, 2017

No of words: 3472



The Philosophical Foundations of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* of Pope Francis

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Abstract: In one's search for the philosophical foundations of the encyclical *Laudato Si* by Pope Francis one may be surprised to find the indirect influence of thinkers like Martin Buber, Martin Heidegger and Max Scheler on the encyclical through Romano Guardini (1885-1968). These philosophers were instrumental in fashioning the liberal thinking of Romano Guardini who in turn influenced the vision of *Laudato Si'*. Descartes told the intellectuals of Europe to stop fussing over theological matters and philosophical abstractions and to get about the business of "mastering" nature. This shift in consciousness gave rise to the modern sciences and their attendant technologies. It is the Guardinian worries about the disastrous consequences of this shift that is shared by Pope Francis in his encyclical. In his elucidations Pope Francis is heavily influenced by Romano Guardini's *End of the Modern World*, which presents a sort of nightmarish vision of humanity, in which human power gives rise to a kind of technology which itself operates by its own logic of progress, liberating itself from human control in the process, and eventually returns to plague the inventor. Many readers of Guardini may not know that in these technological views Guardini was himself heavily indebted to Martin Heidegger's critique of modernity's technological view of thinking? The present essay makes an attempt to show that in the final analysis the foundational philosophical vision of *Laudato Si* is influenced by the critique of Martin Heidegger on the "machinational" interpretation of beings that subjugates hu-

mans and commodifies nature as well as Heidegger's philosophical insights into the way of overcoming it.

Key words: Commodification of nature, technology, being, machinational and relational interpretation, meditational character

Introduction

Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* has definitely provoked ripples in the collective conscience of humanity. An interesting question in this context would be: who is the immediate philosophical mind behind *Laudato Si'*? In answering this question, it would be apt to turn our attention to another historical event that took place on February 28, 2013. In his last act as Pope, while officially renouncing the Papacy and bidding farewell to the College of Cardinals in the Vatican's Clementine Hall, Pope Benedict XVI quoted Romano Guardini in the short speech he delivered. Quoting from Guardini's book *The Church of the Lord*, he said "the Church is not an institution devised and built at table, but a living reality. She lives along the course of time, evolving, like any living being, transforming herself. Yet her nature remains the same."¹

1. Guardini's Critique of Technological Approach to Nature

Guardini, as we know, was a known modernist, who was even under suspicion of heresy before Vatican II. After the Council, Guardini found a warm reception in the Church. In fact, Paul VI wanted to elevate him to the college of Cardinals, something that he politely refused. Thinkers like Martin Buber, Martin Heidegger and Max Scheler were instrumental in fashioning the liberal thinking of Guardini. In turn, he had a definitive influence on Pope Paul VI, Karl Rahner, Joseph Ratzinger and the present Pope Francis. It is common knowledge that Guardini played a key role in the theological

and liturgical movements of the '30s and '40s of the twentieth century that led to Vatican II. He had redesigned a chapel at Burg Rothenfels. Discarding the Gothic altars and elaborate décor, he stripped the church, painted the walls white and installed a moveable altar surrounded on three sides by simple stools. The focus was entirely on the congregation and the priest, together forming a community gathered for worship with no separation between them. We see that he was a worthy precursor of the Council's Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and Paul VI's liturgical reform. Guardini feared that the popular devotions that had energized the Catholic revival of the nineteenth century had fostered anarchic spiritual individualism in which prayer had become simply a tool for attaining merit in the quest for individual salvation. Communism offered an alternative to this anarchy, but only at the expense of eliminating individual freedom. Against these extremes, he emphasised that the idea of the Church as the Body of Christ, an organic union of persons that made possible the full flourishing of the "free personality," which is "the presupposition of all true community." The spirit of the liturgy is above all a spirit of community, uniting the faithful with each other even as it unites them to God. This side of Guardini is known to all.

But there is another unknown side of Guardini that is made remarkably visible by the encyclical *Laudato Si*. Guardini loved nature and took particular delight in the lake region around Milan. Besides being enchanted by the physical beauty of the area, what intrigued him above all was the manner in which human beings, through their architecture and craftsmanship, **interacted non-invasively and respectfully with nature**. When he first came to the region, he noticed, for example, how the homes along Lake Como imitated the lines and rhythms of the landscape and how the boats that plied the lake did so in response to the swelling and falling of the waves. But by the 1920's he had begun to notice a change.

The homes being built were not only larger, but more “aggressive,” indifferent to the surrounding environment, no longer accommodating themselves to the natural setting. And the motor-driven boats on the lake were no longer moving in rhythm with the waves, but rather cutting through them indifferently.

In these unhappy changes, Guardini noted the emergence of a distinctively modern sensibility. He meant that the attitudes first articulated by Francis Bacon in the sixteenth century and René Descartes in the seventeenth were coming to dominate the mentality of twentieth-century men and women. Consciously departing from Aristotle, for whom knowledge was a modality of contemplation, Bacon opined that knowledge is power, more precisely power to control the natural environment. This is why he infamously insisted that the scientist’s task is to put nature “on the rack” so that she might give up her secrets. Just a few decades later, Descartes told the intellectuals of Europe to stop fussing over theological matters and philosophical abstractions and to get about the business of “mastering” nature. This shift in consciousness gave rise to the modern sciences and their attendant technologies. It is the Guardianian worries about the disastrous consequences of this shift that is shared by Pope Francis in his encyclical.

The Encyclical *Laudato Si* with the thematic title “On Care for our common Home” moves away from the customary practice of being addressed to the bishops of the Church or the lay faithful, but similar to Pope Saint John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris*, is addressed to all people in order “to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home” (#3). The primary focus is not the ecological dangers that the modern world faces, but our mistaken understanding of nature, and of our place and role in nature. We have of ourselves an inflated image and a criminally commodified vision of nature. We regard it, in essence, as a kind of accident demanding technological mastery and manipulation for our own self-

centered purposes. Attempts were also made to justify such a criminal approach by referring to the creation account in Genesis (1:28) that apparently grants man “dominion” over the earth. It is not without reason that the objection was raised that the Judaeo-Christian tradition based on this account has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by man.

