Pope Francis

Untying the Knots
The Struggle for the Soul of Catholicism

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interviews: "I know we need a theology of women and we're working on it." But who is we? Because women have been working on it for a long time. So the Vatican doesn't need to work on it; it just needs to read what women theologians have been writing for the past 50 years.'

There are some small grounds for optimism, she feels. In April 2015 a one-day conference was held at the Pontifical University Antonianum in Rome, entitled "Women in the Church: Prospects for Dialogue". The event was the initiative of the Roman institution's new rector, Sister Mary Melone who is the first woman every appointed as rector of a pontifical university. As well as presentations from women from all five continents the conference heard from Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, who quoted extensively from the texts of women's writers. Among the topics discussed were the idea that the Church's traditional notion of 'complementarity' might be replaced with a concept like 'reciprocity' or 'relationality'. The conference agreed to produce an anthology of new writings on the place of women in the Church for publication just ahead of the Synod on the Family in October 2015. 'It is only a small step,' said Professor Beattie, 'but it is a step in the right direction.'

There is a long way to go. Rethinking the role of women in the Church, Professor Melone suggested, inevitably also involves men rethinking their role in the Church too. Unless Francis can stimulate that – and persuade men in the Church to act upon it – then, for all his aspirational words, it is clear that this is one area in which Pope Francis risks being adjudged by many to be a grave disappointment.

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Prophet or Politician?

President Barack Obama was smiling broadly when he left his private meeting with Pope Francis. What was he so pleased about? Only a very few people knew. Those who guessed got it wrong. Ahead of the meeting, conservatives in the US bishops' conference had briefed Vatican officials that the Pope should give Obama a roasting. His affordable healthcare legislation would, in the eyes of the American Right, result in public funding of abortion. The Pope did not agree. Indeed Pope Francis, according to one source high inside the Roman Curia, actually approved of the President's signature healthcare legislation. Francis felt it would help the poorer citizens of the world's greatest power. But it was not Obamacare that brought the smiles.

Nor were they produced by agreement over the issue of poverty and inequality, at home and around the world, on which the Pope was well to the left of the President. That was clear from the searing criticisms of global capitalism contained in the copy of Francis's manifesto *Evangelii Gaudium*, which he gave Obama to take away. The President took the denunciation of a global economic system that excludes the poor and said he would keep it in the Oval Office to read when he was feeling frustrated. But he was not smiling about that either.

The copy of the communiqué issued after the meeting said that the two men – who talked for almost twice as long as the half-hour that had been scheduled – spoke about 'the exercise of the rights to religious freedom, life and conscientious objection, as well as the issue of immigration reform'. Pope and President seemed to find a rapport, though they spoke through interpreters. They pledged to work together on their common commitment to eradicate human trafficking. They also discussed 'current international themes'. It was in this last bald phrase that the clue lay.

The Pope's diplomatic network had briefed him that Obama, after his re-election in 2012, had fixed on Cuba as an area in which he could do something that would be part of his legacy when he left office. Francis, though he was not a big international traveller in his time as Archbishop of Buenos Aires, devoured

newspapers and journals on global politics. And he had a particular interest in Cuba, having been there as part of the Catholic Church's official delegation when Pope John Paul II visited the island in 1988. Indeed, the then Cardinal Bergoglio had edited a book on the dialogue between John Paul and Fidel Castro. It saw the Church as the vehicle to rescue Cuba from communism. So in his meeting with Obama in March 2014 he raised the subject. The Pope returned to the matter several times in their 52 minutes together. By the end of the meeting Francis had agreed to broker a deal to restore diplomatic relations between Washington and Havana, which had been frozen for five decades.

As soon as Obama left, the Pope summoned Cardinal Jaime Ortega, the Archbishop of Havana, to see him. They had known and respected one another for decades. Ortega was the man who had asked Bergoglio for a copy of the speech that convinced cardinals in their pre-conclave meetings that the Argentine should become Pope. The Cuban cardinal had then posted it on his website ahead of the papal election for all the world to see. Ortega began to set up secret meetings between Washington and Havana. The Canadian government agreed to host them but its officials took no part. Vatican diplomats were the mediators. They shuttled back and forth to Toronto and Ottawa, where most of the clandestine meetings took place. Pope Francis was, apart from the American and Cuban presidents, the only head of state involved in 18 months of undercover negotiations. When the talks were about to break down, over the exchange of prisoners, the Pope wrote personal letters to the two presidents urging them to take the risk and swap. He offered to act as personal guarantor of the good faith of each side in the deal. It worked, bringing an end to the last remnant of the Cold War that had dominated world history for over half a century. When the President of the United States and his counterpart in Cuba, Raúl Castro, simultaneously announced the reopening of diplomatic relations between their two countries, both named – and effusively thanked – Pope Francis for his part in bringing it about.

It was a process that benefited all sides in the Rome-Washington-Havana triangle. The first Pope ever from Latin America offered the US President a degree of Catholic cover from the wrath of Republicans, most particularly the large Cuban émigré population in Florida. The Cuban leader Raúl Castro looked to the Catholic Church – to which 60–70 per cent of Cubans still belonged – to provide stability and continuity in the transition from communism now that Cuba could no longer rely on a daily subsidy of 80,000 barrels of oil from Venezuela, as it had once done. And Pope Francis himself saw it as the first major fruit of the strategy he had set out in his first address to the Vatican Diplomatic Corps after his election when he said that peace, the fight against poverty and 'building bridges' should be its three main goals. 'Pontiff' comes from the Latin for bridge-builder.

Pope Francis managed to accomplish something that had long eluded some of the world's finest diplomats for half a century. 'It was classic Francis spontaneity, a real bit of papal creativity,' one ambassador to the Holy See told me. 'The Pope told his diplomats not to be afraid to take risks. Francis does, and sometimes they pay off. He is ready to put his prestige on the line with anybody where he thinks he has a realistic prospect of success. But he is not naïve. He also understands the limitations of political power.'

For decades before the Cuba deal, Vatican diplomats had been nurturing good relations with both sides. Diplomacy may need grand gestures, but as Francis said after helping to broker the Cuba agreement, it also needs *piccoli passi* – baby-steps. Inching the needle forward was what the Pope was doing earlier that year when he invited the Israeli and Palestinian presidents to a prayer summit at the Vatican after his visit to the Holy Land. Nothing would come of it, sceptical political analysts predicted. But the fruits of peace do not fall suddenly.

Pope Francis was a pragmatist as well as a risk-taker. He had also surrounded himself with those with very different skills to his own. One of the diplomats who had played a key role in the Cuba negotiations was his Secretary of State, Cardinal Parolin, a career diplomat who had previously been responsible for some of the Vatican's most delicate relationships – with Venezuela, Israel and China. Parolin, now the man in charge of all the Holy See's foreign affairs, called the Cuba deal a model for future ambassadorial efforts. Parolin's dexterous diplomacy and the Pope's prophetic pragmatism made them a formidable duo. As one Vatican official put it: 'What came together here was the flower of one of the finest, oldest and most refined diplomatic corps in the world and someone who comes completely from outside of that. And they worked brilliantly together.'

The pair put in place a similar long-term strategy with China, with which the Holy See has been locked in a decades-old impasse over the control of China's 12 million Catholics – half of whom are members of underground churches loyal to Rome and half of whom belong to a government-sponsored church with bishops appointed by the Chinese Communist Party. Relations with Saudi Arabia were similarly delicate. And despite Francis's fondness for big gestures he also knew when he should listen to advice. The Pope told his staff that, on the way back from Korea in August 2014, he would like to stop off at Ibril in Iraqi Kurdistan, where hundreds of thousands of Christians and other religious minorities have fled from the advance of the ruthless fundamentalists of the

so-called Islamic State. Despite his reputation for being a maverick, the Pope listened to the advice of his security staff who said that, with Islamist militants within fifty miles of the city, it would be too dangerous, not just for the Pope, but also for those who would flock to see him.

But what the Cuba deal showed was that the Church should expect the unexpected from its unpredictable pontiff.

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The Pope nodded. Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi had just told him that what he liked about Francis was that he generally used straightforward coordinate clauses when he spoke rather than the sprawling subordinate clauses often favoured by intellectuals.

The Pope just nodded.

Ravasi was a high-brow if ever there was one. He was the president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Culture and had spent many years running the famous Ambrosian Library in Milan. He was a friend of Umberto Eco – the semiotician, essayist, philosopher, literary critic and novelist who was perhaps Italy's most celebrated intellectual. He was, according to the doyen of daily Rome-watchers, John Allen, the 'Noam Chomsky of the Vatican – an intellectual who's become a star through a combination of brain power and media savvy, not to mention a remarkably entrepreneurial spirit for an egghead'.

Pope Francis pondered Ravasi's words and then, a little while later, waved the cardinal over and asked him: 'What does that mean?'

The response was characteristic of Francis. It spoke of his self-confidence – and his sense of humour. Being Pope helped with the self-assurance. But the sense of comedy came naturally.

'Pray for me every day,' Francis said to the head of the Jesuits when he came to visit.

'I do,' said the Jesuit Superior General, Father Adolfo Nicolás.

'Ah, but do you pray *for* me or *against* me?' the Pope laughed.

The naturalness was what ordinary people admired. Discombobulated cardinals, like Francis George or Raymond Burke, may have claimed they couldn't understand the Pope but the plain people understood him well enough. Perhaps the cardinals were just too clever, which may be why Pope Francis warned against cleverness at the opening of the Extraordinary Synod on the Family when he said: 'Synod assemblies are not meant to discuss beautiful and clever ideas, or to see who is more intelligent... They are meant to better nurture and tend the Lord's vineyard, to help realize his loving plan for his people.'

