



E-BULLETIN #128

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)

item 242

building a discerning community with a sense of mission

In the 19-25 Apr edition of *The Economist* there is an article recommending that Business Schools add Jorge Bergoglio to their list of "turnaround CEOs" because in less than a year he has successfully "rebranded RC Global". The Pope's appeal is amazing. He has been declared Time magazine's Person of the Year and has appeared on the front cover of Rolling Stone. Then Esquire magazine judged him the best dressed man of the year, and this for a man who wears the same soutane every day of the year. Clearly something more than the cut of his clothes is shining through.

There are many explanations for his enormous appeal but the one I like the most is William Grimm's "A normal priest for normal people" which appeared in ucanews.com on 30 Jan. He believes Pope Francis' appeal is that he comes across as a normal, simple parish priest who is interested in people and for whom pastoral care takes priority over everything else. He laments, "Clearly, the world is starved for normalcy and simple decency in our public figures, whether they be politicians, financial leaders, entertainers, sports stars or even religious leaders."

There is a lot to what Bill Grimm says. His simplicity and normalcy surprise and attract people but it would be a mistake to think of the Pope as a "simple" man. He is an extraordinary leader with a dream to reform the Church's culture, priorities, structures and spirit. The Economist is right. In twelve months he has started to turn around the biggest and oldest multinational in the world. But how?

I think much of it goes back to simple leadership theory. In my experience there are three basic principles:

- leaders have a vision that inspires and gives a sense of mission
- they constantly try to build learning and discerning communities
- they help make meaning in transitional or crisis times and prepare their people for the future

a vision that inspires and gives a sense of mission

Rather than speaking about the dangers of the modern world and criticising secularism or pluralism, Pope Francis concentrates on presenting the beautiful and joyful face of a believer in Jesus. When he was asked by Father Spadaro SJ of *La Civilitá Catolica* "Who is Jorge Bergoglio?", he replied, "I am a sinner..... on whom the Lord has turned his gaze". He is a redeemed and free man with a dream. He has been "set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness" to experience a "joy ever new, a joy which is ever shared." [EG #2] He feels compelled to share his joy because "Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort." [EG #10]



The thing he fears most is a Church turned in on itself. He wants a missionary church involved in the world. "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." [EG #49] Francis told the Episcopal Conference of CELAM, when he met them in Brazil after World Youth Day that we need to be able to share the mystery that is within us for "Only the beauty of God can attract. God's way is through enticement, allure...

He reawakens in us a desire to call our neighbours in order to make known his beauty. Mission is born precisely from this divine allure, by this amazement born of encounter."

Pope Francis challenged the Latin American Bishops to become a warm and beautiful Church that can dialogue. "Unless we train ministers capable of warming people's hearts, of walking with them in the night, of dialoguing with their hopes and disappointments, of mending their brokenness, what hope can we have for our present and future journey?" We need to know and show our joy. As Stephen Bevans pointed out at the 2013 Mission: one heart many voices conference, "The problem with Christians, Nietzsche is supposed to have said, is that "they don't look redeemed!" But Pope Francis really does 'look redeemed'. And it seems to be, that the way Pope Francis 'looks' makes all the difference."

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis challenges us to become a merciful church. He uses the word "mercy" 32 times in the Exhortation and reminds us that, "The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open. One concrete sign of such openness is that our church doors should always be open, so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door. The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak." [EG #47] This does not mean that commandments are unimportant, but the Pope seems to be acknowledging that spiritual progress takes time and right now many people need acceptance, love and confidence. Grace comes before judgement in the reign of God. Rules alone can make us harsh judges whereas mercy opens up the heart and gives us pastoral flexibility and realism in walking with people through their imperfect lives.

building a learning and discerning community

Francis is a Pope who wants to talk with us. I think that is why he chose to write an Exhortation rather than an Encyclical. It allows him to speak in a more personal and conversational style and that "speaks volumes" in itself. It embodies the style of Church he wants; a friendly, compassionate, conversational and persuasive one. He prefers to share rather than lecture, to invite rather than order, to persuade rather than command. His style is deeply pastoral and encouraging. He is comfortable with being fallible and is not at all defensive. He has drawn us back into the Church and restored our faith and interest in it.

He is a Pope who does not want to control everything. He wants to encourage more collegiality and consultation. "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.'" [EG #16] The Pope emphasises the Episcopal Conference [EG #32] but he also wants the Church "to listen to everyone". [EG#31] He challenged the Bishops at CELAM: "[do we give the laity] the freedom to continue discerning, in a way befitting their growth as disciples, the mission which the Lord has

entrusted to them? Do we support them and accompany them, overcoming the temptation to manipulate them or infantilize them?"

