

The Great Disaffiliation Part IV

The Francis Effect

According to a number of sources, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio was the runner-up in the 2005 papal conclave and perhaps that he chose to be. It has been suggested that he believed that he had become compromised during the Conclave as a result of an alleged dirty tricks operation mounted against him involving the Argentine Ambassador to the Holy See. Given what has transpired since his election as Pope Francis in 2013, one can only begin to imagine what kind of a Church there would be now, ten years on.

It has become clear that a principal reason for the widespread euphoria at Bergoglio's election was that Catholics were jubilant that the thirty five years of regression and stagnation under JP II and Benedict XVI were over. From what John Allen has had to say, the Cardinal electors too had had enough of the previous regimes:

“In this case (the Conclave which elected Jorge Bergoglio) it wasn't a rejection of the substance of Benedict XVI's papacy, but it was a rejection of the methods of management and governance. They were either non-existent or dysfunctional. The Cardinals wanted somebody who was not tainted in any way by association with this regime. To them, this meant a geographic outsider and a life-experience outsider. I think those were the key pieces for Bergoglio.” (1)

At Jorge Bergoglio's first public appearance following his election as Pope he began to reignite old energies, trigger renewed hopefulness and inspire collective confidence among Catholics. Australian Missiologist and author, Peter Wilkinson has reflected on the effects of Francis' first dramatic gestures following his election and their effects on the Catholic and non-Catholic world:

“Intentionally or unintentionally, these symbolic acts (rejection of formality and ostentation) must have sent a clear message (perhaps even a sharp rebuke) to many of his fellow bishops who still clung to pomp and power. If they did not realize that the carnival was over, they were blind. A new era of service and identifying with the poor had begun.

It didn't take long for Catholics and the world to recognize that here was a very different leader, and they liked what they saw. The first Francis effect was immediate: fresh hope and joy.” (2)

Francis, however, has also succeeded in upsetting elements within the Roman Curia. For example he stopped Benedict's regressive *Reform of the Reform* and has confronted the right wing ideologists who have for decades demonised Liberation theology and Romero.(3)

The task he has set himself is formidable as this self interested body has become, since about the early 12th century, more of a church within the Church than its servant.

Massimo Faggioli writes about the institutional resistance Pope Francis is facing as he attempts to reform a deeply entrenched bureaucratic juggernaut like the Roman Curia. Over

the centuries it has become something of a church within the Church, self-sufficient, self-perpetuating and self-interested.

“The main governing body of the church, the Roman Curia, still closely resembles the one that was first created in 1588; the reforms of the 20th century have largely left its pre-modern infrastructure unchanged. Meanwhile, the role of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the former Sant’Uffizio) is still primarily one of censorship, even after Pope Francis’s decision to radically restructure the influence of the Congregation during his papacy.” (4)

Francis’ vision of a merciful Church:

Francis has signalled an important break from former Synodal practice especially by his encouragement of an atmosphere of transparency and openness. He is firmly committed to bring everyone under the same tent to work together with a view to achieving consensus on key issues.

Francis has spelt out his vision for the Church in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* which summons the Church to reappropriate the Vision and pastoral intentions of the Second Vatican Council. Significantly, *Evangelii Gaudium* is modelled in structure and substance on the Aparecida document of May 2007. (5)

Like the Aparecida Document, *Evangelii Gaudium* encapsulates a clear vision for a Church in need of healing, reform and liberation from the dead weight of its past. Francis avoids a sterile theoretical discussion of renewal by insisting on the centrality of Christ and personal relationship with him.

“Therefore, it is not on this point that one must look for the novelty of Pope Francis’ *Evangelii Gaudium*. He only confirms what his predecessors inculcated over and over. The novelty is to be sought elsewhere: in the appeal he addresses to the readers at the beginning of the letter and which, I believe, constitutes the heart of the whole document:

“I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not for him or her” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, nr. 3).