The encyclical sets out first to correct such mis-readings of the biblical accounts. “The creation accounts in the book of Genesis contain, in their own symbolic and narrative language, profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality. They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. .. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn distorted our mandate to “have dominion” over the earth (cf. *Gen* 1:28), to “till it and keep it” (*Gen* 2:15). As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual (cf. *Gen* 3:17-19).” (LS, 66)

As the next step, the encyclical turns to the problem of modern ecological crisis? It begins by acknowledging the contribution of modern technology as it “has remedied countless evils,” and the genuine progress it has effected, “especially in the fields of medicine, engineering, and communications” (102). But the cost that is being paid for it is unjustifiably high. The Pope writes, “Technology tends to absorb everything into its ironclad logic”; “in the most radical sense of the term, power is its motive—a lordship over all” (108). This results in a serious problem. It manipulates and commodifies everything in nature. This commodification poisons everything, not only our environment but our self-

understanding. It affects our use of our own bodies, our grasp of the meaning and purpose of our sexuality, the relations between the sexes, and our attitude toward children, marriage and family life. This commodification of nature causes us not only to abuse and dispose of the poor and marginalized through sheer selfishness. And worse still, it causes us to abuse and dispose of ourselves.

The problem for modernity is that it vacillates between two extremes—between envisioning humanity as lord and master over the raw material that is nature and seeing the human animal as the enemy of the rest of the natural order. Francis focuses on the former error: “Modernity,” he writes, “has been marked by an excessive anthropocentrism” (116). Separating the human from the natural, one direction in modernity promotes manipulation of nature without limits (118), whereas another direction sees humans as the chief threat to the cosmos. Accordingly, Francis observes, we find ourselves in a “constant schizophrenia, wherein a technocracy which sees no intrinsic value in lesser beings coexists with the other extreme, which sees no special value in human beings.”

Now to return to our initial question: who is the philosophical inspiration behind these insights? It is no doubt that in his elucidations Pope Francis is heavily influenced by Romano Guardini’s *End of the Modern World*, which presents a sort of nightmarish vision of humanity, in which human power gives rise to a kind of technology which itself operates by its own logic of progress, liberating itself from human control in the process, and eventually returns to plague the inventor. But how many readers of Guardini will know that in these technological views Guardini was himself heavily indebted to Martin Heidegger’s critique of modernity’s technological view of thinking? It is here that this essay proposes to make a small note.

2. Heidegger and the Machinational and Relational Interpretation of Beings

Heidegger begins his reflections on modern technology with the candid observation that today, all over the world the humans remain “unfree and chained to technology.”² This has resulted in a dangerous situation, viz. the further the technology advances, the more it “threatens to slip from human control.” (QT, 5) It is this sad situation that necessitates a questioning of the essence of modern technology and the threat it poses. Pointing out the current understanding of technology in its “instrumental character” “as a means to an end” or in its “anthropological character” as “a human activity”, though correct, still fails to show what is really *ownmost* to technology. “Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to sway [essences] in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *alētheia*, truth, happens.”(QT, 13) Heidegger calls our attention to the essential difference between modern and past technologies. Whereas in its original sense technology was a mode of revealing, a “bringing-forth in the sense of *poiēsis*,” the “revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging.” (QT, 14) The windmill is a classic example of the old technology. It needs wind to turn its sails. But it does not unlock energy from the wind. It just goes along the play of things as they are. Or, placing a bridge across a river does not do violence to the river, but rather it allows the river to be what it is. In coal production, in contrast, what is aimed at is to extract the energy stored in coal to generate heat, which in turn is meant to generate steam out of water, with which the wheels of some machines can be turned for some other purpose. Or, take the case of installing a dam across a river for generating hydroelectric energy. In both cases, violence is done to the things and they are manipulated. It is this characteristic of the modern technology that becomes the object of scrutiny by Heidegger.

According to Heidegger, our age is characterized by a machinational interpretation of beings. That is, modern technology comes across to us predominantly in a “machinational” character, that includes such activities of objectifying, making, producing, ordering, etc. (GA 65:115/91) In the process, what is ownmost to technology gets disguised (of course not eliminated.) Here, technology becomes absolutely anthropocentric, representing absolute human domination and mastery over everything, all beings and nature. This total subjugation by man, naturally abetted by technology, leaves no room for other things to be on their own. Everything is there to be exploited to serve the needs of the human subject. This machinational perspective of beings as mere makeable and exchangeable objects is nothing short of nihilism, where man is made the ground of everything amidst a negation of all transcendent ground and values. When man considers himself the measure of everything else in the cosmos, man becomes an unbridled monster, who replaces every transcendental values with technological powers.

In the 50s Heidegger speaks of the essence of modern technology in terms of another “disclosive framework”, viz. Ge-stell which is variously translated as “en-framing” or “positionality.” The World War II heralded a new framework of “standing reserve” (GA 79:32/31) in the place of the subject-object framework that let everything including humans be understood in terms of how it can be represented, arranged, mobilized, exchanged, or replaced for a specific goal, a framework in terms of which everything gets degenerated into mere raw-materials. Everything is positioned or framed into a horizon, where everything, including humans, is just replaceable commodities for global consumption. Just recollect the times we grew up with small riverlets, paddy fields, ponds, where life was really lived. Everything had an intrinsic worth, they formed an essential aspect of that “home” for the humans and other living beings around it. And today?

While machinational interpretation of beings revolved around the subject-object relation that exalted the hegemony of anthropocentrism and reduced everything else to orderable and makeable objects, in enframing the subject-object framework disappears and everything is assimilated into a frame for which everything comes to presence as part of a stockpile that can be manipulated. In the former, human beings as the productive agents or representing subjects had some sort of a prominence, whereas in the enframing technological attitude human beings are just resources within the totalising technological disclosure of reality. As standing reserve everything is pieces of stockpiles to be ordered or replaced, parts to be assembled or disassembled. There is no such thing as a part-whole relation as in a living organism, but everything is a mere part that can be exchanged or replaced. We know how our electronic gadgets come to us today. They come to us as packets of various pieces. If one piece does not work, it gets replaced. Neither parts, nor the whole as such, has any individual identity. They are all parts of a stockpile that can be consumed, exchanged, or replaced.

Human beings are no exception to this circuit of orderability. Days may not be far off, where the attention moves from cloning human beings to erecting factories that produce human beings. The essence of technology as enframing does not leave man alone as in charge of technology. He himself is devoured by the same process of framing, that had in fact facilitated man's domination of the rest of the nature. Not only that a worker is seen as an instrument for production, but even the top brass of companies, who plan and organize, are so easily and ruthlessly fired and replaced. They are mere resources to be ordered, arranged, disposed of or replaced. For Heidegger, the tragedy of such a technological interpretation is that every person and everything in the world loses its individual identity, distinctive independence and uniqueness. Everything is po-

sitioned within a horizon of global commodification. Each and every being is transformed into mere replaceable stockpile.

