

Five Years of Pope Francis: The Catholic Church in the Modern World

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Adam Ward

Okay, good afternoon, everybody. It's a real pleasure to welcome Massimo Franco to Chatham House. I've had the pleasure of knowing Massimo for 15 or 16 years now, I think it is. Massimo once wrote a book, which had the title, *Parallel Empires*. It was a diplomatic history of US-Vatican relations, but sometimes I think that the term 'parallel empires' encapsulates your career quite well. Because on the one hand, Massimo's one of Italy's foremost political commentators with a column in the *Corriere della Sera* newspaper, which I think would be described as Italy's journal of record. He's the author of a seminal biography of three-time former Prime Minister Andreotti, and he frequently appears on Italian television as a cross-examiner, or perhaps I should say a grand inquisitor of the likes of Matteo Renzi and other prominent figures.

But on the other hand, Massimo has sustained a career as a very distinguished author on the Catholic Church, bringing his political and historical perspectives and analysis to bear on the inner workings on the power structures and struggles, as well as the policy dilemmas of successive papacies and the wider Vatican system. I think he's also a coiner of the term 'georeligion' to describe the way in which religious forces are finding geopolitical expression, and also a way of describing the, kind of, diplomacy being pursued by the Vatican.

I should note that Massimo was recently in the news for receiving a letter from America's Pope Benedict XVI in which he was thanking Massimo and his readers for their interest in his health, but at the same time, making it pretty clear that he regarded himself as very close to the end of his life. And as that page turns, in a way so does another, because it's now five years since the beginning of the current papacy, which began with a, kind of, burst of freshness and energy, but has progressively encountered increasing turbulence. So, I'm very pleased that Massimo is here to describe that turbulence to us and to project a little bit into the future, the shape, the priorities and the dimensions of this papacy.

Massimo's going to speak for 15 or 20 minutes or so, and then we'll have questions and comments from you. This is all on the record. Do turn your phones to silent, if you wouldn't mind. So, Massimo, welcome again and over to you. Thank you.

Massimo Franco

Thanks, Adam, thanks to Chatham House. I'll try not to be too long and not to annoy you too much. Of course, for me, it's a great occasion to discuss and to think myself as well about the Pope and about the perspective of the church, and I would say that although five years are nothing in the history of the church, for this papacy, five years is important because this Pope was a trauma – he provoke a trauma and was elected after the trauma of the resignation of Benedict XVI. And I would say that he created many expectations and fears because of the novelty of being a Latin American and a Jesuit. But let me say that after five years, I would say that his revolutionary approach is almost over.

Recently, when he was asked about the reform of the Vatican, Pope Francis said, "Cleaning the Vatican is like polishing the Egyptian Sphinx with a toothbrush." So, it means that – it was a confirmation of his powerlessness about the reform of the church, so it means that many of the things we had predicted, and somebody had hoped and maybe he had – somebody else had feared, are over.

We must think that we live in a, sort of, rosy picture of this papacy because his popularity tends to be like a bubble in which all the problems of the church are veiled or even hidden, but actually, in the Vatican and in the Catholic Church all over the world, problems are huge, and this pontificate has not been able to

solve them. We must consider that at the very beginning this Pope said that the church was like a field hospital. There had been the resignation after 700 of the Pope, there were huge problems inside the Vatican, scandals, manoeuvres, but after five years what is quite striking is that we are still in a field hospital, which is paradoxical, and it speaks volume about the difficulties of this Pope. After five years – I always make the comparison with an earthquake. Of course, when there is an earthquake, you have to have tents, provisional shelters, after five years you want houses, you want a real hospital. This Pope is still with a field hospital and people are frustrated; people think that they should have more certainties about the future.

This is something we must consider also, about his international strategy. This Pope comes from Latin America. The fact that he has Italian roots must not be overvalued. Bergoglio is an American. He looks at the Vatican as a rotten place to be radically reformed or even to get rid of. When he came to Italy for the conclave, one of his parishes told him, “Bishop, you are going to Rome, please bring with you a dog to make it taste your meals, so that they don’t kill you.” So, that was the environment in which he arrived in Rome, and the conclave was the same. It was a conclave with a very strong anti-Italian and I would say, anti-European as well, approach and in fact, it was won by the Americas. But equally, by Latin Americans who viewed this conclave as an occasion to re-Christianise Europe. The paradox was that in the past, Europe was evangelising South America, with this conclave it happened exactly the opposite.

