

CARNEGIE COUNCIL *for Ethics in International Affairs*

Pope Francis Among the Wolves: The Inside Story of a Revolution

Public Affairs

Marco Politi, Julie E. Byrne, Joanne J. Myers

Transcript

Introduction

JOANNE MYERS: Good evening. I'm Joanne Myers, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council, I would like to welcome you all to this Public Affairs program.

We are delighted to be hosting this conversation between internationally renowned Vatican insider Marco Politi and Julie Byrne. I believe you all received a copy of their bios, which will provide you with a sense of their expertise and a familiarity of the subject at hand. Their exchange will be based on Marco's recently published book, entitled *Pope Francis Among the Wolves: The Inside Story of a Revolution*, a title which portends the conversation to follow. His book will be available for you to purchase at the end of the hour today.

Last week, with every step of his [visit](#), citizens in Washington, New York, and Philadelphia were captivated by a most unusual man, a man who personifies moral authority by inspiring us not only with his words, but through his deeds. Who among us can erase the image of Pope Francis riding in a Fiat sandwiched between police escorts in enormous SUVs, traveling the opposite direction on one-way streets? Perhaps a metaphor for what he is trying to achieve in his church.

Yet from the [moment](#) on that day in March 2013 when he first stepped onto the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica and greeted the masses, it was history in the making, not only because he is the first Latin American pope ever chosen to lead the church, nor was it his refusal to wear the red slippers or shun the official Vatican apartments, but after decades of conservative papal vision, his spiritual mission to place the poor at the center has enabled him to change the emphasis in the church.

Through gestures and words, Francis has repeatedly challenged elites inside the church and out. He has attacked an insular Catholic hierarchy for focusing too much on dogma and spiritual worldliness and too little on ordinary people. In projecting a merciful, welcoming tone that had been shattered by clerical sexual abuse scandals, lack of transparency, and one that was identified with theological rigidity, he has inspired many progressives.

But Pope Francis has also angered the conservatives. Some within the church are now asking whether Pope Francis is focusing on issues at the center of Catholic teaching, or has he abandoned core Catholic beliefs to promote a liberal agenda? Many wonder, what is the basis of his moral perspective, and will he succeed in his mission?

For the answers, please join me in giving a very warm welcome to your guests today, Marco Politi

and Julie Byrne. Thank you both so much for joining us.

Discussion

MARCO POLITI: I want just to inform the American citizens that the pope uses a Fiat in New York, but in Rome he rides a Ford Focus. So he balances. [Laughter]

JULIE BYRNE: Thank you for coming, Marco Politi, on the occasion of this book, *Pope Francis Among the Wolves*. It has just been such a pleasure for me, who, like all of us in the room, has been thoroughly "popeified" at this point with Pope Francis's [tour](#) up the East Coast.

To turn to your book and reflect with you on what is really going on, not just in the United States, but Francis as a global figure, who is the head of this Roman Curia and international church, and what he is trying to do, what his challenges are, I wonder if I could take a note from our introduction and just say that one thing that so many observers appreciate is that he is someone who matches actions and words. A critique of religion is often its hypocrisy, but he is someone who puts what he wants to see happen with all humanity into action personally.

If you could first say, how did he get like this? How did he turn into the person—what ethical sources, what influences is he drawing on to do it like he does it?

MARCO POLITI: First of all, it must be said that to see the pope so sure of himself on an international stage has been, after his [election](#), a surprise for many, because as archbishop of Buenos Aires, he wasn't traveling a lot. He almost doesn't speak foreign languages. He speaks Spanish and Italian. He tried hard here in the United States.

But there is one reason for this sense of secureness which he has on the international stage. It comes from the fact that this is the first pope born in a town with millions of inhabitants. The night when he was elected and he went to the balcony, he spoke to the crowd, saying the brethren cardinals "called me from the end of the world." This shows the sense of humor of Pope Francis.

But actually he is not coming from the end of the world. This is the first pope who wasn't born in a village—in a Bavarian village, in an Italian village, in a German village. It makes a great difference if you are born in a little reality where almost all people are Catholic or you are born in a city like Buenos Aires, which has a core of 3 or 4 millions, but the greater Buenos Aires is made up of 14 million inhabitants. He comes from a mega-town where all economical and social situations and layers are present, where there are so many people from different ethnic roots, not only Spanish. There are Italians, Swedes, Germans, Arabs, Russians, Chinese. There is a great variety of religious beliefs and of cultural beliefs. There are Catholics, Protestants, free churches, Jews, Muslims, followers of Asian religions, and a strong anti-clerical Freemasonry tradition.