What then is the main danger of modern technology? For Heidegger, the primary danger is not so much the atomic or other destructive weaponry or even the environmental disasters resulting from the application of modern technology. They can only bring about a physical destruction. But the real problem is the spiritual destruction of man living under the sway of such technological attitude. Through an abject surrender to such a technological attitude, man lives under the illusion that they are the masters and everything is in their perfect control. This illusion is the result of their belief that everything before them is just objects and means to be ordered and organized by them. But they are oblivious to the truth that under this illusion, they reduce themselves to mere resources, subject to the same process of being ordered or replaced. To dispel the illusion that we are the masters of the world and to respond appropriately to the domination of technology, what is needed first is to realize that we are not before or beyond the complex of technological relationships, but rather we are inescapably chained to such relationships.

How do we respond to this technological interpretation of being appropriately? Technology can never be overcome, because it is no more under our power; we are not its masters. Heidegger favours rather a free relation to technology. This free relation to technology begins with the realization that today the first challenge is to disclose technology in its one dimensionality, where the humans are dangerously enslaved by technology, negating any role for their free will. Becoming aware of this danger opens up the possibility for a free relation to technology in the sense that it will free us from any compulsion to continue with it unconditionally or to rebel against it as something devilish. We can use technology or any technical devices, without being enslaved to them, without

being controlled by them. This amounts to experiencing the ‘technological’ in terms of its limitations. Experiencing the limits of technology would make us so free in our dealings with them that we can let go of them at any time. Such a free relationship implies an “yes” and “no” at the same time, an yes to the unavoidable use of technical devices, but with a no to any right on their part to dominate us, to enslave us.

Indeed technology has its inherent danger. The way to overcome its danger is not by rejecting technology, but by perceiving the danger it poses and allowing ourselves to be ourselves. Realizing its danger itself opens the possibility of a “turn” away from it. It is in this sense that he quotes the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin: “But where the danger is, there grows also what saves.” (QT, 28) What is decisive in the process, warns Heidegger, is to remember that “despite all conquest of distances the nearness of things remains absent.”³ This could easily be illustrated with what happens in most of our human communities today. A cell phone easily reduces distances across the globe. But for that we often sacrifice the nearness of one another, say at a dining table, when each one is busy with their electronic gadgets. In order to truly experience and maintain nearness, we must encounter things in their respective truth, understand them in what they are. Only then will we be saved from the danger of technology, from being reduced, both things as well as ourselves, to mere supplies and reserves.

Having taken this detour, let us ask the question: Is the encyclical a corrective to the excesses of modern technology? No. It is true, that the Pope gently but firmly states that modern technology is fundamentally flawed. The very philosophy behind it is cancerous. However, the key thrust of the encyclical is much more than being a cry of protest against the evils of modernity or modern technology. For the Encyclical the ecological crisis is as much a crisis of

human person, who is now lost in the cosmos, increasingly alienated from self, others, nature, and God. “If the present ecological crisis is one small sign of the ethical, cultural, and spiritual crisis of modernity, we cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships” (119). What makes this a truly great and moving and beautiful encyclical is the magnificent exposition of another view of reality: a description of the true nature of the created order, in all its marvellous and interconnected glory, and of the true role of man as the gardener of this garden of wonders. The heart of the encyclical revolves around the question of how to move away from an exploitative technological relation to a caring relation to our entire environment.

It is again here that the Heideggerian insights on the relational character of everything finite could throw further lights on the encyclical. With the notion of the “fourfold” (Thing, 173f.)⁴ Heidegger attempts to highlight how the entire finite existence -- that includes humans as well as every aspect of the entire universe -- stands so interrelated that it opens ways of authentic relationships away from the dangerous technological one that consider things as mere stockpile under our domination.

With the notion of the fourfold, Heidegger tries to show that what we encounter in our universe is not lonely objects out there, but essentially things that “gather” in themselves earth, sky, mortals, and divinities. In every finite existence, “earth and sky, divinities and mortals dwell *together all at once*. These four, at one because of what they themselves are, belong together. Preceding everything that is present, they are enfolded into a single fourfold.” (Thing, 173) “Earth” stands for the very “matter” of existence, but not in the sense of the solid ground, but in the sense of non-quantifiable sensuous appearing. It is not the substantial basis from which everything

evolves, but rather, it is that which shines or radiates in a thing while making it appear. This shining or radiating of a thing requires a medium to appear and that medium is the sky. The sky represents the mediation of the appearance of a thing in terms of such elements like the weather patterns, variable lighting, as well as the temporal exposure to night and day and seasonal changes. Thus, one can say that the appearance of a thing is always 'weathered' by the sky. But these two constitutive elements are not all that is there to the appearance of a thing. There is, then, the dimension of the divinities that indicates the disclosure of the finite, mediated appearance as essentially meaningful. According to Heidegger, the reason why every single thing is inherently meaningful is because of the participation of divinities in its constitution. We know that it is the relatedness among things that give things their initial meaning. But such relatedness is possible only because they are exposed to a beyond and are addressable by it, viz. the mystery of grace. When Heidegger says that divinities are a constitutive element of a thing, he is underlining the fact that all things, not just humans, are exposed to the surprise of grace. All finite existence is always already immersed in a "hermeneutics of message." It is this exposure to grace, it is this immersion in a message that makes any meaningful existence possible at all. The fourth constitutive element for a thing is the mortals. Things appear as meaningful to man. In turn, they cannot appear as meaningful if man is not exposed to them. For Heidegger, what is unique to man is that he is a being-in-the-world, whose ownmost possibility is death. No one can die our deaths for us. Death is a possibility that we can neither evade, nor possess. It is a possibility that makes all our other possibilities impossible. It is this fact that what is most my own remains outside me that draws me outside of me and opens me essentially to the world. As mortals, we exist as members of a community who participate in the world. With this notion of the 'fourfold' Heidegger highlights how

everything finite stands essentially interrelated into a onefold. “Each of the four mirrors in its own way the presence of the others” and in doing this, each of it “sets each of the four free into its own” in their “essential being toward one another.” (Thing, 179)

Heidegger’s thinking of a thing in its mediational and relational character is in effect a thinking of finitude itself. When we speak of something as finite, we think of it as limited and this limitation as something negative. But for Heidegger, the finitude of a thing is to be understood positively as that surface or interface of its exposure to the world beyond it. Taken this way, finitude stands for the extension of a thing beyond itself and the many relations it has entered into and is open to. For Heidegger, thus, for a thing to be finite means for it to exist beyond itself. This beyond that supports this ecstatic character of things is the world. To appear as a thing is to be exposed to other things as well as to the world as the beyond that facilitates this exposure. Everything that shares finite existence does so in its interrelatedness to everything else around it within the world that surrounds them.

