

THE POPE FRANCIS EFFECT:

Changing Political Discourse & Challenging the Church of the Global North

By Tom Cordaro, November 1, 2014

Hopeful expectations regarding Pope Francis began with his first public appearance after being elected. His humility and openness made an immediate impact, not only on Catholics but on people around the world. From the time he walked out on the balcony to accept his new role as pontiff to this day, it has been clear that Jorge Mario Bergoglio was going to be a different kind of Pope.

My personal experience with past papal expectations has been rather mixed and so I am still a little hesitant to fully embrace this new global enthusiasm for our new pope. Pope Pius XII was pope when I was born, but I have no memory of him and therefore I had no expectations.

St. John XXIII was the first pope I was aware of and his pontificate had the perverse effect of raising unrealistic expectations for all future popes. Pope John XXIII was the first pope in modern times to be considered a genuine world figure; he was loved and admired by people of all faiths in every country he called the Second Vatican Council in order to renew the Church; he was a Time Magazine's "Person of the Year"; and his death was mourned around the world. And as a young Catholic, with no other experience of a pope, I thought every pope would be like John XXIII.

With Blessed Paul VI expectations were initially high because he was committed to continuing the work of the Council. However over time it became clear that, his deep concern over possible schisms during the Council, would lead him to bow to the conservative minority. For me this was evidenced in his encyclical, "Humane Vita." At the same time he did make significant contributions to Catholic Social Teaching with his emphasis on the connections between development and peace and his encyclical on evangelization.

Pope John Paul I came as a breath of fresh air. Here was a pope with a contagious smile; an approachable man who seemed to be the perfect Pope for our media age. (So different from the scholastic and dower Paul VI.) Of course all of that potential was crushed with his untimely and unexpected death.

The election of St. John Paul II was an exciting surprise— the first non-Italian pope since 1523. Here was a man who understood what it meant to live under repressive rule and who had championed the struggle for freedom from tyranny.

He was also a man who was charismatic and articulate. He was the first truly global pope; traveling and speaking around the world. He also made important contributions Catholic social teaching in the areas of labor/economics, global solidarity and the environment. But over time it also became clear that this pope was an autocratic figure who drew all power to himself; crushing all those who voiced any dissent from his own interpretations of orthodoxy and voiding the authority of Church structures that fostered collaboration & collegiality. This was a pope who did a lot of talking but very little listening.

Pope Benedict XVI was the first pope in my lifetime for whom I had very low expectations upon his election but was surprised at the end of his pontificate. In addition to his contributions to the development of the

Church's teachings on the environment, his resignation, I believe, will be the most important and historically significant act of his papacy.

And so, as you can see from my own limited experience, when it comes to making judgments about any pope this early in their pontificate I am a little gun-shy. Will today's hope be crushed tomorrow? Is it better to expect little today in order to protect oneself from the possibility of painful disappointment down the road?

In the weeks following Pope Francis' election, I was interviewed by a few newspaper and radio journalists about my impressions of the new pope. At the time I said that the symbolism & atmospherics were excellent but I was unsure about the substance and direction of his pontificate.

Who could not be impressed when Pope Francis first came out onto the balcony to ask the People of God for their blessing? And what a surprise when he chose the name FRANCIS and what that might mean?

I was ecstatic about his decision to move out of the papal palace and into an apartment in the Vatican's Santa Marta hotel. At his first Holy Thursday Mass, Francis washed and kissed the feet of drug addicts, one of whom was a Muslim woman. During an interview on an airplane returning from World Youth Day he responded to a question about homosexuals with his headline producing quote, "Who am I to judge?" His recent trip to the Middle East was filled with grand gestures that spoke volumes about his heart and his head: all of which had greater impact than any of his prepared texts or sermons.

After such a long time of formal teachings through numerous encyclicals and doctrinal proclamations during the reign of Pope John Paul II, it has been difficult to adjust to the persuasive power of Pope Francis' Christian witness & compassionate gestures as unique forms of teaching. It is not that St. John Paul II was incapable of the grand gesture or that he did not give Christian witness. The difference is that Pope Francis understands the power of compassionate witness as an effective means of teaching in this audio-visual age.

When St. John Paul II had something important to say, he would write an encyclical. When Pope Francis has something important to say, he gives us an example to follow. And, in terms of impact and effectiveness, Pope Francis' compassionate public witness has probably made more of an impact both inside the Church and outside of the Church, than most encyclicals.

