

Pope Francis Online



Year II (2014-2015)

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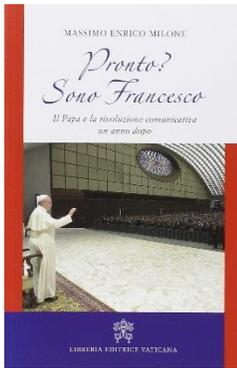
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The Pope's Revolution (12-12-14)

“The pope and the communications revolution one year later” is the subtitle of a new book by the director of Vatican Radio. Massimo Enrico Milone has reviewed all of the pope’s interactions with journalists. He argues that, while the message is in continuity with previous popes, the modality and style and objectives are revolutionary.

Below are six key claims from the book, extracted and translated from an online article by the [Pontifical Council for Social Communications](#).

- (1) *The Pope and Social Communication* – Considering social communications a field for mission and a new place people “inhabit,” the pope urges us to be present there in two ways: in search of an authentic encounter with others and in search of truth by way of questions about the meaning of life.
- (2) *The Internet and Conscience* – The Pope recognizes “the risk of a distracting use of the media,” which offers people an excess of answers to questions never asked! He affirms that technology “should simplify and improve the quality of life.” But he also notes that “the speed with which information is communicated exceeds our capacity for reflection and judgment.” When our daily routines online create disorientation, he suggests “reminding ourselves of our Creator who allows us to live, who loves us, who accompanies us on our journey.
- (3) *Against Technological Determinism* – A crucial concern for the pope is the media’s ability to predetermine personal relationships without necessarily being respectful of the truth of who people are. Calling the media to pursue truth and meaning and unity – which according to Pope Benedict XVI “remain the deepest aspiration of being human” – Pope Francis reminds us that “communication is ultimately a human rather than technological achievement.”
- (4) *The Internet as a New “Existential Periphery”* – Because the web relativizes space and time, the meaning of “neighbor” has changed. In a world now of “social networks,” Pope Francis exhorts the Church to go out also to the digital streets, which are “crowded with a humanity that seeks salvation or hope.” It’s there that communications requires us to be more neighborly.
- (5) *Internet and Mission* – The logic of communications today has passed from one of “transmission” to one of “sharing.” As a result, Christian witness in the new digital environment works best not be bombarding the airwaves with religious messages but by exhibiting a willingness to encounter others there “with respect to their doubts, on the path of searching for truth and the meaning of human existence.”
- (6) *The Example of Pope Francis* – In 2013, Pope Francis claimed the greatest visibility of anyone on the Internet (with more than 49 million mentions!). Even more, his popularity in the digital realm reflects his deep awareness of the nature of the new means of social communications. The pope uses new media not simply to transmit messages but to create a participatory way in which to encounter others personally.

Beyond what the author claims, I’d venture to say that the papal “revolution” is not really new! He’s actually demonstrating the experience of the season we now celebrate. Through social communications Pope Francis gives flesh to his words; ultimately, though, he shows us how to share *the Word* – the One that comes to encounter and transform all human life.

featured image from www.pccs.va

Awaken ... open ... speak! (12-19-14)



Rudolph, Charlie Brown, Clarence the angel ... these are just some of the beloved characters that come home to us each holiday season via television. And even though we no longer hear his melodic voice, the pioneering work of John Cardinal Foley in television allows us to partake of the liturgical beauty of the Christmas midnight Mass from the Vatican.



Recently, Pope Francis spoke to employees of [TV 2000](http://www.pccs.va/index.php/it/), an Italian broadcasting network that carries Catholic programming. He shared three thoughts he considers central to contemporary communications. We share these three thoughts here because they also go to the heart of what we celebrate in this sacred season.

(image from <http://www.pccs.va/index.php/it/>)

The first duty of the communicator is to awaken words. Beyond the tactical and technical, Christian communication must be bold and courageous. Not subject to propaganda or ideology, we are to speak with the frankness and freedom of faith. “Every word has within itself a scintilla of fire, of life,” says the pope.

That spark of fire shines in a star that marks the birthplace of the Christ-child, the true light that enlightens everyone. His is the glory of the Father’s only Son. His are the words of eternal life. May we resolve in the New Year to awaken ourselves more to that Word ... and to share that Word freely with all to whom we speak.

The second duty of the communicator is to open. This means to avoid the pitfalls of “filling up” (with an excess of slogans) or “closing off” (with brief and easy solutions). Christian communication seeks, instead, to embrace the tiring work of respecting and responding to the complexities of real life, the avoidance of which “is a frequent error within communications that is ever faster and less reflexive.”