This is the greatest challenge of *Evangelii Gaudium*. It will involve a new level of faith and new skills and structures. It will be a challenge for those in each country to discern for themselves the signs of the times. Do we have the courage and imagination for such responsibility and the skills needed to discern after decades of waiting for Rome to speak? We will have to develop new structures for listening, consulting and deciding that involve everyone and especially the laity.

Three of the most important words for Francis are "frontier", "dialogue" and "discernment". In January he reminded his brother Jesuits that God is "Deus semper major" or a God is always more, who always surprises us. We can never capture God and we do not own God or all God's activity. We must be a pilgrim Church always searching, crossing frontiers and journeying to the outskirts to find God in all things.

But if we venture forth from our familiar world of Church we will need to be discerning people to discover what God is doing in the world. In a strange and unfamiliar world the truly spiritual will often not be obvious. We will only be able to recognise it if we know the Spirit in our own hearts.

We will also need to respect and search with others and to befriend the world. The Church has traditionally been critical of or hostile to the world. Vatican II was the first time in which we took a positive attitude identifying ourselves as fellow pilgrims, sharing the joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of every man and woman and searching with them for the true, the good and the beautiful. And finally, as St Ignatius teaches us, we must always discern from a spirit of consolation, appreciation and peace not from desolation, negativity and criticism.

It will be a wonderfully new thing if Francis can help us to become a constantly searching, discerning and always learning community.

helping to make meaning in transitional times and preparing us for the future

One thing good transformational leaders do is to ask enabling questions of their community at a level that gets below the normal divisions and appeals to the basic goodness of all members. I do not think it is exaggerating to say that the Church was divided and many were weary and increasingly losing interest. Francis has given us back the Church. He has largely done this through gestures, profoundly moving gestures that have spoken to our deepest humanity and decency, from his first greeting "Buona sera", his asking for our prayers over him before he blessed us, paying his own bill, living in Santa Marta, embracing the sick and severely disfigured etc. We don't know what he will do next and so are waiting expectantly on his every word and gesture. In this way he has freed us from our locked in positions, opened us up and freed us for mercy and mission.

He radiates hope and confidence without giving us all the answers. Last September he made a statement to the priests of Rome that I find extraordinarily encouraging, "The defining aspect of this change of epoch is that things are no longer in their place. Our previous ways of explaining the world and relationships, good and bad, no longer appears to work. The way in which we locate ourselves in history has changed. Things we thought would never happen, or that we never thought we would see, we are experiencing now, and we dare not even imagine the future. That which appeared normal to us – family, the Church, society and the world – will probably no longer seem that way. We cannot simply wait for what we are experiencing to pass, under the illusion that things will return to being how they were before." I find it remarkable that a leader with the level of responsibility that the Pope has could openly admit that he doesn't know what the future will be. This is a real case of "the truth will set you free". And he still maintains his joy, compassion and confidence. That is making meaning and giving courage in transitional times.



Finally he has also given us a clear goal: service of the poor. There was something self-serving about ideas of “new evangelisation” that were restricted to bringing people back to the Church. Compassion for and service of the poor is a much more life-giving and credible goal. But no leader, no Pope, can change an organisation on his own. He has given us back a sense of community and a pride in the Church. He is challenging us with real and worthy questions encouraging us to discern. Now it is up to us to befriend the poor, to go out to the frontiers and to keep confidently searching for God.

Noel Connolly ssc
Head of Mission and Culture at the Broken Bay Institute
Director Mission Studies at the Columban Mission Institute, Sydney
02.06.14

item 243

new student – IC Province



At its meeting on April 8th, the Provincial Council of the *Immaculate Conception* Province approved the application for admission to formation in our Society of Brandon Olley of Natural Bridge, N.Y.

Brandon is a 2012 graduate of The Catholic University of America with a B.A. in Theology. He is also a 2nd Lieutenant in the United States Army Reserve. He is 26 years old and has been working in his family's construction company and on the family farm.

Brandon will enter the Society in May at Pallottine Seminary at Green Hill in West Hyattsville, Maryland.

Please pray for Brandon and continue to pray for and promote vocations to our Society!

PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

St Vincent Pallotti, you were chosen by God
to revive and promote in the Church the Universal Apostolate.
Intercede to God for us that those who are inspired by the Pallottine mission may have the
courage and support to follow their vocation. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Peter Sticco sac [MD] – Fairview – NEW JERSEY
08.05.14
frpeter@nj.rr.com

sac asia oceania e-bulletin

you commented...

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