I think our pre-occupation with distinctions like "official teaching" vs "unofficial teaching" or "off the cuff remarks" has blinded us to this powerful style of communication embraced by this pope. Francis seems less concern with dogmatic exactness and more concern with Christian witness as a means of teaching the eternal truths of the Gospel. In other words, there seems to be a shift in emphasis from orthodoxy (right thinking) to orthopraxy (right doing).

Addressing the Global Human Family

Even with this new style of teaching it is still possible, to identify some of the major priorities and themes of Pope Francis' papacy so far. Let's begin by looking at some priorities and themes raised by Pope Francis in addressing the global human family.

1. Creating an Economy of Inclusion & Justice

From the start of his papacy Francis has made the sin of economic exclusion and inequality an important focus of his teaching. He understands that the increasing gap between the rich and poor is not just the results of impersonal economic forces (like the invisible hand of the market) but is the consequence of human sin that ultimately kills. As he stated in his apostolic exhortation:

Just as the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say “thou shalt not” to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills.

He also laments the way we have become callous to the daily human toll this economy of exclusion takes on the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters. Pope Francis also takes on the false promises of supply-side economics and rebukes the theory of trickle-down economics by pointing out that ---- like the emperor with no clothes, -- these economic theories of prosperity have never worked for the majority of people. The pope also defends the right and the obligation of the state --- charged with vigilance for the common good -- to exercise prudent regulation of the economy and the market. And he condemns those who defend the “absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation,” calling it a “new form of tyranny.”

Pope Francis also makes a clear link between economic justice and peace. He points out that until exclusion and inequality are reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence and war.

2. Rejecting Consumerism, Restoring Human Dignity and the Common Good

In highlighting the world financial and economic crisis, Pope Francis sees a deeper problem; a distorted and defective understanding of human dignity that reduces humans to nothing more than consumers and producers in the economic machine. The impact of this defective understanding of human nature has distorted not only our personal self-image but it has distorted the way we treat our fellow human beings and has corrupted the way we think of ourselves as members of one human family. As he stated in his recent apostolic exhortation:

... human beings themselves are nowadays considered as consumer goods which can be used and thrown away. We have started a throwaway culture. This tendency is seen on the level of individuals and whole societies.

Pope Francis sees great danger in consumerism and individualism because they make achieving the common good impossible. As he put it:

Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God’s voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades.

Addressing the Global Catholic Family

Now let’s look at some priorities & themes raised by Pope Francis in addressing the global Catholic Community.

1. It’s all about Jesus

I believe it is more than a coincidence that Pope Francis chose the topic of evangelization as the theme for his first formal address to the Church. It is part of his overall efforts to put the focus of the Church back on Jesus. And what I find appealing about this apostolic exhortation, “The Joy of the Gospel” is that it is firmly rooted in the Good News of Jesus the Christ.

Unlike some forms of the “new evangelization” which focus more on the glories of the Catholic Church than on the person of Jesus, Pope Francis reminds us that salvation is found, not in “churchianity” but in Christianity. The joy of the Gospel is not found in doctrines, dogmas or rituals but in a personal encounter with the risen Lord. As he states at the beginning of his exhortation:

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfaithfully each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord”

In taking this Christ-centered approach to the Catholic faith he chides those who like to measure fidelity with ledgers----- tallying the wrongs of others while rooting their own faith in the exactitudes of rules and regulations. He laments that: “There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter.” [Those who are] tempted to find excuses and complain, acting as if we could only be happy if a thousand conditions were met.”

Echoing the words of Benedict XVI he points out that being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty ideal, but the result of an encounter with Jesus. Putting the emphasis back on Jesus, Pope Francis stated:

“The church sometimes has locked itself up in small things, in small-minded rules. The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you. And the ministers of the church must be ministers of mercy above all.”

2. A Poor Church in Service to the Poor

As the first pope from the southern hemisphere, Pope Francis has put the concerns of the poor at the top of the agenda for the entire Church, starting with each individual and every parish. As he has stated: “Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society.”

Pope Francis understands that poverty is more than just a lack of economic resources, it is the exclusion and marginalization of the poor which denies them full participate in the life of the community and keeps them from developing their full human potential. He points out that the option for the poor has a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity because it is the result of a divine preference that has consequences for the faith life of all Christians.