Second, from the strategic point of view, his election meant that there wasn’t any more a South – a West/East divide from which this Pope was looking at the world. He was looking at the world from the South of the world, so he refused the logics of the Cold War. He refused all the mental habits of politics to which the West was accustomed, and that mattered a lot in the first two years or so of his papacy because we can explain his capability to be a mediator between the United States and Cuba because of his origin, Latin American not a Westerner. And the fact that for instance, about Russia and Crimea, he was accepted by Putin as an objective ally, that was because he was South American who refused the logics of the Cold War.

We must notice that after the annexation by the Russians of a part of Crimea, the Vatican, the Pope particularly, never labelled Putin as an aggressor because Putin is an objective ally, both in Syria for Christian minorities, and in that part of Russia, of former Soviet Union. Why? Because the Pope and the Vatican diplomacy fears that if there is a new Cold War, a political Cold War, it might turn into a religious Cold War between Orthodox and Catholics, while they want a détente with the Orthodox Church. And that is the same reason for which the Pope has a growing relation with China. It’s quite an asymmetrical one because China is stronger. They say in the Vatican that China has the grip of the knife and every time the Vatican approach, it takes the blade and it bleeds. But they want to have an agreement with China because they think that it’s one of the last occasions to open the door of China. Of course, it will be at a high price within the Catholic Church as well.

This make us understand that with the West, the situation is more controversial. The United States is not today, an ally. To the Pope, with Trump relations are very tense, as you can imagine, but I would say that they are quite tense with a part of the American episcopate as well, because I think that they don’t agree on some possible doctrinal openings of this Pope.

American Bishops are, in general, cultural warriors. They have spent lots of years fighting Obama’s laws, fighting Hilary Clinton’s secular approach, so they are a bit disoriented. But what I think is the most thorny problem for the Pope is the Vatican. I think that inside the Vatican the Pope has lost his fight. Both economic reforms and the reform of the Curia are not going ahead anymore. I would say that they are bouncing back.

He decided to live in this Casa Santa Marta Hotel, which is a hotel created by John Paul II to host Cardinals during the conclaves, but when there are no conclaves, it's used as a hotel for people very close to the Vatican. He decided this, he said, for psychological problems. I think that he knew that in the Apostolic Palace, there had been so many bad things, during the last years of Benedict XVI's tenure, so he wanted to shape by himself his agenda and to avoid new manoeuvres and to prevent other people from deciding what he wanted to do. But eventually, I must say that the Santa Marta system didn't work because an informal court, *de facto*, was created and the Pope is realising more and more that people getting his ear don't give to him accurate informations and time-by-time, even not true informations. That is explaining why, for instance, the Pope had this very bad setback in Chile about sex abuse scandals because he was ill-informed about what was going on in that country and he was forced to apologise to the victims after a rebuke, an official rebuke, by the Archbishop of Boston, and Patrick O'Malley. So, it means that something is not working anymore.

And overall, about the economic reform, what is quite striking is that in the last year or so, we have seen the firing of all the reformers that the Pope himself had appointed. So, one after the other they were fired and what is quite strange is that the Pope usually delivers his speech at the end of the year, a Christmas speech to the Curia. It has been traditionally a speech with very tough accusations against the Curia. The novelty this year was that, of course, there were the usual accusations against the Curia, but there were as well very, very strong remarks against the reformers who reacted, in his view, vocally when they were delicately sent away.

This adverb 'delicately', in my view, was a bit exaggerated because, for instance, about this General Supervisor, the Financial Supervisor of the Vatican, Libero Milone, he was fired in last June and an official communique said – statement say that he had resigned, in accordance with the Vatican. After three months, he made an interview to our newspaper in which he say that he had resigned because he had been forced, under threat of arrest, for wrongdoing.

The paradox is that no trial has been opened so far, as far as I know, against him. So, there is something, which means a lack of transparency, even with this Pope, which is quite worrying. And the last novelty was that just last week, and one of the most respected member of the Board of the IOR the Società Italian – Vatican Bank, Mary Ann Glendon, who was the former Ambassador of the US to the Holy See, she resign abruptly. And probably because there are still tensions inside the IOR, and there is a strong opposition to the Director General Mammi, who has been appointed personally by the Pope. Some say he was imposed by the Pope.