It is the fourfold that opens the thing to this beyond and makes it addressable by that world in turn. The world that addresses things in this age of technological domination is precisely that one-dimensional framework that robs the things of their relationality and reduces them to a status of mere replaceable pieces of a stockpile solely at the service of the consumeristic and power-hungry self-interests of man. An appropriate response to the dangers of such a technological approach would realize the essential interrelatedness of all finite existence and allow the things to disclose themselves as they are. It would be a response that opens the possibility for them to show themselves not only as existing within a cluster of relations that draws them out into innumerable directions of varying degrees (spatial, temporal, affective, associative,

etc.) of relations, but also as bridges between our surroundings and ourselves, touching us and transforming us in the process. A response in terms of such a “releasement” from the will to dominate would also enable man to “dwell” within the world, not as its master or its exploiter, but as its “servant” allowing everything to presence themselves in their own glory and as its “shepherd” concern fully nurturing and protecting them *to be* what they are. Thus, things in the world “do not appear *by means* of human making. But neither do they appear without the vigilance of mortals. The first step toward such vigilance is the step back from the thinking that merely represents . . . to the thinking that responds and recalls.” (Thing, 181). This step back will begin, when the mortals really learn to dwell, in the sense of cherishing, protecting, preserving and caring for, and “build out of dwelling, and think for the sake of dwelling” (BDT, 161).

3. Conclusion

In an age, where most of the initiatives to protect our environment against its senseless exploitation and mindless destruction still share the assumption that man has a “right” to manipulate nature without causing much damage to it, Heidegger’s views challenge this very assumption. We need a kind of conversion, a conversion from being harbingers of the technological attitude, driven by the hunger for power over all things and a compulsion to reduce everything to mere commodities to a new vision of reality and ourselves that would facilitate everything in the world to manifest themselves in their own intrinsic worth. That could be the first step, according to Heidegger, for the emergence of an authentic ecological consciousness.

On similar ontological foundations, and in the true spirit of the author of the book of Genesis, the Biblical prophets, Irenaeus, Thomas Aquinas, Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis wants to recover a properly cosmological sensibility, whereby

the human being and her projects are in vibrant, integrated relation with the world that surrounds her. “The earth was here before us and it has been given to us. The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to “till and keep” the garden of the world (cf. *Gen* 2:15). “Tilling” refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while “keeping” means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. (67) Clearly, the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures. (68) Everything has its place, everything is relational.

Notes

- 1 Cf. https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2013/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20130228_congedo-cardinali.html.
- 2 Martin Heidegger, “The Question concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977, p.4. (hereafter cited as QT and will be incorporated into the text.)
- 3 Martin Heidegger, “The Thing,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971, p. 166. (Hereafter referred to as Thing/ and will be incorporated into the text.)
- 4 This notion of the ‘fourfold’ is further elaborated in his essay “Building Dwelling Thinking,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, *op. cit.*, pp. 150ff. (Hereafter BDT). For a very detailed presentation of this theme, cf. Andrew J. Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2015.

Article received: Apr 14, 2017

Article approved: Oct 22, 2017

No of words: 5051



Pope Francis and Science: A Healthy and Necessary Amalgamation for the 21st Century

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Abstract: Pope Francis has given a strong impetus to the efforts and the trends of the Church in providing a common platform for the integration of science and faith (religion). Correcting its earlier mistakes, the Church, in the modern times, has been trying to see how science can deepen our faith. Some of the Church documents of the past about 200 years make it a point to highlight the possibility of mutual enrichment between science and faith. The present Pope has taken that task a step further to give a clarion call to the world of science to take concrete measures to protect the planet earth. He likes to interact with scientists in order to listen to them and to invite them to see their grave role in helping humanity to become responsible in their dealing with nature. This short paper begins with highlighting the general realization to bring science and faith together in order to grapple with deep realities of our existence. Then Pope Francis' involvement with the world of science is presented to show how he is open to learn from science and at the same time he does not hesitate to call a spade a spade in pointing out when science happens to fail in its commitment to the total welfare of humanity and nature. The last section presents some of the insights from his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, underlining the need to have clarity in our priorities so that we, the most rational beings in the whole of creation, become very responsible in protecting nature and realized the urgent need for integrating Science and Faith.

Keywords: Pope Francis, Integration of science and religion, Eco-spirituality, Enrichment of the Environment, Enlightenment of humanity

Introduction

In the 21st century it is not difficult to find common platforms for science and religion. Gone are those days when these two powerful human enterprises were seen opposing each other; it was unimaginable then to think of common interests between these two disciplines. But now the findings from both the macro and the micro worlds reveal that science alone cannot answer many of the questions that humanity comes across.

The Church has been taking keen interests in science, especially in astronomy, since the 16th century, when Pope Gregory XIII brought in reform of the calendar. Later in 1890s Pope Leo XIII founded Vatican Observatory; it has now acquired a good reputation, with 1.8 meter telescope for exploring the vast dark space out there; quite a few astronomers of the observatory engage in several significant studies and researches in many fields of Cosmology; they study asteroids, meteorites, extrasolar planets, stellar evolution, and so on. Further, in the recent past, the Church did not keep aloof from science and it always encouraged its followers to do serious science. Priests and monks have been ardent partners in the scientific enterprises; we find a priest or a religious, at every crucial turn in the progress of science in the modern era; for instance, the famous geneticist Gregor Mendel was a Christian monk and the epoch-making theory of Big Bang in Cosmology was the brain child of Georges Lemaitre, a Belgian mathematician and Catholic priest. This priest indeed had a great reputation too. He travelled to California in January 1933 for a series of lectures and in one of them he elaborated his Big Bang theory. Einstein could not resist his desire to openly applaud him; he gave him a standing ovation and announced: “This is the most

beautiful and satisfactory explanation of creation to which I have ever listened”.¹

Pope John Paul II always encouraged dialogues between science and religion and appealed to theologians that they be sufficiently informed of the recent developments in science; he advised them to be equipped with the basics of science so that they could avoid making shallow statements and uncritical reflections regarding scientific theories, like the Big Bang. He sincerely invited scientists also to be aware of the recent developments in the theological trends and the Scriptural researches. In short, as mentioned in his letter to George V Coyne, the then Director of Vatican Observatory, on 1 June, 1988, that he was always convinced and he invited others too to be convinced that “Science can purify religion from error and superstition; Religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes. Each can draw the other into a wider world, a world in which both can flourish.”²

Thus, though a few centuries ago the Church had a wrong understanding of science, now the Church has realized that there would not be real contradiction between these two powerful enterprises. With the modern tools of interpreting the Bible and the new theological understandings science is not seen as a threat to faith. Science, in fact, can be seen as something that strengthens one’s faith.