Lay people seemed to understand Francis – the only Pope ever to take the name of a saint who was a layman rather than a priest – when he boiled down his message to say: 'Let's be the Church of Yes, not No.' When the people in the pews were asked what they liked about Pope Francis, their answers were revealing: his warmth, his smile, his simplicity, his humility, his audacity, his joy, his sense of liberation, his respect for people of other faiths and even for atheists. Above all, people cited his ordinariness, his extraordinary ordinariness. 'He is one of us,' they said. It is why in Rome they coined the phrase: the scandal of normality. 'Though the faithful respected and admired Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI they did not feel the extraordinary warmth we detect now,' one Vatican insider said. Pope Francis was bypassing theological discussion and aiming straight to the heart of the people.

Even when he addressed a crowd of three million people in Brazil, and of six million – a papal record – in the Philippines, Pope Francis sought to maintain the same approach. He described it in this way: 'I manage to look at individual persons, one at a time, to enter into personal contact with whomever I have in front of me. I'm not used to the masses.' When he gave interviews his choice of recipients revealed the same desire for connection; he gave them to a Jesuit journal, an Argentinian newspaper, a community magazine from a shanty town, an atheist intellectual, and several newspapers in Rome, of which he frequently declares himself bishop, rather than describing himself as universal pontiff. But his scattergun sayings went beyond interviews, or his uninhibited in-flight press conferences. What grabbed the public imagination was not his set-piece addresses to important international bodies but odd lines from his folksy unscripted daily homilies in the Casa Santa Marta chapel – or the one-to-one phone calls to people who had written to him to share their troubles. The details of those were invariably leaked. Francis did not seem to mind. As mentioned in Chapter Eleven, when the atheist Eugenio Scalfari interviewed Francis, he arrived without a voice recorder or even a notebook. When he offered to send Francis his write-up of their encounter the Pope told him not to bother, saying, 'I trust you.' This was not the act of a holy innocent; it was the sophisticated calculation of a man who was trying to change the way that papal utterances were heard. It was part of his strategy to demystify the papacy and make the Pope a first among equals.

Again and again he sent out the message that he wanted to be one with the people. When he landed in the typhoon-devastated Philippines the weather was so bad that his advisers wanted him to celebrate Mass in the cathedral at Palo. Immediately he said no. The cathedral could accommodate only a few hundred people and the crowd was immense. He had come to be with them,

not to shelter from the weather. And when local church officials offered him a giant umbrella to protect his vestments, Francis said he wanted a plastic yellow hooded poncho exactly like those being worn by the crowds. He had been due to deliver a prepared speech in English but set it aside and spoke from his heart in Spanish. 'When I saw in Rome that catastrophe, I felt I had to be here. And on those very days, I decided to come here. I'm here to be with you.' He had been advised to call off the trip the day before but had insisted on travelling from Manila to Tacloban on a turbulent flight in a tropical storm, which had turned to a Category 2 typhoon by the time he finished Mass and had to leave. Unless he went to the worst-hit area, he said, there was no point to his trip to the Philippines at all.

Ordinary Catholics, in the Philippines and people all around the world, knew how to read that. What they perceived in Pope Francis was a deep personal integrity. 'He walks the walk, as well as talking the talk,' a pilgrim in St Peter's Square told me one day. 'He's a priest who practises what he preaches.' The common man is more astute than elites give credit for, wrote the award-winning Catholic commentator Michael Sean Winters, adding: 'The man on the street can spot a person who is comfortable in his or her own skin and sniff out a phony a mile away.' The Catholic provocateur Garry Wills was hinting at the same thing when he said, mischievously: 'It's a bit disorienting to have a Pope who is actually a Christian.' An old inter-faith colleague, a rabbi from Latin America, Abraham Skorka, told me that this had always been part of the Bergoglio he knew as Archbishop of Buenos Aires: 'He is genuine; he is the real thing. What you see is what you get. You can't fake authenticity.'

Clever clerics may have chosen to be bemused but the Catholic faithful knew exactly what the Pope meant when he said: 'If a gay person seeks God, who am I to judge?' and later added that marriage must be 'between a man and a woman' but also insisted that the Church needed to look at the issue of civil unions to protect the legal rights of people in 'diverse situations of cohabitation'. He saw no contradiction in that; only complexity. What he learned at Aparecida was that life comes before reflection and action. Law follows life, not vice versa.

A Vatican insider offered an interesting reflection on that. 'Francis is the first Pope to come from a city, so he understands both modernity and diversity,' he suggested. 'Previous popes grew up in villages, so they are more disposed to try to recreate the past, to feel nostalgia for what they feel has been lost. So Francis, being the first Pope of the City, accepts plurality and accommodation where Popes of the Village valued conformity and convention. People who live in cities see the power of symbols, whereas in the village and in the country they value something which is more direct.'

Certainly Francis was the first Pope in recent times who had formerly been an ordinary diocesan bishop rather than a diplomat or a theologian. He brought with him a sense of engagement with the real lives of ordinary people. 'He knows that a sense of touch is often what is missing from the life of the city,' said that same Vatican insider. 'He understands the physicality of human touch, the washing of the feet, the kissing of the disfigured man, the embrace of the transgendered man cold-shouldered by his parish priest.' Francis was adept at putting people at their ease. At a conference on human trafficking in the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences, a stately sixteenth-century villa in the middle of the Vatican gardens, the Pope encountered a prostitute who was giving a verbally graphic account of how she had been raped. What could the Pope do to help, he asked. 'Give me a hug,' she said. He did.

One of the characteristics that most irked panjandrum prelates was precisely what most endeared Francis to plain people – his tendency to shoot from the lip. Violence was not to be condoned, he said after the *Charlie Hebdo* killings, but anyone who insulted his mother ought to expect a biff on the nose. The lack of linguistic precision, which horrified the elite with its philosophical untidiness, was what communicated so colourfully to ordinary listeners. The people in the pews could feel a common sense in sentences that reporters delighted as seeing as self-contradictory or controversial:

- There is no Catholic God.
- Flattery was 'the leprosy of the papacy'.
- Atheists can go to heaven.
- God is not afraid of new things.
- Communists have stolen Christianity's flag.
- I would happily baptize a Martian.
- Catholics do not need to breed like rabbits.
- Proselytism is solemn nonsense.
- Let's not talk about the perfect mother-in-law.
- Argentina was undergoing a 'Mexicanization' by drug gangs.
- Women are the strawberries on the cake.
- Sometimes a father must hit his child, but never in the face – that's beautiful.
- Clerical careerists had 'spiritual Alzheimers' because they got so caught up in ambition and self-importance they forgot why they became priests in the first place.

Time after time Pope Francis found a flamboyant phrase that was provocative – and sent his press officers into overdrive trying to explain that he did not really mean what he seemed just to have said. It did not convince those who thought that

Francis lacked papal dignity and should realize that his pronouncements ought to be more carefully considered as they would be minutely scrutinized by those who had become accustomed to analysing the significance of every pontifical word. Francis's chief spokesman, Father Federico Lombardi, a fellow Jesuit, must have felt like the man with the shovel after the Lord Mayor's Parade, constantly following behind to sweep up the mess. The Pope did not seem bothered. 'From the point of view of style, I haven't changed from the way I was at Buenos Aires,' he told one Italian newspaper. 'To change at my age would be ridiculous.' On the second anniversary of his election a Mexican television interviewer put to him the criticism that he talked too much, and too spontaneously. The Pope replied: 'I talk the way I talk, like a parish priest, because I like to talk that way. I've always spoken that way. Always. For some it's a defect; I don't know. But I think the people understand me.'

They did indeed. Perhaps they could not quite articulate his message and repeat it back to him. But they understood it, and so did the clever clerics who feigned not to comprehend because they did not like what he was saying. Nor did they like what their flocks were saying as a result. 'The bishops are unsettled because the faithful are asking "why are our bishops not more like Francis?" ' said one prominent Jesuit in Rome. 'One of the most significant aspects of Francis's papacy so far is that he is holding up for people the "face of Christ" ... which is loving, merciful, patient, rather than obsessing about particular moral issues,' said another US Jesuit, Father Pat Kelly, a theology professor at Seattle University. That was a massive shift of emphasis from the kind of message many US bishops had been stressing. 'Pope Francis has turned out to be an extremely skilful political player,' said a British Jesuit. Those who are uneasy with the radical things he says have to face up to his world popularity.' Francis has turned his popularity into a powerful tool for taking on entrenched interests.

Francis is at the heart of a struggle for the soul of Catholicism, and his greatest allies are the ordinary Catholics in the pews. Public opinion polls, like the Pew Forum survey in the United States, showed that the popularity of this pope had grown steadily over his first two years in office. Nine out of ten American Catholics gave him favourability ratings as high as those of Pope John Paul II, who visited the US five times. And that was even before Pope Francis set foot on US soil. More than that, analysis by Georgetown University showed a Francis Effect: the number of Catholics who said the strength of their religious affiliation had increased under Pope Francis had risen by 7 per cent – a figure which Georgetown's Mark Gray said was a 'significant bounce'. Interestingly, 94 per cent of conservative Catholics gave the Pope a thumbs-up, seven points higher than his 87 per cent approval among Catholics who described themselves 'moderates or liberals'.

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As his papacy entered its third year the old debate about whether Pope Francis was a conservative or a liberal began to look irrelevant. What was emerging was that this Pope was orthodox on doctrine but revolutionary in his application of it. He put the Gospel – and a vividly merciful expression of it – before dogma. He had an openness in his attitude to liturgy – another issue which polarized so many in the Church. And he had about him a simplicity which was calculated, and an asceticism which was joyful, rather than puritanical, despite its severity. He rejected the papal palace in favour of living in the Vatican guest house, the Casa Santa Marta, not only out of a distaste for luxury but because he needed to chat to other people in the cafeteria rather than live in regal isolation.

He espoused traditional Catholic teachings, but gave new reasons for them or added new dimensions to them. He lauded the ban on artificial contraception. But he did so not by deferring to philosophical theory about natural law. Rather he saw it as a defence of the poor in the face of an assault by the rich who wanted to impose population control to grab an even greedier share of the world's resources. He opposed gay marriage, but defended civil unions on human rights grounds. Yet he disapproved of gay adoption because he said it put the rights of adults to be parents above the right of a child to have a mother and a father.

