

Pope Francis: The First Year

SFU

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Dear colleagues and friends: Ladies and Gentlemen:

Introduction

Thank you for your warm introduction. I am very happy to be here with you this morning for the lecture arranged by Father Fernando Mignone, the Catholic Chaplaincy and CCO, with a grant from the Simon Fraser Student Society. It is especially a pleasure to mark today the one-year anniversary of the installation of Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Pope Francis, as the Successor of Peter and the 266th Bishop of Rome.

My task this morning is to suggest to you some of the changes introduced by the present Pope in the longest surviving institution in the western world, the papacy. I will contend that Pope Francis is pointing the Church in a fresh direction – “changing” it, if you will, though that word is loaded. But let me be clear at the outset. Those who think the Pope is about to change the Church’s teaching on what are often referred to as hot-button issues are bound to be disappointed. This is not what I am proposing, because it is not what Francis is suggesting. What can, indeed must, change is the way the Church presents and pastorally applies her teaching, making it more persuasive and compelling for individuals. That’s the kind of change that

Francis is fostering: a continuity in doctrine, but a change in pastoral approach.

This change can be detected in at least five areas: first, by restoring the popularity of the papacy on the world stage; second, by using social communications in a new way; third, by re-framing the public image of the Church; fourth, by emphasizing our need to go the “periphery”; and fifth, by fostering co-responsibility in the governance of the Church. If time allows, I will deal with each of these.

1. Restoring Popularity by a New Style

Pope Francis, in less than a year, has rebooted the image of the papacy on the world stage. “The most important achievement of Pope Francis is that he has rebranded Catholicism and the papacy. Prior to Francis, if you asked someone on the street, “What is the Catholic Church all about? What does the Pope stand for?” the response would be, “He is against abortion, gay marriage and birth control.” Certainly in the media that was what has been portrayed, along with the horrendous scandal of clerical sexual abuse. Today, the response would be different. “He is concerned about compassion, love, especially for the poor.” He has even won over the media. The Church is making the front page for

something other than criminal activity and scandal.¹

In fact, the Holy Father has made such a positive impact on the world stage that negative comments are almost entirely absent – something quite different from the relentless – and, I believe, unfounded criticism that plagued his predecessor, Benedict XVI.

Just one year after his election, Francis is probably the most respected and beloved person on the planet today. The huge crowds at his every public function, high approval ratings, and the attention paid to his words and actions have had an enormous impact on people.

Accustomed to change at a leisurely, if not glacial pace, something immediately happened when he first stepped onto the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica after his election to greet the crowd. He wore his old metal pectoral cross, which he still wears, began with "buona sera," and shortly thereafter bowed his head before the people, *his* people, and asked for their prayers. In retrospect, this was an image of things to come – and so a lasting icon of his papacy never to be forgotten.

1.1 What's In a Name?

This papacy begins with a name. Not only is Francis the

¹ Cf. Thomas Reese, "Pope Francis after a Year."

first Latin American and the first Jesuit Pope in history, he is the first one to take the name of the most beloved of all Saints in the calendar, and not only by Catholics but by other Christians and adherents of other faiths.

Why did he take this name on March 13 last year?

The choice, coming after 12 Piuses, 14 Clements, 16 Benedicts and 23 Johns, is clearly and pointedly personal. In his first audience with journalists and media people very soon after his election, the new Pope told us why he chose the name:

Some people wanted to know why the Bishop of Rome wished to be called Francis. Some thought of Francis Xavier, Francis De Sales, and also Francis of Assisi. I will tell you the story. During the election, I was seated next to the Archbishop Emeritus of São Paulo and Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation for the Clergy, Cardinal Claudio Hummes: a good friend, a good friend!

When things were looking dangerous, he encouraged me. And when the votes reached two thirds, there was the usual applause, because the Pope had been elected. And he gave me a hug and a kiss, and said: "Don't forget the poor!" And those words came to me: the poor, the poor. Then, right away, thinking of the

poor, I thought of Francis of Assisi. Then I thought of all the wars, as the votes were still being counted, till the end. Francis is also the man of peace. That is how the name came into my heart: Francis of Assisi. For me, he is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation... How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor!²

Since the choice of the name was so spontaneous, it can hardly be said that he had long intended it to set the program for his papacy if he were to be elected, as apparently had nearly been the case in the conclave of 2005. But the Saint of Assisi has stamped his pontificate.

