



Pope Francis greets Pope Emeritus Benedict at Castel Gandolfo  
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## A Jesuit Pope, Latin American and New Directions of the Church

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With the election of Pope Francis, I would like to summarize and share some ideas of Fr. Libânio<sup>1</sup>, which I find very interesting. They can help us understand this historical moment now in the Church's history, a time of questions and expectations.

Pope Francis succeeded Pope Benedict XVI. In general, when the Pope chooses a name, it takes on a special significance for his papacy. In a way, it bespeaks a kind of "inheritance". In choosing the name of

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Video: *A Jesuit pope, Latin American and the new directions of the Church*. This video was produced by the Loyola Center from a roundtable held in Belo Horizonte Brazil, April 20, 2013, with participation of renowned Brazilian theologian and Jesuit João Batista Libânio and Fr. Manuel Godoy. You can view it at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1ZWeTVqFIU>

Pope Benedict XVI, then-Cardinal Ratzinger wanted to emphasize being a European. This is because he realized Europe was rooted in the Christian faith, and he sought to re-Christianize Europe so it would return to its 'roots'. Cardinal Bergoglio chose Francis, a name without papal precedent, as he followed a different path from his predecessors. Although a Jesuit, Cardinal Bergoglio chose a name identified with Franciscans, highlighting his originality.

Moreover, the new pope comes in after the resignation of Benedict XVI, which is really the first true resignation of a pope. The resignations of popes before Benedict XVI were often due to economic or political realities of the time. Pope Benedict's resignation 'splits' the theology of papal primacy, defined at Vatican I. Benedict's resignation was not an isolated act of a coward who flees and abandons the mission. Rather, it was a conscious and mature decision of a man who felt unable to continue the physical and spiritual demands needed of papal ministry today.

This attitude reveals the fragility and limitations of the papacy as an office. It definitely calls into question some previous religious and societal ideas of the pope as an untouchable, unquestionable, and sacred figure. This former 'theology of the papacy' ratifies the pope as infallible, with all glory, authority, and above any suspicion. It does not allow one to waver - how does a pope quit if he's seen as being a detached figure, a totality from 'above'? In my opinion, this theology of papal primacy, forged in recent centuries, is now being revised to a new way of being. The figure of the pope is now seen as one who is more human, with the strengths and weaknesses of an 'average'<sup>2</sup> man. In his act of his resignation, Pope Emeritus Benedict dismantled the traditional understanding of the figure of the Pope, and opened new pathways and possibilities for Pope Francis. Therefore, although at this time there is the loss of a certain papal aura of sacredness, Pope Francis, with a different mindset, can create a new understanding of what it means to be a successor of Peter in today's world.

The "buzz" around the new Pope has led many to look more closely at him and wonder what to expect. Cardinal Bergoglio is a man of great qualities, who has a great proximity to people, and especially a concern for youth as the future of the Church. He has management experience

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<sup>2</sup>Fr. Manuel Godoy was surprised that the media highlighted several noteworthy gestures and attitudes of Pope Francis, seen as "common and normal". These include using public transportation, paying his hotel bill after the conclave and being a football fan. It is interesting to observe the emphasis on the normal, trivial things that millions of people usually tend to do. The fact that Pope Francis has done these things can also inform us just how 'abnormal' our conception of the life of a Pope can be!

as provincial in the Society of Jesus and Bishop of the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires. Compared with Pope Emeritus Benedict, there are big differences. Benedict XVI is a brilliant theologian, well-respected as the 'German doctor', an intelligent man who tried to solve problems utilizing the vast range of his theological vision. Yet, he had much difficulty in making this vision viable and solving these problems in the concrete reality of life today. Pope Emeritus Benedict could ably wrestle with problems in theory, but he had difficulty in tackling the practical aspects of many problems confronting the Church today. In his decision to resign the papacy, Benedict has acknowledged the complexity and difficulty of governing the Church in today's world. These factors, with his advancing age, gave him the courage to see he was in no condition to continue in command of the Church.

Pope Francis is a pastoral man. He has a good theological formation, but he is not an intellectual. He is a pastor, closer to everyday problems. Influenced by the populism in his native Argentina dating back to the era of "Peron", he is affected by the idea that power derives its authority from being closer to the people, both in physical and emotional proximity. His way of being simple and close to the people and the poor comes largely from his life experiences and the influence of the "Peronist" era in Argentina, rather than a critical understanding of liberation theology, which sees the poor as exploited and the core group in building a just society.

Furthermore, concerning certain perceptions (or "shadows" as they are often called) on his performance during Argentina's dictatorship, one needs to be realistic. It is easy today, in a quieter environment, to analyze the past, tense, uncertain, and difficult days with sometimes harsh judgments. Bergoglio was young and had no experience. He is not the same today; he has grown, changed, matured spiritually, and one can expect him to be different from the past. In the present, one can revisit some positions that may not have been brave and appropriate for the past. As for what positions he will take to reform the church, one must wait and see what he will do in time.

An analytical view will show that the Pope Francis must serve in a church environment marked by large and complex challenges, including the great centralization produced in the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. In fact, this centralization of the Church is not new, but traces its origin to the "*Dictatus Papae*" of Pope Gregory VII in the eleventh century. This new papacy begins at a time when, due to the force of secularization, institutional religion has lost its normative force. Many people today ascribe to a vague religiosity. This institutional crisis of the Church has resulted in a loss of strength of ecclesiastical power. It also occurs within the context of a Church moving "East and South", giving it a configuration less European.

Given these and many other challenges, without underestimating the power of the pope, one can see that he is not a person who can change the Church overnight. Immediate institutional changes are needed and expected. However, it is more important to promote and strengthen movements of renewal and change within the Church. It is also essential to support and promote new initiatives and movements for change from theological, geographical, and cultural horizons.

Our expectations and concerns must also consider using objective data gleaned from the valuable tools of social sciences and theology to find ways to understand and live out our faith realistically to avoid being naive. However, on some level, our reflections will always be incomplete, because when it comes to belief, it is ultimately about living the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Otherwise, our "human analysis" can appear harsh and pessimistic. What undergirds and gives vigor to the faith and the Church is the person of Jesus Christ, who sends his Spirit to renew and strengthen us.

It is necessary today to deepen our awareness and understanding of the theology of the Holy Spirit, which leads us to the historical Jesus. At various times in its history, the Church developed a mode of theological reflection that seemed to silence the role of the Holy Spirit and relegate the historical Jesus to a superficial level. A constant effort to engage the historical person of Jesus will help us develop a communal, historical, and concrete praxis for our faith, so we may discern new ways of fidelity and authenticity. In doing this, we can avoid the pitfall of living an "individualized religion" which only leads to isolation and the death of a true communal faith. To meet the challenges of our time properly, we must be willing and able to articulate and engage the two essential dimensions in the experience of following Christ: the person of Jesus and the community he called us to become, the Church.

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