Francis language of a ‘personal encounter with Christ’ may smack of Protestant fundamentalism but, in fact, it cuts to the very heart of the matter and that is Jesus Christ. This is central to Francis’ vision for the authentic and lasting renewal of the Church. (6)

By drawing attention to Christ and the utter importance of believers seeing everything through the eyes of Christ, he has reminded the Catholic People that the deepest truth about God is the endless mystery of limitless mercy and compassion. This was the theme of last October’s Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in Rome and has been promoted and reinforced by

Francis since then. Strange to say, it is not God's mercy and compassion which are debated but how they are pastorally mediated. The debate about this will, no doubt, continue to be a feature of the Ordinary Synod of Bishops in October.

Francis and dehumanising economic systems

Another thematic shift in the teaching of Pope Francis is the reaffirmation of some of the hard-saying s of Catholic Social Doctrine. One very noticeable source of reaction to Francis' catechesis is the world of free market Capitalism particularly by his habit of demonizing it. He has succeeded in getting a lot of people very worried indeed. Garry Wills, American Catholic historian and author, has recently commented on Francis "scariness" as Pope, specifically the extent to which he worries those vested interests in the financial and manufacturing world most likely to be affected by his teaching:

"Now, however, something is looming that has billionaires shaking in their boots, and when Catholic billionaires shake, Catholic bishops get sympathetic shudders. These are the men who build their churches, hospitals, schools, and libraries. Catholic lore has made winning over such Money Men the mark of the true church leader—....." (7)

Francis draws on his own personal experience when he speaks of the human devastation caused by morally rudderless laissez faire Capitalism. Bruce Duncan of Melbourne's Social Policy Connections writes:

"Pope Francis's views are arousing controversy, since many people seem unaware of how strongly Catholic social thinking is opposed to the neoliberal policies of the free-marketeers. In *the La Vanguardia* interview, Francis was distressed that in some countries unemployment levels exceeded 50 percent of workers. He had been told that 75 million young Europeans under 25 years of age were unemployed. "That is an atrocity, discarding an entire generation to maintain an economic system" that was collapsing, and that depends on the armament industry to survive. He supported the possibilities of globalisation, but deplored the discarding of the young and the elderly. It was "incomprehensible" that so many people in the world are still hungry. He said "the world economic system is not good", and "we have put money at the centre, the god of money." (8)

If the church does not have the courage to reform their own structures, they will never have the moral strength to criticize the structures of society. - Bishop Dom Helder Camara, shortly after the Second Vatican Council.

The institutional governance of the Catholic Church is profoundly and systemically dysfunctional. The Second Vatican Council mandated changes to the way the Church's life, worship and governance should be ordered and function. That programme was sabotaged. The Council's mandates for reform were not fully received as intended by either JP II or

Benedict XVI. For the thirty five years after 1978, the Church's vision was blinkered and its memory of Vat II very nearly erased.

Issues that can be changed under Francis' watch:

1) Local ecclesial autonomy:

A poorly run corporation is about the standard of Church governance. When this is pointed out, the apologists immediately evoke the "family" metaphor. In May 2010, for example, ++Charles Chaput, then Archbishop of Denver, wrote that "the Church is much closer to a confederation of families than to a modern corporation." (9)

The Archbishop fails to acknowledge that the Church ceased to function anywhere near like a healthy family probably with the end of the house churches in the 4th Century. Furthermore, the Catholic community has indicated that they do not accept the family metaphor as having any credibility and least of all in the current situation. What prevails is a system of institutional governance in the Catholic Church which is profoundly estranged from the example of Jesus Christ and his Gospel.

Over more than two years, Pope Francis has constantly urged the bishops to treat their people as adults by listening to them more closely, by consulting with them more closely and by taking their counsel to heart. The laity in probably most countries has been subjected to selective hierarchical deafness and inertia. Even when many bishops do respond to communications from the laity these are often couched in the coded dialects of unctuous courtesy, dismissive arrogance or even patronising contempt. In one of the most forthright sections of EG, Pope Francis boldly challenged the Bishops to venture outside the gated areas of their own security and engage with their people:

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis says to bishops:

"In his mission of fostering a dynamic, open and missionary communion, [the bishop] will have to encourage and develop the means of participation [such as the diocesan synod, diocesan pastoral council, diocesan financial council, and parish pastoral councils] and other forms of pastoral dialogue, out of a desire to listen to everyone and not simply to those who would tell him what he would like to hear." (n.31).