1.2 Symbolic Gestures of Simplicity

A lot of Francis' popularity, I think, has to do with his style, which is both simple and profound. He strikes a cord with ordinary people. By putting aside the gleaming Mercedes and replacing it with a modest car, a Ford Focus; by living not in the papal apartments in the Apostolic Palace but in two ordinary rooms at the Santa Marta Residence, sometimes referred to as the Vatican's "B and B," the same kind of accommodation reserved for those who work in the Roman Curia; by returning to

² Francis, Address to Representatives of the Media (16 March 2013).

the Casa del Clero after his election and paying his bill in person; by getting down from his Popemobile and tenderly embracing a very handicapped young man in his arms by kissing and washing the feet of incarcerated young people on Holy Thursday, including a Muslim girl. All of these are reasons why he has endeared himself to the public. In an age when many are deeply troubled by the vanity of celebrities and the wealth of plutocrats, the Pope has swiftly become the leading global symbol of compassion and humility.

Pope Francis, they say, is relentlessly personal, a one-on-one person, who exudes a compellingly attractive warmth and who talks all the time. And he has admitted as much. When asked why he didn't move into the papal apartments he just said: "I cannot live alone or with just a few people! I need people, I need to meet people, to talk to people."³

Part of the enthusiastic response to Francis is the sense that you are entering into a relationship with a father figure. People catch that sense of spiritual paternity and think, "This could be my father." Unlike the gentle and shy Benedict who took to the sidelines, never drawing attention to himself, Francis is more attuned to what people want in a leader. The sheep want a

³ Francis, Interview on Papal Flight from Rio to Rome (28 July 2013).

pastor who demonstrates that he knows his sheep. In a technological world, people are hungry for this kind of relationship. And Francis is giving them that. As an editorial in *The Tablet* put it: He “accepts human nature as frail and does not demand perfection. This is a pope who, rather than wag his finger, puts his arm around the shoulder.”⁴ He understands that people need to be loved; to know that God loves them unconditionally.

A couple of weeks ago the Pope was interviewed by *Il Corriere della Sera* of Milan, the *New York Times* of Italy, and was asked: “You have said that the Francis-mania will not last long. Is there something in your public image that you don’t like?” Francis replied:

⁴ Editorial, *The Tablet* (5 October 2013), 2.

I like being among the people. Together with those who suffer. Going to parishes. I don't like the ideological interpretations, a certain "mythology of Pope Francis." When it is said, for example, that he goes out of the Vatican at night to walk and to feed the homeless on Via Ottaviano. It has never crossed my mind. If I'm not wrong, Sigmund Freud said that in every idealization there is an aggression. Depicting the Pope to be a sort of superman, a type of star, seems offensive to me. The Pope is a man who laughs, cries, sleeps calmly and has friends like everyone. A normal person.⁵

2. *Developing a New Communications Strategy*

A second significant change in this pontificate is the way in which the Holy Father approaches the media. We might say he is developing a new communications strategy. And I just don't mean his wildly popular twitter account [Francis@Pontifex](#).

In private and in public utterances, Pope Francis talks freely, very freely, and without spin doctors of any kind. Indeed, since July at least three major "interviews" or informal statements have made headlines around the world in a way that his first encyclical,

⁵ Francis, Interview, *Il Corriere della Sera* (5 March 2014).

Lumen Fidei, admittedly primarily the work of his predecessor Benedict XVI, caused only a polite ripple of response. We might consider that a new form of magisterial teaching, one to be added to encyclicals, exhortations, apostolic letters, homilies and discourses is emerging: the papal interview.

As in so many other ways, however, Francis has been following Benedict's lead. Already in 2010, Peter Seewald published his book, *Light of the World*, which was the fruit of his conversations with Pope Benedict at Castel Gandolfo that summer. But, as in other steps he is taking, Francis pushes the envelope just a little further, and with the help of a much more favorable press. A great deal of what Francis is doing is putting flesh and blood on the teaching which Benedict had already, at least in part, articulated.