1. Interaction between Science and Religion

The need for interaction between science and religion seems to be on the steady increase. Several developments in the recent science call for a revision of our traditional notions; for instance, the traditional understanding of ‘reality’ is forced to be re-visited.

Contemporary science questions the classical understanding of ‘reality’. The new discoveries and observations, both in

the macro and the micro worlds, challenge the dogmas of scientism and they “radically alter the status of knowledge and the place of the knowing subject”.³ ***The mysterious nature of matter:*** Heisenberg’s principle of uncertainty and Bohr’s principle of complementarity suggest that the actual nature of reality escapes our complete understanding, because, “The elementary particle is neither a wave nor a corpuscle but a ‘thing’ that combines the two images”.⁴ Therefore, at that level, matter ceases to be ‘material’ and “Matter has lost its substance”.⁵ ***The Mystery of the ‘Fine-tuning’:*** The study of biotic coincidences and the anthropic principles seem to suggest that the universe has been very meticulously fine-tuned to be ready to receive conscious human beings; being convinced of this Dyson, asserts that “the universe knew we were coming”⁶ and Paul Davies declares that “We are truly meant to be here”.⁷ Fine-tuning in the universe is, though may not be a proof, but a strong indicator for an intelligent design; for instance, the initial density of the universe had to be meticulously fixed to an accuracy of 10^{-60} and this precision is like an archer hitting a one-centimeter-square target placed fifteen billion light-years away.⁸ Several scientists-turned theologians, like John Polkinghorne, Arthur Peacock, Ilya Prigogine etc. also find something more to the evolution process than mere chance. They have gone beyond reductionism and are open to mystical and metaphysical overtones in their approach to reality. Even great minds, like Einstein, are also convinced that such fine-tuning in the universe cannot be the outcome of a mere chance. If one argues that all these fine-tunings are just fixed by laws of physics, the question arises: “Where do the laws of physics come from? And why *those* laws rather than some other set?”⁹ Therefore the mystery still remains!

Further, as science proceeds we realize that we lose our grip over reality. The classical notions of certainty, causality, absolute measurability and stability are significantly challenged. We are forced to get reconciled with arbitrary

nature of the initial conditions, irreducibility, uncertainty, and unpredictability. By this “we are reminded of the contingency and finite nature of man”.¹⁰ Such realization of our finitude makes us wise and humble. We are cautioned not to meddle with the wisdom of nature that has been there for about fourteen billion years.

One of the fundamental ways to define humans is to see them as ‘seekers of meaning’. As Victor Frankl shows, the search for ‘meaning in life’ becomes more fundamental to life than food, shelter and clothing. Philip Clayton shows that the meaning-quest is related to the very nature of human being and sciences alone will not be sufficient to comprehend human nature, and therefore, the quest for meaning cannot be satisfactorily fulfilled by science, though science may contribute something in the process of meaning-seeking.

Though humans are biologically very much a part of creation and share a lot with other creatures, yet they seem to be far different from all of them, in terms of reason, will power, ability to imagine, the exercise of control over natural passion and above all the ability to go beyond the immediate environment. However, we cannot easily define life, nor its meaning or purpose, *because the “questioner” and the “questioned” are one and the same here*. Modern neuroscience may succeed in mapping the areas of the brain to find out what happens when one is filled with love or hatred, fear or tranquility; Psychology may come up with convincing theories about the good effects of love and the bad effects due to its absence. *But science cannot exactly define what love is, and since it is this love that makes one find meaning in life, science can comprehend neither love nor meaning.*

2. Pope Francis' Commitment to Science

As Pope Francis has done some studies in Chemistry he is not a stranger to science. He has always been encouraging priests and religious to involve more and more in serious science. He expressed his deep desire, in a meeting with the participants of Symposium Sponsored by Vatican Observatory, that the Church must have many more religious men and women to bridge the gulf between faith and science.¹¹ Knowing about our cosmos is indeed the satisfaction of the innate desire to know. According to Guy Consolmagno, a Jesuit brother, appointed by Pope Francis as the new director of the Vatican Observatory, in 2015, makes it clear that Vatican is eager to investigate in the field of astronomy because astronomy satisfies our quest, as it is a part of being human.¹²

Pope Francis always cautions about the dangers of the literal reading of the Bible, especially the account of creation in the book of Genesis. So in his address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on the Big Bang Theory and Evolution. (27 October, 2014), he alerts: "If we take this story literally we run the risk of "imagining that God was a magician, complete with an all powerful magic wand." But, he affirms, "that was not so."¹³ The theories on the origin of matter and life, like the Big Bang and the evolutionism, leave several questions unanswered. Science does not provide any satisfactory, provable answers to the questions like, the wherefrom of the primeval atom, the cause of the big bang, the mode and the purpose of the Big Bang and so on. Pope goes on to announce that "The Big Bang theory, which is proposed today as the origin of the world, does not contradict the intervention of a divine Creator but, rather requires it."¹⁴

Pope Francis explains how God has chosen to create nature with the inherent power to evolve further. The scientific theory of evolution implies creation, because unless there is something in the first place it would not evolve. God did not want a

‘finished product’ when he created the world, rather he wished his creation to evolve towards ‘perfection. Creation implies a “Creator” as an art implies an artist, a dance a dancer! Catholic teaching says God created all things from nothing, but it doesn’t say how and that leaves open the possibilities of evolutionary mechanisms like random mutation and natural breeding.

Pope Francis has high hopes with scientists. They need to instruct the policy makers and the general public regarding the critical situation of the ecological crisis. But they are very often influenced and hijacked by very many other forces, from within and without, in such a way that they are not able to do justice to their vocation to do science in a moral way. “I would say that it falls to scientists, who work free of political, economic or ideological interests, to develop a cultural model which can face the crisis of climatic change and its social consequences,” he said, “so that the vast potential of productivity will not be reserved for only a few.”¹⁵

It was a very interesting meeting between Pope Francis and Stephen Hawking, known as the 2nd Einstein, during a session of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences convened to discuss the impact of scientific knowledge and technology on people and the planet (November 25-29, 2016). Pope sincerely wants to remind the world that “We are not custodians of a museum and its masterpieces that we have to dust off every morning, but rather collaborators in the conservation and development of the existence and biodiversity of the planet and human life.”¹⁶ He insists upon moral basis for all our human endeavours, including scientific ones. Authentic collective living has to be based on morality. He *critiques consumerism and irresponsible development; he strongly suggests a holistic vision rooted in spirituality which would ensure a healthy environment for everyone and a better care for the environment itself.*

