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# Looking at Vatican II with Pope Francis' Eyes: Leadership and Spirituality - 2015

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# 2015 SANTA CLARA LECTURE

JOHN O'MALLEY, S.J.  
SANTA CLARA UNIVERSITY  
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IGNATIANT CENTER  
FOR JESUIT EDUCATION

**2015 Santa Clara Lecture**  
**Looking at Vatican II with Pope Francis' Eyes: Leadership and Spirituality<sup>1</sup>**

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Georgetown University  
Santa Clara University, February 2015

The big news is Pope Francis. Pope Francis has captured the imagination of all kinds of people. *Fortune* magazine featured a long article about his management style. The current issue of the *New York Review of Books* highlights Pope Francis on the cover...My own experience, and I'm sure this corresponds with yours, is that so many people come up to me and say "Father, I'm not a Catholic, but I love your pope and I think he's doing a great job." Pope Francis is recognized as a real leader, not just religiously, but socially and politically too, a person very much concerned with the good of all. He's bold, savvy, honest, transparent, and free.

What I'm going to do this afternoon is in two parts. The first part will focus on the Second Vatican Council, because I see Vatican II as providing the basic program for what Pope Francis is trying to accomplish. The second part will be on Pope Francis as a leader, and in that part I will make a connection with the Ignatian spiritual tradition, with the fact that Pope Francis is a Jesuit.

Part One: What about Pope Francis and Vatican II?

What's remarkable about Pope Francis on one level is that he's the first Pope in 50 years not to have participated in the Second Vatican Council. For me, looking at him, that's an advantage. I really feel that Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, and Pope Benedict XVI, on some level, were still fighting the battle to the Council. Pope Francis doesn't have that baggage. He was ordained just as the Council was finishing and in a sense, he received the Council in its pure form. Somehow or other he managed to assimilate it and to appropriate it. It is often remarked that when compared

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with his predecessor, Pope Francis refers, cites, and quotes Vatican II rather infrequently. That is true. I think he doesn't do that because it's so much a part of him. It's the way he is. It's how he sees the church.

In 2008 I published a book on the Second Vatican Council, and I received a lot of invitations to lecture on it and was very happy to do that, but when I finished the lectures I would think to myself, "I'm really talking about something dead in the water. It's an interesting thing that happened, but it's gone." And then beginning in 2012, with the anniversaries of the Council, more invitations came and I felt the same way. However, I don't feel that way today. I don't feel that way at all. I think the Council, with Pope Francis, is almost as alive as it was in 1965...

Today I will identify five [focal issues of Vatican II] that I think are crucial, and crucial for understanding what Pope Francis is doing. First: collegiality, second: the local church, third: dialogue, fourth: reconciliation with other religions, and fifth: servant leadership...

So first, collegiality. What is that? That's the teaching that the bishops have a responsibility for the whole church as well as for their own diocese in union with the Roman pontiff. So it's a principle in the Council first announced for the relationship between the bishops and the pope, but if you go through the Council documents it's a theme, it's a principle, that descends to all levels in the church: bishops with their priests, and priests with their people...Collegiality is a participatory church, a people of God church. We're all in it. We all have a voice. We don't all have the same level of voice, but we all have a voice. How about Francis? Well one of his first moves was to create that inner circle of nine cardinals from around the world to consult. That's one level. It's maybe a modest step, but it's a very significant one, a very symbolic one for him. And then there's a whole issue of the event of the synod on the family, part one, which we just had this last October. What's so special about that? It was so different from the synods that recently preceded it. Prior to this synod, a questionnaire was distributed to all the laity. It didn't work all that well, but really it was a very symbolic gesture. Then in the synod itself, Pope Francis exhorted all present to speak freely, to honestly say their mind. That's what you do when you're collegial, people don't need to hide their viewpoint. And there

was no prepared statement for it. In past synods, the bishops have come to Rome and they found out that, under the table, they were going to be told what they had said.

Second, the issue of the local church. That's another focal issue in Vatican II that cuts across the board different ways, beginning with the decree on the liturgy, that the churches have some say in how liturgy is done on the local level. This is a big change from what went on before, and the Council also very much encouraged the development of episcopal conferences and so forth. So Francis, how does he introduce himself on March 13, 2013, the day of his election? He names himself first as the Bishop of Rome. He highlights his place within the local church. And just recently, last week I guess it was, he made a little sort of liturgical change. The archbishops, as you may know, receive a pallium, a small vestment woven partly from lamb's wool. Until last week the archbishops came to Rome and were invested by the pope. Last week Pope Francis said "No, I'll bless the pallium, but the archbishops will be invested in their own diocese because it's an affair of the local church." So it's a very simple thing, we can't make a great deal of it, but it says a lot about Pope Francis' mindset and the significance of the local church, it seems to me.