So, now we are again, in a field hospital, but with more confusion and more divisions maybe than in 2013 and this is quite a paradox because what we are seeing is that this Pope had to reform the church to relaunch it. Indeed, he has a strong personality. He's very good in relating to the people, but the outcome is quite controversial. His relation, direct relation, with the people in quite – somebody say in quite a Peronist way, is something which is going to frustrate his ecclesiastical army. This direct connection with the people tends to undervalue the role of Bishops, of Cardinals.

Second, from the point of view of geopolitics, there is another possible failure, which is the C9 Council, the Council of said Cardinals from all over the world that the Pope created at the very beginning of his papacy, to shape with them the strategy in the world and to reform the Curia. After five years, almost five years, this Council is not working. It's not working because they join – they have a meeting quite rarely; sometimes the agenda is not shared, and some of them are out, for instance, Cardinal Pell, the Australian, was forced to go to Australia to defend himself from accusations for an old abuse scandals case. And one more thing, which is quite worrying, inside the Vatican, there are people, there are rumours, who say that

this trial against Pell was suggested and provoked by some people of the old guard to destroy the reform that Pell was trying to take ahead, to bring ahead.

So, this is the picture, which is quite a worrying one and which make us think that in the future, the unity of the church might be at risk. Gerhard Müller the former Custodian of the Faith, a German Cardinal, who was fired some months ago by the Pope, very – in a very simple way, some say in a very controversial way, told in an interview that the Pope is surrounded by spies, who tended to tell him not the truth, but what the Pope wants to be – wants to hear. So, it's a very fragmented picture. And about the future, I would say that Müller predicts a possible schism as the professed one of 500 years ago, saying that “The unity of the church is deeply at risk because of these different conceptions and teachings about marriage, about gays and about all these issues.” I think that a schism is not in sight, also, because there isn't the religious vitality that usually prepares a schism.

What I can say is that we don't know what will be next. The Pope is trying to build the next conclave, appointing Bishops from the very periphery of the world, sometimes with quite an eccentric choice. What we perceive so far is that time is not working for the Pope, is not working for his reforms, and people say that the next Pope might be a European or even an Italian, after 40 years from the last Pope. So, I think that when there will be the next conclave, I hope not soon, I hope that this Pope will succeed and that he will go ahead and possibly recover. The big question mark is, if this Pope will be cancelled from the memory of the church or if his successor will continue his work. This is a big question mark for all of us.

Adam Ward

Massimo, thank you very much for that, that was fascinating. You mentioned earlier that the Pope had lost his fight inside the Vatican. So, who has won and what do they want and what can we expect from them?

Massimo Franco

Well, I think that people saying that the old guard has won, says something exaggerated. I think that what we perceive now is overall a void, a void of governance, a void of responsibilities and so, everybody tends to look within. Every ministry tends to work for itself; nobody's taking responsibility. Casa Santa Marta, which had to be the pedestal to conquer the Vatican, to reform it, has become an island on which the Pope is, in some way, encircled. So, I don't know, it's like Italian elections, when you say that Berlusconi is back, Berlusconi's winning, Berlusconi's a survivor and is the mirror of the failure of the new wave, but Berlusconi's not winning. So, the same in the Vatican, if I may make such a comparison quite [inaudible – 22:52] anyway, is that the reforms of Pope are failing. We don't know what is next, but of course, if there is a void, the old power can appear to be winning.

Adam Ward

You describe the, sort of, perspective of the Pope and a Southern perspective, in some ways, against the European establishment, willing to make accommodations, pragmatic, geopolitical accommodations with Putin and with China, drifting away from the United States. Do you see any dangers for the Vatican in this, or are those inflections all understandable? Do they mark a, sort of, permanent structural change, or are they forms of opportunism?

Massimo Franco

Well, I think as always, the Vatican is moving according to a realpolitik, so this is the main, and realpolitik is useful to protect Christian minorities all over the world. So, I think this is the first concern and as far as in the West, there aren't Christian minorities, so this is a second problem for the Pope. But I would say that this might be dangerous for the church because you must explain to the Western church and Western public opinion why you are doing this. For instance, about China there was not at all transparency, so when and if this agreement on the appointment of Bishops will be signed, I think there will be tensions with the Western press, with the Western media.