So this is a man who was born and raised in a global society framework. This explains why when he speaks he doesn't speak only to Catholics, not only to Christians. He speaks beyond religious borders. He speaks to men and women as they are in contemporary society. For instance—he underlined it—he never thought that an atheist, non-believing in God, was a sort of lame duck. He never thinks like that. You have always had other religious personalities, other Catholic thinkers who say if a man or a woman doesn't believe in God, there is something less to this personality. But for Pope Francis, as he was raised in this framework, this makes him capable to speak to the global society today.

Of course, this also helps him to be present at the crossroads of the great problems of modern

society. When he speaks about inequality, when he speaks about the cry of the excluded, of the marginalized, of the outcast, it is not something he has learned reading a report which was given to him by some secretary. It is not something he has read in newspapers or seen on TV.

When he became archbishop, he left not only the residence of the Argentine bishops; he decided to live at the last stall of the curia in a small apartment. Already there, he chose a very simple life. He renounced the chauffeur and he renounced the car. He used day by day only the metro and the bus, and he went every week to these shantytowns, to these slums, which are around Buenos Aires, and which are really towns of 40,000, 50,000, 60,000 people, full of violence, full of solidarity, full of a sense of religiousness, but also places where there are drug dealers, where there are feuds between clans, where houses are burned in clashes, where boys come to their parish priest and hug him, but at the same time they have a gun in their jacket, and where there are sometimes very, very tough and inhuman conditions.

One family—I heard it from one parish priest—adopted a young girl from these slums and then, later on at school, they saw from the drawings this girl was making that she had been present at the abortion of one of the members of her family and that the fetus had been thrown to the dogs in the street.

This makes it why Pope Francis, speaking to the [U.S. Congress](#) or to the [UN Assembly](#), when he says that there are great social issues, he always underlines that they are not abstract issues. It's about men and women, real men and real women, who are living, striving, and suffering.

JULIE BYRNE: It is really noticeable, for example, that he is a man of the city and a man close to the people, when, for example, positions on immigration come to the fore and you see that he does feel it personally. His parents were immigrants. He has been talking with immigrants personally. Maybe you could say something about how he has moved the conversation about the moral dimensions of some of these international issues, like the need to be welcoming to the immigrant or to take care of the earth, in his *Laudato si'*.

MARCO POLITI: It is certainly noticeable that the way Pope Francis came to the United States—he didn't come to teach lessons. This shows also the complex personality of Pope Francis. Pope Francis is a man of prayer. At the same time, he has a political mind. He is very simple when he speaks, but he is not a simpleton.

When he came to the White House, he said, "I'm here like a brother," and then, "I'm here like the son of immigrants," remembering and reminding how this great nation has been built by different and various waves of immigrants.

Francis especially wants to remind us that today the issue of a great wave of millions of people moving from one country to another, from the poorest country to the First World, to the Northern Hemisphere, is not a detail. It is a historical moment in which these people, either because of wars or because of misery, are trying to build a better life. What is important for him is to remind people that one must not make as if things were in order—this is one of his sentences—because one could overlook things and say things are okay or everybody will try his way. He wants to underline that there are great social issues of real inequality which have to be solved. He doesn't think that it is up to the church to give recipes. It is up to the citizens. It is up to the political leadership. But it is up to the voters and to the political leadership to cope with these problems, not to close their eyes, and to give answers.

In the same time, for instance, when he has written his [encyclical about climate change](#), about

ecology, he didn't do it from an ideological point of view. But he thinks, as he has said repeatedly, that deterioration of the environment has social effects, has a social impact. If there is, for instance, a desertification in some parts of the world, this will urge people to move because they can't do agriculture in any way. If there is pollution, this has a social impact.

Yesterday I opened *The New York Times* and there was an [article](#) about Jakarta in Indonesia, about the smog pollution in Jakarta. It was written that 58 percent of the illnesses in Jakarta come from the pollution, come from the smog effect.