He said that mercy was a higher Gospel virtue than judgement or condemnation. In his very first Angelus address, just days after becoming Pope, he highlighted the Gospel story in which Jesus saves a woman whom the authorities wanted to stone to death for adultery. In the story, Francis said, Jesus did not use words of contempt or condemnation, 'but only words of love, of mercy, that invite us to conversion'. Elsewhere he said: 'Truth is like a diamond; when you show it to people in your hand it glitters and attracts; but if you throw it in their face, it is hard and it hurts.'

He proved generally tolerant of the use of the Latin Mass for those who wanted it (having discouraged it as Archbishop of Buenos Aires). He even used Latin in the modern form twice himself in the Vatican and again in Korea where he and the people shared no common liturgical language but Latin. Tolerance and inclusion emerged as two of his hallmarks. When an interviewer once asked him what phrases he had picked up in the Roman dialect since becoming Pope he replied: '*Campa e fa' campa* [live and let live]'. Having said that, he made clear his own preference for the changes ushered in by the Second Vatican Council, which dropped Latin for the language of the local people in each place. He said Mass in Italian at the parish of All Saints

in Rome on the 50th anniversary of the first Mass ever said in the vernacular by Pope Paul VI after Vatican II. And in doing so he said: 'Let us thank the Lord for what he's done in the Church in these 50 years of liturgical reform. It was quite a courageous act of the Church to draw close to the People of God so they could understand well what they are doing. And there is no going backward, we must always go forward, always forward. Those that go backward are mistaken.' Francis's approach to liturgy, because it had not restricted the use of the Latin Mass, as he had in Buenos Aires, was thus described as 'good news for traditionalists' by the British Catholic conservative commentator Damian Thompson, while the US liberal, Michael Sean Winters, pronounced: 'For the first time in my adult life, there is the sense that the wind is at our back in the Church, not in our face.'

In all this, Pope Francis exploded the old polarities. Previously the Catholic Church had divided along four planes – but into two sides. On politics, those to the left emphasized Catholic Social Teaching on issues of social justice and the need to side with the poor while those to the right down-played that and enthroned their opposition to abortion, women's ordination and gay relationships as the key tokens of Catholic identity. On doctrine, rigorists said no change was possible in what the Church taught, whereas progressives said teaching could be modified in the light of the changing insights of the times. On liturgy, the traditionalists preferred lace and Latin as against modernists' liking for contemporary music and the language of the living room. On governance, centralizers favoured a clear authoritarian monarchical style while decentralizers wanted the wider Church to take part in the way decisions were made.

Pope Francis has revealed that the dynamics inside the Catholic Church are rather more complex than the secular media often portrays. The old stereotypes were that political conservatives were also doctrinal rigorists, liturgical traditionalists and uncompromising centralisers. Under Francis it was possible to be a political conservative and a determined decrentraliser. Enthusiasts for social justice might also reveal a fondness for the Latin liturgy. A doctrinal conservative could speak loudly on behalf of the poor. Pope Francis dissolved old boundaries. In doing so he has left senior figures in the Church grasping for new metaphors to express the Francis style. 'He's not changing the lyrics but only the melody,' said one of the pontiff's inner circle, Cardinal Sean O'Malley, adding: 'The Church's message was perhaps too harshly presented to people and out of context. He is trying to show us the whole context... God's love and mercy and desire to accompany us and to forgive us when we fall and to help us overcome our weaknesses. And to have a sense of connectedness to the Lord and to one another.'

The cardinal who said to me: 'Francis plays on the same team as us but he kicks the ball in an entirely different direction,' meant that Pope Francis sees the same world through a different lens, the lens of mercy. 'His differences with the mainstream Vatican are as much temperamental as ideological,' said one senior Curia official. That is why there is no common doctrinal character in his appointments to senior positions in the Curia, and the men he has made new cardinals or bishops. 'What matters is that they should see themselves as pastors before all else; the doctrinal positions they hold are secondary. And they should have a collegial style rather than an authoritarian one.'

I asked a number of cardinals the same question: 'Is Francis a conservative or liberal?' 'Neither, he's a Catholic,' said one. 'Neither, he's a radical, in the sense of going back to the sources, to the idea that above all God is love and mercy,' said another. 'Neither, he's a revolutionary,' concluded a third.

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Pope Francis has shown himself to be both a prophet and a politician. The qualities needed for both have been manifest, in differing combinations, in many of the key areas of activity we have examined in the past chapters.

He brought a prophetic eye to the task of cleaning up the Vatican Bank. If the secrecy went, so would the shady dealing, he insisted. But he also brought to the task both sophisticated administrative skills and political shrewdness – and showed resolute insistence that he would not be blinded by banking technicalities. Those whom he grew to perceive as obstacles were ruthlessly removed.

On the reform of the Curia he again had a clear vision – of transforming the Vatican bureaucracy from the master to the servant of the wider Church. And there too he demonstrated considerable political subtlety, working simultaneously on a number of levels. He replaced the most recalcitrant of the old guard and attempted a reform in the attitudes of those who remained. Encountering resistance to structural reform he sought to shift the balance of power within the Curia away from the dominance of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. To shape longer-term change he tried to appoint a different type of cardinal, from different parts of the world, to tilt the balance within the conclave which will elect the next pope. Again, he wanted pastors to dominate. And for the first time, Europeans are now outnumbered by the rest of the world.

A similar balance has been evident in his reshaping of the synod process. He began with a prophetic vision – that the Church should be transformed from a creaking feudal monarchy into an institution where decisions are made by a

much wider group. But again he brought a political pragmatism to the process, consulting the world's lay people as part of a two-year two-synod process which could transform the synod into a body more continually in session. And again he brought his political wiles to bear on the process. Indeed some said he may have been too Machiavellian in packing the committee that wrote the Extraordinary Synod's controversial interim report with those who shared his own conciliatory views on the treatment of the remarried and gays.

Only in two areas did his blend of the prophetic and political seem to falter. On sex abuse he understood that action was needed to bring predator priests to justice and that systems needed to be set in place to prevent sex abuse in the future. But he seemed more enthusiastic about the prevention than the prosecution. He did not appear to put the same effort or urgency behind the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors that he showed on the Vatican finances. The issue of how to hold bishops to account for their failures in reporting seemed difficult for him to push through a wilfully obstructive curial bureaucracy. He also seemed privately anxious about whether the new 'zero tolerance' procedure on abuse might lead to false accusations against priests; in March 2015, the month in which he stripped the disgraced Scottish cleric Keith O'Brien of his 'rights and duties' as a cardinal, he also controversially promoted a bishop in Chile, Juan Barros, who was enmeshed in a cover-up scandal – having received assurances in private from the man and his superiors that he was guiltless. As if to counter-balance that, a month later the resignation of Bishop Robert Finn was abruptly announced in a single terse paragraph from the Vatican. It said that Finn had resigned under Article 2 of Section 401 of Canon Law which refers to a situation when 'a diocesan bishop who has become less able to fulfill his office because of ill health or some other grave cause is earnestly requested to present his resignation from office'. Finn had been summoned to Rome weeks before to a meeting with Cardinal Marc Ouellet, the Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, who had made clear to the Opus Dei bishop that his position was untenable. Finn's supporters, Cardinals Justin Rigali and Raymond Burke, were no longer members of the body.

The decision was widely welcomed across the spectrum of Church opinion. Even more conservative journals concurred. In Britain the *Catholic Herald* said Finn's 'clinging on to office was a scandal' and in the US the *National Catholic Register* described his resignation as 'a bitter but necessary reckoning'. But the move did little to lessen the growing sense of crisis inside the sex abuse commission over the Barros affair. Four of its lay members publicly expressed alarm at Pope Francis's decision to make a bishop of a man who

had previously been accused of covering up for a clerical child abuser. Barros denied the accusation and Pope Francis, after reading all the papers in the case, decided to override protests – including those of three victims who said Barros witnessed their abuse. 'I am very worried,' said one commission member, Dr Catherine Bonnet, a French child psychiatrist, calling for a meeting with Cardinal O'Malley on the issue. She and the commission's other psychiatrist, Baroness Sheila Hollins, and its two sex abuse survivors, Marie Collins and Peter Saunders, flew to Rome to express their concerns to O'Malley, who promised to pass them on to Pope Francis. The appointment of Barros went completely against what Pope Francis had said in the past about those who protect abusers, said Collins. 'The voice of the survivors is being ignored,' she said. 'The concerns of the people and many clergy in Chile are being ignored and the safety of children in this diocese is being left in the hands of a bishop about whom there are grave concerns for his commitment to child protection.' Saunders was even more blunt: 'The Pope cannot say one thing and then do another,' he said. Local people were so worried that almost half of Chile's members of parliament, 30 priests and 1,300 ordinary Catholics wrote to the Pope. But the appointment went ahead. Francis also seemed to have difficulty reconciling theory and practice.

And on the place of women in the Catholic Church the Pope seemed to understand the vision – 'we need a new theology of women' – but appeared to have no idea what to do about it in practice. One of the most outspoken critics, Ulla Gudmundson, who spent five years as Sweden's female ambassador to the Vatican, said: 'I think the attitude to women is the last remnant of the pre-Vatican II Church.' Father Timothy Radcliffe, whom Pope Francis appointed as a consultor to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in May 2015, believes that 'the single biggest challenge that the Pope faces is how he is to give voice and authority to women'.

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It is characteristic of both prophets and politicians that they look forward rather than back. President Barack Obama wondered, ahead of the first visit by Pope Francis to the United States, who would turn up in Washington in September 2015: the prophet or the politician? The American President tried to anticipate both. He praised the prophet for a moral example that 'shows us the importance of pursuing the world as it should be, rather than simply settling for the world as it is'. But he also took the precaution of announcing the subjects the two men would discuss at the White House – 'a broad range of issues' including poverty,

the environment, welcoming and integrating immigrants and refugees into our communities, and protecting religious minorities and religious freedom around the world. That, he hoped, would prevent the pontiff from springing any unexpected surprises. The US bishops tried to exert a measure of influence too. Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, the vice-president of the US bishops' conference, tried to steer Pope Francis on to the turf of the old US culture wars. 'Some people say that he hasn't said much about the unborn or about pro-life,' the cardinal said. 'But when he talks, he's very strong on it. So I know he's going to do that when he comes,' he predicted.