Third, the principle of dialogue. This was a word introduced into the Council by Pope Paul VI himself, and he wrote an encyclical during the Council, in which that word occurs again and again and again. The Council took it up so much so that it became almost the symbol of the Council, almost a caricature of the Council, dialogue this, dialogue that, dialogue the other thing. So it's open to abuse and so forth, but still it's a church of dialogue, not monologue, a church of not just speaking but also of listening. And how does Pope Francis take this up? Next week Rabbi Abraham Skorka is coming to Santa Clara. While Pope Francis was Archbishop of Buenos Aires, as you know well, he carried on an ongoing dialogue with the Chief Rabbi of Buenos Aires, Rabbi Abraham Skorka, and they talked about a wide variety of topics uncensored, and the translation was published in English. That is incredible. It is incredible, in the history of the Roman Catholic Church, for a bishop or archbishop to sit down for week after week or month after month and have an open free-flowing discussion with a rabbi. To put it in minimal terms, it never was

done before. It's absolutely earth-shaking. Moreover, as Pope Francis describes it, the purpose of this dialogue is not to come to an agreement necessarily. It is not, "I'll compromise a little bit if you compromise a little bit." It's not that at all. It's simply to get to understand the other person, to be able to sympathize with where that person is coming from, and that's the whole purpose of it. Presumably, in the long-run, this dialogue will have a good effect. So again, it's the listening church and the dialogical church and Francis is an excellent example of that.

Fourth, reconciliation with other religions. Of course reconciliation with other Christian bodies, but especially reconciliation with non-Christian religions, was hammered out at Vatican II in the document eventually called *Nostra Aetate*, meaning "In Our Times." It is the shortest document of the Council and it dealt principally with Muslims and Jews. It had terrible difficulty getting through the Council, so much so that at one point the commission that sponsored it thought they would withdraw it from the Council agenda...So what did this document do? It is also earth-shaking, I think. It gave the church a new mission. It was a mission to be an agent of reconciliation in the world.

Well that's the Gospel, right? But if you look at church history and so forth, that's not always been the concept of the mission of the church. I have to say that Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, really took this seriously and promoted it, but Pope Francis has taken it to another level altogether. I just keep coming back to this dialogue with Rabbi Skorka and Pope Francis washing the feet of that Muslim woman on Holy Thursday.

Finally, the fifth principle, servant leadership. All through the Council this triad occurs: prophet, priest, king. This triad traditionally, at least since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, has been applied only to the clergy. Prophet, the one who speaks on God's behalf, priest, the one who prays for the people, and king, the one who governs. Well Vatican II takes that triad and applies it to bishops, it applies it to priests, and it applies it to laypeople, of course with a slightly different nuance at every level here. And in this application, the Council offers a radical redefinition of "king," namely as servant...a very important and radical move. This goes back to the Gospel, Jesus washing the feet of his disciples...this is how the church is called to govern. The church is the servant, the church is the one who goes out and helps. How

about Pope Francis? Well, servant leadership is certainly how he looks at his office, his duties. He has, as you know, a real contempt for princely trappings. His refusal to live in the apostolic palace was a very dramatic gesture and a very symbolic gesture. We had at Georgetown, he graduated two years ago, a young student whose name was Luca Johnny and he had an interesting passport. His passport was from Vatican City and his father is General Johnny who is the head of security in Vatican City. So I met General Johnny. At any rate, the story goes that when Pope Francis was about to take possession of his cathedral, he was in a procession from St. Peter's Basilica over to the Basilica of St. John Lateran. Before setting out in the procession, he went up to General Johnny and said "Can I ride with you?" Johnny supposedly replied: "Sure. Do you want to drive too?" These are small gestures, but they mean a lot. When Pope Francis was made cardinal, there is a wonderful quotation from him and it really touched me deeply. It's very simple and very short. He said "Every ascent implies a descent. You must go down if you want to serve better."

So a participatory church, a local church, a listening Church, a reconciling Church, a serving church...