3. Pope Francis and Eco-Spirituality

Pope Francis' involvement with science and his hopes with the scientists came out very clearly in his encyclical, *'Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home'* (18 June, 2015); it is an Encyclical on Ecology by Pope Francis; it is acclaimed by several as the, may be described as the most significant contribution of the Catholic Church to ecology. As he assumed his office, he took the name of St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) precisely because of the latter's love for nature and admiration for God's creation. St. Francis of Assisi had deep love for nature; he treated all that is in nature as his brothers and sisters. Inspired by this ardent love, Pope Francis wrote the encyclical. It is for the first time that a Pope dedicated an entire encyclical letter to the issues of environment and climate change. He deliberately and affectionately addresses to 'every' person who lives on earth, as we all share the 'common home'. It is the moral responsibility of everyone in caring for the earth. Oftentimes a wrong reading of the creation account absolves humans of their sin of exploiting the earth; but actually *in the beginning God gave humanity the earth to "till and keep"* (Gen 2:15), where tilling refers to 'cultivating, ploughing, or working' and keeping means, 'Caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving'.

Pope Francis is greatly concerned about the ecological crisis. He is deeply convinced that all need to work on a war-footing in order to save the earth, our common home. He gave a clarion call to the world of scientists to establish "a regulatory system that includes inviolable limits and guarantees the protection of ecosystems before new forms of power derived from the technological-economic paradigm produce irreversible damage not just to the environment but also to coexistence, democracy, justice and freedom."¹⁷

There have been also serious voices of blame and accusations of Pope transgressing the areas of morality and

theology to go into the unfamiliar and unnecessary terrain of science; for instance, the Republican presidential candidate Rick Santorum openly suggested that Pope Francis to “leave science to the scientists” in order to show his displeasure about Pope’s constant reminder and efforts to fight against climate change.¹⁸ Since Pope openly challenges the irresponsible ways of the nations and societies that add up to the environmental crises, there are attacks on him. Of course there also powerful voices that support his genuine concern for the eco-welfare of humanity at large. His efforts to point out to the world, the rich and the poor nations, the highly educated elite and the poor ignorant, about the urgent need to act collectively and proactively to protect the mother Earth are greatly appreciated by many world leaders.

Pope demands a right understanding of stewardship, rather than ownership, regarding our role in taking care of the earth. He has supported his arguments for the immediate need to protect the Earth from the environmental degradation with enormous scientific accuracy. As David M. Lodge points out, he has situated the environmental crisis in a much broader context, by linking it “to economic exploitation and the plight of the poor”¹⁹

a. Poverty and Ecology

His concern for the poor is well-known. He invites humanity to work together to remove poverty from the face of the earth. He feels that the earth has also been impoverished by the careless actions and greedy attitude of humanity. Therefore as he voices out for the poor in humanity, in the same breath he draws our attention to the impoverished earth; he calls for a caring treatment for the earth urgently, because “the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor.”²⁰ Thus he sees the link between poverty and the ecological crisis. Most of the

ecological problems like the increase in the global temperature or the pollution of the atmosphere are the result of the careless attitude and reckless activities by the rich and the affluent. But the poor and the underprivileged, as the sharers of the common home, are forced to suffer from those ecological crises. The air conditioning machines blow hot air adding slowly and steadily to the global temperature; the burning of the fossil fuels and other travel mechanisms pollute the air; but the poor, who are generally add much less to these, suffer more because of the ill effects. When they are afflicted with related diseases, those diseases have a great impact on their lifestyle and even their very survival.

b. Ecological Conversion

Pope Francis sees the urgency in taking care of nature; he invites the whole of humanity to engage in this with the utmost dedication. To dedicate ourselves to work for nature is like dedicating oneself to a new religious or social ideology. One needs to “convert oneself” to this new mission; one needs a profound interior conversion; no one can keep oneself aloof from this important mission of saving the environment. If one decides to participate in this global mission, one has to be ready to change one’s life style which adds to the environmental crisis in some way or the other; if one likes to participate in the global drive for saving the earth but at the same time if one continues in one’s old ways of life that are damaging the earth, then it is an inconsistent and self-contradicting behavior. Therefore he is convinced that *“what they all need is an ‘ecological conversion’, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them”* (Laudato Si’, No. 217).

c. New Spirituality

Pope Francis proposes a ‘new spirituality’ that enables us to see the Creator in the Creation, to realize that wasting the natural resources is an insult to their creator and to realize that we are not the ‘owners’ of this earth, but ‘responsible stewards’ who are called to be ‘co-creators’ with God. Thus one realizes that saving water and natural resources is also a spiritual virtue. Each creature has its own beauty, dignity and purpose; their purpose is not to be assessed in terms of their usefulness to human existence. His new spirituality enlarges its vision and includes social structure and environment. Thus, not only caring for the poor but also valuing manual labour, denouncing consumerism and the tyranny of the market forces are certainly spiritual activities. Excessive use of plastics, consuming natural resources and fossil fuels, wasting energy, increase in the global temperature are some of the blunders that modern humanity is engaged with.

Conclusion

It is high time that we all realized that we are very much part and parcel of cosmos. Nature is never hostile to us, nor that are we strangers to it. Sometimes when we are struck by natural disasters like earthquakes, floods or tsunamis, we are made to think that nature works out against our survival and well-being. In fact, in many of such cases it can be traced out that nature, in its efforts to maintain its fine balance, just reacts to our actions, which are very often highly detrimental to itself. We all are very much part of nature. The inter-connectedness between us and nature is so much that, it is said, very many minerals, salts and chemical elements, like iron, carbon, oxygen, calcium, potassium, magnesium, iodine etc., that are in our bodies are also abundantly found in nature, in the plants, animals and even the distant stars, millions of light years away. As we are very much part of nature, the mother earth never

rejects us; for example, when we are buried after death, the earth very comfortably accommodates us, nor the atmosphere rejects the smoke that comes out when we are cremated. We often don't realize the significance of our being part of the unimaginably vast universe. For instance, when one holds a litre of water a part of the whole cosmos is in it. If only all the molecules of that water are kept as a string one by one it will be long enough to reach the moon from the earth, up and down for about seven times. [There are about 10^{25} molecules in one litre of water; each molecule is 10^{-10} meter, and the length of the whole string will be 10^{15} meter].