Both as a prophet and a politician Francis continued his unpredictability. On the plane back from the Philippines he had quipped that he'd love to enter the United States from its border with Mexico to pay homage to the country's immigrants but then thought he could not pay a fleeting visiting to the homeland of Our Lady of Guadalupe and promised to go there for a full week on another occasion. Neither politicians nor church leaders could be quite sure whether Francis would speak to their agenda. One wit predicted that when Francis stood up as the first Pope ever to address a joint session of Congress – around 30 percent of whose members are Catholics, more than belong to any other religion – he could turn out to be 'an equal opportunity annoyer'. After all, when the European Parliament had invited Francis to speak he had taken their breath away with those remarks comparing Europe to a haggard old grandmother who was no longer fertile or vibrant.

For all his famous 'who am I to judge' remark on homosexuality, Pope Francis was happy enough to make withering judgements on global capitalism as an idolatrous ideology promoting the 'economics of exclusion' which kept the young without jobs and neglected the elderly. He was just as capable of saying something equally acerbic in the nation which prided itself on being the home of free enterprise. Similarly the US bishops knew, or ought to have known, that though Francis was an uncompromising opponent of abortion he was just as likely to include opposition to the death penalty in his definition of what it meant to be pro-life. And he might also include in the same category a broad sweep that included everything from the care of children and their education, to unemployed young men and young women trafficked for sex, to the poor and marginalized, to the infirm and elderly. This was not quite what was envisaged by those bishops for whom life begins, and all too often seems to end, with conception. Where Pope John Paul II used to talk about the 'culture of death' Pope Francis had a more far-reaching concept with his notion of a 'throwaway culture' that incorporates everything from the waste of food to old folk robbed of dignity 'because they're no longer useful'.

Previous popes, including John Paul II and Benedict XVI, had included similar condemnations of unregulated capitalism in their social encyclicals, though John Paul in particular had included caveats about the need to respect wealth creation. Pope Francis's genuflection to that in *Evangelii Gaudium* was perfunctory. But Francis's predecessors had not provoked major Catholic businessmen to threaten to withhold big donations from the Church as they did with Francis. 'The people with the money are upset,' said David Gibson, a long-time observer of the US Catholic scene. 'They are used to the perks that come with writing big cheques. John Paul and Benedict made the same kind of statements on economic issues but it did not seem to be a high priority for them.' For Francis it was personal. He had seen half his flock plunged below the poverty line when the International Monetary Fund had flown in from Washington during Argentina's massive debt default crisis in 2001. His empathy with migrants was not ideological; he was born of migrant parents. 'Not to share one's wealth with the poor is to steal from them,' Francis disdainfully wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium*. 'Economics, immigration and the death penalty were secondary issues for John Paul and Benedict and their closest allies in the US,' said Gibson. 'So wealthy conservative Catholics could make a prudential judgement. But Francis will not let the rich off the hook on economics. What they don't like about Francis is that he takes this stuff seriously.' The shift from sex to money was particularly discomfiting for many conservatives who had felt safe with a generation of bishops appointed by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI who were happy to see sexual ethics as the shibboleth of Catholic identity. The idea that the Church might now shift focus from sex to the ethics of economic justice was deeply disconcerting to those who sat comfortably atop the hierarchy of the distribution of the world's wealth.

Conservative commentators reacted by saying that Pope Francis did not understand US capitalism because he was 'a creature of his background in Argentina' where a corrupt crony capitalism ruled the roost and was very different from red-blooded US capitalism. That was only partly true. Francis, like many Latin Americans, had an ambivalent attitude to the United States which mixed respect and resentment at its economic dominance of the Americas. 'Francis is not friendly to the Anglo-Saxon world,' one senior Jesuit in Rome told me. 'The Argentinian mind-set sees the US as anti-Latin American.' A senior Englishman in the Curia said: 'Francis is anti-American when it comes to aspects of US foreign policy as well as its corrosive influence as the crucible of consumerism and materialism.' The British economist Maurice Glasman, who was invited by Francis to participate in a Vatican seminar on Catholic Social Teaching, traces the roots of that firmly to Bergoglio's personal experience of

the devastating impact of global capitalism on the poor. 'He became bishop of Buenos Aires in the 1990s during a period of Washington-led free-market economics that ended in a spectacular and devastating crisis,' Lord Glasman has written. 'Argentina experienced austerity and a financial crash nearly two decades before the rest of us, and the bishop was witness to the destitution and institutional breakdown involved.'

Whatever the origins of this, it is undeniable is that this Pope has switched the Catholic focus from what he has privately called 'below the belt' issues of sexual ethics to focus on money – an altogether less comfortable subject for wealthy Christians. He has been clear that the Church has been too 'obsessed' with abortion, gay marriage and contraception. And has called for a poor Church for the poor. By constantly returning to the theme of the poor, the marginalised and the excluded he has reminded Catholics that the issue of the relationship between poverty and riches was Jesus's most common theme throughout the Gospels (apart from the Kingdom of Heaven). Jesus mentions the poor literally hundreds of times. By contrast his references to sexual ethics are few. That has been Francis's emphasis too. In *Evangelii Gaudium* he also warned clerics against getting moral issues out of perspective. In a section headed 'From the Heart of the Gospel' he wrote:

> In preaching the Gospel a fitting sense of proportion has to be maintained. This would be seen in the frequency with which certain themes are brought up and in the emphasis given to them in preaching. For example, if in the course of the liturgical year a parish priest speaks about temperance ten times but only mentions charity or justice two or three times, an imbalance results, and precisely those virtues which ought to be most present in preaching and catechesis are overlooked. The same thing happens when we speak more about law than about grace, more about the Church than about Christ, more about the Pope than about God's word.

A vivid example of Pope Francis's determination to shift the Catholic Church's agenda from sex to money was clear to Lord Glasman from his visit to the Vatican. In a seminar in the presence of the Pope he outlined what he saw as the central features of Catholic teaching on capitalism, emphasising its incentives to virtue over vice, its stress on the dignity of labour, on a vocational economy, and on the representation of the workforce in corporate governance. It was the kind of capitalism more typically found in somewhere like Germany rather than in the more red-blooded Anglo-Saxon model of the US and the UK. Unrestrained capitalism created incentives to sin against the dignity of individuals and their families. Glasman later wrote: 'There were audible

rumblings of discontent in the audience, and a visiting American put the view plainly that my argument, with its implied interference in managerial prerogative and the sovereignty of capital, was "communist". It all felt a bit uncomfortable. But Pope Francis interjected with a question. He asked my interrogators – for there was more than one – "What is your idea? That the banks should fail and that is the end of the world, but the workers starve and that is the price you have to pay? You exploit the parents and then buy pencils for their children in school?"'

The acolytes of the free market, who had been taken aback by the vehemence of the Pope's condemnation of capitalism in *Evangelii Gaudium*, were not going to take the risk of waiting before they reacted to Pope Francis's much-trailed encyclical on ecology and the environment. The fact that Francis wanted to write such a document had been known in the first few months of his papacy when the leading liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff, told friends he had been contacted by the Pope. Boff was by now Emeritus Professor of Ethics, Philosophy of Religion and Ecology at Rio de Janeiro State University. He had broadened his reach to look at creation as well as liberation. Francis asked to see Boff's writings on eco-theology. Boff at the time declared: 'Francis is more than a name – it's a plan. It's a plan for a poor Church, one that is close to the people, Gospel-centred, loving and protective towards nature which is being devastated today. Saint Francis is the archetype of that type of Church.' A key moment in the conversion of the great saint from Assisi, Boff recalled, came when he heard a voice from the crucifix at San Damiano calling: 'Francis, rebuild my house, which is falling into ruins.' That call, according to Boff, is today a metaphor for much more. 'What is in ruins is not just the Church but the whole of Creation, for the modern world has ceased to see it as sacred. The planet has instead become a place that we master and abuse rather than "our Sister, Mother Earth", as St Francis called it, which instead ought to be cherished, preserved and healed.' Understanding that is the most radical form of humility, grounded in the very humus of the earth, said Boff. The Pope took the name of his eco-encyclical, *Laudato si*, from a 13th century prayer attributed to St Francis, The Canticle of the Sun. It was the first papal encyclical ever – another Francis innovation – not to have a title in Latin. The title, like the subtitle, 'on the care of our common home', was in Italian.

But the encyclical was a long time in preparation because of a split inside the Vatican. Some wanted it to keep humankind as the focus of creation, as Pope John Paul II had done in his writings. He had stuck with the traditional Catholic understanding of the relationship between humans and the natural world which saw man as separate from nature. Man was expected to use his

intelligence, and exercise his freedom, to dominate and subdue the earth. But others in the Curia argued that this anthropocentric understanding was part of the mind-set which had led to the careless and casual exploitation of the earth's resources in unsustainable ways. Pope Benedict, in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, had diluted the language of domination and shifted church teaching more clearly towards environmental protection. The inclination of Pope Francis seemed to be to move further in Benedict's direction. 'God always forgives, man sometimes forgives, but nature never does,' Francis told one journalist. 'I don't know if humans who mistreat nature are fully responsible for climate change but they are largely responsible for it,' he added later.

