

Pope Francis the Revolutionary

Nine months into his papacy, the pontiff has made clear his aim to restore the church's original evangelical passion.

By
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Nov. 28, 2013 4:38 p.m. ET

The first nine months of the pontificate of [Pope Francis](#) have often resembled a gigantic Rorschach test in which various commentators inside and outside the Catholic Church have "seen" their dreams and fears realized. Alas, what has been "seen" has often had little to do with the record of Jorge Mario Bergoglio as priest and bishop or with his most consequential decisions as pope.

Those projections reached fever pitch with the publication on Tuesday of Francis' first apostolic exhortation, "Evangelii Gaudium" (The Joy of the Gospel), which was celebrated, or lamented, as if it were an Occupy Whatever position paper for a G-8 summit. Instead, the papal document should be read and appreciated for what it manifestly is: a clarion call for a decisive shift in the Catholic Church's self-understanding, in full continuity with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI.



Pope Francis' general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican, Nov. 6. AFP/Getty Images

Given the fantasies that the pope and his pontificate have inspired on both left and right, it might be useful, at the three-quarter pole of Francis' first year in the Chair of Peter, to describe with more precision the man with whom I shared a wide-ranging conversation about the global state of the Catholic Church in May 2012.

First and foremost, Jorge Mario Bergoglio is a radically converted Christian disciple who has known the mercy of God in his own life and who wants to enable others to share that experience – and the healing and joy that come from friendship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

As he declared in a widely publicized interview in September with an Italian Jesuit magazine, Pope Francis is a "son of the church" who believes and teaches what the Catholic Church believes and teaches, and who wants others to hear and be moved to conversion by the symphony of Catholic truth, which he thinks is too often drowned out by ecclesiastical cacophony.

Pope Francis is completely dedicated to what John Paul II called the "New Evangelization," by which he means a dramatic re-centering of the church on its evangelical mission and a life-changing rediscovery by each of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics of the missionary vocation into which he or she was baptized.

He is a pastor who is deeply concerned for the flock, draws spiritual strength from the flock, challenges the flock to make good decisions, and respects popular piety.

The pope "from the ends of the Earth," as he described himself from the central loggia of St. Peter's on the evening of his election on March 13, is a reformer who, as he made clear in "Evangelii Gaudium," will measure authentic Catholic reform by the criterion of mission-effectiveness. Thus the Franciscan reform of the Roman Curia will not be undertaken for whatever modest satisfactions may be derived from moving slots around on an organizational flowchart, but to ensure that the Catholic Church's central administration serves the evangelical mission of all the members of the church.

As described by José María Poirier, director of the Argentine Catholic magazine *Criterio*, the pope is a man who "wants a holy church, or at least one with a great striving for virtue," because he knows that Christian example is at least as important as logical argument in the church's evangelization work—a conviction that explains his recent (and welcome) criticism of Catholic "sourpusses."

He is, by the testimony of many who have worked with him, an efficient executive who consults widely, ponders his options, and then acts decisively. He is not afraid of making decisions, but he makes his decisions carefully, having learned (as he once put it) to be skeptical of his initial impressions and instincts in facing difficult situations. He is not afraid of criticism, he learns from his mistakes, and he wants his collaborators to challenge him when they think he's wrong.

He is a man of broad culture, well-read theologically but more given to literary references and illustrations than to scholarly theological citations in his preaching and catechesis. Thus one of his recent daily Mass sermons praised Robert Hugh Benson's early 20th-century apocalyptic novel, "Lord of the World," for raising important cautions against dictatorial utopianism, or what the pope called "adolescent progressivism."

Pope Francis also grasps the nature of the great cultural crisis of post-modernity: the rise of a new Gnosticism, in which everything in the human condition is plastic, malleable and subject to human willfulness, nothing is simply given, and human beings are reduced, by self-delusion, legal definition or judicial dictums to mere bundles of desires.

The pope is passionately concerned about the poor, and he knows that poverty in the 21st century takes many forms. It can be found in the grinding material poverty of his native

Buenos Aires, caused by decades of corruption, indifference, and the church's failures to catechize Argentina's economic and political leaders. But poverty can also be found in the soul-withering spiritual desert of those who measure their humanity by what they have rather than who they are, and who judge others by the same materialist yardstick. Then there is the ethical impoverishment of moral relativism, which dumbs down human aspiration, impedes common work for the common good in society, and inevitably leads to social fragmentation and personal unhappiness.

As he wrote in "Evangelii Gaudium," Pope Francis is not a man of "political ideology." He knows that "business is a vocation and a noble vocation," if ordered to the common good and the empowerment of the poor. When he criticizes the social, economic or political status quo, he does so as a pastor who is "interested only in helping all those who are in thrall to an individualistic, indifferent and self-centered mentality to be freed from those unworthy chains and to attain a way of living and thinking that is more humane, noble, and fruitful."

Pope Francis is a revolutionary. The revolution he proposes, however, is not a matter of economic or political prescription, but a revolution in the self-understanding of the Catholic Church: a re-energizing return to the pentecostal fervor and evangelical passion from which the church was born two millennia ago, and a summons to mission that accelerates the great historical transition from institutional-maintenance Catholicism to the Church of the New Evangelization.

Mr. Weigel is the author of "Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21st-Century Church" and co-author, with Elizabeth Lev and Stephen Weigel, of "Roman Pilgrimage: The Station Churches," both published this year by Basic Books.

Pope Francis calls faithful married love 'revolutionary'. Pope Francis at the general audience Oct 31, 2018. Credit: Daniel Ibañez. Follow. By Courtney Mares. Vatican City, Oct 31, 2018 / 04:48 am MT (-).- Faithful married love, in which a husband loves his wife like Christ loves the Church, is "revolutionary," Pope Francis said Wednesday. "This letter of St. Paul is revolutionary to say a husband should love like Christ loves the Church," the pope continued, in a departure from his prepared remarks. "It's a revolution. Always on the way of love." Pope Francis' comments came as a part of a weekly catechesis on the Ten Commandments. This Wednesday, the pope reflected on the Sixth Commandment, "Do not commit adultery." "Who then is the adulterer, the lustful, the unfaithful?" asked the pope.