Initially, he did not adopt the form of the interview to communicate with the faithful and the world. In fact, on his trip to World Youth Day in late July, he told the journalists on the plane: "It is true that I do not give interviews, but why, I do not know, I can't, it's just like that. For me it is quite an effort to do so."⁶ But since the experience in Rio, he has changed his mind. And

⁶ Francis, Meeting with Journalists on Route to World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro (22 July 2013).

mightily. Now it seems no effort at all. On the return trip from Brazil, he granted a long question-and-answer and no-holds-barred interview on any topic presented to him.

The most fascinating, revealing and charming interview – an absolutely “must read” – was the one published last September in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, a semi-official organ of the Holy See, and in English in the Jesuit magazine *America*.⁷ It was the fruit of a series of conversations between the Pope and Father Antonio Spadaro, editor in chief of *La Civiltà Cattolica*. It was put down in writing with great care and was checked word for word by the author before it was given to the press.

With good reason, therefore, this interview rightly can be considered, say many commentators, as if it were the first true “encyclical” of Pope Francis. The interview, then, is now an established papal literary genre, one aimed at facilitating the reading and fostering of its widespread diffusion. But we are still not yet used to it as a form of papal discourse. When the Pope speaks in this still untraditional way, the world bends its ear to hear him. The novel appeal of an informal, conversational Pope opens up possibilities for engaging audiences otherwise

⁷ Antonio Spadaro, “A Big Heart Open to God: A Conversation with Pope Francis,” *America*, vol. 209:8 (30 September 2013), 14-38.

unreceptive or tuned out the Gospel.

In granting interviews, and not only to in-house Vatican officials but also to the most popular Italian papers like *La Repubblica* and *Il Corriere della Sera*, Francis is aware of the risks that he runs. During informal conversation, a speaker is thinking out loud, he can omit important qualifications to categorical statements. He can take premises for granted and be unaware of how what he says, when taken out of context, might lend itself to misinterpretation, innocent or malicious. Some feel that conversational phrases such as these compromise the weight that should always be given to what the Pope says. Others have criticized the lack of careful scrutiny by people of trust as imprudent, since it is common practice for public figures to have their oral and written texts reviewed by others.

Benedict was often criticized for communications problems during his pontificate. The difference between his approach and Francis' efforts is that between night and day. Benedict wasn't terribly interested in meeting with reporters. And people were not expecting Cardinal Bergoglio to be either. He wasn't out giving interviews in Argentina. But now he is running his own communications shop – and very well, thank you. How, then, can we describe Pope Francis' media strategy? As one reporter

put it: “Get out of the way; Francis is in town and doing his thing and winning over the masses.”

3. Re-framing the Image of the Church

A third item of what we can loosely call the Pope’s “renewal agenda” is his evident desire to re-frame the public’s view of what the Church is about. Like St. Francis, he knows that people don’t want a Church laden with a bureaucratic and officious attitude. People need a Church that loves in practical ways.

3.1 The Church as a Womb of Mercy and Field Hospital

The Holy Father is obliging them. He wants the world to know that the Church isn’t here to condemn them. For him, that is a false understanding of the Church. Francis wants a Church that is always reluctant to condemn but never hesitant to offer mercy. And he uses two particularly striking images to convey this: the Church is like a mother who never gives up on a wayward child; and second, the Church is like a field hospital in time of warfare; she tends the wounded.

Likening the Church to a mother who never gives up on her children, even when they err, the Holy Father has said:

She is a merciful mother who understands, who has always sought to help and encourage even those of her children who have erred or are erring; she never closes

the door to home. She does not judge but offers God's forgiveness, she offers his love which invites even those of her children who have fallen into a deep abyss to continue on their way.⁸

⁸ Francis, General Audience (18 September 2013), 2.