Pope Francis again makes it plain clear that courageous new dynamics of interaction, consultation and dialogue between bishop and people are not only needed but are imperative. For this to be achieved much will be required: courage, trust, patience, a deep sense of partnership and a profound sense of common ownership of the Church

And as if anticipating a desultory response from some, he (the Pope) adds:

“Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way.’ I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style, and methods of evangelization in their respective communities. A proposal of goals, without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them, will inevitably prove illusory. The important thing is to not walk alone, but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters....” (n. 33).

After thirty five years of being micro-managed and coached in authoritarian practices none of this should be surprising. If, however, Church leadership is genuinely committed to partnership with their people, to rebuilding the local Church and to establish moral credibility once more, then bishops must establish permanent ongoing consultative bodies such as national and diocesan assemblies. Apart from the moral obligation to guarantee these consultative assemblies, bishops are also bound in Canon Law and papal exhortations. Many, if not most of them are selective in their compliance. Francis must continue to hold the bishops accountable if they do not have the maturity to do so freely. It is noteworthy to see that the German Episcopal Conference has declared that its bishops do not comprise a ‘branch office of Rome.’ This should be compulsory reading at the regular new Bishops’ school. (10)

2) *Women in the Church*

At the very start of Vatican II, the late Belgian Cardinal Leo Jozef Suenens is said to have asked: "Why are we even discussing the reality of the church when half of the church is not even represented here?" Nothing has changed since Suenens, except that the quality of the hubris has grown richer.

The *Magisterium* has traditionally taught about the vital necessity of the female presence, voice and wisdom for the life and healthy development of the Church at its most basic level of the family. The contribution of the ‘female genius’ is not, however, welcome in the highest counsels of Church governance. The practice gives the lie to the preaching. This exclusion bears no rational defence or explanation. It is misogyny with a Clerical twist. Even Pope Francis, for all his good intentions, seems to be mesmerised by the hubris. In a recent article focusing on Pope Francis promotion of the necessary role of women in Church life and governance, Frank Bruni writes:

“But a change of tone in defiance of fact should be flagged (and flogged) as such. And neither Pope Francis nor any other top official in the bastion of male entitlement known as the Vatican can credibly assert concern about parity between the sexes. Their own kitchen is much too messy for them to call out the ketchup smudges in anybody else’s.” (11)

A generation of educated and critically attuned Catholic women and men no longer accept the culture of tokenism in the way women especially are treated. Increasingly, they are seeing through the shallow ‘natural law’ and ‘divine will’ justifications of the status quo.

Tony Flannery, an Irish Redemptorist, explains it well:

“A great tragedy for the Church is that fact that as a result of the superexaltation of Mary, (particularly her virginity) the radical example of Jesus’ behaviour towards women has largely been lost. His rejection of the culture and practice of his time in relation to women, his treatment of them as equals, are some of the most outstanding characteristics of his life and teaching. But the unhealthy combination of Greek and Jewish philosophy with the personal obsessions of Augustine served to bury this crucial part of the Gospel message. The current teachings in relation both to the sexuality and the place of women in the Church are the legacy of centuries of misogyny.” (12)

Pope Francis himself has, wittingly or not, contributed to the continuance of this attitude by his often ambivalent comments about women and their place in the economy of Grace and their role in the Church. Sometimes, remarks about women tend to be patronising and demeaning and maybe these stem from the remnants of Latin American *machismo* in his character. The effects of all this is not going unnoticed. (13)

And again, Frank Bruni writes about the implicit putdown effects generated by some of the throw-away lines coming from the Pope and others:

‘Can the church afford to alienate a generation of young women mystified by its intransigence?’

"They've grown up in a world where all doors have been open to them," said Kathleen Sprows Cummings, director of the Cushwa Centre for the Study of American Catholicism at the University of Notre Dame. "And it just strikes a disconnect when they see the church with no female leadership – at least they're not the ones at the altar.”

Francis hasn't sanctioned any discussion of putting them there. When pressed about that by an Italian reporter last year, he reminded her that "women were taken from a rib".