This is why he wants a Church which is poor and for the poor. Pope Francis also makes it clear that this option for the poor is not based solely on the needs of the poor for our charity. He points out that the poor have much to teach us and that we need to be evangelized by them. _Returning again to a proper understanding of the “new evangelism” Pope Francis reminds us:

The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in [the lives of the poor] and to put them at the center of the Church's pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.

This commitment to become a poor Church for the poor is not simply given as advice about how to conduct or parish outreach programs or inform our peace and justice work. For Pope Francis it is crucial to the on-going health and future of the entire Church. As he warns us:

Any Church community, if it thinks it can comfortably go its own way without creative concern and effective cooperation in helping the poor to live with dignity and reaching out to everyone, will also risk breaking down, however much it may talk about social issues or criticize governments. It will easily drift into a spiritual worldliness camouflaged by religious practices, unproductive meetings and empty talk.

3. The Church belongs to everyone

In a 180 degree turn from the effort of those who advocate for a smaller more devotional Church that would exclude all those who do not pass their dogmatic litmus test that defines a "good Catholic", Pope Francis has returned to the Church's long tradition of genuine catholicity and openness to all. As he made clear:

"The Church is not the Church only for good people. Do we want to describe who belongs to the Church, to this feast? The sinners. All of us sinners are invited. ... You can't pick and choose: the Church is for everyone, beginning with those I've already mentioned, the most marginalized. It is everyone's Church!"

Pope Francis points out that this mercy shown to all is the fruit of the mercy that God has shown to each of us. He encourages us to reach out even to those considered unclean with the full understanding that to welcome the unclean is to share in their social stigma. We must be willing to take on "the smell" of those we dare to welcome. Again, in explaining his understanding of evangelization,

An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the "smell of the sheep" and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be.

His struggle to turn the church to mercy first is evidenced in his input into the synod on the family. Pope Francis wants a church that put the human dignity of members LGBT at the forefront. He wants to find a way to welcome those who are in unsanctioned marriages and relationships while at the same time holding up the ideal of married life. He challenges us to recognize the value and gifts those who in the past have been condemned and rejected by the Church.

4. It's Time to Change the Conversation

Reflecting the concerns and priorities of the Church of the Global South Pope Francis, has signaled a need to change the conversation within the Church. He points out that the Roman Catholic Church had grown “obsessed” with preaching about abortion, gay marriage and contraception. In remarkably blunt language, Pope Francis seeks to set a new tone for the church, saying it should be a “home for all” and not a “small chapel” focused on doctrine, orthodoxy and a limited agenda of moral teachings.

In an interview with the Editor in Chief of *La Civiltà Cattolica* the pope said:

“It is not necessary to talk about these issues all the time. The dogmatic and moral teachings of the church are not all equivalent. The church’s pastoral ministry cannot be obsessed with the transmission of a disjointed multitude of doctrines to be imposed insistently.”

Calling for a new balance, the Pope warns that an obsession with all things pertaining to sex puts the Church in danger of losing the freshness and fragrance of the Gospel. While continuing to support and defend the Church’s teachings on sexual morality, the Pope has signaled that sexual morality is not the heart of the Gospel nor is it the sum of our moral teaching.

From the perspective of the majority of Catholics who live in the global south, sexual ethics is probably not most challenging issue they face. And it is no coincidence that well-off Catholics in the north seem preoccupied with sexual morality because doing so provides a convenient distraction from those moral teachings of the Church that directly challenge their economic and social power and entitlements.

5. Collaboration is important; everyone has a part to play

Building on his concern over the culture of selfishness and individualism that often prevails in society Pope Francis calls for a return to genuine solidarity. And it is this culture of solidarity that provides the foundation of his call for greater collaboration and collegiality in the Church. His model of pastoral ministry (for both ordained and lay) is grounded in a theology of accompaniment that respects people’s dignity and is open to learning something new from those to whom we minister. As he urged the bishops of Brazil:

“Unless we train ministers capable of warming people’s hearts, of walking with them in the night, of dialoguing with their hopes and disappointments, of mending their brokenness, what hope can we have for our present and future journey?”

This trust in the working of the Holy Spirit through the entire People of God is leading him to revive the structures and practices of collegiality in the Church. As he points out:

“There is need, then, for a greater appreciation of local and regional elements. Central bureaucracy is not sufficient; there is also a need for increased collegiality and solidarity.” What is needed is “not unanimity, but true unity in the richness of diversity.”