Part Two: How is Pope Francis doing as a leader? How is his leadership shaped by Ignatian spirituality, his life as a Jesuit?

I have three qualities of leadership that I would like to explore here...The first is that a good leader chooses the right people to be around him or around her to give advice. We recognize this instinctively with any executive we know, any university president, any president of the United States. Who does he listen to? Whom does she talk to? So that, I think, is the first quality of a good leader, and to do that you have to have a good dose of humility. You have to be able to say: "I am not omniscient. I need help. I don't know. I have to go to people and ask them to help me." The second quality of a good leader is inner freedom, to not look over one's shoulder before making decisions. A good leader needs a great level of self-possession and the ability and willingness to make moves that challenge convention, to not be afraid of criticism...Third, a leader has to have a vision and boldness in implementing this vision. He or she has to be able to move the agenda, move the institution, or move the whatever-it-is along.

So what about Francis? Now I'd like to make a correlation of these three qualities of leadership with the Ignatian spiritual tradition and the experience of Pope Francis as a Jesuit. First, humility and choosing the right people. Here we go to the First Week of the *Spiritual Exercises* and before that to the history of the Jesuit order. I think one of the most striking characteristics of Ignatius of Loyola's leadership of the Society of Jesus was his choosing two people to be his closest collaborators because he knew they complimented his gifts and made up for certain lacks of gifts. So one of these was his brilliant executive secretary, Juan de Polanco, S.J. In Ignatius's writings when he was general it's really difficult to sort out where Ignatius ends and where Polanco begins, even a document like the Jesuit Constitutions. Ignatius was able to let this better educated man and, in many ways, in terms of practical issues, more gifted man, guide him and collaborate with him and say "I don't know. I need your help." And the same thing occurred with Ignatius' second great assistant, this man, Jerónimo Nadal, S.J., whom Ignatius gave plenary potentiary powers to *carte blanche*, to go out in all of Europe, to visit the Jesuit houses, and tell them what it meant to be a Jesuit. The result was that by the time Ignatius died, Nadal knew the Society of Jesus better than Ignatius did. He was hands-on and he was also a brilliant man and knew what he was talking about, so again for Ignatius, that was fine. So this is a good example of the significance of humility and the willingness to choose people that are more qualified than oneself within the history of the Society of Jesus, within which Pope Francis has been formed.

Let's move to the *Spiritual Exercises*. So the First Week of the *Exercises* is a reflection about oneself and about one's previous life, and if you do it correctly what you see is that you have been messing up. You've been often chasing down the wrong paths. So what the First Week does is it makes you aware of your weaknesses and of your need for guidance. I'm a weak person. I need guidance. I can't always trust my own judgment. Humility, openness to guidance, this is a central piece of Jesuit spirituality...

In 1974-1975 the Jesuits held their 32<sup>nd</sup> General Congregation (GC 32). It was an extremely important meeting. A General Congregation is the highest authority in the Society of Jesus, and this one was held during the generalship of Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J. The second decree of this



Congregation was on the vocation of a Jesuit, and it begins: “What is a Jesuit? A Jesuit is a sinner redeemed by Christ.” Jorge Bergoglio, S.J. [Pope Francis], like me, was at that congregation. I can't help but think that this made an impression on him. It was one of those decrees that everybody said “Yes, yes, yes this is right. This should go.” Then there was the experience Bergoglio had at GC32 itself. As I say, I was there as well, and this was a very difficult meeting. It went on for three and a half months. Those of you who are faculty members, just imagine you had a faculty meeting that went on for three and a half months, five and a half days of week, with the agenda being the greater glory of God...Those three and a half months were one of the two most difficult periods in my life as a Jesuit. They were also the best in my experience as a Jesuit. At any rate, when I came back I reported to my province and what I said was: “Well, a Jesuit is a Jesuit is a Jesuit.” We had all these differences, all this controversy, and so forth. What we knew was everybody was trying to speak honestly about what they thought was best for the Society of Jesus and best for the church, best for the world. What really struck me was how honest and straightforward people were.

Bergoglio was at that Congregation and it seems to me that when he convened the recent synod, in the back of his head he had a Jesuit Congregation in mind. The good thing about the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Congregation was there was a lot of debate, a lot of passion, and at the end we were able to pull it together. I was asked today at a seminar I had with some faculty here: “Where's the Holy Spirit in this whole thing?” Well I really feel that nobody knows where the Holy Spirit is, right? I mean that's a mystery. That's beyond us. But if the Holy Spirit is anywhere it's in honesty, or he's in honesty, she's in honesty.