But about the West, I think that these misunderstandings, this remoteness with the US, with Europe, stems also, from the fact that, for instance, Trump is considered a cultural enemy because he mirrors a conception of Christianity, which is just the opposite of the – not just of the Catholic Church, but of this Pope. So, this Pope is inclusive, pro-immigrant, pro-Islam. Trump is exclusive, anti-immigrants, anti-Islam and what is the risk that I think the Catholic Church foresees? They foresee the danger that not Protestants as Trump, but Catholic Conservatives might use that model as a model for Europe and for the US, which would mean an interpretation of Christianity, which is just the opposite. And as far as we see many signs of this in Europe, Orbán, Poles, but I would say pockets of xenophobia all over Italy, France, even Germany, which is – so, I think this is their main concern and so, there is a disconnection today culturally, between the Pope and large portions of Western public opinion, I would say in Italy as well.

Adam Ward

And finally, just following on from that, are you basically describing a Catholic Church that increasingly, looks like it could be a federated system? Different in Latin America and Africa, different in the United States?

Massimo Franco

Yeah.

Adam Ward

I mean, not formally federated, but in practice?

Massimo Franco

That's why I said yeah, I agree with you, but I think that many people, in the Catholic Church, agree with you, which is more paradoxical, but yes, I think that what we are viewing is that keeping the unity of the church is more and more difficult. What I would say, is that in many episcopates already now, everybody tends to interpret what the Pope says in different ways. So, the big challenge, for the future, will be to keep the Catholic Church united all over the world.

Adam Ward

Good, okay, we have about 30 minutes or so for questions. Please catch my eye and identify yourself, for Massimo's benefit. You're the first to catch my eye, sir, if you just wait for the microphone to reach you. Second row, here in the middle.

David Keppen

Hi, D – hello? And David Keppen. So, Pope Francis, and this is a question, two questions actually, Pope Francis was of the generation in Latin America of the liberation theology movement in the 1970s and 80s, correct? And as I understand it, it was actually Ratzinger who was despatched by Pope John Paul in the 80s to suppress the liberation theology movement in the early 80s when John Paul was taking on the Eastern Block. So, was Pope Francis not inevitably on some, kind of, a crash course between – you know, just intrinsically on a crash course with his view and his worldview and his background, with the Europeans? And then second question, which is, sort of, a corollary to that is the conservative elements versus the progressive elements and many of your comments remind me of the parallel in the UK with Brexit. In the United States right now where we see, you know, a group of white – predominantly, over 55-year-old white people resisting change.

In Quebec, where I'm from, you know, we had a very strong Nationalist movement, those were also – that demographic's also, sort of, 55 and older typically, whereas, younger people have a different outlook and the world is moving quickly. Is it not – can we not look at this, the challenges that the Pope is having right now as being episodic as opposed to intractably – an intractable battle between Conservatives, as the demographics continue to shift...

Adam Ward

Okay.

David Keppen

...digital technologies continue to influence people's thinking?

Adam Ward

Right, thanks.

Massimo Franco

Well, about the first assessment, the Pope was not for liberation theology. In fact, the Pope created an expression which was 'theology of the people', which was meant to oppose the Marxist liberation theology. It was a typical expression of the Argentina situation, anti-Communist, so the Pope was considered, in Buenos Aires, a rightist, not a leftist. He's socially very open, but actually, he was not viewed very well from the Jesuits because he was considered too much a Conservative. So, I think there isn't any disconnection culturally, with the Pope. It's maybe on values, on divorce, on abortion, but not on Communism. So, when you see that former Communist bow in Latin America to this Pope, they do not because he's a friend, a hidden Communist, but because they have been defeated by the church, so it means we recognise that you were right, we were wrong.

About the other challenge, I think that [pause] the Pope is felt as an ally. He's a, sort of, labourist Pope. Maybe he's not, but that's what the general perception is, that's why in Italy, he's so much loved by all leftist people, while sometimes, Catholics keep silent. So, this is a strange situation. Maybe it never happened before. I think that the big challenge is with the young people because when the Pope says that Europe is old, that Europe cannot generate new phenomenon's, he – I think he points at a real true point.