In this encyclical, what is interesting is that it is the first time that the pope doesn't have a point of departure, with dogma or doctrine, [from science] and isn't trying to teach the scientists what to do, like it was with [Galileo Galilei](#). But it is just the other way around. It is the first time a pope bases a reflection on scientific studies and then says how you have to act morally, how a Christian has to act following the [Gospel](#) and following the main principle, "Love your neighbor," and do something against the deterioration which, as he has told to the UN Assembly, produces a relentless marginalization.

JULIE BYRNE: It strikes me that he is someone who is so idealistic on a certain front, at least constantly exhorting everyone to an attitude of hope, and yet he is a canny politician, as you say, and he is very pragmatic. One thing that struck me so in his talking to the U.S. Congress, perhaps the biggest takeaway for me, was his saying we can't let things devolve into simple reductionism. We cannot think it is all black and white, one way or the other always, and to resist fundamentalisms of every kind. For that to be his message to the very divided U.S. Congress, of course, was pointed. But it is an emblem of his pragmatism, working through the complication, being a complicated man himself, but encouraging others to take complicated approaches, nuanced approaches, too.

MARCO POLITI: Certainly he is not an idealistic personality. He speaks of values. He wants to be, as all the popes, a voice of conscience and a moment of reflection, of meditation about the issues. He is very realistic, because this was his experience as archbishop in Buenos Aires.

But at the same time, he is fully aware that one of the dangers of the present sociopolitical situation is fundamentalism. As he said very clearly, first of all, this danger is present in all religions. He didn't hide this fact—in all religions. He means it beginning from his own religion. There can be fundamentalism in the Catholic religion, Christian religion, Jewish, Muslim religions. We have seen even in Buddhist countries, where it should be unthinkable that there is a fundamentalism, like in Burma, Myanmar—we have seen all of a sudden in the last years that there is an [explosion of fundamentalism](#). In the last 20 years, we have seen an explosion of fundamentalism in India, for instance, when never in the Indian culture, which was so polytheistic, there was an idea of fundamentalism, and now you have it.

So for the pope, political, religious, also economical fundamentalism is a great danger. This means that he always urges us not to think in stereotypes. He himself must not be seen in stereotype. For instance, people see him always smiling and his great contact with the people. But he wasn't so in Buenos Aires. He had to learn to be more open to the crowds. In Buenos Aires, if you see the pictures, you almost cannot find a picture where he is smiling, because he has also an introverted nature, a meditative nature.

He was in Germany for a couple of months studying after his failure as superior general of the Jesuits. This also was important in his formation. He has told it auto-critically, and he has told it when he was pope. Generally, if you get a higher position, you try to hide the dark or the gray pages of

your biography. He did just the opposite. When he became pope, he gave an interview to all the Jesuit magazines all over the world, and he said that when he was superior general, he had been too authoritarian and that later on he had understood that it is a fault to be authoritarian. Now he says, "When I have to take a decision, I don't take the first decision which comes in my mind, but I stay a little bit longer, I listen to people, and then I take a decision."

So to say, he has a complicated nature. Tangentially, he has also an introverted nature. It is very interesting to see him when he celebrates mass in the morning in the guesthouse of the Vatican, the guesthouse Santa Marta.

Everybody knows he left the papal apartments, not because the papal apartments are especially luxurious, but he didn't want to live in a sort of ivory tower, where nobody has access and where it becomes dangerous that somebody, maybe your secretary, decides who has access or not to the pope. So he said, "For me, it's important to stay with the people." He said, "It's also a psychiatric issue. I need to be among the people." He stays in this guesthouse, which is like a normal hotel. There is a normal restaurant. In the evening—there is self-service—he goes with his tray and takes his things.

The Argentine friends, of course, make a joke. They say he stays there so he can't be poisoned, because he eats with the other people.

For him, it is important to stay with the people. And when he says mass in the morning, there are, during the celebration, long moments of silence, of meditation. Even after the mass, he comes among the believers, which are a group of 30, 40 people generally from parishes, and then he kneels again and stays in silence. He needs this dimension of silence.

When he was in Germany, he brought back from Germany a picture of a Madonna, of the [Virgin Mary](#), from south Germany, which is the [Virgin of the Knots](#), who is untangling the knots. This means that he knows that life is full of knots and that it is necessary, with delicacy, to untangle the knots.