Elsewhere, the Pope has said that he believes that this is “the season of mercy”⁹ for the Church. The many problems in the Church – like the poor witness given by some priests, problems of ecclesial corruption, abuse and clericalism, for example, have left many people hurt. What is the Pope’s answer? “The Church is a mother: she has to go out to heal those who are hurting, with mercy. If the Lord never tires of forgiving, we have no other choice than this: first of all, to care for those who are hurting. The Church is a mother, and she must travel this path of mercy. And find a form of mercy for all.”¹⁰

There is no doubt in my mind that a major leitmotif of Pope Francis’s fledgling papacy is this emphasis on the mercy of God, which, in turn, the Church must manifest. “We need a Church capable of rediscovering the maternal womb of mercy,” he has said. “Without mercy we have little chance nowadays of becoming part of a world of ‘wounded’ persons in need of understanding, forgiveness, love.”¹¹

⁹ Francis, Interview on Papal Flight from Rio to Rome (28 July 2013).

¹⁰ Francis, Interview on Papal Flight from Rio to Rome (28 July 2013).

¹¹ Francis, Address to the Bishops of Brazil (28 July 2013).

The Pope's point of departure for this emphasis on mercy is his looking at himself. In his interview with *La Civiltà Cattolica*, Father Spadaro records that he asked the Pope point-blank: "Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?" He replied: "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 whom the Lord has looked upon."¹²

This emphasis on mercy was evident right from the very beginning of his pontificate. The words he used upon accepting his election were: "I am a sinner, but I trust in the infinite mercy and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹³ As Paul Vallely, the Pope's biographer has remarked, "Judging by his personal history, the themes of sinning, forgiveness and mercy are an

¹² Antonio Spadaro, "A Big Heart Open to God: A Conversation with Pope Francis," *America*, vol. 209:8 (30 September 2013), 16. His motto is "Miserando atque Eligendo," "By Having Mercy and By Choosing Him." This is illustrated in Caravaggio's painting of the call of St. Matthew in San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome: Jesus is at one and the same time "having mercy" on the publican and "choosing" him to share in his mission. As Michael Holman notes: "This is language many Jesuits will associate with the opening sentence of the second decree of the thirty-second General Congregation of the Society of Jesus in 1974, at which Fr. Jorge Bergoglio, then Jesuit provincial in Argentina, was a delegate. 'What is it to be a Jesuit?' the decree asked. 'It is to know that one is a sinner yet called to be a companion of Jesus as Ignatius was'" (Michael Holman, "Decoding Pope Francis," *The Tablet* (28 September 2013), 6.

¹³ Antonio Spadaro, "A Big Heart Open to God: A Conversation with Pope Francis," *America*, vol. 209:8 (30 September 2013), 16.

autobiographical as well as a theological preoccupation.”¹⁴

Perhaps the most original of Pope Francis’ images of how he views the Church is that of the “field hospital” where wounds are healed. Again, to cite his interview with Father Spadaro:

¹⁴ Paul Vallely, “Decoding Pope Francis,” *The Tablet* (28 September 2013), 6.

I see clearly that the thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after battle. 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, heal the wounds. . . . And you have to start from the ground up.¹⁵

¹⁵ “A Big Heart Open to God: A Conversation with Pope Francis,” *America*, vol. 209:8 (30 September 2013); cf. Francis, Meeting with Priests (6 March 2014): “Today we can think of the Church as a ‘field hospital.’ This, excuse me, I repeat, because I see it like this, I feel it so: a ‘field hospital.’ There is need to cure the wounds, so many wounds! So many wounds! There are so many wounded people, by material problems, by scandals, also in the Church ... Wounded people by the illusions of the world ... We, priests, must be there, close to these people. Mercy means first of all to cure the wounds. When one is wounded, one needs this immediately, not analyses, such as the significance of cholesterol, of glycaemia ... But the wound is there, cure the wound, and then we will look at the analyses. Then the specialist cures will be made, but first the open wounds must be cured. For me this, at this moment, is the most important. And there are also hidden wounds, because there are people who move away, so that their wounds are not seen.”

The physician, the Church, on the field of battle is to treat major wounds and to try desperately to stop the bleeding. What we find today, he thinks, are people who are spiritually gravely wounded: alienated from God, struck in the no-man's land of moral relativism, adrift in an abyss with no sense of direction or purpose.