My only question mark is, if the church is the solution or if the church, in the last years, was a part of the problem?

Adam Ward

Thank you. This lady there, in the third row. Yes, you, yes. Just wait for the microphone.

Catherine Pepinster

Thanks, and thank you very much for your comments and my name's Catherine Pepinster. I was interested in what you had to say about the conclave where you suggested that there had been an anti-European approach. I'm not, myself, convinced of that because there were definitely great supporters of the Bergolio candidacy amongst the Europeans, both amongst the older and – non-voting and also, the voting Cardinals. But I think you're quite right to talk about the importance of the South and particularly...

Massimo Franco

Of?

Catherine Pepinster

...of the South, and particularly of Latin America. And following on from that, I wondered if you could say something about the importance of the Secretary of State, Cardinal Parolin, somebody who's been in office since Pope Francis was elected and chose his members of the Curia and what he and Parolin are doing, in terms of geopolitics, I'd like to hear a bit more from you about that.

Massimo Franco

I think that Parolin was one of the best choices made by the Pope and apparently, it's a contradiction towards my thesis about the anti-Italian approach, but actually, it's the exception, which confirms my assumption. I think that the conclave was dominated by the personality, negative personality of former Secretary of State, Tarcisio Bertone, and I think that Bertone was one of the worst sources of the revolt of the conclave against the Italians and as a consequence of a European choice. So, I think that the conclave was a victory of Latin America overall, but also, of the Americas in general. I don't know if they – in the conclave, it was stated a principle of a continental alternates of Popes, this time it's up to America, but in any case, I think the European were a bit frustrated by the outcome and Italians overall. And still now, what you perceive in Rome is that many Italians think that although there are good responsibilities of Italians themselves, there is still, from the Pope quite a old-style approach. That's what I think.

About Parolin, I think that Parolin is one of the Directors of this opening to China. He wants this agreement, although they know that it will not be a convenient one for the Vatican, but I think, as far as I know directly, is that they think that with the Congress of the Communist Party, the situation might worsen. So now, the door is a bit open. If they don't enter now, maybe the door is closing again and for a long time to not possible to enter China. So, they accept the fact that apparently, they are losing in this deal, but they think that the principle that the Catholic Church is, by definition, against the Communist regime, is over. They want to start a new season in which there must be a more pragmatic approach, so they say, "We try. That's the good moment to do that, we must do that." And Parolin – to confirm what I was saying, and you were saying about the conclave and the after conclave, Parolin had been fired by

Bertone. He had been sent to Venezuela because they didn't want him to stay in Rome because he was not considered enough loyal to the Bertone circle. And it was Parolin's luck because Bertone could prove to be a very skilled diplomat and he had very good relations with all Latin American Cardinals, so that when a new Secretary of State was appointed, it was up to him naturally.

Adam Ward

And on the China side, this would be an unprecedented agreement, it's rumoured, in which...

Massimo Franco

Yes.

Adam Ward

...civil authorities, for the first time, would have a direct and a strong say in the selection of Bishops, doesn't...

Massimo Franco

Yes.

Adam Ward

...but isn't that an asymmetric deal? Isn't it enough that...?

Massimo Franco

It is asymmetric, but to the Vatican, it's important also, the fact that for the first time, the Chinese accept that a foreign religion intrudes in their affair, so they have a deal on the appointments. So, this is the – should be a win-win. Anyway, it's quite controversial, but this is the logics.

Adam Ward

Win-win is a Chinese term, by the way. The gentleman here in the middle row, yes, with the hand up, yeah.

Member

A very interesting talk.

Adam Ward

Sorry, just to – the gentleman behind you has...

Euan Grant

Yeah, thank you very much. Euan Grant, Chatham House member. I was once warned, by an Irish Catholic friend of mine, that I might be in danger because I'd criticised some Irish Catholic Church, and I stress Irish Catholic Church, attitudes to the Northern Ireland conflict. She said that "As many of the

Priests had relatives in the IRA,” she was concerned that my details would be passed to the IRA. The audience might want to consider the implications of that. My question is, who – is there any indication that the Pope might resign or as a quick follow-on, are there any indications of who perhaps is in the lead to succeed from either Conservative or reformers or as you put it, the Americas and the South versus Europe? Thank you.