The carols and speeches and drama made popular at this time of year reflect simple joys. But the only medium that truly captures the depth of beauty in the Word-made-flesh is prayer. Only in meditative wonder, guided by the action of the Holy Spirit, will we fully appreciate [the perfect gift](#) given to the world. May we resolve in the New Year to give more time to prayer ... and open ourselves to the power of the Spirit present in our lives.

And the third duty of the communicator is to speak to the entire person (mind and heart), “so that they may know to see beyond the immediate, beyond a present that risks to be fearful and forgotten.” Christian communication must avoid the three sins of modern media – disinformation, calumny, and defamation – and instead renders concrete a real culture of encounter.

And that, ultimately, is what Christmas engenders – a real encounter between God and human beings, come to life in the baby Jesus. The eternal enters into our time. The divine assumes our humanity. No matter the troubles we fear or the past we’d prefer to forget, God is with us. May we resolve in the New Year to encounter one another more gracefully ... and ever more cognizant of the image of God that every person is to us.

Merry Christmas!

featured image from www.facebook.com/Tv200i



How Pope Francis says “Merry Christmas” (12-23-14)

From headline hype to online commentary, many have missed the mark about Pope Francis’ Christmas greetings to the Roman Curia.

The media message (even from pro-Church outlets) is designed to grab attention with the depiction of a pope who supposedly “chides” or “blasts” or “attacks” his own staff with a “blistering rebuke” directed at “greedy gossips” or “power-hungry hypocrites.”

Those headlines are inaccurate on several levels, including the intent, the form, and the theology of the papal address. One reason for this may be the [incomplete English text](#), which hits the 15 high points (or low ones), but fails to include the opening and closing, which provide the necessary context.

That context is the annual event of the pope’s sharing a Christmas message with his Curial staff. Beyond the seasonal niceties which such greetings assume, the pope wishes instead to give a properly *spiritual* talk. He makes clear his intent at the outset: “I would like that our encounter and the reflections I share with you should become, for all of us, a support and stimulus to a true examination of conscience to prepare our heart for Holy Christmas.” That’s not chiding or blasting or attacking or rebuking; it’s leading, as a true spiritual father would.

The type of speech is an *examination of conscience*. It takes the traditional form used by “the Fathers of the desert,” namely a “catalogue” of things to think about in one’s own life. These are possibilities, not statements of fact. These are temptations, not accusations. These are the sorts of things that people in their position are potentially subject to, not a list of wrongs being entered into evidence.

And the pope makes it clear that these “ailments” are not limited to curial clerics but “are naturally a danger for every Christian and for every curia, community, congregation, parish, ecclesial movement, and can strike both at the individual level and the communal level.”

Might some who heard this take offense or feel impugned? Quite possibly, yes – especially if the ailments so pointedly described actually apply! But in that case, it’s actually something good to hear, for self-knowledge can effect change. No examination of conscience is comfortable. Conversion is challenging. But that is our Christian lot in life – to acknowledge humbly our faults and to entrust ourselves to the redeeming love of God, the very God who comes in person to bring salvation to the world.

And that’s the actual conclusion to the talk – not a “so there” excoriation of the papal collaborators, but a call to be who they are and be that well as a model to the entire Church. Before wishing them a Merry Christmas, the pope says: “Let us ask Him (the divine Father) to make us love the Church as Christ, his son and our Lord, loved it, and to have the courage to recognize ourselves as sinners and those in need of his Mercy and to not be afraid to abandon our hands into his maternal hands.”

That abandon, that mercy, that love – that is the real greeting of Christmas, to which the Holy Father courageously calls his own *and all of us*.

featured image: CNS photo/Paul Haring



The Power of the Crèche (12-26-14)

“Let us draw near the crèche, where ‘a great light’ dawns ...” With these words Jorge Mario Bergoglio (Pope Francis) begins a meditation on Christmas. With this post, we share some his vision, as enlightened also by Fr. Antonio Spadaro in *Civiltà Cattolica*.

To meditate on this mystery is to place ourselves in the scene, to become witnesses through the grace of imagination. Prayer thus activates a theology of the “as if” – in our own experience of the nocturnal peace of Bethlehem and the silence that dominates the night.

At the crèche we see the “hidden light” of the Lord – a “kindly light” that neither blinds nor dazzles. Rather, the light of Christmas is intimately dynamic: it awakens the numb conscience, shakes the soul, and sets us on our journey as pilgrims. “The way that the crèche promises us is different from that cultivated by our ambition,” says the pope. It “transforms us not only by enveloping us from the outside but by changing (our) heart, desires, and love.”