One of the German poets he likes especially is the poet [Hölderlin](#), who wrote many beautiful poems, but one is especially important because it is a poem dedicated to the destiny of the human beings. It begins, how the gods, Greek gods, live well in the sky and they are like babies who have no preoccupations, no concerns at all. But we human beings are like the water of a waterfall who are falling down and down for always, for all the years.

So he has also a pessimistic comprehension of things. And when he speaks even about the devil, some people were laughing—what, is he coming? He is so pragmatic, he speaks contemporary language, but from time to time, he quotes the devil. This means that he wants to remember that one is not to have too much optimism, because in human history and in human nature there can be a dark side of something beastly, of something of an animal, who is cruel, who makes bad things, and it is necessary also to think about that.

JULIE BYRNE: Another amazing moment here in New York was the [interfaith service](#) at the museum and memorial for 9/11, and to watch Pope Francis very comfortable in, as you were describing in Buenos Aires, an interfaith context. That is new for popes, who have been ecumenical before, but perhaps not welcoming Buddhists or Sikhs or the whole panoply into their midst. He was very comfortable. To the right and to the left were a [rabbi](#) and an [imam](#), and that was, of course, symbolic of these three [Abrahamic faiths](#) very close to the pope's heart and, of course, symbolic of some things he is trying to do internationally as well. Perhaps you could speak to what he is trying to do as regards [Israel-Palestine](#), what he is trying to do as regards the specter of a group like [ISIS](#)

[Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/the Levant, ISIL].

MARCO POLITI: I too was very impressed by the Ground Zero memorial ceremony, which began with this embracing of the rabbi and the Muslim imam, but then also with the other voices of the other religions. For Pope Francis, this is something very normal. When he went to the Holy Land, he brought with him a rabbi from Buenos Aires and a Muslim leader from Buenos Aires too. He brought them.

But you are a sophisticated audience. It is important to notice the nuance. He brought two friends of his from the two religions also because he wanted to say, "Now that I come at the very difficult crossroad"—and we know that the [chief rabbis](#) of Israel and the [grand mufti](#) of Jerusalem are not in a good relationship. It was to say, "I don't want to be involved in your quarrels, but I want to remind you that I have an old friendship and relationship to the Abrahamic religions."

It must be said that looking at this ceremony at the Ground Zero Memorial, one can also understand that there are echoes from previous popes in what Francis is doing. Francis, for instance, on the international policy scene, is going on the footsteps of [John Paul II](#). John Paul II was a very strong presence on the global scene.

Also in interfaith issues, John Paul II was the first who, in 1986, in the town of Assisi, organized the first great [interfaith prayer meeting](#). This brought up opposition in a part of the Roman Curia, also with the chief of the congregation for the faith, Cardinal [Ratzinger](#), who would become later Pope Benedict. They didn't like it. They said, "But that is a sort of tutti-frutti, that we don't know who is the right God and not the right God." But Wojtyla, John Paul II, gave the example of a great respect, not wanting to level every religious belief, but showing that every human being and culture has its own way to God, and this must be respected. The Catholic church has to respect everybody's own way to God.

Certainly the great ceremony—to see in Assisi so many people praying together. It was the first time that there were also Native Americans and these little religions, which in the past were called only paganism, if you look at the words. There has been also a change of the words. This has been one of the great achievements of John Paul II.

So Francis is reviving this tradition strongly. Pope Benedict was always a little bit suspicious vis-à-vis these celebrations. He is reviving this tradition and he is reviving also the strong presence of the Holy See on the international scene.

Few commentators have noticed that in his UN speech, he was speaking also about the issue of the so-called Islamic State jihadist caliphate. He didn't mention it, but it is always necessary, especially in the Vatican world, to read every line with attention, and often also between the lines. He was saying, when in front with regard to all these atrocities against minorities, ethnic and religious minorities—here again is something specific to Francis. Of course, he has to defend the persecuted Christians, but he doesn't make out of it only a defense of Christians. He has always said, since the beginning of the [slaughter in Syria](#) or in other places, that one has to care about all the minorities, because everybody is a son or daughter of God. Every human being is a son or daughter of God.

