

Pope Francis

Lazy Trout 12 May 2014

Based on Wikipedia and <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21598677-how-modest-canny-man-approaching-complex-task-leading-roman-catholic>

The Catholic Church is the largest Christian church, with more than 1.16 billion believers worldwide. It is among the oldest religious institutions in the world and has played a prominent role in the history of Western civilisation. The Catholic hierarchy is headed by the Pope, the Bishop of Rome. The Catholic Church teaches that it is the one true Church founded by Jesus Christ. It additionally teaches that its bishops are the successors of Christ's apostles and that the Pope is the sole successor to Saint Peter who has apostolic primacy.

Catholic social teaching emphasises support for the sick, the poor and the afflicted through the corporal works of mercy. The Catholic Church is the largest non-government provider of education and medical services in the world. Catholic spiritual teaching emphasises spread of the Gospel message and growth in spiritual discipline through the spiritual works of mercy.

Papal infallibility is a dogma of the Catholic Church which states that, in virtue of the promise of Jesus to Peter, the Pope is preserved from the possibility of error "when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians

This doctrine was defined dogmatically in the First Vatican Council of 1869–1870.

The clearest example (though not the only one) of the use of this power, referred to as speaking *ex cathedra*, expressed since the solemn declaration of papal infallibility by Vatican I on July 18, 1870, took place in 1950 when Pope Pius XII defined the Assumption of Mary as being an article of faith for Roman Catholics.

Pope Francis born Jorge Mario Bergoglio 17 December 1936 is the 266th Pope

Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Bergoglio worked briefly as a chemical technician and nightclub bouncer before entering the seminary. He was ordained a Catholic priest in 1969, and from 1973 to 1979 was Argentina's Provincial Superior of the Society of Jesus. He became the Archbishop of Buenos Aires in 1998, and was created a Cardinal in 2001 by Pope John Paul II.

Following the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI on 28 February 2013, a papal conclave elected Bergoglio as his successor on 13 March. He chose Francis as his papal name in honour of Saint Francis of Assisi. Francis is the first Jesuit Pope, the first Pope from the Americas, the first Pope from the Southern Hemisphere and the first non-European Pope since Pope Gregory III in 741, 1272 years earlier.

IN THE 12 months since he appeared on the balcony of St Peter's to begin his papacy with a disarmingly unaffected "Good evening" to the crowd below, Pope Francis has won a following far beyond the Roman Catholic church. He has softened the image of an institution that had seemed forbidding during the reign of his predecessor, Benedict

Based on "*Faith, hope – and how much change*" The Economist 8 March 2014

Will he change the Vatican?

Francis was elected after a clash in the General Congregations, the discussions before a conclave in which the cardinals debate the issues that will face the new pope. A faction composed largely of English- and German-speaking pastoral cardinals made clear their exasperation with what they depicted as the arrogance, secretiveness and mismanagement of the "Italians", a group of insiders, most of them Italian by birth, the Vatican bureaucracy, which is steeped in a very Italian ethos of reciprocal favours, patronage and conspiracy.

Though his spirituality and managerial talent counted, Francis, an archdiocesan cardinal and the son of Italian emigrant parents, was also the embodiment of a compromise between the two factions.

His first decision after taking office was to shun the papal apartments in the Apostolic Palace overlooking St Peter's Square for simpler accommodation. He has explained this decision in terms of his need as a member of a religious community, the Jesuits, not to live in isolation. But it was also a shrewd political move. It expressed his desire to eschew ostentation and to seek counsel from outside the church's traditional power structures: living in Casa Santa Marta gives him the freedom to buttonhole all and sundry as they pass through Rome.

He has set up Councils to advise him minimising the old guard 8:1.

He described the court that forms around a pontiff as a "leprosy of the papacy".

Among his many difficult tasks will be to clean up the Institute for the Works of Religion, often known as the Vatican Bank.

Such reforms are essential to the success of Francis's papacy: the Vatican Bank has been at the centre of several financial scandals that have embarrassed recent popes. But they are also dangerous: many in Rome believe that a Curial plot forced Benedict's resignation. When, on January 26th, a crow attacked doves of peace released by children standing beside Francis, some Romans took it as a warning that he risked a similar fate.

Will he save the Catholic Church?

More than anything, Francis has demonstrated an extraordinary ability to communicate his ideas, and those of his faith, purely by gesture.

A fear sometimes voiced privately in the Vatican is that Catholicism risks one day becoming a religion largely for Africans and Asians, confined elsewhere to a self-consciously reactionary fringe. Much therefore depends on this frugal, likeable man.

The task ahead is daunting. High birth rates in the developing world mean the number of baptised Catholics, around 1.2 billion, continues to grow. But there is an ever-widening gap between the doctrines of the church with regard to sex and marriage and what Catholics, particularly in the developed world, think and do.

"The issue for those who do not believe in God is to obey their conscience".

"If a person is gay and seeks God and has goodwill, who am I to judge?"

On single mothers he has accused priests who refuse to baptise their children of having a "sick mentality"

A poll published by the Pew Research Centre on March 6th found that, in America, two-thirds of Catholics and half of non-Catholics regard the new pope as a change for the better. But whether he is attracting lapsed Catholics to return to regular observance is unclear. In a poll of Italian priests last year, more than half reported increases in church attendance. But Pew found no significant change in how often American Catholics said they went to Mass.

Clerical sex-abuse scandals, and the church's complacent response, have also seen many Catholics in western Europe and North America turn away in disgust.

Says Anne Barrett Doyle of the American watchdog group bishopaccountability.org. "I would never have predicted that a whole year would go by without the new pope reaching out in a meaningful way to the victims."

Will he save the World?

As the first Latin American pope, Francis has a political and economic perspective quite unlike that of his predecessors—in particular the two most recent, Benedict XVI and John Paul II, both Europeans whose attitudes and thinking were shaped by the cold war. Diplomats listening to his annual “state of the world” address in January noted with interest, even astonishment, that Europe was barely mentioned beyond its role as a destination for poor migrants.

Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical in 1891 (“The Rights and Duties of Capital and Labour”), which first set out Catholic social teaching in 1891, was as critical of the excesses of capitalism as it was of socialism. “To misuse men as though they were things in the pursuit of gain, or to value them solely for their physical powers—that is truly shameful and inhuman,” But since then Catholic leaders have become more tolerant of capitalism. One reason was their perception that Marxism, which is inherently atheistic, was the greater Satan

Francis “tends to see capitalism in terms of its effects on the third world”. The form of capitalism he knows from Latin America is, for the most part, not liberal, but corrupt and crony-ridden. His disdain for it radiates from his first Apostolic Exhortation, (“The Joy of the Gospel”): “Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless.”

Francis’s views pose difficulties for conservatives inside and outside the church. One passage in “The Joy of the Gospel” appalled many: “Just as the commandment: ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say ‘Thou shalt not,’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality.” Even more radically, he quoted St John Chrysostom, an early church father: “Not to share one’s wealth with the poor is to steal from them.”

Rush Limbaugh, a conservative American radio talk-show host, called “The Joy of the Gospel” just pure Marxism”.

The political landscape of Francis’s homeland, however, offers a more accurate, and nuanced, understanding of his views. For most of his life Argentina has plotted a kind of third way between Marxism and liberalism—albeit one with disastrous political and economic results. ie Peronism

. Francis has written “While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by the happy few,” he has written. “This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation. Consequently, they reject the right of states, charged with vigilance for the common good, to exercise any form of control.” **I bet he would have loved to have occupied Wall St!**