Was he ribbing her? He laughed and said so. But the metaphor remains, and it casts women as offshoots, even afterthoughts.” (14)

This kind of demeaning macho game playing simply masks a world of personal and institutional insecurities. It is ultimately destructive of the Christian community.

The Catholic Church is fast using up its moral and intellectual capital on many fronts. One of these is the issue of women and their role in Church governance. The Church’s claims to credibility and authenticity are dependent on realities of its life and practice to validate these claims. The Church has failed miserably when it comes to taking women seriously. The Second Vatican Council insisted that for the Church to exercise persuasively its mission in the world, its life and structures must support its claims. There is a profound credibility gap in this area.

There is no reason why most leadership positions in the Catholic Church should require clerical appointments. There is no reason, beyond some provisions in Canon Law and other conventions, why women should not occupy these positions in the Church. Pope Francis can

change this. If and when he does, the whole perception of what is possible will then change. When the Roman Curia becomes accustomed to the idea that what once was theoretically possible has become reality, then maybe God will be free up to make the *impossible* things possible.

3) *Clerical child abuse*

Earlier in 2015, Cardinal Sean O'Malley, Archbishop of Boston and President of the Pontifical Commission on Child Abuse, signalled the urgency for the Leadership of the Church to act decisively to address and to end the scourge of clerical child abuse. Unfortunately, the Cardinal used language which implies that the Church's loss of honour and credibility are far more regrettable than the actual clerical abuse of children.

“This (CSA) has been caused in large part by the perception of a lack of accountability on the part of our leadership, causing many people to lose their trust in us and in the church,” he said. “We cannot fail to do all that is possible to restore our credibility.” (15)

Unfortunately, what he did not mention was that there are provisions in Church Law which continue to guarantee the protection of perpetrators including the prohibition on bishops and religious superiors to report criminally abusing clergy when not required to do so by civil law. O'Malley and the Pope must know this and they must know that this particular issue can be dealt with immediately by the Pope as chief legislator. In reality, it is the Magisterium itself which breached trust and lost touch with the People of God. In losing its way with the Catholic People, Church leadership has also become a stranger to the world it was sent to evangelise.

That Francis has not acted decisively to expunge the provisions in Church Law which perpetuates the cover ups and the protection of abusive clerics might indicate that he is monumentally ignorant of the legal situation or he has been seriously compromised as Archbishop of Buenos Aires by his own collusion in cover-ups and shifting abusive priests around. If either of these are relevant, he needs to set the record straight and to deal decisively with the resultant appalling attrition on the faith of the People of God. (16)

Conclusion:

Catholics, young and old, are indicating that they have become disenchanted with a Church structure that has little or no connection with the world they inhabit. They are very forthright too in declaring their lack of interest in trying to engage with Church leadership which gives every indication that it is not interested in talking with them. Increasingly, people are turning

their backs on the Church which proclaims Jesus Christ but who seems largely absent from its workings.

Catholic people, young and old, are capable of distinguishing between what is authentically of Christ in his Church and what is not. They have comprehensively rejected the latter.

Even the little that Pope Francis has accomplished so far in his papacy is largely of enormous value. He has served notice that he has broken continuity with those ecclesiological policies and practices of JP II and Benedict XVI which had were not in accord with the vision and mandate of Vatican II. He has also effectively buried Benedict's regressive programmes for the *Reform of the Reform*.

A very significant initiative of Francis has been the reform and restructuring of the Vatican's financial institutions. This is an encouraging beginning to an ambitious plan to overhaul the entire Roman Curia as urged by the Cardinals at the last pre-conclave 'Congregations.'

The new format and style of international Synods have proven a huge success since Francis dealt with the implied culture of censorship and predetermination of outcomes which prevailed during the previous two papacies. His encouragement of forthrightness, courage and transparency has had the effect of bringing often deeply opposed groups to the same table under the same tent. A huge challenge will be for Francis to have the vision and will to change relevant laws and protocols to broaden the base of participants from simply bishops to large numbers of non-ordained and so to a healthier sense of collegiality and model of Church.

On a more sober note, it would probably be prudent for those most enthused and enlivened by Francis' election to resist the temptation to be carried away with optimism and to start shouting *santo subito* ('saint now!') It may be a matter of mental and spiritual hygiene not to think or hope that Francis has already 'fixed' things, that all is well now, and that the problems have disappeared.