While all this internal debate was going on in the Vatican a raft of 'prebuttals' began to appear in conservative journals. Writing in the right-wing philosophical monthly *First Things*, Professor Robert P. George of Princeton University proclaimed: 'The Pope has no special knowledge, insight, or teaching authority pertaining to matters of empirical fact of the sort investigated by, for example, physicists and biologists, nor do popes claim such knowledge, insight, or wisdom. Pope Francis does not know whether, or to what extent, the climate changes (in various directions) of the past several decades are anthropogenic – and God is not going to tell him.' Quite why Professor George, a law professor rather than a scientist, should be thought to have any more expertise than the Pope was not clear. Over at the business magazine *Forbes* the free-market economist Steve Moore was even more biting: 'Pope Francis – and I say this as a Catholic – is a complete disaster when it comes to his public policy pronouncements. On the economy, and even more so on the environment, the Pope has allied himself with the far left and has embraced an ideology that would make people poorer and less free.' Perhaps rudest of all was a blast from the controversialist columnist Maureen Mullarkey, who wrote: 'Francis is not a fool. He is an ideologue and a meddlesome egoist. His clumsy intrusion into the Middle East and covert collusion with Obama over Cuba makes that clear. Megalomania sends him galloping into geopolitical – and now meteorological – thickets, sacralizing politics and bending theology to premature, intemperate policy endorsements.'

Francis was not to be diverted. Fighting inequality and protecting the environment were long-standing core components of Catholic Social Teaching. Deniers may have wanted to ignore the full force of the consensus of the 800 scientists who make up the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change but it was inescapable that the planet was getting warmer and that Christians had a duty to care for God's creation, irrespective of the causes of climate change. The brunt of that change was being borne by the poorest people in the

world who were, theologically and politically, Pope Francis's invariable starting point. 'It's not Marxism,' said Father Augusto Zampini, the Argentinian moral theologian. 'It's the Gospel.'

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In the run-up to the Second World War, on a number of occasions, the Russian dictator Joseph Stalin made a joke when discussing the relative strengths of Europe's armies. 'How many divisions has the Pope?' mocked Stalin, suggesting that moral authority meant nothing in the face of the supremacy of brute force. He was so pleased with his quip that he repeated it several times to several politicians, including Sir Winston Churchill. Ironically the dictator Stalin and his Soviet state socialism are long gone but the Pope and his power are still with us.

The moral authority of popes is manifest in the secular world through what political scientists call soft power. Soft power is what Pope John Paul II used to help bring about the collapse of communism and the fall of the Berlin Wall. That remade the political map not just of Europe but of the world. Benedict XVI used his moral authority to envision a war between an ideologically pure Church and a secular culture which was in thrall to an acquisitive consumerism and materialism – in a world wallowing in a hedonist quagmire in which all moral certainty had been lost. Pope Francis turned that notion on its head: the reason the Church was in decline was not the power of self-indulgent secularism; the Church was fading because it was weak and weary and turned in on itself. It was failing to get out to change the world by inspiring it with the joy of the Gospel. The tide had turned, he felt: it was time for the vibrancy of the Church in the poor world – Latin America, Asia and Africa – to revitalize the flagging churches in the rich world of North America and Europe. He had said as much in his first interview as Pope when he told Antonio Spadaro:

> The young Catholic churches, as they grow, develop a synthesis of faith, culture and life, and so it is a synthesis different from the one developed by the ancient churches. For me, the relationship between the ancient Catholic churches and the young ones is similar to the relationship between young and elderly people in a society. They build the future, the young ones with their strength and the others with their wisdom. You always run some risks, of course. The younger churches are likely to feel self-sufficient; the ancient ones are likely to want to impose on the younger churches their cultural models. But we build the future together.

But how would Francis use the new soft power that had been placed in the hands of the Pope from Argentina? A line in the statement from President Obama, on what he and the Pope would discuss in the White House, mentioned 'protecting religious minorities and religious freedom around the world'. One of the new challenges facing the world in Pope Francis's time was a change in the form of Islamic fundamentalism. In the previous decade, its most extremist adherents had threatened the peace of the world mainly through acts of terror. But the rise of the so-called Islamic State in Syria, which then spread to Iraq, transformed the threat into a standing army on the ground which seemed initially capable of taking large swathes of land with relative ease. Any peoples who did not share their narrow and distorted view of Islam were killed, crucified, beheaded, burned alive or driven from their homes. Terror became a weapon of conventional war. Millions became refugees as chaos spread across the Middle East. Religion became a key determinant. Christians, Yazidis and all other Muslims – Shias, Sunnis and Alawites – became victims of their ruthless wave of persecution.

The beheading of hostages – in orange jumpsuits designed to echo those worn by Muslim inmates in US detention in Guantanamo – shocked the world with its callous gleeful brutality. Pope Francis was particularly shaken by the grisly ritual in which a line of Islamic terrorists in black hoods created a line of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians whose only crime was to have crossed from Egypt into Libya in search of work. Their last words were 'Jesus, help me'. Francis said in a private audience with another Christian leader. 'The blood of our Christian brothers and sisters is a testimony which cries out to be heard,' he said in Spanish and without a script, always a clear sign that a message comes direct from the heart of the pontiff. 'It makes no difference whether they be Catholics, Orthodox, Copts, or Protestants. The martyrs belong to all Christians.' Elsewhere he coined the phrase 'the ecumenism of blood' to describe this common martyrdom as the Islamic jihadists proceeded with their aim to create 'Christian-free' zones in the region that was the cradle of the faith. That, along with the militancy of Boko Haram and others in Africa and Asia, was turning Christians into the world's most oppressed religious group.

Francis knew he had to strike a balance in his response to this. When the United States first threatened airstrikes on Syria in 2013 the Pope had responded by staging a global prayer and fast for peace. But when refugees began to flee the Islamic forces in 2014 Francis sent a personal envoy, Cardinal Fernando Filoni, to northern Iraq to find what assistance they needed. Questioned by journalists about the situation, the Pope conceded that efforts to stop Islamic militants from attacking religious minorities were legitimate. 'In these cases, where there

is an unjust aggression, I can only say that it is licit to stop the unjust aggressor,' Francis said. 'I underscore the verb "stop". I'm not saying "bomb" or "make war", just "stop". And the means that can be used to stop them must be evaluated.' But he added that the international community, including Muslim communities – under the umbrella of the United Nations – should orchestrate the initiative and must act in accordance with international law. The United States should not act alone. 'Terrorism' cut both ways. The word could also be used to describe the way some national governments used military force unilaterally. When an individual nation decided to strike on its own, feeling it has 'the right to massacre terrorists and with the terrorists many innocent people fall', that could be 'state terrorism'.

For all those caveats it seemed that the Vatican's position hardened as the so-called Islamic State advanced and tensions rose. In the same month that the 21 Copts were beheaded, human rights organizations warned that the terrorists were trying to completely eradicate Iraqi minority groups from large areas of the country. Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Vatican's permanent observer at the United Nations, said jihadists were committing 'genocide' and must be stopped. 'What's needed is a coordinated and well-thought-out coalition to do everything possible to achieve a political settlement without violence,' he said. 'But if that's not possible, then the use of force will be necessary.' That statement crossed a line for the Vatican, which has traditionally opposed the use of force in the region. 'We have to stop this kind of genocide,' the archbishop said. 'Otherwise we'll be crying out in the future about why we didn't do something, why we allowed such a terrible tragedy to happen.'

There was, and is, grave danger in such talk. It risked creating a truth out of the jihadists' delusion that Christendom is engaged in a Holy War against them – a perception which had not been helped by President George W. Bush's careless use of the word 'crusade' after 9/11 when he launched the 'war on terror'. Pope Francis was alive to the perils. For decades he had carefully cultivated good relations with Muslims when he was Archbishop of Buenos Aires as part of a wider effort to create a friendly inter-faith atmosphere in Argentina. There he had visited mosques and Islamic schools. In the Buenos Aires Islamic Centre he had written a greeting in the visitors' book using an Islamic prayer title: 'I give thanks to God, the Merciful'. He became a friend of the centre's president. He had fallen out with the Vatican after he condemned Pope Benedict's gaffe in his Regensburg lecture where he quoted a Byzantine emperor as saying the only new things produced by Islam were 'evil and inhuman'. Bergoglio had responded by organizing an inter-faith meeting.

As Pope he had written in *Evangelii Gaudium*: 'Authentic Islam and the proper reading of the Qur'an are opposed to every form of violence.' On his trip to the Holy Land in May 2014 he had taken with him two old friends, Argentine Rabbi Abraham Skorka and a Muslim leader, Omar Abboud, president of the Institute for Interreligious Dialogue in Buenos Aires. Later that year on his trip to Turkey he had expressed sympathy for Muslims defending the Qur'an as 'a prophetic book of peace' and had prayed facing Mecca in the Blue Mosque in Istanbul. At the end of the trip he called on moderate Muslims to combat religious extremism. He had also said that he would 'never close the door' on the possibility of dialogue with the Islamic State if that might bring peace. 'I never count anything as lost,' he said. 'Never. Never close the door. It's difficult, you could say almost impossible, but the door is always open.'

All this has placed Pope Francis in a unique position to 'weigh in diplomatically', according to Francis Rooney, the former US ambassador to the Holy See. But the US diplomat wanted the Pope to speak in favour of war. Francis should promote, Rooney said, a 'just' force to combat Islamic extremists consisting of 'a broad community of nations'. Such a force may be needed. But it is by no means clear that the Pope should be the one calling for it. Endorsement by the Pope could turn necessary international policing into a Crusade against Islam, in the rhetoric of terrorist recruiting sergeants. Pope Francis's visit to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 had been timed to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the 1965 address by a previous pontiff. Then, with the Vietnam War being waged, Pope Paul VI had famously declared: 'War never again, never again war.' No Pope since then had contradicted that resolution. Should Francis go down in history as the Pope who reversed that? And called for what would be seen by many Muslims, if he gave a military force his blessing, as a Holy War?

Ambassador Rooney was right about one thing. Pope Francis was in a unique position. But it was a position in which he could make clear, while condemning the brutal violence of a tiny minority of extremists, that he wanted to make common cause with the moderate Muslim majority. Only they could effectively counter the men of violence within their faith. But the support, rather than the condemnation, of the Pope was what they needed.