Already early in his pontificate Francis has called for a synod of bishops to help him in his role as teacher and pastor to the Church. He described the synods as “one of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council” and a structure “at the service of the mission and communion of the church, as an expression of collegiality.” The Pope has made it clear that he does not intend to control everything from Rome. He expects local bishops to take initiative to meet the needs of their people.

This Pope has also revived and given special emphasis to the concept of '*sensus fidei*' – the sense of the people. In June, the Vatican International Theological Commission released a groundbreaking document, "*Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church." The statement surprised many because it acknowledges the role played by ordinary Catholics in the growth and development and change in church teaching throughout history and still today. The document states:

"The *sensus fidei fidelis* is a sort of spiritual instinct that enables the believer to judge spontaneously whether a particular teaching or practice is or is not in conformity with the Gospel and with apostolic faith"

The Response to Pope Francis

Within the Church the reactions to Pope Francis have been overwhelmingly positive – especially his emphasis on poverty and the need of the Church to live simply and put mercy ahead of judgment. At the same time, some Catholic Traditionalists have been scandalized by our new pope. As Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput stated "Catholics on the right wing of the church have not been really happy about (Francis') election."

Many traditionalists are trying to reconcile Francis's words and deeds with their own understanding of what it means to be Catholic. And it should be noted that many are genuinely struggling to connect with this pope. They are sharing widely online essays with names like "Pope Francis is killing me," and "Why Pope Francis makes me uncomfortable."

Mary Ellen Barringer, of Silver Spring, Maryland attends Mass daily and she misses Pope Benedict "desperately." Right away, she said, Francis challenged all Catholics to do more. She felt him saying to people like her: Writing checks to pro-life causes isn't enough; you need to get closer to the disenfranchised and the poor. She felt the pope telling her she was being smug about less traditional Catholics. "Maybe Pope Francis is calling me to love someone whose views I don't like. And how much better would the world be if we got over all this."

On the other hand some traditionalist denounce his pastoral emphasis as being too populist — which in the mind of some traditionalist means that he is theologically naïve or sloppy. It is clear that populism; the belief in the rights, wisdom, or virtues of the common people is viewed as disdainful & morally suspect by some critics of the Pope.

John Vennari, noted Catholic observer and editor of The Catholic Family News wrote: "He seems to have a good heart and some good Catholic instincts, but theologically he is a train wreck—remarkably sloppy," In a recent blog Vennari wrote "Though this might shock some readers, I must say that I would never allow Pope Francis to teach religion to my children."

On the other side of the political spectrum some progressives think that Francis is just more of the same, but with better PR skills. John Bloodworth, editor of the popular British progressive political blog Left Foot Forward, warns that Francis is no different from his predecessors. He believes that part of Francis's popularity is simply a result of "clever repackaging"

In the political world many progressives who, for decades, have struggled for economic and social justice have been encouraged by Pope Francis. For Catholic peace and social justice activists, this new papacy comes like a breath of fresh air providing new possibilities within the institutional Church that had been unthinkable just a few years ago. And while we are a long way from seeing peace and social justice become a mainstay in parishes and dioceses across the U.S. it is at least a little harder for bishops and pastors to ignore or dismiss parishioners who echo the Pope's call to be a poor church for the poor. At the same time many progressive politicians have not been shy in quoting this Pope when defending and promoting policies they champion that address economic inequality and the needs of the poor.

On the other end of the political spectrum the words and deeds of Pope Francis have not been well received. After a very short "honeymoon" of favorable coverage about the Pope the conservative punditry has gone into high gear in their critique of his words and deeds. (At this point, conservative politicians have remained silent because it is still bad politics to openly criticize the leader of the Global Catholic Church. However, an innocuous resolution intended to honor Pope Francis had trouble making its way through the House of Representatives — reportedly mired in politics because some lawmakers view the pontiff as "too liberal.")

In the world of conservative punditry Pope Francis has been called a Leninist, a Marxist, a Communist and anti-American, But the worst indictment from the political right is that Pope Francis is "the Catholic Church's Obama." The political right is outraged that the Pope would criticize capitalism even though every pope in the modern era has done the same including their favorite, St John Paul II. For some on the right, capitalism is the economic system ordained by God;

The attacks from the political right in this regard can be divided into two basic arguments. The first is that the Pope is ignorant of economics. In a December 5 column on FoxNews.com, senior analyst Andrew Napolitano criticized Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation charging him with a "disturbing ignorance" of economics. The charge is that the pope and more widely most bishops know nothing about economics and do not have the competency to speak on the subject. (Given the abysmal record of most conservative economists' predictions over the last 30 years this charge is almost laughable.)