A healthy realism is necessary. Francis is an old man now. He may very well have a vast agenda for reform but he will achieve only a fraction of that. He has begun well, accomplished some important things especially in stripping away that perverse sense of absolute certainty and security that came with two very directive and autocratic popes. Francis has encouraged people to take responsibility for their ideas and actions especially the bishops. They are not very used to this and consequently, most have little or no idea of how to act with independence and imagination after thirty five years of 'just obeying orders.'

Endnotes

- 1) Nicholas G. Hann, "John Allen: the Real Clear Religion Interview," *Real Clear Religion*, April 16, 2013. (Linked [here](#)); Austen Invereigh, *The Great Reformer. Francis and the making of a radical Pope*, London, Allen & Unwin, 2014, 281-183. See also

John Bingham, “Pope Francis: How Cardinals’ lobbying campaign paved the way for Argentine pontiff,” *The Telegraph* 22 Nov, 2014 (Linked [here](#)); Related: David Timbs, ‘A Spirit Uncontrolled’ *Cathnews* 23 May, 2013. (Linked [here](#).)

“Uniformists” who believe that everyone in the Church should be just like them. “They are rigid!” said the Pope. “They do not have that freedom the Holy Spirit gives,” and they confuse what Jesus preached with their “own doctrine of uniformity.” Jesus never wanted the church to be so rigid, Pope Francis said. Such people “call themselves Catholics, but their rigid attitude distances them from the Church.” The Pope likened the “uniformists” to the early Christians who demanded that pagans become Hebrews before they could enter the Church, when this was not what God intended. - “A House that’s not for rent. The Pope’s Mass at Santa Marta” *Vatican News*, 05/06/2014. (Linked [here](#))

- 2) Peter Wilkinson, “The Francis Effect, A Talk to Spirituality in the Pub Meeting, Sandringham, 23 April 2014” *Catholics for Renewal* (Linked [here](#)); Garry Wills, “The Pope is a Christian,” *NYR* March 29, 2015. (Linked [here](#)); Cardinal Walter Kasper, “Open House. How Francis sees the Church,” *Commonweal*, March 15, 2015 (Link [here](#)); Rocco Palmo, “Be Pastors, not Pilots. For the Bishops, the Pope’s “Global Vision,” *Whispers in the Loggia*, 19 May, 2015. (Linked [here](#)); Robert Mickens, “Can Pope Francis succeed in reforming the Curia?” *NCR*, May 26, 2015. (Linked [here](#))

- 3) Paul Vallely, “A Victory for Pope Francis,” *NYT*, 22 May 2015 (Linked [here](#))

- 4) Massimo Faggioli, “A Faith both Roman and Global. The Future of Catholicism, 2015-2025” *The Huffington Post*, 08/05/15 (Linked [here](#)) An important indicator of just how much controversy has been stirred up by Francis so far is the high level of reaction, even fierce hostility that has been generated especially in the more conservative sections of Church and secular society. This negative side might reasonably be called the *Hermeneutic of Reaction*. It is difficult to imagine that the levels of active and passive aggression now directed against Pope Francis was ever focused to the same degree against JP II or Benedict XVI by even their most trenchant critics. The intensity of the hostility appears to depend to a great extent on a website’s editorial policy. Interestingly, many of more nuanced conservative site take the disingenuous path of stressing that the Pope “is not speaking infallibly” on this or that matter!

See also Robert Mickens: “In *Evangelii Gaudium*, which he has called a sort of blueprint for his pontificate, Francis says clearly, "I am conscious of the need to promote a sound 'decentralization'." In this sense, he indicates that the doctrinal role of local and regional bishops' conferences should be developed, as should collegiality and synodality.