Though humanity has not sufficiently realized the cosmic significance, which results in ecological crises, yet Pope does not lose hope with humanity. Since God has given us the reasoning power we can certainly reflect upon our own responsibility towards protecting nature. As God never loses hope with us let us also not lose hope for the betterment of the current situation. But the only concern is that we all have to be convinced of the dire need for immediate action. *Pope invites all brothers and sisters, living on the planet earth to make a pledge to save the earth and to protect the environment.* We hope that the Pope Francis' sincere efforts to work towards a better environment will bring forth lasting fruits. As David M. Lodge is hopeful, "if Pope Francis can persuade the communist Raúl Castro to reconsider Catholicism",²¹ he could easily create an atmosphere for the scientific consensus, whereby various communities of faith, science and the rulers can come together for open sharing and mutual learning.

Humanity needs to realize that God is truly present in all his creation, not only in human beings. This very realization is the foundation of eco-spirituality, which will motivate everyone to deal with nature in a cautious and respectful manner, to ensure its inner worth and undeniable dignity. S. Ignacimuthu explains the fundamental role of eco-spirituality

in his book: Eco-spirituality is the basis for all our efforts to find solutions for the ecological crisis. In our present times we are facing huge challenges and crises in ecology and in this context the need and relevance of eco-spirituality is very high and important.²²

As Francis Bacon wished, science must take us back to the glorious state of the pre-fallen state. It should make us wise, not otherwise. If we are not humble enough to “learn how to learn from nature”, as Dudley Shapere puts it, we may end up using science as a tool of desolation and it would be like chopping off the very branch of the tree upon which we are sitting and, as Claude Levi Strauss fears, “the world began without the human being, and will end without him”.²³

The substance of Pope Francis’ analysis of science and his exhortation to the world of science can be summed up as follows: “We need science with the human face”. Only such science will enrich humanity. Enriching humanity would mean, among many other, making humans wiser, more sensible to mysteries and enabling them to find more meaning in their existence. Though humans have enormous cognitive power, yet they are cosmically very insignificant in the vast dark universe, known and unknown. As Blasé Pascal has it, “Man is only a reed, more frail than nature, but he is a thinking reed. It does not need the whole universe to wipe him out; a breath, a drop of water, is enough to kill him.” But still humans are more powerful and noble than the universe, because, “he knows that he dies and knows the advantage the universe has over him”,²⁴ whereas the universe that kills him does not, cannot know anything.

With due admiration and respect to science, joining with Pope Francis, let us dearly expect science to collaborate with other disciplines to enrich humanity and protect nature. It is high time that we realized, as Philip Clayton declares, “... science alone will never provide the answer”.²⁵ Thus the efforts

and mission of Pope Francis to integrate science with other social and spiritual disciplines are very essential and relevant in paving the way for better humanity and safer environment.

Notes

- 1 See: Mark Bidmon, “A Day without Yesterday: Georges Lemaitre and Big Bang”; <http://www.catholiceducation.org/en/science/faith-and-science/a-day-without-yesterday-georges-lemaitre-amp-the-big-bang.html>; accessed on 11 May, 2017
- 2 See: https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_19880601_padre-coyne.html
- 3 Thierry Magnin, “Moral Philosophy – A Space for Dialogue between Science and Theology”, in *Science and the Search for Meaning – Perspectives from International Scientists*, Jean Staune (ed.), (PA, USA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006), p. 140.
- 4 Ibid., p. 146.
- 5 Trinh Xuan Thuan, “Science and Buddhism”, in *Science and the Search for Meaning – Perspectives from International Scientists*, Jean Staune (ed), (PA, USA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006), p. 181.
- 6 Freeman Dyson, *Disturbing the Universe* (NY: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 250.
- 7 Paul Davies, *The Mind of God* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1992), p. 232.
- 8 Trinh Xuan Thuan, “Science and Buddhism”, p. 184.
- 9 Paul Davies, “Glimpsing the Mind of God”, in *Science and the Search for Meaning – Perspectives from International Scientists*, Jean Staune (ed.), 2006, p.31.
- 10 Thierry Magnin, “Moral Philosophy – A Space for Dialogue between Science and Theology”, p.142.
- 11 See: <https://zenit.org/articles/pope-francis-church-needs-religious-who-bridge-the-gap-between-science-and-faith/>; accessed on 17 April, 2017.
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- 19 See: <http://www.nature.com/news/faith-and-science-can-find-common-ground-1.18083>; accessed on 17 April, 2017.
- 20 See: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2016/11/29/pope-francis-urges-world-leaders-not-to-delay-climate-change-efforts/?utm_term=.787f92d71df8; accessed on 11 February, 2017.
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- 24 Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, ed. Philippe Sellier (Paris: Mercure de France, 1976), p. 231 & 145.
- 25 Philip Clayton, "Foreword", in *Science and the Search for Meaning – Perspectives from International Scientists*, Jean Staune, (ed.), 2006, p. xvi.

Article received: Apr 24, 2017

Article approved: Oct 12, 2017

No of words: 4472



Violence against Women: An Objectification

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Abstract: This article deals with the objectification of women and the resulting violence against them. Humanity is the culmination both genders, identities and differences. We are not to be led by the sudden impulses and emotions but as a free agent who actively makes something meaningful out of this life. “Man is responsible for his acts. Evil is the free act of the individual who uses his freedom for his own exaltation.” Being responsible for one’s own freedom can make us a healthy individual respecting the freedom of the feminine gender. Objectification and identifying in miniaturizing ways are violence against women. Their respect and worthiness is downgraded by our limited or biased perception. The only way out is to fashion a new universe of symbols opening out to a new oneness and wholeness. Which emphasize the interconnectedness and the loving bond exist between the genders.

Keywords: Violence against women, objectification of women, gender, varying identities, subjectivity.

Introduction

In Indian context a bird is described as ‘twice-born’ – once in its limited shell and then finally in the freedom of the unbounded sky. This shows a movement from limitedness to unbounded freedom. Similar movements are seen in human

realm of existence. When considering the case of humans; this freedom of the unbounded sky determines a lot of meaning; its exercise can be always a question of morality. When deciding to become a husband or a wife or to give birth to a child are the deliberate choices we make. But the exercise of choice to have only a male child is a matter of morality and our ethical principles. Denying room for the existence of difference becomes an act of violence; giving a space only for our miniaturized thinking or wants denies the existence of other. All differences need to exist to understand the other or the opposite in a better way; each must be complementary to one another. We are individuals of a gender but connected to both genders and that is how we make meaning out of this life. “Far from us starting out as isolated individuals who then face the problem of making contact with other people, our existence from the beginning is a shared and social one, and our problem is that of becoming individuals, finding an authentic mode of personal existence.”¹ This is how Heidegger analyzes the human situation. The aspect of “thrownness” can help us to understand human differences in a better way. Being a man or a woman is not a choice, it is given to us or that is the way we are. This is the “thrownness” which we face, “thrownness” with uniqueness and differences.