([flickr.com/photos/32811857@N08/5369763540/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/32811857@N08/5369763540/))



(image: CNS/Art Resource/Album)

The ones who receive this light “are the simple, the faithful: the shepherds, the Magi, Elizabeth, Zechariah, Simeon, Anna, Joseph, Mary. They are summoned by the light, in the midst of apparent gloom, in the mediocrity of an ordinary life.” But there they experience glory! In the body of a crying baby takes shape the apocalyptic image of the Lord who comes. Precisely there, in the ordinariness of our lives, the light awakens us: “we should draw near the crèche of Jesus,” says the pope, “in the desire that his grace touch us and help us to continue to grow in his service.” Keeping company with the child, we see who we are, loyal and sinful, knowing that “this baby will be our savior.”

To meditate as if we were there is also to act as Mary and Joseph did. They held the newborn child in their arms. So, too, we are to embrace the hope of the Gospel, welcoming it in our arms and handing it away to all people, especially those experiencing difficulties and crises.

The contemplation of Christmas and the “power of the crèche” leads Pope Francis to understand that God, the center of the universe and Lord of history, became a child in silence, illuminated by a “hidden light” in a periphery of the empire and manifest to poor shepherds who live on the periphery of life. The profound meaning of Christmas inspires him to consider that the truly central events in life don’t happen in the “center” but on the peripheries, whether they be geographical or existential.

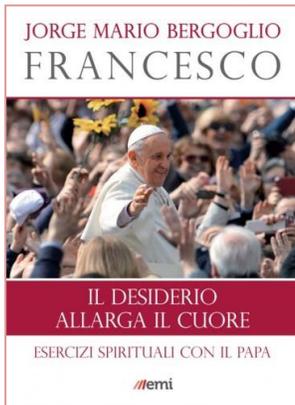
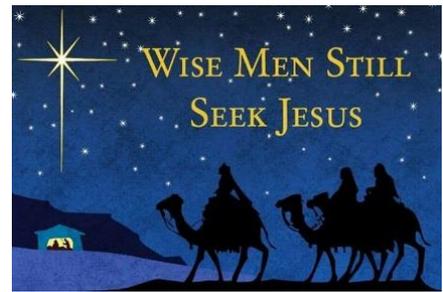
For Pope Francis, Christmas reveals what it means to be divine. In the horizon of the Kingdom of God, the infinitesimal can be infinitely grand, and immensity can be a small hutch. God is hidden in what is small and in what is growing, even if we are not able to see him.

That, ultimately, is the power of the crèche – the strength of a God who humbles Himself to be born human like us, so that we might be enlightened to grow in that divine love and bring God’s light to the world around us.

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The Wisdom of Desire (1-2-15)

The new year begins with a prayer for world peace (Jan 1) and a visit from the wise ones (Jan 6) who know that true peace is found in the birth of the Christ-child. The three who came from the East followed not only a heavenly star but a heartfelt desire – to see for themselves and encounter the newborn King. While we might prefer GPS for our travels, that same desire is at work within all who seek to be wise today.



For Pope Francis, following the soul's desire is fundamental to the spiritual life. We see this in a [newly published](#) collection of spiritual exercises he preached, whose title tells us that “desire enlarges the heart.” The rest of the text shows how desire enables us to discern the voice of God within us.

In his introduction to the book, Fr. Antonio Spadaro points out why desire is so central to the pope's teaching. “It's important because in reality God himself is a *Deus desiderans*, is a God who desires to communicate himself and to arouse desires in our heart.”

That desire is realized in the Incarnation. That desire inspires the Epiphany.

That desire, and its realization in the person of Jesus, demonstrates for Papa Francesco that God is “the sweet and unique obsession of every day in the course of all days.” God remains an obsession precisely because the manifestation of God, which happens in time and space, cannot be harnessed by moments in our history.

And thus we begin the year anew. God has come (again) and continues to reveal Himself to us, particularly in the desires of our hearts and souls. These are not simply natural, in the instincts of bodily life. Nor are they merely personal, in the expressions of what we wish or what we want. Rather, spiritual desire reflects that “restlessness” of the human heart to which St. Augustine famously pointed.

[Speaking to the Augustinians last year](#), Pope Francis elaborated on this restless desire. He describes it as “spiritual seeking” of the God who waits for us and who never ceases to be the first to seek us. He explains that this desire is what moves us toward a personal encounter with Christ. And he notes that, as a result of this encounter, the desire to love arises as “an incentive to go towards the other, without waiting for the other to manifest his need.”