At the same time Pope Francis and his fellow bishops have many years of experience in running large not-for-profit corporations that manage millions of dollars' worth of property and investments; they are responsible for making the payroll; they develop annual budgets and have financed new buildings and capital projects. The fact of the matter is that most bishops have more real life experience in "economics" than most of the conservative pundits who call them ignorant.

The irony of this line of attack from the political right is that, while they claim that the Catholic hierarchy has no competency to speak about economics they have no problem with the hierarchy speaking dogmatically about issues related to women's reproductive health and family planning; even though their competency in this area is arguably less than their competency in economics.

The second argument made against Pope Francis' teachings about the sin of economic inequality is that he must be talking about someone else. They argue that the kind of capitalism Pope Francis is talking about does not exist; and if it exists at all, it does not exist in the U.S. Breitbart.com's John Hayward takes issue with the Pope's critique of capitalism stating:

Would the Pope care to show me some of that "unfettered" capitalism he's talking about? I don't know if that's even a defensible description of the Third World exploitation he usually criticizes. It's absolutely laughable to think "unfettered capitalism" exists anywhere in the Western world.

Others like Cardinal Dolan of New York take a more subtle approach. They blame the media for quoting the pope out of context and of wrongly applying the pope's critique to the way capitalism works in the U.S. Commenting on Cardinal Dolan's opinion piece in the Wall Street Journal, equating the American economic system with "virtuous capitalism" Fr. Drew Christiansen, professor of ethics and global human development at Georgetown university stated:

It wasn't Argentinean populist economics, Eastern European crony capitalism or African kleptocracy that threatened the world economy with the worst recession since the 1930s. It was no-holds-barred American capitalism that did that. ... Cardinal Dolan misses what Pope Francis sees so clearly. The growth of inequality everywhere, including the U.S. is a result of American-style capitalism and the financialization of the economy.

Pope Francis effect on Catholics in the pew in the U.S.?

In March of this year the Pew Research on Religion and Public Life sought to measure this impact. They found that the evidence on this question was mixed. Researchers found no change in the share of U.S. adults who identify as Catholics. They also found no change in self-reported rates of Mass attendance among Catholics. This survey also found no evidence that large numbers of Catholics are volunteering more or going to confession more often than in the past.

At the same time, one-quarter of Catholics say they have become more excited about their Catholic faith over the past year. Increased excitement and devotion are most pronounced among Catholics who already attend Mass regularly. This suggests that if there has been a "Francis effect," it has been most pronounced among Catholics who already were highly committed to the practice of their faith.

I think it also demonstrates that old political axiom of former Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill that all politics is local. Or, in this case it means that most Catholics' attitudes toward the Church are rooted in their experiences in their local parish. Pronouncements from Rome or from the chancery may excite or disappoint, but in the end, most people decide to stay or leave based on their experience of church in their parishes.

And I think this observation speaks to the long-term prospects of what impact a Pope Francis papacy may have on the Church at the parish level. I think it would be a mistake to think that Pope Francis could have the same impact on the Church as St. John Paul II. This has nothing to do with the quality of his teaching or the impact of his Christian witness. In the end it is all about life-expectancy.

The papacy of Pope John Paul II lasted 27 years (the second longest in history). Because of this, his impact on the Church was enormous. Most bishops around the world were appointed by him. In addition, because of his long 27-year reign; every Catholic institution, from seminaries to universities, has been impacted by his style of leadership and his ecclesial theology.

On the other hand, Pope Francis was 77 years old when he was elected. At best he will only have 10 years to make his mark on the Church. Because of this he has to be very selective and strategic about what he does with the little time he has. For those of us who live in the Global North, this means we will need to come to grips with some hard truths about ourselves and we will need to develop strategies that will help us identify and deal with our over-inflated sense of entitlement and privilege.

Before going further I want to take a moment to describe what I mean by the terms Global North and Global South. When I speak of the Global North and the Global South I am not speaking primarily in terms of geographic location; I am speaking about social, political and economic location.