In his speech to the UN, he said it is necessary that there is an international action against those who commit these atrocities. But he also reminded them that we have seen that if one nation wanted to act one-sidedly, it had negative effects. This is very delicate, this is very nuanced, but it was a reference to the [Iraq invasion](#), in order to say you can't solve these problems with your own coalition of the willing. You have to sit together with China, with Russia, with all the powers who are involved

in the region if you want to cope with this problem.

In these days, we are seeing [Russia is intervening in Syria](#). The [United States](#) had already intervened. You see every time it is not possible in the Vatican policy view that if I intervene, it is okay; if the other intervenes, it is not okay. So it is necessary—this is a strategy of the Holy See for the last 50 years; one can say very clearly since [Paul VI](#), for instance, that you have to take a common action if you want to cope with these problems.

Pope Francis is very alarmed by what he calls "the third world war in bits and pieces." All these hotspots where things happen—Syria, the Middle East, Africa, [Yemen](#), some parts of Asia—you cannot say anymore that they are local conflicts. They are a third world war in bits and pieces. The pope urges also to think, what is behind this? It is not enough only to say there is terrorism or there are atrocities, but who pays them? To whom do they sell their oil? Where did they get financing? Why are there, for instance, 30,000 people from Europe and from the United States who are going—they leave these countries, also my country, Italy, and then they go with these jihadist terrorists. Why are they going?

So it is important also to ask questions and not only to be simplistic and say this is only a caliphate we must stop. No. In order to stop it, you need a common action, and you have to ask yourself, as political leadership, a lot of questions, which generally are overlooked.

JULIE BYRNE: He was very complimentary of the UN when he was describing all that the UN has accomplished in common action. He is also someone who was devastating in his critique of the bureaucracy: "Let us not always just be forming the next committee and writing the next study. There must be action."

What do you make of his own position as someone who wants so much to advance what you call a program for revolution in the church, in the probably short time that he has to him, and yet is the head of a multinational conglomerate himself that is famous for hierarchy, for pronouncements, for red tape?

MARCO POLITI: Yes, he makes the same critical remarks also to his priests and to his bishops. He says, "You must not only put up programs or just write statistics to see whether one program went well and the other maybe could be improved." He wants action and he wants everybody to be a real witness of the Gospel, as he is a religious leader.

Of course, he has a tough program of change. Somebody told me in this trip, in these conversations, maybe it is too broad a program, because he is not concentrating only on one issue. This pope wants to reshape the papacy. The papacy must not be an imperial monarchic papacy anymore. The church must be more communitarian; the Catholic Church must be more communitarian, must be more participatory. He wants to implement a great principle of the [Second Vatican Council](#), which was the principle of collegiality. Collegiality means that the bishops are not local governors or prefects of the church and the pope is like the emperor who gives orders, but, as the Second Vatican Council said, the bishops are the descendants of the apostles. The church has to be led by [Peter](#) and by the [apostles](#), by the pope with the bishops. The bishops represent the local churches. The bishops should represent all the variety of this multinational reality of more than 1.2 billion believers and followers.

For instance, this is a hard task, because the Roman Curia and the self-comprehension of papacy for many Catholics, for many parts of the clergy, for the bishops and the majority of the cardinals has been built up over centuries as a very strong centralized system of command. The Curia is the high

chief of the staff of an army who commands.

The pope wants to change this. He wants to change it because he understands that maybe if a foreign leader comes to the Vatican he is impressed, of course, by [Michelangelo](#), by these beautiful rooms, also by the moral leadership of the popes, but modern society, especially the youth, wants the Gospel more, is no more fascinated only by the strength of an ideology, by this icon of the almighty pope. So he wants to reshape in this sense the Catholic Church to make it more participatory.

This means, for instance, that he has begun to give the Synod of the Bishops—you could say, in a secular way, the parliament of the bishops—who come together every two years to discuss an issue proposed by the pope, a real power of making proposals to solve hot issues of Catholicism in today's society. In the past 40 years, these synods were like a sort of academic symposium, where every bishop, every delegate was speaking for three, five minutes, and at the end, the pope, after one year—every pope—was writing a document for his own, sometimes also saying the opposite of what had been said by the others.

There is a very precise example. In the year 1980—it was still the years when the bishops were coming from the great experience of the Second Vatican Council, so they were more free and they were more brave, one could say—the great majority of the synod, discussing the issues of family, proposed to the pope, then John Paul II, to study the practice of the orthodox churches. You know, in orthodox churches, you can remarry two or three times.