The best chance for carrying out a sound or healthy decentralization, it would seem, is by giving greater authority to the conferences and the Synod of Bishops. A third institution that could also be reformed with the aim of decentralizing decision-making away from Rome is the office of metropolitan archbishops. Since the Council of Trent (1545-1563), juridical authority that once was constituent of the metropolitans has all but disappeared, leaving them with the strange woolen band draped over their shoulders and precedence in liturgical processions as the only things that differentiate them from other bishops.” “Can Pope Francis succeed in reforming the Curia?” *NCR* May 26, 2015. (Linked [here](#))

- 5) The Aparecida Document, CELAM, May 2007. (Linked [here](#)) “This means that the ultimate purpose of evangelization is not the transmission of a doctrine, but an encounter with a person, Jesus Christ. The possibility of such a face to face encounter depends on the fact that Jesus, risen, is alive and desires to walk next to every believer, as he really walked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus; more than that, as he was in their very heart, when they returned to Jerusalem, after having received him in the broken bread.

- 6) Fr Raniero Cantalamessa, chaplain to the Papal Household, has offered a retreat catechesis on this in recent times:

In Catholic language, “the personal encounter with Jesus” has never been a very familiar concept. Preferred instead of “personal” encounter was the idea of ecclesial encounter, which occurs, namely, through the sacraments of the Church. To our Catholic ears, the expression had vaguely Protestant resonances. Obviously the Pope is not thinking of a personal encounter that substitutes the ecclesial. He only wishes to say that the ecclesial encounter must also be free, willed, and spontaneous, not purely nominal, juridical or habitual.” - Francis appeals to Catholics to rediscover a personal relationship with Christ. – “Fr Raniero Cantalamessa’s 1st Lenten Homily, 2015,” *Zenit.org*, February 27, 2015. (Linked [here](#))

- 7) Garry Wills, “Who’s afraid of Pope Francis?” *New York Review of Books*, April 30, 2015. (Linked [here](#)). Ross Douthat, “Will Francis break the Church?” *The Atlantic Monthly*, May, 2015. (Linked [here](#))
- 8) Bruce Duncan, “Pope Francis. Economic System is failing millions,” *Pearls and Irritations*, 24/07/2014 (Linked [here](#)) See also Bruce Duncan, “Pope runs moral template over G 20,” *Pearls and Irritations*, 17/11/2014. (Linked [here](#)) Even a cursory survey the websites of the *Acton Institute*, *Napa Institute*, *Legatus*, *Crisis Magazine*, *First Things* plus writers such as Michael Novak, George Weigel and Samuel Gregg with the editorial support of the Murdoch media to illustrate the ideological bloc Francis is dealing with. It seems more than a coincidence too that these Neo-Conservative entities are invariably opposed to key Vatican II documents such as *Gaudium et Spes*, the decrees on Ecumenism, Religious Freedom, Non Christian Religions and often the vernacular Eucharist. They also seem to have a special liking for home-schooling! See also, Rocco Palmo, "Our Credibility Is at Stake" – In Blockbuster Preach, Pope Tells Cardinals Jesus "Reinstates the Marginalized" *Whispers in the Loggia*, February 15, 2015 (Linked [here](#).)
- 9) “Archbishop Chaput: the Pope is not CEO and bishops are not his employees,” *CNA*, May 26, 2010. (Linked [here](#))
- 10) Jonathan Luxmoore, “Cardinals says bishops’ conferences cannot go it alone on doctrine,” *NCR*, 27 March 2015. (Linked [here](#) and a CNA article linked [here](#))
- 11) “Catholicism Undervalues Women,” *New York Times*, May 6, 2015. (Linked [here](#))
- See also Michael Phelan: “Speaking to an international group of women and men religious last Saturday, Pope Francis said that the Church needed women’s voices, input, and experiences. He went on to say that although women could be appointed as heads of some offices of the Vatican curia, that would not be enough to “recover the role” that women should have in the Catholic Church. What was important was ensuring that women had a voice and are listened to because the Church needs their specific richer, stronger, and intuitive contributions. He said, as he has before, that the Church needed the “feminine genius”. Nevertheless, so far there has been little evidence of any such real progress for women as advocates or officials in the Church.” – Michael Phelan, “Women Deacons could solve Pope’s conundrum,” *The Tablet*, 22 May, 2015. (Linked [here](#))