The Global North represents the centers of power and privilege around the world. Those who inhabit the Global North have control of most of the important levers of power and have access and control of most of the world's resources. They are privileged by race, class, gender, sexual orientation and other social, political and cultural markers of superiority.

While most of those who inhabit the Global South live in the southern hemisphere there are also wealthy groups in the south who inhabit the social, economic and political space of the Global North. Likewise, there are many communities who live in the northern hemisphere who inhabit the social, economic and political space of the Global South. One salient characteristic of those who inhabit the Global South, regardless of where they live on the planet is that they are predominately poor people of color.

The Challenge to the U.S. Catholic Peace & Justice Movement

With this description in mind let's begin by acknowledging of some important truths that are far too easy to forget. The first truth we need to acknowledge is that the U.S. Catholic Church is only 6% of the global Catholic Church. The vast majority of Catholics on this planet are brown and black and they are--- by U.S. standards ---extremely poor. It is also clear that the concerns of these Catholics will be the primary focus for Pope Francis' papacy.

In other words, the Catholic Church agenda will not be driven by European and American concerns. The focus will not be on our theological, pastoral, social and cultural issues. This will be true for progressives as well as conservatives.

The second truth that we need to keep at the forefront of our work on behalf of peace with justice is that the U.S. Catholic Church will soon become a majority minority Church. And while it is not the case that all Catholic people of color are poor, it is true that people of color suffer more from policies and practices that oppress and marginalize the poor. As a national Catholic organization that is still predominantly white Pax Christi (PCUSA) needs to be attentive to the way white power and privilege mis-shapes our understanding of nonviolent peacemaking and limits the effectiveness of our peace and justice work.

Since its founding in the early 1970s PCUSA has done an excellent job of making nonviolent peacemaking a legitimate expression of Catholic teaching in the U.S. and has helped build legitimacy for Catholic conscientious objection. The shadow side of this extraordinary accomplishment is that fact that our mostly white Catholic peace movement has completely colonized the theology and practice of Catholic nonviolence and peacemaking in the U.S. Church in a way that excludes much of the wisdom and experience of communities of color in the United States who struggle to combat violence where they live.

Fortunately PCUSA is beginning to recognize this problem. Through our Brothers & Sisters All Anti-Racism Initiative PCUSA is beginning to recognize how white power and privilege impoverishes our theology and practice of nonviolent peacemaking and stunts our effectiveness in building a broad-based Catholic movement for peace with justice.

In order to develop a more inclusive and authentic understanding of nonviolent peacemaking and to counteract the temptation of operating out of white power and privilege PCUSA is learning to be more accountable to POC where we live. This is an important step in aligning ourselves with the struggles of our brothers and sisters who inhabit the social, economic and political space known as the Global South.

We also need to resist the temptation of pitting the needs of the Global South here in the U.S. against the needs of the Global South around the world. (This divide-against strategy is often employed by those who exercise power and privilege at the expense of the oppressed and marginalized and it is a way for white social justice activists to stay in control the agenda.)

Instead we need to make the connections between the struggles of communities of the Global South in our own cities and town with the struggles of communities of the Global South around the world. We need to move away from the false choices of working on so-called international issues of violence and poverty or working on so-called national issues of violence and poverty. What global free market capitalism has already fully integrated into the way it operates but what most peace and justice groups have yet to come to grips with is that the local IS the global and the global IS the local. The real challenge for peace and justice activists moving forward centers on the issues of integrity and authenticity of our peace and justice work not on whether we should focus on national issues or international issues.

Doing our peace and justice work with integrity and authenticity means that the quality of our solidarity with poor communities of color on the wrong side of town will determine the integrity and authenticity of our solidarity work with poor communities of color around the world. For a peace and justice movement more accustomed to building solidarity with poor communities in the Third World than with building relationships with poor Communities of Color where we live, this work begins with learning to follow the lead of poor Communities of Color in our midst. And for the white peace and justice movement, it means using our power and privilege to create opportunities for Communities of the Global South where we live to build relationships with Communities of the Global South around the world so that together they can create a peace and justice agenda for all of us.

Acting in this way I believe we can enter into the kind of conversion that Pope Francis is calling on us to make. In order to have a Pope Francis Effect on our own lives, maybe we need to heed the wisdom of another prophet of the Global South, the Mahatma Gandhi:

“Recall the face of the poorest and weakest person you have seen, and ask yourself if this step you contemplate is going to be any use to that person.”