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The story of Jorge Mario Bergoglio that has unfolded throughout this book has been a story of change. He changed himself and, when he became Pope, he set about changing the Church in the same way. The journey from Argentina

to Rome, from Bergoglio to Francis, uncovered a pope of paradox – a man who has turned out to be a radical but not a liberal, an enabler with an authoritarian streak, a self-confident man in constant need of forgiveness, and a churchman who combines religious humility and political wiles. It has also been the story of a man who has undergone a deep inner transformation – growing out of that 'great interior crisis' he underwent in Córdoba – which wrought such a profound and long-lasting change in both his personal and political vision.

As leader of the Jesuits of Argentina he had determined to revive older church practices and was content to live with the political status quo. For almost two decades he resisted the work of those Jesuits striving to empower the poor and place their destiny in their own hands rather than in the hands of government or employers. And, though he always had a deep love for the popular piety of the poor, and was assiduous in providing charity to them, until he was near the age of 50 he avoided addressing the economic and social circumstances which made, and kept, people poor. Rather he was the hammer of Liberation Theology. But his great interior crisis, and his prolonged contact with the poor as Bishop of the Slums, reshaped him. It turned him from an authoritarian reactionary into a model of humility, listening and consultation. And it reshaped his politics too. Instead of merely reprimanding the rich and telling them to treat the poor more fairly he began repeatedly to denounce political and economic systems as structures of sin – making use of the language of the Liberation Theology he had once rejected. Oppressing the poor and defrauding workers of their wages, he now said, were sins 'that cry out to God for vengeance'. And he went on to become the Pope who has shaken up the complacencies and self-certainties of the Vatican – deconstructing the monarchical model of papacy, stripping away its rococo affectations and accretions, and declaring his desire for 'a poor Church for poor people'.

The story of Bergoglio's life shows how a man who made mistakes had, through a difficult time of personal transformation, become aware of his own frailties and devised, after prolonged prayer, a strategy to handle them. Acutely conscious of the forgiveness and mercy of God, he determined that his future should make redress for the mistakes of his past. It made him both tender and strong. He was humbled but steeled for the task. After he became a bishop, said one of those he trained, Father Rafael Velasco SJ, there was 'huge change in his pastoral outlook'. 'His speeches denouncing injustice and those who oppress the poor, were,' said Velasco, 'something new'. He added: 'I was pleasantly surprised by it, because that was not the Bergoglio I knew. But I can only judge Pope Francis on the actions he takes as Pope and I like what I see.'

The transformation in Córdoba appears to have had its roots in the pivotal Spiritual Exercises set out for the Jesuits by their founder, Ignatius of Loyola. One of the key Exercises is called The Two Standards meditation. It sets the Standard of the Enemy (riches, honour, pride) against the Standard of Christ (poverty, dishonour humility). Father Pat Kelly SJ believes it is crucial to know that to appreciate the Jesuit Pope. 'I think it is helpful for understanding Francis to recognize that humility is a part of the Standard of Christ. So it is the "way of Jesus".' Another US Jesuit Father James Martin, editor-at-large of *America* magazine, explained: 'In another Exercise St Ignatius sets out three degrees of humility, each harder but more desirable than the one before. The first is the humility of the person who resolves not to do anything wrong and be obedient to the law of God, which is hard enough. The second is where the individual develops a sense of spiritual detachment so they do not feel any preference for wealth or poverty, or a long life or a short one. That would be like someone being asked to choose between flying business class or economy and feeling such spiritual freedom that they genuinely had no preference for one over the other. The third degree, which is the most perfect way of being humble according to St Ignatius, is to intentionally choose the hardest option – poverty, discomfort, contempt – in deliberate emulation of Christ.' In Córdoba, it seems, Bergoglio worked through to this third degree. 'To admit publicly, as he later did, that he made rash and authoritarian decisions is an amazing thing,' said Martin. 'Usually people would say something like: "Looking back, perhaps I might have done things differently". But there is a searing honesty about what Pope Francis admitted in the interview he did with Fr Spadaro for our consortium of Jesuit magazines. Imagine the humility that takes. So Francis is clearly a very free man. And he learns from his mistakes. As a young Jesuit provincial, he tried running things from the top down and it didn't work very well so as Pope he is trying a different way entirely.' The Pope's insistence on collegiality and synodality is a massive learning from experience. The Argentinian Jesuit Father Michael Petty, who knew Bergoglio throughout his Jesuit leadership years, agreed: 'I always think that this is the great lesson he takes to the papacy: he can't bash into those who think differently from him.' The Dominican Father Timothy Radcliffe said: 'One of his greatnesses is that he has the capacity to realize he was wrong.'

But that was not the end of the transformation. The man who later became the smiling Pope was known as a dutiful but rather dour character as a bishop and archbishop in Buenos Aires. So much so that the locals called him Horseface. Jesuits said he was the man who never smiled. Friends said his face lit up only when talking about his football team, San Lorenzo. An Argentine photographer who followed Bergoglio around for a decade in Buenos Aires rarely got a picture

of the camera-shy Bergoglio smiling. His press secretary Guillermo Marcó was constantly trying to persuade him not to look so glum in front of the cameras on the very rare occasions he was prepared to give interviews to the media. As Pope, Francis never stops smiling and gives interviews at the drop of a papal zucchetto.

What changed? It was not just the smile. In Buenos Aires he was preparing himself for retirement having reached the age of 75. He looked worn-out, worried and rather sad. Today, Argentinians say, he looks ten years younger. His sister Maria Elena says there is definitely something different about her brother since he became pontiff; 'I get the impression he's very happy,' she said. One cardinal who knew him well in Buenos Aires said to the Pope rather bluntly when the two met privately: 'You're not the same guy I knew in Argentina.' Something has rejuvenated him. But it is more than all the cafeteria food in the Casa Santa Marta, which has made him put on a fair bit of weight since becoming Pope (his doctors have told him to lay off the pasta). 'He's got a billion people praying for him,' laughed James Martin. 'Also, as we like to say, it's the grace of office: the spiritual help that God gives you to carry out your ministry.' Being made Pope has liberated him to be the person he feels God meant him to be. There is a joy and a sparkle about him. He is warm and engaging. 'He comes across to people in private like every family's friendly uncle,' one member of the papal inner circle told me. 'He is kindly, reliable, and direct. You intuitively trust him.'

The change came, miraculously it would seem, at the very moment he was elected Pope. 'During the vote I was praying the rosary – I usually pray three rosaries daily – and I felt great peace, almost to the point of not being aware of myself,' he told Mexican television in an interview to mark his second anniversary in office. 'It was the very same when everything was resolved,' he said, referring to the moment when he was elected Pope. 'For me this was a sign that God wanted it. Great peace. From that day to this I have not lost it. It is "something inside", it is like a gift. I do not know what happened next. They made me stand up. They asked me if I agreed. I said yes. I do not know if they made me swear on something; I forget. I was at peace.' Francis said the same thing in private to friends. A cardinal close to Francis, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, told me: 'He's told me he's at peace, that he doesn't find the job alarming.' His friend for 40 years, the human rights lawyer Alicia Oliveira, told me just before she died: 'He's having a great time. Every time I speak to him I tell him: "Be careful Jorge, because the Borgias are still there in the Vatican." He laughs and says he knows. But he's very, very, very happy. He's having fun with all the people in the Vatican telling him he can't do things – and then doing them.' One of his C9 cardinal advisers, Cardinal Reinhard Marx, said: 'He is very authentic. He is relaxed, calm. At his age, he does not need to achieve anything or prove he

is somebody. He is very clear and open and without pride. And strong. Not a weak person, but strong.' That strength, and the self-mocking confidence which grows from it, was evident in his final remarks to the Mexican TV interviewer who teased him by asking about the reputation Argentinians have for thinking they are superior to the rest of Latin America. The Pope replied: 'Do you know how an Argentine commits suicide? He climbs to the top of his ego and jumps!'

Members of the Society of Jesus, above all, are clear as to the source of that strength. It comes from his 13-year formation as a Jesuit and the disciplines St Ignatius drilled into the training of members of the order. Father Juan Carlos Scannone, who was one of his teachers, said: 'I think he's very Ignatian and it helps him not only in his interior life but also in his way of governing.' Father James Martin agreed: 'The key to understanding him is that he's a Jesuit. He is, as we Jesuits say, a man of the Exercises. The hallmark of the Jesuit is freedom. He doesn't have to live in the Apostolic Palace because he's free from what Ignatius called "disordered attachments"; so he doesn't feel bound to practices he feels are no longer essential. The way he governs is also very Jesuit; his nine cardinal advisers are just like the council of consultors which every Jesuit provincial has, made up of senior men who are not currently holding any other office in the province, and who can speak their minds. The way he's running the synod is basically like a big Jesuit group discernment.'

Discernment is a central Jesuit characteristic. The word describes a process of reflection, prayer, talking, listening and debate which allows different perspectives to emerge. The Pope's opening instruction to the synod fathers – to speak with boldness and listen with humility – were classic Ignatian instruments of discernment, explained the South African Jesuit Father Russell Pollitt. His closing speech at the synod, Pollitt noted, was peppered with Jesuit terms, speaking of the process being 'a journey' with moments of 'consolation' and 'desolation'. His warnings to conservatives not to be 'hostile' and 'inflexible' were drawn from Jesuit vocabulary. So was the admonition to liberals not to succumb to the temptation of 'binding wounds without first healing them'.

Outsiders might not have recognized all the vocabulary but they understood the spiritual dynamic. 'What he has got going for him is his spiritual formation as a member of a religious order,' said the American theologian Sister Elizabeth Johnson, who is herself a member of an order, the Sisters of St Joseph. 'He's tapping into a very deep vein of relationship with God which makes him both comfortable and profound. It comes from deep in his soul.'

'I feel like I'm still a Jesuit in terms of my spirituality, what I have in my heart,' Pope Francis told reporters early in his papacy. 'I think like a Jesuit.' His former Argentine confrère, Michael Petty SJ, agreed, insisting that his Jesuit training

made him more than a match for the intrigue of the Curia. 'He can deal with the politics of the Vatican with his little finger,' Petty said simply.