In her *fiat*, Mary acquiesced to this desire. In making their journey, the Magi followed this desire. Like them, [says the pope to his fellow Jesuits](#), “We need to seek God in order to find him, and find him in order to seek him again and always.”

Perhaps, then, a most fitting resolution for the New Year would be for each of us to get in touch with this primordial desire of our heart and soul.

The Faces of Francis (1-16-15)

The sagacious Vaticanista, John Allen, recently wrote about [the power of the media's narrative in shaping people's perception of Pope Francis](#). "He's seen as a peace-loving advocate for the poor and downtrodden, as well as a maverick reformer steering Catholicism in a broadly progressive direction."

(NOTE: John Allen is coming to Saint Charles Seminary on January 26 to give [the second annual John Cardinal Foley Lecture on the Church and Communications](#).)



The first face is currently on display in the Philippines where more than five million citizens are expected to crowd surge for a glimpse of the visitor from Rome. The second face appears somewhat behind the scenes, as when the Holy Father grants a media interview or speaks to diplomats and other leaders. Still, even those encounters exhibit a public bearing when the pope's words are published and shared via global social communications.

The peace-loving advocate abhors human violence, yet recognizes that [free speech is not without limitation](#) when it comes to showing respect for others. Comparing religious satire to a curse word spoken of his mother, he bantered with reporters that such speech might elicit a punch! (In a sad demonstration of the power of the media narrative, a spokesman had to "clarify" those words from the pope as not at all meaning that violence against speech is justifiable.)

The maverick reformer calls world leaders to attitudinal conversion by castigating the "throwaway culture" that leads to inter-personal, societal, and international conflict. In his latest interview, [in the Italian newspaper La Stampa](#), the pope says: "When the center of the system is not man but money, when money becomes an idol, men and women are reduced to simple instruments of a social and economic system characterized, indeed dominated by profound imbalances."

Yet, the duality of papal presence and proclamation in this narrative does not imply an intra-personal or institutional dissonance. The Holy Father's persona and preaching are of one mind, integrated by a living faith in the divine person whose vicar he is, and whose Church he now leads.

The advocate seeks peace and the maverick seeks reform in the same way – through a renewal of Gospel values. As Pope Francis said in his latest interview: "The Church, when it invites us to conquer what I have called the 'globalization of indifference,' is far from any political or ideological interest whatsoever; motivated uniquely by the words of Jesus, it wishes to offer its contribution to the construction of a world where we take care of each other and are taken care of by each other."

The papal narrative is accurate. The two faces, far from suggesting anything bi-polar, show forth in this pope the splendor of the Gospel – in a love that cares and a love that converts – so that all of us might become who we are meant to be.

featured image from www.pacifiqa.com/



The Courage of Simplicity (1-23-15)

He said what?!

That question is asked whenever Pope Francis speaks “off script.” He does this in his homilies at the Casa Santa Marta, which the Vatican describes as “daily meditations” so as to distinguish them from formal teachings. He does this in interviews with newspaper reporters, though these are usually reviewed prior to publication. And he does this often on his travels, when he departs from prepared texts or conducts an in-flight press conference.

Three from his recent [flights to/from Asia](#) are making the rounds on the social media circuit. Opining about the terrorist attack in Paris, the pope observed that insulting commentary about his mother, no matter how freely expressed, would elicit a punch. Recalling a corrupt financial offer made to him in Buenos Aires, he pondered the possibility of kicking the speaker where the sun don’t shine. And commenting on birth control, he called for responsible parenthood in contrast to the view that to be good Catholics means being like rabbits.

The media revel in these extemporaneous remarks, which provide headline grabbing sound-bites. More appealing still is the “normalcy” with which the Holy Father converses. Readers no doubt hear a bit of themselves in his way of speaking.

With Francis, pope-talk is fast becoming world news. There’s a risk, of course. Spontaneous speech is never vetted and causes agita among church diplomats. Words spoken off-the-cuff are often [misrepresented](#) and easily [misinterpreted](#) (e.g., a “[hoary slur](#)” displaying “[gossipy judgmentalism](#)”) which leads to more work for papal spokespersons and parish priests.

But the benefits outweigh the risks. Comments made in his native tongue reveal the pope’s passion about [topics that matter to him](#) most. Neither [boring](#) nor boorish, Pope Francis cuts to the core of human interests. With or without clarification, his words give rise to thought. Indeed, his provocative phrases and [idiomatic images](#) lead to further discussion about, and continued attention on, important issues with which people are genuinely concerned.