They need healing – and fast.¹⁶ They need the consolation of knowing they are loved by God, and “the chance to live life on a higher plane.”¹⁷

3.2 Pastoral Approach: First the Essential

When the Church addresses “tough” issues which touch the intimate, especially sexual, lives of people, they have to be talked about within the context of the full Gospel. Stated in another way, it is a question of knowing the priorities, of knowing what is of greater and what is of lesser importance, and of scrupulously observing that order, never fashioning one's message so that what is secondary is what is first proposed.

¹⁶ Cf. Robert Barron, “The Church Is a Home for Everybody,” *Catholic Register* (13 October 2013), 13.

¹⁷ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 10.

“The Church sometimes has locked itself up in small things, in small-minded rules,” Francis has said. “The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you. And the ministers of the Church must be ministers of mercy above all.”¹⁸ Here he is not saying that rules – moral, liturgical, canonical and so on – are unimportant or unnecessary. But he is suggesting that they can make sense only in light of what is primary: encountering the mercy of the living Christ.

With insistence he made the same point later in *Evangelii Gaudium*, where the Pope laments that, because of the media attention given to certain moral issues, the heart of the Gospel is obscured and a moralism is falsely equated with its message:

In today’s world of instant communication and occasionally biased media coverage, the message we preach runs a greater risk of being distorted or reduced to some of its secondary aspects. In this way certain issues which are part of the Church’s moral teaching are taken out of the context which gives them their meaning. The biggest problem is when the message we preach then seems identified with those secondary

¹⁸Antonio Spadaro, “A Big Heart Open to God: A Conversation with Pope Francis,” *America*, vol. 209:8 (30 September 2013).

aspects which, important as they are, do not in and of themselves convey the heart of Christ's message. . . . [And here he gets to the specific point he has to make] When we adopt a pastoral goal and a missionary style which would actually reach everyone without exception or exclusion, the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary.¹⁹

4. Going to the Periphery

A fourth way in which we can draw attention to the changes being introduced by the Pope Francis is to look at his emphasis on “going to the periphery.” This ties in both with his particular emphasis on the need for the faith community to go out of itself, and of being a “poor Church for the poor.”

4.1 To the Margins

Pope Benedict XVI worried that Christians were being sidelined from mainstream culture in the West, yet they could still serve as a “creative minority,” a leaven in an increasingly secular world. Benedict was interested in putting the internal house of

¹⁹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 34, 35; cf. 128: “always keeping in mind the fundamental message: the personal love of God who became man, who gave himself up for us, who is living and who offers us his salvation and his friendship.”

See also Antonio Spadaro, “A Big Heart Open to God: A Conversation with Pope Francis,” *America*, vol. 209:8 (30 September 2013):

the Church in order, ensuring that God was at the center of the Church, including the Liturgy. Certainly he proposed, like his own predecessor, a “new evangelization.” But Pope Francis goes one step further. He is concerned that the faithful are too insular and have retreated from outreach to the work, with the risk of slipping into a tribal mentality. He wants to open the Church’s doors to the world outside. It is for the whole world. And he wants this message seen, heard and understood.

“At this time of crisis we cannot be concerned solely with ourselves, withdrawing into loneliness, discouragement and a sense of powerlessness in the face of problems. Please do not withdraw into yourselves!” the Pope challenged thousands of people from the ecclesial movements on the Vigil of Pentecost. Then he warned that “when the Church becomes closed, she becomes an ailing Church, she falls ill! . . . Think of a room that has been closed for a year. When you go into it there is a smell of damp, many things are wrong with it. A Church closed in on herself is the same, a sick Church.”²⁰

²⁰ Francis, Address to the Ecclesial Movements, Vigil of Pentecost (18 May 2013).

Bringing the Church “nearer to people”²¹ is on Francis’s mind. Speaking of the parish, for example, he warns that it must “not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed cluster made up of a chosen few.”²² He is constantly telling people where they should go: to the margins and fringes of society, to where they do not feel comfortable, to where people most need their presence and to hear the message of the Gospel. By his own admission, Francis says: “I therefore like using the expression “to go toward the outskirts,” the outskirts of existence.”²³ He wants his people to go to the margins, from where there is physical and real poverty to where there is intellectual poverty, which for him is equally real.

4.2 Bringing the Good News to the Poor

Going out to the periphery for Pope Francis, to the margins and fringes of the world, also includes a specific group who have the first right to have the first claim, so to speak, to attention. There is a group of favourite sons and daughters – and those are the poor.