- 12) Tony Flannery, *A Question of Conscience*, Dublin, Londubh Press, 2013, 115.
- 13) Gibson, “Lost in translation? 7 Reasons some women wince when Pope Francis starts talking,” *RNS*, December 10, 2014. (Linked [here](#)) (More examples of Francis’ alleged ambiguous statements on women are discussed [here](#), [here](#))
- 14) Catholicism undervalues women,” *New York Times OpEd*. May 6, 2015. (Linked [here](#))
“Pope Francis’ sex abuse point man urges bishop accountability,”
- 15) *Daily News/Associated Press*, February 16, 2015. (Linked [here](#))
- “Pope Francis address to CELAM Leadership,” *Vatican Radio*, 28/07/2013. Francis warns Latin American bishops not to ‘infantilise’ their people: “As pastors, bishops and priests, are we conscious and convinced of the mission of the lay faithful and do we give them 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?” (Linked [here](#)).
- 16) This and related issues have been central to the advocacy work of *Catholics for Renewal* over the past few years and it will continue to be so. *CathfR*’s initiatives and outcomes have been documented comprehensively on its website, www.catholicsforrenewal.org/.

“The most dangerous time for a bad government is when it starts to reform itself.”

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1835.*

Some more suggested reading:

Joshua McElwee, “Cardinal Kasper: Francis wants a hierarchy that listens to ‘sensus fidei,’” *NCR*, May 26, 2015. (Linked [here](#))

Robert Mickens, “Letter from Rome. How Italy differs from Ireland,” *Commonweal Magazine*, May 27, 2015. (Linked [here](#))

E.J. Dionne, “A Radical Pope. Francis has challenged the Catholic Church. How much can he change it?” *The American Prospect*, Spring, 2015. This is a very long but comprehensive and insightful assessment of Francis’ papacy so far. (Linked [here](#))

Eric Hodgens, “Can Pope Francis Turn the Church Around?” *Pearls and Irritations*, 03/16/15 (Linked [here](#))

Garry Wills:

In Wills’ translation of Book 18, the church is a place “where many recalcitrants are mingled with good people and both are collected in a kind of Gospel dragnet.In this fallen world, Wills finds equivalence between churches and states. The “large gang of thieves called the government trying to enforce justice” operates in the third city on equal footing with “the large gang of sinners called the church trying to remind one another of the love of God.” Wills concludes: “We are, at our best, not only members but patriots of our blundering state and sinning church, muddling along in our shared city.” - “The Future of the Catholic Church with Pope Francis,” Viking Penguin. (Review linked [here](#).)

Jim Newell, “Pope Francis makes Tea Party heads explode: Why Steve King & Louie Gohmert have it in for the pontiff. GOP members are worried about what Pope Francis will say in his speech to Congress. ” *Salon.com*, 16 May, 2015. (Linked [here](#))

Phyllis Zagano, “Why stay,” *NCR*, April 21, 2015. (Linked [here](#)) and Pope Francis calls for the door to be kept open writes David Timbs “God, Compassion and Law,” Catholics for Renewal website (Linked [here](#))

Peter Steinfelds, “Contraception and Honesty. A Proposal for the Next Synod,” *Commonweal Magazine*, 14 May, 2015. (Linked [here](#))

The Conservative white ants are out before the Encyclical is even published. See Russell Shaw, “Dissenters Set Out to Silence the Pope on the Environment,” *Aletheia*, 15 May, 2015. (Linked [here](#))

Three statements on Conscience: one by Professor Joseph Ratzinger in 1967; one by Moral Theologian, Dr Brian Lewis in 20017 and the third by Card George Pell in 2005. The first two represent the Theology of Thomas Aquinas which is standard Catholic doctrine. Pell’s views do not represent mainstream Catholic theology. The references are from the Blog [v2catholic.com](#) January 28, 2012. (Linked [here](#))

Paul V. Kane, “Kane: Three bold moves the Catholic Church needs,” OpEd, McClatchy-Tribune News Service, May 4, 2014.

Kane’s suggestions:

- 1) Retirement age of bishops reduce to 70
- 2) Mandatory celibacy abolished.
- 3) Parish Pastoral Councils made mandatory and free up from absolute power of the local priest. (Linked [here](#).)

*(A favourite line of “Enda” in *Catholica Forum*)

David Timbs is a member of Catholics for Renewal

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