Even more so, this kind of papal speech demonstrates the power of encounter. The pope’s spontaneity usually happens when he is touched by someone (like the young girl who tearfully asked why God allows suffering) or when he engages individuals (especially reporters) in ordinary conversation. In those moments, interaction supercedes preparation, and person-to-person dialogue trumps diplomatic caution.

In this, the pope exhibits a virtue near and dear to another Francis, the saint whose feast the Church celebrates tomorrow. In his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, St. Francis de Sales dedicates five chapters to speech in which he counsels not only charity but simplicity. For de Sales, simplicity is a “little virtue,” able to be practiced by anyone, that favors forthrightness in all that we say and show and do. For the Doctor of the Church, “No artifice is so good and desirable as plain dealing. ... Lying, double-dealing, and dissimulation are always signs of a weak, mean mind.”

In the courage of speaking freely, we see Pope Francis’ mind – one convinced by faith, deeply concerned for the well-being of others, and bold enough to say so in terms that resonate with everyone.

featured image by Stefano Rellandin/ Reuters from www.newsdaily.com

Communication as Visitation (1-30-15)

Pope Francis' annual [Message for World Communications Day](#) was published last week on the feast of St. Francis de Sales. Its focus – “Communicating the Family: A Privileged Place of Encounter with the Gift of Love” – fits right in with the upcoming [World Meeting in Philadelphia](#) and the next [Synod of Bishops](#) in Rome.



As brief and straight-forward as it is, it's hard to believe the message is already being misinterpreted! Case in point: an article from [CRUX](#), picked up by [CBS News](#), that claims in its title and its lead that “Pope Francis is urging families to put aside their iPhones and Twitter feeds and learn to talk to one another again.” The pope acknowledges multiple ways in which modern media can be problematic, but nowhere in the message does he make any such recommendation!



What he does offer is a meditative look at the roots of any/all communication in family life. Urging better communications within the family and positive communications about the family, the Holy Father inspires the world by lifting up the biblical Visitation as an icon for all communication.

In their intervention at the presentation of the pope's message, professors Chiara Giaccardi and Mauro Magatti elaborated on this iconic representation. Two insights from their erudite analysis are worth repeating.

The first concerns the purpose of communications. “To communicate proximity with proximity, that is together the medium and the message.” As the professors explained, Mary's arising and going in haste to Elizabeth's town demonstrates that “to go to find, to be near, to offer the simple gift of one's own presence and one's own time – these are the first messages of authentic communication.” The pope's message expands on this: “To ‘visit’ is to open doors, not remaining closed in our little world, but rather going out to others. So too the family comes alive as it reaches beyond itself; families who do so communicate their message of life and communion, giving comfort and hope to more fragile families, and thus build up the Church herself, which is the family of families.”

The second insight emphasizes the means. “The joy of encounter,” said the professors, “is the frame and the premise of every authentic communication.” Having been visited herself at the Annunciation, Mary seeks to share that with Elizabeth, and with dancing in the womb their exultant dialogue takes place. The joy, in and between persons, that emanates from encountering one another leads to these words from Pope Francis about modern media: “By growing daily in our awareness of the vital importance of encountering others, these ‘new possibilities’, we will employ technology wisely, rather than letting ourselves be dominated by it.” Digital connections certainly do help (or, when isolating, they can hinder). But in the end it's the personal encounter that matters most.

Throughout 2015 countless words will be spoken, written, and shared about the Family. A great place to start this vitally important conversation is by reading the pope's words for yourself.

featured image from www.news.va

Hanging Out with the Pope (2-6-15)

Had I ever told my mother that I was going to “hang out with the pope,” the answer no doubt would have been, “don’t you sass me, young man!” My how times have changed!

Yesterday, in the second Google+ Hangout live from the Vatican, young men and women from various parts of the world really did hang out with the pope. According to [Vatican Radio](#), the event was sponsored by Scholas Ocurrentes, an independent charity organization that “brings together young people via sports, art, and technology.”



Speaking with disabled children, the Holy Father admitted his own lack of knowledge working a computer! But that didn’t stop him or them from communicating.

In fact, the pope is reported to have said that “When you communicate, you give the best you have inside, and you receive the best from others, and that is very important.” And he added, “When we don’t communicate, we stay alone with our limitations, and that is bad for us.”



So forget about this blog (just for a moment!). Go hang out with the Pope! ([click here to see it happening](#)).

Even if you don’t understand all the words being exchanged, the images communicate quite clearly – with an inviting smile across the way, a depth of concern for the one to whom we speak, and a willingness to encounter others wherever they are. That’s what hanging out is all about!

featured image from www.tecnologia.ondeneews.it