The chief of the congregation of faith in those times was Cardinal Ratzinger. The pope was John Paul II. They didn't absolutely take into account this desire of the representatives of the universal church, and after a year, Pope John Paul II wrote a document saying it is absolutely impossible to give the communion to remarried, divorced people, and it is absolutely impossible to give any kind of blessing to gay partnerships.

This time, the pope wants to empower the bishops to make proposals to solve this problem. But as this is a typical revolution from above, it is the emperor who gives freedom to the representatives of his organization. It may happen, as it happened last October in the first session of the synod, that the majority of the people who are afraid of the changes or who are against the changes or who are too doctrinarian or who are conservatives will stop this movement.

In this moment, there is a great fight within the church between the reform-minded bishops and cardinals, and the pope, and a strong core of conservatives. At the eve of this [synod](#), which will begin Sunday, there has been a great mobilization of the conservatives. Eleven cardinals have written a book saying that it is impossible to change the doctrine. Four hundred signatures have been collected by believers, by priests. There are 100 bishops who have signed this petition to the pope, to say, no, don't make any changes. Tomorrow there will be a great international conference in Rome in order to say there must not be a change.

This means that the pope is really in a very difficult situation. After all the applause he has gotten here and in other parts of the world and in Rome every Sunday, he is rather alone in the Roman Curia; he is in the minority. Of course, the Roman Curia must not be stereotyped. There are some who are reform-minded. But in general, the pope is still a minority within the structure, within the apparatus of this great organization, of this great multinational organization.

For six years I was a correspondent in Moscow. It was a moment when I didn't deal with the Vatican. I could understand the Kremlin well because I knew the Vatican, and when I came back, I

understood the Vatican even better after having lived around the Kremlin. [Laughter]

There is something which reminds me of the story of [Gorbachev](#). He was trying to democratize a huge apparatus, but when he gave freedom to this apparatus, in the first moment, the majority was against him and he was [ousted](#). Then finally, anyway, the conservatives couldn't block the change, the [historic change](#), and Russia went with [Yeltsin](#) to become a democratic state, or a half-democratic state—anyway, overcoming the old totalitarianism.

Something like that is happening also now. The conservatives are very aggressive, for many reasons. There are conservatives in absolute good faith. They fear what they call also a "Protestantization" of the church. They think that one has to stick to old doctrine, to old tradition. They don't understand that the contemporary society needs less power rituals and less aird declarations, and needs more witnesses—what the pope calls the church has to be a field hospital, someone who helps the wounded of the society, not even looking at if they are Catholics or non-Catholics.

So these conservatives are very aggressive. You can see it very much on the Internet. There are little splinter groups which now are fueled by cardinals and bishops—I repeat, not only in Rome; all over the world, in the universal church, in the United States. And these websites are very aggressive against the pope. They say that he is diminishing the sacrality of the papacy, that he is diminishing the primacy of the pope, because the pope must be the absolute ruler of Catholicism. They blame him for speaking too much about poverty. They say it is pauperism, that he is a demagogue, that he speaks only like the crowd wants, that he is too much of a feminist. Imagine.

So there is a very aggressive wave against the pope—also because the pope, in his long agenda, for instance, wants the bishops to be less Renaissance princes, as he says, less bureaucrats, but more living with the flock, living with the people. He wants the priests not to be only functionaries, people who are staff. He wants them not to be narcissists, not to be self-centered, but to live with the sheep, as he says. He always says that the shepherd has to smell like the sheep. He has also said that sometimes the shepherd must be at the avant-garde of the flock, to lead the way, sometimes in the middle to hold it together, but sometimes also he has to lead the flock to go forwards, because the flock—this means the lay people, lay believers—maybe have a better sense of where to go.

When he touches all these issues, when he says, for instance, that women have to go in places where they decide or exert authority—it doesn't mean ordination for women, but it means that in the organization of the church, the women must have leadership, something which is abhorred by the macho-style old guard, who fear women in such a position—or when he makes a great cleanup of the Vatican bank or when he is very strong against corruption, then there is the opposition of the old guard.

Questions

QUESTION: I am Edith Everett.