So this seems to me really an important sort of experience that Pope Francis had that I think has made a lot of difference. At the end of the synod, the address he gave was noteworthy. He said: “Well, we had a lot of disagreements, and that doesn't bother me. This is the way it should be...We had consolations and desolations and that's just a sign that the Spirit is at work and that we are talking honestly. We are trying to listen honestly.” So correlation number one: humility and Jesuit spirituality.

Correlation number two, inner freedom. Inner freedom is basically what the

*Spiritual Exercises* [of Ignatius of Loyola] are trying to accomplish. I think we need to realize that not only has Pope Francis been a Jesuit for many, many years, he was also master of novices. He made the *Spiritual Exercises*, the full 30-day retreat, twice in his life and as the master of novices he led other people, he led the novices of the Society of Jesus in making the *Exercises* too. So he knows the *Exercises* well and he knows that inner freedom, finding out God's will and being ready and willing and able to do God's will, to leave things behind, to move ahead, to be your own person, is one of the big fruits of the *Spiritual Exercises*.

Finally, the third correlation with the Jesuit tradition, boldness and courage. A key meditation in the *Spiritual Exercises* is the Meditation on Christ the King, it introduces the Second Week of the *Exercises*, the week that begins to look at the life of Christ, the public life of Christ. And at the end of this meditation, the person making the retreat is to ask himself or herself: "So what am I going to do?" Ignatius says in the *Exercises*, "Those who want to give greater proof of their love and to distinguish themselves will offer themselves entirely." So it's an utter commitment, a boldness, a full press, you might say. I think that is another correlation with Jesuit spirituality within the leadership of Pope Francis.

Now I want to conclude with an unusual piece about this boldness and Jesuit leadership. I've mentioned already the Constitutions. They were written by St. Ignatius along with his secretary Juan de Polanco...The ninth part of the Constitutions, just before the end has to do with the superior general of the order, and the qualities needed in the general. In one way it's a portrait of the ideal general. You can broaden that and say it's also a portrait of the ideal Jesuit. The ideal Jesuit should have these qualities...he needs to be a person of prayer, needs to be a person of solid virtue, needs to be a person who knows how to combine severity and mildness...but then it goes on to speak about magnanimity, great soul, great soulness. This is unique...the very fact that this is considered a characteristic that the general should have. The second thing that's interesting is a particular paragraph, a long paragraph, and I would like to share just part of it with you to conclude. It is not a paraphrase of the New Testament. It's not a paraphrase of the Fathers of the Church. It's not a paraphrase of St. Thomas Aquinas. It's not a paraphrase of any papal

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document. What is it? It is a paraphrase of the Roman statesman and orator Cicero, a pagan...I find it very inspiring myself and I think this also helps us understand Pope Francis and his style of leadership and the kind of person he is...

Magnanimity and fortitude of soul are likewise highly necessary for him because he must bear the weakness of many and must initiate great undertakings in the service of God our Lord. He must persevere in them with constancy, without losing courage in the face of contradictions even though they may come from persons of high rank and power. He must not allow their entreaties or threats make him desist from what reason and the divine service required. He should rise above all eventualities, not allowing himself to be exalted by those that succeed or depressed by those that go badly. Be altogether ready to suffer death itself if it is necessary for the good of the society in the service of Jesus Christ our God and Lord.<sup>2</sup>

**John W. O'Malley, S.J.** is University Professor in the Theology Department at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. A native of Ohio, he is a specialist in the religious culture of early modern Europe, especially Italy. His best known book is *The First Jesuits*, which received both the Jacques Barzun Prize for Cultural History from the American Philosophical Society and the Philip Schaff Prize from the American Society for Church History. He currently has two books in press. John O'Malley has lectured widely in North America and abroad on both professional and more popular topics. He is past president of the American Catholic Historical Association and of the Renaissance Society of America. He is a correspondent for the Vatican's Pontifical Committee for Historical Sciences and holds a number of honorary degrees. He is a Roman Catholic priest and a member of the Society of Jesus.

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<sup>2</sup> "The Kind of Person the Superior General Should Be," *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, Part IX, Chapter 2, no. 5 [728].