The man who was born Jorge Mario Bergoglio has been, over the past two years, attempting to put the Church through the same kind of transformation he underwent himself in Córdoba and thereafter. Just as he went from a strict authoritarian approach to a consultative and collegial style, so he wants the universal Church to mutate from a monarchical model of the papacy into a more participative paradigm in both the College of Cardinals and Synod of Bishops. The transformation requires a shift in behaviour but also, more profoundly, a change of attitude. Conservatives in the Catholic Church, in resisting Pope Francis, have routinely resorted to talking about what Cardinal Burke has called the 'unchanging and unchangeable truths' of church teaching. But this is a misleading trope, as the internationally acclaimed expert on church councils, Father Norman Tanner SJ, Professor of Church History at the Gregorian, earlier explained when he said: 'Those who pretend that the Church has always been as it was in the Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI era are either ignorant or dishonest'. The theologian Elizabeth Johnson spelled out some of the ways in which the Church has developed and reformed. 'The Church has over the years changed its teaching on slavery, the right to usurp other people's land, usury, contempt for the Jews, freedom of religious practice and the right to follow your own conscience,' said Johnson. Once again law often follows life, not vice versa. 'Changes in doctrines about Mary – the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption – were the Church catching up with the ideas which the laity had already accepted,' said another theologian, Tina Beattie. And change is not always advertised as such. As the church historian Michael Walsh put it: 'Popes depend upon tradition. Even when they change something they often preface it by saying "as my venerable predecessors have always taught…"' 'Change can happen but I think at this point it must come from top,' said another church historian, Massimo Faggioli. 'It's one of the paradoxes of this papacy.'

There are paradoxes aplenty. Pope Francis is a monarch who wants to abolish the papal monarchy. He is a decentralizer who wants everything to pass across his desk. He is the first among equals who issues unilateral instructions about collegiality. He wants to demythologize the papacy and is the Pope that masses of the faithful love because of it. He is the Jesuit who took a vow never to strive for high office who occupies the highest position in the universal Church. He is a pontiff whose homely imprecision is his antidote to infallibility. Perhaps, some suspect, it has been his plan all along – from the moment he refused the red ermine-trimmed cape symbolizing papal authority and had the raised papal throne replaced by a chair on the same level as everyone else. Perhaps. Or

perhaps he is just untroubled by inconsistency and wants to let the Holy Spirit blow where it will. Perhaps, in the end, changing the way the Church makes decisions is more important to him than what those decisions turn out to be. If so, there is a downside to that.

Pope Francis has set up massive expectations of change on issues like Communion for the remarried. He has taken the risk that huge disillusion will set in if there is no change on an issue which has become emblematic and which is of significant importance in the pews. Of course, if there is no change, the official teaching may be disregarded; many remarried Catholics may just continue to take Communion even as many married Catholics allow their consciences to override the Church's official teaching on contraception. But for Francis to resile from his indications that he wants a more compassionate pastoral practice could be as damaging to his authority as *Humanae Vitae* was to that of Pope Paul VI. Even if he suggests that he is deferring to the wishes of a more conservative Synod of Bishops his personal standing could be severely damaged.

Those expectations are high. A Pew Forum survey in 2014 showed that 56 per cent of US Catholics thought that the Church would allow birth control by 2050 and 51 per cent believed priests would be allowed to marry. Note they said 'would' not 'should'. The latter figure was significantly up since the election of Pope Francis. Some 42 per cent even thought there would be Catholic women priests by the same year and 36 per cent thought the Church would recognize same-sex marriage by that year. Conservatives were horrified by the figures but a number also said that the Pope could be hoist on a problem of his own making. 'When that finally becomes clear,' wrote one moral theologian, Professor Christian Brugger, 'there is going to be disappointment, anger, and, I fear, intransigence.' If Francis has overplayed his hand that might so dent his authority as Pope that it could endanger the important reforms and initiatives he has set in train in so many other areas.

* * *

Can the reforms of Pope Francis outlast his papacy? How far are Francis's changes to date reversible? What can he do to lock them in?

Some of the changes Pope Francis has made seem already unlikely to be reversed. The clean-up of the Vatican Bank has imported principles of transparency and accountability which are standard practice in all walks of public life and in most private companies. It is hard to see what justification could be made for returning to the secrecy and opacity which earned the bank such a

scandalous reputation in recent years. Likewise, though the reformed structure of the overall Vatican and Holy See finances could be reshuffled by a future pope, it seems unimaginable not to retain the orthodox budgeting and auditing procedures that have dragged the curial finances into the twentieth if not the twenty-first century.

Formal reform of the Curia has proceeded at snail's pace. The Pope's new C9 Council of Cardinal Advisers were set the task of devising a totally new constitution of the Curia. But all that their first two years of work produced was the merging of six or seven pontifical councils into two new super-congregations. Resistance to even that limited idea was immediate and wide-ranging. It is unclear whether something far more radical may yet be in the pipeline. There is, however, more to the reform of the Curia than restructuring. Important changes of personnel have taken place. There have been moves to demote the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to a more equal ranking with other Vatican departments. Pope Francis has announced he wants a change of attitude. But a new pope could undo all that with a wave of the hand.

Francis has moved swiftly and decisively to alter the composition of the College of Cardinals. Many of those in big metropolitan sees who expected red hats have not got them. Cardinals have been appointed from far and wide, including from places on the peripheries which have never before had a cardinal. Francis has placed an emphasis upon the developing world but also on choosing men who are both pastoral and collegial. For the first time more than half the cardinals are from outside Europe, with 41 per cent from the poor world. That is already likely to have an impact on the balance within the conclave that will elect Francis's successor. 'The Eurocentrism of the past few centuries has definitely come to an end,' declared the Pope's favoured theologian, Cardinal Kasper.

The Pope's changes in revitalizing the Synod of Bishops are perhaps the most far-reaching of his changes, and yet they are to date the least institutionalized. The synod is no longer the rubber-stamping body for policies devised by the Pope and the Curia as it was under Pope John Paul II and, slightly less so, under Benedict XVI. It is a place of genuine debate. Bishops have stopped talking through veiled allusions and it might take them a while to shed that freedom were Francis to be succeeded by a policeman pontiff. But a hardliner would doubtless silence them before too long. 'Unless Francis changes the way bishops are appointed then nothing is reversible,' said Dr Nicholas Lash, Emeritus Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge.

In other areas reform has been so negligible that it makes little sense to talk about whether it might be reversed. Very little progress has been made in

overhauling the Vatican's incorrigible secrecy in handling sex abuse. Reforms on the current and future protection of minors are patchy, with enormous variation from one country to another. In some countries, like Italy, bishops' conferences are dragging their feet disgracefully. There are dark forces within the Curia seeking to block progress on the bringing to book of predator priests and on the disciplining of bishops who persist in covering up such scandals. Francis talked of zero tolerance and then appointed a bishop in Chile whose track record on cover-ups is so controversial that his service of installation was violently disrupted by protestors. On the place of women in the Church there has been talk but almost no action. That is the area in which zero tolerance is most effectively in place.

If the progress which Francis has made is to be locked-in, both the Pope and his cardinal supporters know that institutional changes are needed to ensure that the reforms to date are not reversed by some centralizing successor. The Council of Cardinal Advisers, the C9, needs to be institutionalized in the curial constitution. A less drawn-out and, ironically, less consultative process needs to be imposed to transform the curial court into a modern civil service. Statutes need to be drawn up to ensure that consistories of cardinals are more routine and function like a senate, overseeing the Curia and acting as a revising chamber for legislation from the Synod of Bishops. Pope Francis needs to delegate decision-making powers to the synod, which needs to meet more regularly. The Synod of Bishops should be empowered to supervise and vet all future appointments of personnel to the Curia. Democratic governments around the world offer a variety of models that the C9 could study in pursuit of Pope Francis's overriding ambition that whatever decisions are taken by the Church should be made by a consensus of Catholics – bishops, clergy and laity – all around the world.

Reform-minded cardinals, both conservative and liberal doctrinally, understand what is required. 'If you're going to make change and it's going to stick,' said Cardinal Napier, 'you've got to put structures into place that are going to make those changes follow through regardless of who's in the seat.' The key principle for Pope Francis, said Cardinal Kasper, is that 'he must set in motion a process which is irreversible'. At present, another cardinal close to the Pope told me, 'reform is a bit like the kingdom of God; it is both already here and yet a future promise'. The reform has certainly not passed the point of no return, one member of the Pope's inner circle said. 'There is every chance, given the intensity of the opposition, that the pendulum could swing back. What we need for Francis is another four or five years.'

But will Pope Francis be given the time?

* * *

There were two Swiss Guards by the door of the elevator. The American cardinal said 'Buona sera' as he approached. Pope Francis had asked the cardinal to come up to see him privately after dinner in the Casa Santa Marta. The guards saluted.

'Are you going to see the Holy Father?' one asked. The cardinal nodded. 'Would you mind telling him something? Tell him he's really got to move out of this place; we can't guard him properly here. Will you tell him?' The cardinal said he would and entered the lift. At the second floor the doors opened. Pope Francis was waiting by the doors to greet his guest. As they walked down the corridor to the Pope's room, Francis asked: 'Did the Swiss Guards tell you to tell me to move?' The cardinal looked surprised. The Pope laughed. 'Don't listen,' he said. 'They say that to everyone.'

The guards were not merely hankering after the old ways. There had, after all, been a serious attempt on the life of a previous pope, John Paul II. Noises were made about threats from the Mafia after Pope Francis had taken firm stances against them on several occasions. Most dramatically, on one occasion, he declared that Mafia bosses had excommunicated themselves from the Catholic Church.