²¹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 28.

²² Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 28.

²³ Francis, Address to the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome (17 June 2013).

“A poor Church for the poor.” This is becoming a slogan of Francis’ papacy. In taking this path, the Pope is imitating his namesake, St. Francis, who, “longed for a poor Church that took care of others, that received material help and used it in order to support others, with no thought for herself. Eight hundred years have passed and times have greatly changed, but the ideal of a poor and missionary Church still holds. This is, in any case, the Church that Jesus and his disciples preached.”²⁴

The Church herself must be poor if she is to imitate her Lord authentically and convincingly, with all the power her witness can muster, to preach the Good News to the poor (cf. Lk 4:18). Why does he speak so frequently about the poor? He has told us, lest we confuse his intention with an ideology:

²⁴ Interview with Pope Francis, by the Founder of the Italian Daily *La Repubblica* (1 October 2013), in *L’Osservatore Romano*, Weekly edition in English, n. 41(9 October 2013).

Poverty for us Christians is not a sociological, philosophical or cultural category, no. It is theological. I might say this is the first category, because our God, the Son of God, abased himself, he made himself poor to walk along the road with us. This is our poverty: the poverty of the flesh of Christ, the poverty that brought the Son of God to us through his Incarnation. A poor Church for the poor begins by reaching out to the flesh of Christ. If we reach out to the flesh of Christ, we begin to understand something, to understand what this poverty, the Lord's poverty, actually is; and this is far from easy.²⁵

²⁵ Francis, Address to the Ecclesial Movements, Vigil of Pentecost (18 May 2013); cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 198: "For the Church, the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one."

For Francis, preaching the Gospel to the poor is to have pride of place for the Church. Why? Because “God’s heart has a special place for the poor, so much so that he himself ‘became poor’ (2 Cor 8:9).”²⁶ The Gospel is destined “for the poor first of all, for all those who all too often lack what they need in to live a dignified life.” What’s the take-away from all this? The Holy Father could hardly be more straightforward and directive: “Go to the poor first of all: this is the priority. At the moment of the Last Judgement, as we can read in Matthew 25, we shall all be judged on this.”²⁷

Because of the clarity of the criterion for judgment, Francis insists on the practical service the Church must offer to the marginalized and her obligation to carry out the corporal works of mercy. Each individual Christian and every community, parish and movement is called to be “an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. This demands that [they] be docile and attentive to the cry of the poor and to come to their aid.”²⁸ They

²⁶ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 197.

²⁷ Francis, Address to the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome (17 June 2013).

²⁸ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 187.

come to the aid of the marginalized by working in at least three related areas: the provision of their ordinary and daily needs for food, shelter, education, employment, health care and so on; the elimination of the structural causes of poverty and injustice; and the promotion of the integral human and spiritual development of the poor, including their evangelization.²⁹

5. Curia Reform and Collaborative Governance

²⁹ Cf. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 188, 192.

The Pope has embodied not just a refreshing humility but a collegial style of governance. This is my fifth and final point. In doing this he is following the mandate he received from the cardinals who elected him.³⁰ They asked that he set up a commission cardinals, now called the Council of Eight Cardinals, as a body, outside the structure of the Roman Curia, to be his special consultors or advisors. Talking with Father Spadaro he said:

The consistories [of cardinals], the synods [of bishops] are, for example, important places to make real and active this consultation. We must, however, give them a less rigid form. I do not want token consultations, but real consultations. 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.³¹

³⁰ Cf. Francis, Interview, *Il Corriere della Sera* (5 March 2014): “I began to govern seeking to put into practice that which had emerged in the debate among cardinals in the various congregations. In my way of acting, I wait for the Lord to give me inspiration.”

³¹ Antonio Spadaro, “A Big Heart Open to God: A Conversation with Pope Francis,” *America*, vol. 209:8 (30 September 2013).

In the interview coming back from World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, he explained: “This is entirely in keeping . . . with the maturing of the relationship between synodality and primacy. In other words, having these eight Cardinals as his advisors will favour synodality; they will help the various episcopates of the world to express themselves in the very government of the Church.”³²

During the Council of Cardinals’ first meeting in October, Father Lombardi, the Vatican spokesman, said they made a plan to review each of the Vatican’s nine congregations and twelve councils “one by one.”