I can't thank you enough for that extraordinary insight. I learned so much in this short period of time. Thank you very much.

My question is, how does the fact that the pope is a Jesuit impact his view of the world?

MARCO POLITI: Certainly the fact that he is a Jesuit was important in his formation. It is part of the Jesuit tradition to be at the difficult borders of the histories. Jesuits were extraordinary missionaries

also, trying to understand different cultures. Remember, for instance, the missions in Paraguay —there was this beautiful film *The Mission* here in the States—where they tried to form communities of South American indigenous people who could be organized by themselves, being Christian, being artists. This was destroyed by the Spanish kings, this experience, because it was too democratic; it was too much autonomy. Jesuits are on the borders of culture. Jesuits have had great scientists.

Jesuits, of course, in the 19th century were also very supportive of the absolutist conservative view of Pope Pius IX, who wanted the infallibility to be declared and who succeeded in this reactionary project. So Jesuits have been on both sides of the barricade during history.

But it is part of the Jesuit tradition to think, to reflect. It is also part of a Jesuit tradition to have a way of leading the order of the Jesuits, which has two aspects. One is a democratic aspect. There is a council around the superior general. The superior general must discuss with this council and to listen to what they tell. They are people from all over the world. But then the final decision is of the superior general.

This is something that Pope Francis has implemented in the Vatican because he has formed a crown council, we could say, of eight cardinals, coming from all parts of the world. What is interesting is that these cardinals are not friends of Francis, all same-minded as Francis. They are from different trends and opinions. There are reform-minded, like Cardinal O'Malley of Boston or Maradiaga in Honduras. They are strict conservatives, like Cardinal Pell from Australia. There are cardinals, we could say, from the center, chosen by Pope Ratzinger, like the German cardinal, Marx. The pope wants to be inclusive.

People in the Vatican, his supporters also, are critical of him because they say that he is too inclusive, that he has not formed and built up his staff in the Vatican. He has hired only a few cardinals, two or three, not much. Some people who support him say that he is too generous, too mild, that he should form his staff, his group, and put them in key positions in the Vatican.

Another critical aspect is that, they say, he should not also give an influence with his words, but he should begin also to write instructions and rules in order to say to all the church "now you have to do so-and-so." He wants to give more of an example. He is like a sower. Maybe he knows that he will not reap the harvest. But some of his supporters say that this is a fault, that this is an error. They would like him to write instructions and to build his staff.

QUESTION: Good evening, *buona sera*. *Benvenuto a Carnegie Council*.

What you have described within the Vatican seems to be the common thread that flows from the beginning of the Holy See up until the present. It seems there has always been some conflict. There has been intrigue. I have read so much of the history of the Vatican. This seems to be par for the course, if you want to put it that way.

But what I would like very much to know is, they knew what his history was, what his attitude towards the poor was, what his focus on simplicity was, and with this very conservative wing within the Holy See, how did he get elected? I would love to know what the machinations were, what the politics of it was. I wonder if you are privy to that information. I think it would be fascinating to know.

But I also want to thank you for a really exquisite presentation. Thank you very much.

MARCO POLITI: Thank you. You will read just this described well in the pages of my book, when I tell how Ratzinger was really brave and farsighted in *resigning*. It was not an act of weakness. Of

course he was old, but he was also emphasizing that the popes must be capable to rule the church in connection with the rapid change of the times. This was very interesting, this nuance. A pope cannot be anymore like in the Middle Ages, somebody who is maybe very old and lives in the Vatican and somebody else is ruling the church.

Benedict was in that moment putting forth a very important issue. Nowadays, in the 21st century, the pope cannot be an icon. He must always be the real leader. If he feels that the moment has come that he cannot be the real leader, then he must give the voice to the voters. And who are the voters? The cardinals who have to elect a pope.

No, the cardinals didn't know exactly that Francis was so revolutionary. This happens in the history of the church, for two reasons. First of all, I wouldn't like to depict the Roman Curia as a permanent center of intrigue and of conflicts. This would be false. This would be just simplistic. The Roman Curia is a world with very different personalities, with great nuances, which is very effective also in ruling. They have much less staff than the United Nations, and they are very competent in ruling. But, of course, there are also many differences of vision, of attitudes.