Gender: An Expression of Freedom

When something new appears in any field we say it as creativity and appreciation follows with many sorts of rewards. If such differences are appreciated and rewarded, then how we understand violence based on differences. Here we try to analyze how gender difference becomes a reason for violence. This violence can be defined as “as the violation of beings worthy of respect.”² Everyone needs to be respected and also their individual freedom. When such freedoms are violated respect doesn’t exist between them. Being a human

itself shows that we have the potential to reason out and value our freedom and to express it in a socially acceptable manner. If such freedom I hold I should see the same in the other too because it has got a value and reason. This sort of violence can be said as depriving others right of 'being free to live reasonably.' "Freedom is valuable for at least two different reasons. First, more freedom gives us more opportunity to pursue our objectives – those things that we value. Second, we may attach importance to the process of choice itself. We may want to make sure that we are not being forced into some state because of constraints imposed by others."³ The freedom which I hold explains that I am held accountable for my actions. My actions are or suppose to be an outcome of my reasoning and the values I attach to it. In this sense when we look at the violence it shows the degradation of human ethical principles. What value or reason can I attach to a rape, a murder, objectifying women for my sexual desires and the like? If we don't value or reason out our actions what sort of freedom do we hold? Can we be just fools who don't reason out? "We are ourselves the entities to be analyzed."⁴

Objectification

The process of objectification takes place in the modern society in many different ways against women. Objectification can be defined as seeing and/or treating a person, usually a woman, as an object. According to Immanuel Kant's view objectification involves the lowering of a person, a being with humanity, to the status of an object. Humanity is an individual's rational nature and capacity for rational choice. The characteristic feature of humanity is an individual's capacity for rationally setting and pursuing her own ends. A being with humanity is capable of deciding what is valuable, and of finding ways to realize and promote this value. Humanity is what is special about human beings. When we hinder these potentials

of an individual by any means it becomes violence. The right to actualize oneself in a reasonable way is one's right; that doesn't depend on others permission. Instead in a reasonable manner one realizes it. Many feminist thinkers have spoken elaborately about the objectification takes place especially in the sexual realm. Martha Nussbaum has identified several features that are involved in the idea of treating a person as an object. They are:

Instrumentality: the treatment of a person as a tool for the objectifier's purposes;

Denial of autonomy: the treatment of a person as lacking in autonomy and self-determination;

fungibility: the treatment of a person as interchangeable with other objects;

Denial of subjectivity: the treatment of a person as something whose experiences and feelings need not be taken into account.

Ownership: the treatment of a person as something that is owned by another.

The objectification can be of two modes that are individual and social. When it is done in an individual level we can correct the individual by applying the law that is reward and punishment. But when it is in a social level it needs a long process to change such things. The mind set and the outlook of the group has to be changed. Here the value aided education plays vital role. If the values are not inherited by the young minds then we need sophisticated laws to bring in such values. This sort of objectification basically brings in gender inequality. When inequality exists the space for appreciation of difference is removed and instead that space will be occupied by the biased perceptions of society. The outcome of such perceptions end up in seeing the female gender as an object: in this context the above aspect of instrumentality, denial of

autonomy, fungibility, denial of subjectivity and ownership develops.

Varying Identities

All humans have got different identities, most are shared identities and some are unique to the persons. We all assert our personal identities but these can be limited in the eyes of others, no matter how we see ourselves. When I see my mother I see in her the identity of a women and the same time I also see the identity she holds before me as my mother. On the basis of gender inequality most often we miniaturize these identities and see only what we want to see. Such miniaturization of the one's identity is the reason for violence. The shared identity of humanity is not considered in an act of violence. The aspect of difference seen automatically gets connected with identity prioritization. Which identity we give priority and why? If such things come to mind a stable answer can be found for oneself and a relation with others identity can also be seen. Differences in the identities can also become a resource. This difference can help me to recognize and realize myself in the difference. Identifying the identities can exclude people but at the same the aspect of inclusion and complementarity also develops. So the best way is to prioritize my identity and ask oneself what value and reason do I attach to it. "Identifying with others, in various different ways, can be extremely important for living in a society."⁵

Each one of us men are 'potential rapists' on one hand and a store house of values. If we value ourselves and the rights of the other we can't be a rapist. If parents could begin by inculcating the correct values in children without gender disparity, there can be a lot of changes. The aspect of mutually supporting relationship of man and woman should be projected. "For a culture to be aesthetic it must be androgynous not only in the Jungian sense of every man having a share of womanliness

and every woman a share of manliness but in the sense the human is neither man nor woman separately but man and woman taken conjointly. That is why women's liberation cannot be achieved without men's liberation."⁶ To usher in a beautiful society we must have beautiful relationship between man and woman. It is necessarily a need of the hour to fight against the deeply entrenched tendency to reduce all to genital sex. So the liberation of man and woman though in opposite direction ultimately must lead to self-transcendence from necessity to freedom, from fragmentation to wholeness, from reign of unconcern to concern and for the well being of all. A unification based on values can bring in differences together which gradually lead to a universal value shared by all. Differences in identities become a platform for realizing oneself and the other. Hope in the collective future of humankind has no staying power unless the hoped – for has already been somehow experienced. This is where the hard and fast rules fail to attain a peaceful situation.

Conclusion

A new age has come up where our struggle is to save ourselves from our degraded values and attitudes. We are getting alienated from ourselves, when I become unsure of what I am and can expect to be, when I fail to express and find myself in what I do. When we get separated from our own ethical principles, love, care and concern our humanity dies. Humanity is the culmination both genders, identities and differences. We are not to be led by the sudden impulses and emotions but as a free agent who actively makes something meaningful out of this life. "Man is responsible for his acts. Evil is the free act of the individual who uses his freedom for his own exaltation."⁷ Being responsible for one's own freedom can make us a healthy individual respecting the freedom of the feminine gender. Objectification and identifying in

miniaturizing ways are violence against women. Their respect and worthiness is downgraded by our limited or biased perception. The only way out is to fashion a new universe of symbols opening out to a new oneness and wholeness. Which emphasize the interconnectedness and the loving bond exist between the genders.

Notes

- 1 Bryan Magee, *The Story of Philosophy* (New York: DK Publishing, 1998), 212.
- 2 Robert Audi, ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: University Press, 2006), 959.
- 3 Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 228.
- 4 Bryan Magee, op. cit., 212.
- 5 Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 19.
- 6 S. Kappan, *Tradition Modernity Counterculture* (Bangalore: Vishtar, 1994), 55.
- 7 S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanisads* (Great Britain: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2011), 104.

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- Article received: Apr 25, 2017
- Article approved: Oct 11, 2017
- No of words: 2034



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