Pope Francis seems to know where his gifts lie and where he can profit from the assistance of his colleagues in ministry. Whether the issue at hand is the viability of the Vatican Bank or the workings of various offices of the Curia, the Holy Father does not come across as attached to any one plan of action, but to what best advances the mission of Christ in today’s world.

For Francis, the Church needs greater shared governance, collegiality in practice between himself and the world’s bishops, as well as a heightened awareness of co-responsibility and *communio* among all the baptized. Collaborative governance

³² Francis, Interview on Papal Flight from Rio to Rome (28 July 2013).

needs to mean more than calling on the advice and competence of others to make up for episcopal shortcomings. Rather, governance involves seeking how God is revealing his work through others in the community. That's the reason behind the recent questionnaire sent by the Holy See to local Churches around the world inquiring about the state of marriage and family life.

5.1 Criticism of the Roman Curia

Pope Francis seems to be suspicious toward the Roman Curia in its present form. And not without some reason. The biggest obstacle he faces in his resolve to decentralize the Church's central governance apparatus is the simple fact that his immediate two predecessors spent decades centralizing that very structure. "The papacy and the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion,"³³ he wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium*. Else he even defined its courtly aspect as "the plague of the papacy"³⁴ and castigated the Curia for focusing inward, and with having a narrow vision rather than being of service to the wider Church:

³³ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 32.

³⁴ Interview with Pope Francis, by the Founder of the Italian Daily *La Repubblica* (1 October 2013), in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly edition in English, n. 41(9 October 2013).

It [the Curia] has one defect: it is Vatican-centered. It looks after and cares for the Vatican's interests, which are still to a great extent temporal. This Vatican-centered vision ignores the world around it. I do not share this vision and I will do all I can to change it. The Church is and must become again a community of the People of God and the clergy, parishes, the bishops who are charged with the care of souls, are at the service of the People of God. This is what the Church is.³⁵

At the Mass concelebrated with the new cardinals last month, the Pope reminded them: "A Cardinal – I say this especially to you – enters the Church of Rome, my brothers, not a royal court. May all of us avoid, and help others to avoid, habits and ways of acting typical of a court: intrigue, gossip, cliques, favouritism and partiality."³⁶

Last February 24, Pope Francis announced the first major overhaul of the Vatican's outdated and inefficient bureaucracy in a quarter-century, creating an Economics Secretariat to control all

³⁵ Interview with Pope Francis, by the Founder of the Italian Daily *La Repubblica* (1 October 2013), in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly edition in English, n. 41(9 October 2013).

³⁶ Francis, Homily, Mass with the New Cardinals (23 February 2014).

economic, administrative, personnel and procurement functions of the Holy See. Australian Cardinal George Pell was named its prefect. The aim of the new structure is to simplify and consolidate the existing management structures, improve oversight, internal controls and transparency – and provide more support for the Vatican’s works for the poor.

5.2 Slowness of Reform

What’s the hold-up for major reform? Part of the answer is that Pope Francis has named several advisory bodies, in addition to existing ones, to help him in the reform process. Their tasks sometimes overlap, and that complicates things.

A few weeks ago, for example, the Vatican experienced a virtual gridlock of committees, councils and consistories. There’s the committee on administrative and economic reforms and a separate committee on the future of the Vatican bank, both of which have reported to the Council of Eight. Then there is the “Council of 15,” an advisory body of cardinals established by Pope John Paul II to monitor financial affairs. The Pope’s concern is how to ensure that the financial structures of the church are “at the service ... of the world and not at the operational service of the Vatican itself.” The Vatican has also hired outside consulting agencies to help simplify and coordinate its bureaucratic

structures, especially in communication. And so on.

Remember: all these entities are advisory. Essentially, Pope Francis will decide when to decide.

Conclusion

Does what I have said lead to the conclusion that the first year of Pope Francis' ministry has been one of significant changes? A lot depends on the weight given to how you understand "change." In any case, Pope Francis has set the Church on a path of renewal that even a year ago would have been unthinkable.

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