Massimo Franco

The Pope always says, “I might think to resign when my reforms will be irreversible.” I should conclude that he will not resign. And I also think that this Pope is very – he loves deciding. So, I’m not sure that he wants to give up. That doesn’t mean that in the inner circle of the Pope, many friend of the Pope, many Latin Americans as well, they do not exclude such an outcome, but, you know, the problem, anyway, is first of all, two former Popes would be too much, even for the Catholic Church.

Second, I also think that the problem is what the consequence might be, because there isn’t any written law regulating the relations between a resigned Pope and the present Pope. They were hugely loyal to each other and it was a miracle that they behaved without intruding and with a great agreement, a gentleman’s – a Pope’s agreement, between Benedict XVI and the present Pope. So, the big question mark is, if this Pope would resign, why would he resign? And if it were in polemics with the Vatican, what would it mean for the Church because the assumption is that a Pope resigns and keeps silent, but if a Pope resigns and starts to criticise the Vatican...

Adam Ward

Or write letters.

Massimo Franco

...or write letters, what can happen? So, this is a big question mark. I don’t know, so if there is a perspective or resignation, I don’t know. But this is – these are the problems behind. Second, about the succession, I don’t know. I don’t know, actually. I – but what I hear more and more often is, probably there will be a more Conservative Pope. The reaction of this creative confusion of Francis might be a Conservative Pope. A top Catholic member, Italian member, I don’t want to say the name, he told me, “If the Pope doesn’t accelerate with reforms, we might have a Pope like Mussolini or Hitler.” Of course, it was a joke, but that’s to say that the mood is very reactive inside the church.

Adam Ward

Thank you. Yes, gentleman here in the front row.

Member

Grazie, Signor Franco. I understand the Vatican Bank is trying to be reorganised, can you comment on what the reorganisation might be and does this stem from way back in the 70s when the proposed scandal with Calvi and Ambrosiano, when all that was going on? And the second thing, can you list briefly, the issues that the Pope is trying to get done and the resistance to those issues? Where does it come from and why? Thank you very much.

Massimo Franco

I think that the reform of the IOR formally should be concluded. The problem is that it is not at all, so what we perceive now under – after this succession of resignations or dismissals, is that something doesn't work in this reform. So, transparency is something very much declared, but not lived actually, inside the IOR. There has been a reduction, substantial reduction, of the bank accounts of laypeople who spoilt the IOR to make money or to hide money, but we don't know exactly what's going on today. So, I'm quite sceptical about the possibility of a real reform of the IOR.

I remember that many Catholic bankers, at the beginning of this Pontificate say that “The IOR was a brand to be a failed brand,” so it had to be closed. Then this Pope, who had thought about that, he went back and say, “No, no, it's useful.” We don't know why, but today, we have a very strange situation. We are in limbo.

And about the forces, which are resisting, well, I would say that first of all, there is a doctrinal resistance because the Pope – although the Pope has changed the tunes much more than the substance, there are Conservatives accusing him to go – to have gone too forward, too much ahead with remarry divorced, with tolerance towards gay rights and towards – you know, all these problems, issues, they're based on value, moral values. I think that the Pope is just trying to understand where he can arrive, how much he can open, but I think that the real fight is, must we stay inside the modernity or must we oppose modernity, or resist modernity? This is something which we can sense, very clearly, inside the church.

About the IOR, I think that there is a group of very much rooted interests, which don't want any reform of the Vatican finances and this group is always there. The Pope didn't change any person of this group, so now, they are having a major grip than four years ago, five years ago.

Adam Ward

Thank you. I have two questions here on the...

Massimo Franco

If I knew more, I would have written it.

Adam Ward

Okay.

Anthony Newton

Anthony Newton, Chatham House member. Thank you very much indeed for your talk. I'm neither Italian nor Catholic, so I speak from the outside perhaps and ask a very, very simple question. In view of all the fears and concerns you've been expressing, what are the elements that would make up a successful Pope in the 21st century and would be remembered by history?

Adam Ward

And do you want to just pass the microphone to the gentleman on your left – on your right, sorry. Go ahead. Go ahead.

Member

I forget what I was going to say now. You paint a very pessimistic picture of the church at the moment, but will you not agree with me that throughout its 2,000 years' history, there's always been problems, big problems, and yet I take great faith of what Jesus said to Peter, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it," and I think it will carry on until the end of time.