Now death threats are being routinely made against Pope Francis by the propaganda outlets of the so-called Islamic State. Its magazine has run a cover photo of the militant group's flag flying above the obelisk in St Peter's Square. The terrorist organization has claimed Francis was 'in the crosshairs of ISIS'. In the video it released of the beheading of the 21 Coptic Christians in Libya it claimed that jihadist forces were now 'south of Rome'. Then it announced that they would one day drop homosexuals from the leaning tower of Pisa. In 2015 it described Italy as 'the nation signed with the blood of the cross'. Vatican security chiefs were treating it all as much more than terrorist bluster. In the run-up to the Pope's trip to the Philippines special forces there had foiled an incipient plot to explode a bomb as the papal motorcade began to move through Manila.

But when security chiefs met him, Pope Francis was calm in his response. 'On the horizon we see shadows and dangers which worry humanity,' he told them. 'As Christians we are called not to lose heart or be discouraged.' His was a ministry of proximity, he said. He needed to be able to touch people and them to touch him. Those around him knew that already. Francis had declined a bulletproof vehicle on his visit to the Holy Land with the words: 'At my age I do not have much to lose'. And in Brazil his head of security had told a reporter that he did not even dare to suggest the pontiff wore a bullet-proof vest. 'He would've fired me!' he joked. At the time the Pope had said: 'I am reckless, but

I am not afraid. Nobody dies before their time comes. When my time comes it will be the will of God.' That was before the threats from the terrorist jihadists began. But those did not change the Bergoglio line. In 2015 he told his old friend, the Buenos Aires slum priest Padre Pepe: 'I have said to the Lord: take care of me. But if your will is that I should die or that they do something to me, I ask you one favour: that they don't hurt me.' And boldly – considering that he knew Padre Pepe was writing it up for the shanty-town's community newspaper *La Cárcova News* – he added: 'I'm a real scaredy cat when it comes to physical pain!' But he was genuinely calm. One of his close friends told me: 'He is distinctively Jesuit. He has already given his life to God; when God takes it is up to the Lord.' That may be a religious truth. But it would be mistake to underestimate Pope Francis's considerable personal bravery.

In any case, other intimations of mortality felt more pressing to the pontiff. Entering the third year of his papacy, in which he would be 79, he told another interviewer: 'I have the feeling that my pontificate will be brief: four or five years; I do not know, even two or three. Two have already passed.' It was not the first time he had hinted at such a thing. The year before he had said, in one of his airborne press conferences, that as Pope: 'I try to think of my sins, my mistakes, not to become proud, because I know it will only last a short time,' before adding, 'Two or three years and then I'll be off to the Father's House.' It was, as so often, hard to know how seriously to take such remarks. Was Francis thinking aloud? Was he floating ideas to see what reaction he would get? Was it part of his wider strategy to wilfully devalue the coinage of papal utterances to make them less imperial and more part of the cut-and-thrust of conversation within the Church? Some commentators even speculated that he was raising the idea to confuse those who were resisting his reforms. If his opponents thought Francis's time as Pope might be limited they might be more tempted to sit back in the hope of riding out the storm and returning to business-as-usual under a pontiff they found more congenial, the argument went. Whereas if the resisters thought he might be around for longer they might be more inclined actively to try to sabotage the Francis reforms now. That sounded very tortuous thinking but then the Vatican has specialized in that kind of behaviour for centuries.

The fact of the matter is that in his late seventies, despite his arthritis and his sciatica, Pope Francis seems amazingly sprightly and very active. His aides repeatedly press him to slow down but he takes no notice. The older he gets, the more in a hurry he appears. And although he praised his predecessor Pope Benedict for setting a modern precedent in resigning – adding, 'Benedict should not be considered an exception, but an institution' – he said he did not approve of the idea of popes resigning at a fixed age, such as 80. That would

make him in the years he approached the fixed retirement deadline a lame duck pope who could be successfully ignored by his opponents. Francis is enjoying himself and is willing to continue so long as God sees fit. 'No resignation on the horizon for the Argentinian Pope,' was the perceptive conclusion of one Veteran Vatican-watcher, Andrea Tornielli of *La Stampa*, after the interview. What is more likely is that Francis is worried he might run out of time before he has completed the tasks he has set himself. According to Marco Politi, author of *Francis among the Wolves*, the Pope had told a Latin American friend at the end of 2014: 'The only thing I ask of the Lord is that the changes for which I am making so many personal sacrifices will not be like a light that goes out.' One of those closest to Francis thinks that if the Pope does sense that time is running out for him he will accelerate the pace of change. Archbishop Victor Manuel Fernández, who wrote the first draft of the Pope's manifesto *Evangelii Gaudium*, said in the middle of 2015: 'The Pope goes slow because he wants to be sure that the changes have a deep impact. The slow pace is necessary to ensure the effectiveness of the changes. He knows there are those hoping that the next pope will turn everything back around. If you go slowly it's more difficult to turn things back … You have to realize that he is aiming at reform that is irreversible. If one day he should intuit that he's running out of time and he doesn't have enough time to do what the Spirit is asking him, you can be sure he will speed up.'

But it would be a mistake to look at the first years of the Francis pontificate and judge it by the mechanics of structural change – or even by the extent it had fulfilled Papa Bergoglio's aspirations for what he might eventually achieve. Pope Francis has already changed something massive in the Catholic Church. It is far more than what business leaders, who have cited the Pope as a model of transformational management, call a fundamental corporate restructuring. It is more even than what the marketing men called 'an extraordinary global rebranding'. Pope Francis has set free a new spirit within the Church and one which establishes a new paradigm of what it means to be a Catholic in the twenty-first century.

'It will be hard to go backwards after Francis's papacy,' wrote Father Richard Rohr, the Franciscan friar and international best-selling spiritual author. 'He has forever changed the Catholic conversation. No-one can ever say a validly elected pope, with all that implies in anyone's mind, did not say the things Francis [has] said. They will be quoted for a long time to come. It is now a part of the authoritative data, like the Gospels themselves, and must be reckoned with.' Many agreed. One senior figure high inside the Vatican told me: 'Bishops have acquired the habit of saying what they think. They have stopped talking in code.' An eminent Rome-based church historian added: 'Differences of opinion

are now not just allowed but encouraged. The next Pope could roll that back but he would not be able entirely to disavow the Francis inheritance.' The Pope's chief theological adviser came to the same conclusion. 'No, there's no turning back,' said Archbishop Victor Manuel Fernández. 'When Francis is no longer pope, his legacy will remain strong. The Pope is convinced that the things he's already written or said cannot be condemned as an error. Therefore, in the future anyone can repeat those things without fear of being sanctioned. And then the majority of the People of God with their special sense will not easily accept turning back on certain things.'

Others were more world-weary. 'That's the triumph of hope over experience, I fear,' wrote that great enthusiast for the Second Vatican Council, John Wilkins, who was for decades editor of *The Tablet*. 'If the Curia could nullify key parts of Vatican II in ten years, they could nullify Pope Francis's legacy in ten days.' Several pessimists quoted to me the words of the great Jesuit historian Fr John O'Malley: 'What's done can be undone.' All that is true up to a point. In the unlikely event of someone like Cardinal Burke becoming the next pope, much would change with a snap of the fingers. Yet even so, something of Francis would linger in the collective Catholic consciousness and the people in the pews would say to themselves: Hang on, didn't we just hear the opposite? 'The great twentieth – century theologian Johann Baptist Metz speaks of something he calls "dangerous memory", said Professor Elizabeth Johnson. 'Even after he has gone Pope Francis's legacy will remain as a dangerous memory for he has shown that it is not disloyal to disagree. He has put a different meaning out there of what it means to be a Catholic in good standing.'

A shift in mind-set has taken place. Pope Benedict proceeded from the premise that a solid theological background is necessary if the Church's pastoral practice is to be correct. By contrast Pope Francis insists that it is possible to set aside theological preoccupations and instead to seek first direct contact with people in need of pastoral care and compassion. Neither approach replaces the other; both are complementary, but Francis's insight had been, until now, too long forgotten.

Francis sees the most formidable challenge for the Church today not as the preservation of unchanging doctrine but as the imitation of Jesus Christ in the changing context of a contemporary world. He is neither conservative nor progressive, but he has adopted an approach that uses a discourse which values tradition and yet moves the conversation forward. The genius of Pope Francis is that he combines tradition and modernity with a freshness of expression that is perfectly suited to the times. He both values the treasury of the past and yet moves beyond it. He has given Catholics and non-Catholics

alike a vision of what the Church might look like, and in which it can thrive, in the modern world. Despite what traditionalists would claim, the Catholic Church throughout its history has adapted to different cultures and countries. But in many ways it retreated into a nostalgic cul-de-sac under popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Pope Francis has re-envisioned it in a form which remains challenging but which gets its message across in a way that connects with contemporary culture. 'Francis has created a new level of expectation for how the Church should go about her work,' said Cardinal Donald Wuerl, the Archbishop of Washington, 'and I don't think you can change that.'

Earlier this year Pope Francis invited a large group of Rome's homeless people on an exclusive private tour of the Vatican Museums and the Sistine Chapel followed by dinner. It was not a publicity stunt – the Pope banned cameras from the event as he arrived to greet the homeless in person. But it embodied the change he has brought to the Catholic Church. It was not the action of a philosopher or a theologian. It was the act of a pastor whose radical change is a change of style, persona and emphasis – and ironically of great substance. It was not the act of a pope who has all the answers but one who knows that the greatest act of a Christian is to be a companion on the journey. He was not, in Richard Rohr's words, telling us *what* to see, so much as teaching us *how* to see – through the eyes of love and mercy.

It has been a journey for Francis too. The man whose first job was as a club bouncer, keeping out the undesirables, has become the gatekeeper of a celestial establishment at whose doors he has declared everyone welcome. After two papacies of philosophically precise rigidity, Pope Francis, in just two years, has legitimized an alternative. No one can say that the only way to be Catholic is to be dour and rules-based. He has shown that another kind of Catholicism is possible. Those who have lived through his papacy will never forget it. Pope Francis has not just demonstrated a different way of being a pope. He has shown the world a different way of being a Catholic. And he has said to people of all faiths, and of none, that in our troubled times the Gospel is indeed good news which – if embraced with mercy and humility and joy – really can make the world a better place.