Conflict is part of the history of the church. Conflict is nothing special. Conflict is part of the history of the church every time when you want to make changes. If you don't make changes, generally there is no conflict, because there is a routine. But every time the church has to make changes—let's also think, in medieval times, the great [Gregorian Reform](#), or after the [Lutheran reform](#), the so-called [Catholic reform](#). There were many conflicts within the church, how to make the church able to go further in the new time. So conflict is part of the history of the church. The Second Vatican Council was a period of great conflict, of discussions, of opposing petitions, of compromises, of negotiations.

The majority of the cardinals, after the resigning of Cardinal Ratzinger, felt that it was time to turn the page. The papacy of Ratzinger, of Pope Benedict, was, one could say, the last attempt to halt history, to say, let's stick to tradition, let's stick to doctrine, let's stick to mysticism, even if also Benedict is a very complex personality, a highly intellectual personality, a good preacher.

He had a great success in the United States, as in other countries, don't forget. Newspapers were full of praise for Ratzinger when [he came here](#) in 2008. People tend to forget it. He makes good speeches, because he is a great intellectual—also in Germany and in France. He made a fantastic speech in Paris about the monks in the Middle Ages and the building of Christian culture. Great personalities.

But the papacy of Ratzinger was a last attempt to stop history—like a movie when you stop it—and to stick to tradition, to stick to doctrine, and to stick to a certain way of mysticism.

But in the first moment, the majority of the cardinals were very disoriented. What to choose? A part of them wanted to choose the cardinal of Milan, Cardinal [Scola](#), who was, let's say, from the same line of Ratzinger, but who had a great temperament as manager, as ruler, as governor. Others wanted maybe to have some personality of Europe and still more of the Ratzinger type. But there were cardinals who felt that it was necessary to make a great change. One of the options was the South American cardinal of São Paulo in Brazil, Cardinal [Scherer](#). But he was too much connected with the former secretary of state.

Here you have, for instance, a great play of politics. You make a great change, but a part of the old ruling class still has its newcomers, like Scherer.

But the majority felt that one had not to choose a man from the Curia, a man from Italy, a man from

Europe. It was time to go to the New World, even the most European-like New World/Third World as Latin America.

What did they know about Francis? They knew that he was a man of prayer, that he was very socially engaged, and that he was a very good archbishop. They knew that he was ready, as the cardinal asked, to clean up the Vatican bank. They knew that he thought that the pope in Rome, whoever it would be, should have more contacts with the bishops all over the world. They knew that he could be ready to make a reform of the Curia to make it a little bit more slim.

They didn't know that he had such a revolutionary program, that he wanted to reshape the church. He had never spoken so much about women, about gays, about giving the communion. He gave the communion in his archdiocese—a lot of priests were giving the communion to remarried and to divorced people, but he didn't make a manifesto out of it. He never gave special roles to women, for instance. This is something new afterwards, when he became pope.

He had made a great cleanup in the finances in the Curia of Buenos Aires, but all this which is part of his project of reshaping the church, of overcoming the imperial character, an apparatus which is so hierarchical, this they didn't know. They didn't know that he would say that in the Curia there was spiritual Alzheimer's or too much narcissism. They didn't know that he would say to the priests not to have so much vanity.

So these are surprises of the conclave. We have another great example in history. People who elected [John XXIII](#) wanted a pope who should be more pastoral, less theocratic than Pius XII, less authoritarian. They thought, "John XXIII is a pastor. He is a good man with a great heart." They didn't expect that after three months he would call in the Second Vatican Council. They didn't expect that he would give the bishops of the world the freedom to decide the agenda of the Vatican. They didn't expect that he would give the bishops the right to put aside all the documents which had already been prepared by the Curia for the Second Vatican Council. Also there you had the surprise of a leader who is only partially known by his constituency and who, in the moment when he is free to be the leader, gives a lot of surprises.

Today you can say that there are cardinals who wouldn't vote for him again, also in the States.

JOANNE MYERS: We will vote for you time and time again. Thank you for such a wonderful gift of your presentation.

Audio

Francis is the first pope who wasn't born in a village, says Vatican expert Marco Politi, but in a mega-city with many social-economic levels and faiths. "This explains why when he speaks he doesn't speak only to Catholics, not only to Christians. He speaks beyond religious borders. He speaks to men and women as they are in contemporary society."

Video Clips

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