Massimo Franco

I agree with you. I agree with you, and I hope as you that the church can recover and I'm quite sure it can. But I think that we must just give the picture of today, so what is very dangerous is to think that the situation is good, that the popularity of the Pope suffices to say that the church is in a good shape. This is not – it's not true, so I don't know if I'm pessimistic – pardon?

Member

I don't believe it's in good shape, but I think it will continue.

Massimo Franco

Yes, but I hope so. I hope so because I think that it's a very important institution for the West and for the world, yes, of course.

Member

[Inaudible – 47:32].

Massimo Franco

Yes, of course, well, I don't know about hell, but I think that it is useful to have a strong church, not just for Catholics, but also for the secular world, so if the church is disoriented, the reflection is that even the secular world, the world outside of the church, might lose something.

About the first question of this gentleman, I think that the church has to decide what it wants to do and what it wants to be. I think that the intuition of the Pope to look at – from the periphery and to say, listen, there is no more Eurocentrism, there is no more West centrism, we must think that the third world, the fourth world, they are demographically and from the point of the view of the faith, more and more important. But overall, there are existential peripheries, which are now [inaudible – 48:43], so the lesson, the positive lesson of this Pope is, if we don't integrate this growing portion of the world, this portion of the world will destroy us. So, we must not have the illusion that we can go ahead with this model of development. This is, I think, a good point of this Pope, which must be considered and must be projected in the future.

What this Pope, in my view, is not doing enough is that you cannot just say, I am with the poor, the poor are my goal. Poverty cannot be the only principle to say who is good or who is not good, so I think that to reconcile with the West as a whole, I think that the next Pope will have to recalibrate this approach of the Pope, which is – which stems from his vision of the field hospital, but you must have a shift, a cultural shift towards something, which unites and not divides between poor and rich, because it doesn't suffice to understand the problems of today's world. That's my view.

Adam Ward

Thank you. The lady here on the extreme left, my extreme left.

Judy Hutchinson

Thank you. I'm Judy Hutchinson of the University of Notre Dame. Two questions that correlate for you, sir. You mentioned the Pope's inner circle. I'd be curious to know who you would say they are, who has the most influence on him thinking? And then secondly, I'm curious to know what his, sort of, theological and philosophical influences are? I would say with Ratzinger and with John Paul the II before him, they were prolific writers, it was relatively clear to me, you know, where those influences came from. Neither one of them, I don't think, would ever have gone into China, based on that. So, I'm just wondering if you could state what you think his theologic – or where his theology lies, where his philosophy lies?

Massimo Franco

So, first of all, one of the big problems is that the Pope keeps changing his inner circle, so we have sometimes, the impression that there is a casual flux of news of elaboration. So, this is a big problem, and this is why I'm saying that the Case Santa Marta model doesn't work, because the Pope wanted to have this residence because he didn't trust the Secretary of State, but de facto, there is a parallel court, informal one with people changing, and you don't understand sometimes from where news come to the ear of the Pope.

About the second question, I think that this is another problem because the Pope tends not to trust the doctrine of the faith institution. Müller was fired because Müller may be in a very undiplomatic way, say that he had the task to structure theologically the Pope, the papacy. As to say the Pope is not up to the task, so this irritated the Pope. I feel that his most influential Advisor is not in Rome, he's in Buenos Aires. He's Monsignor Victor Manuel Fernández, who is the Dean of the Catholic University in Buenos Aires. But he's not considered a fine Theologist and he infuriated many in the theology community when he said – three years ago I interviewed him in Buenos Aires and he said that “The Curia was not necessary, that even Rome was not necessary in a way, because what mattered was the Bishop.” So, there you sense these polemics against Rome, which I felt in many Australian Catholic as well. We – to reform the Vatican, we should move from Rome, they say. So, you know, that's something, which theologically, doesn't work so much because Rome is the seat of the Catholic Church and it explains many things.

I think that the Pope, from the theology point of view, is trying to demonstrate that he's as prepared as his predecessors. I think probably he is, but the difference is that first of all, Benedict XVI was a great Theologist although, in my view, he was not a very good ruler. And about John Paul II, he was not a Theologist, he was more a Philosopher, but he had very good collaborators as Benedict XVI, to help him elaborate from this point of view.

Adam Ward

If he's difficult to tie down theologically, is he also, sort of, inconsistent in a way? I mean, you described earlier a situation in which he was concerned about the North American Church moving in a very conservative direction that was not a proper reflection of Christianity as he sees it, but at the same time, the accommodations that he's making with Russia and with China, are playing in precisely to that much more Conservative conception, the liberal policies, the – you know, the...

Massimo Franco

Yes.

Adam Ward

Is there anything you'd just say to that before...?

Massimo Franco

Yes, you have the impression that sometimes, the Pope wants to create confusion because the keyword is 'process'. He wants to create an open process. So, he gives you many paths. The problem is that sometimes, you understand that the episcopates are confused because he doesn't allude the path. So, there are all attempts of this Pope to try to understand where the church is going, where it should go, but what we perceive is that in the end, it will be probably up to his successor to decide among these paths, which is the right one or any way, which is the one the church must take.

Adam Ward

Yes, lady here on the second row.

Camilla Franzo

Hi, I'm Camilla Franzo from [inaudible – 55:56] and I was wondering, what are your views on the Pope having visited seven countries of Latin America...

Massimo Franco

Having?

Adam Ward

Visited.

Camilla Franzo

...and having visited...

Massimo Franco

Yeah, okay.

Camilla Franzo

...seven countries in Latin America and not having been to Argentina yet? I know it's a smaller problem that everything's been discussed already.

Massimo Franco

Are you from Argentina?

Camilla Franzo

Yes.

Massimo Franco

Okay.

Camilla Franzo

That's why.

Massimo Franco

No, it's a very actual question because as far as I understand, it's a, sort of, mystery. As far as I know, the Pope says, when somebody asks why don't you go to Argentina? "They have to wait." What does he mean? As far as I understand, first of all, Argentina is very much a divided country today. Second, the relations with Mauricio Macri, the President, are not so good. I interviewed Mauricio Macri in Italy after his meeting with the Pope. He was very diplomatic, but as far as I know, he was furious because the Pope received him for just 12 minutes because he represents the other Argentina, not the one of the Pope. So, I think that the second reason is that, as far as I know, you know better than I, I guess, the Argentinian press is criticising the Pope more and more. So, my impression is that the Pope doesn't want to go back to his country until he perceives that the situation is pacified, and I don't know when it will happen, but this is the main problem, in his view, I guess.

Adam Ward

We can have one last question from this gentleman here in the second row. This gentleman here.

Member

Your reference to Islam, I think the Holy Father is very right in not wanting to have a confrontation with Islam because it could only be to a detriment of Christianity. And my question really is, some time ago the Archbishop, the leader of the Lefebvrists, the Father [inaudible – 58:25] traditional response of Lefebvre, spoke in a, sort of, hopeful way concerning Francis as to a possible rapprochement between the followers of Lefebvre and the church, the Catholic Church. Now I was surprised that you should actually say that, because he considered that Francis, in a way, sufficiently maverick and as it were, unconventional to help with a return of Lefebvre – the Lefebvre people to a church. What's your take on it?

Adam Ward

And could you just describe what your own sense of Marcel Lefebvre and his followers is, for the audience?

Massimo Franco

Well, let me say that I don't think that the adversaries of the Pope are the Lefebvrists or the most vocal Conservatives. I think that the real adversaries of the Pope are all the people who keep silent, who are

silently hostile to him and they are much more than the Conservatives. You can hear from Cardinals, even Cardinals, very bad words against this Pope, which is bad, which is bad, and even people who officially say they are with the Pope, off the record, they tell you that it will be a huge problem for his successor. So, my view about Lefebvre, I think that they represent, in a way, a literal interpretation of orthodoxy, of Catholic Orthodoxy, but I think that they are a minority inside the church and I don't think that they are going to win inside the church. The church has to have a more inclusive approach, although I think that traditionalists with this Pope have reinforced it.

Adam Ward

Massimo, thank you very much indeed. You've given us, I think, a fascinating insight into the whole world of politics, psychology and strategy that not many people get to have a glimpse into, so thank you very much indeed. Please join me in thanking Massimo [applause].

Massimo Franco

Good, thank you.