

least partial antidotes to the perennial problem of *odium theologicum* that are worth recalling here: “*In fide, unitas; in dubiis, libertas; in omnibus, caritas*” (In matters of faith, unity; in matters of doubt, liberty; in all things, charity).¹⁰⁴

To quote Bishop Tobin of Providence again: “Relax, God is still in charge.”¹⁰⁵

JAMES T. BRETZKE, SJ

Boston College School of Theology and Ministry

The Reach and Limits of the Francis Effect: A Response to James T. Bretzke, SJ

Many people sense that Pope Francis is doing something new. Not only theologians, but ordinary Catholics, people of other faiths, and secular observers are listening to this pope in a new way because he seems different from previous popes. Some argue that though Francis’ tone is distinct, much of what he is saying and doing was said and done by his predecessors. Others warn that while the new tone may be encouraging, moral norms (especially those related to sex, marriage, and gender) have not changed. James Bretzke does a great service by amassing large amounts of data to show that the “Francis Effect” or difference is both substantive and real.

According to Bretzke, while Popes John Paul II and Benedict saw secularism as the problem and called Catholics to trust in the authoritative teachings of the institutional church, Francis sees the church as a field hospital that embodies the love and mercy of the gospel by going out to heal those wounded by poverty, consumerism, violence, and isolation. In my brief response, I would like to affirm Bretzke’s main thesis by highlighting some of the evidence he presents for the Francis Effect, argue that the limits of the effect are evident in Pope Francis’ remarks and actions on gender, and suggest

badly, let him correct him with charity. If that is not enough, let him seek all the suitable means to bring him to mean it well, and save himself” (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/seil/seilo6.htm>).

¹⁰⁴ For an illuminating discourse on the path to unity, see Pope Francis’ message for the Day of Christian Unity held in Phoenix, May 23, 2015, at <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-sends-greetings-for-us-christian-unity-event>.

¹⁰⁵ Tobin, “Random Thoughts.”

Julie Hanlon Rubio is Professor of Christian Ethics at St. Louis University. She specializes in social ethics with attention to marriage and family issues. Her most recent book is Hope for Common Ground: Mediating the Personal and the Political in a Divided Church (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016).

that Pope Francis' welcoming of frank debate and comfort with diversity may signal the beginning of a new era marked by mercy and inclusion, rather than a victory for progressive or traditional Catholics.

While many point to common themes among the three most recent popes, especially on issues of environmental concern, social justice, and the family, Bretzke rightfully seeks evidence for his "Francis Effect" thesis not only in documents but in the speeches, homilies, and staffing changes that are crucial indicators of the character of the papacy. The continuity of key aspects of Catholic social thought in magisterial writings is important to emphasize, especially for secular observers who may be unaware of the church's long history of critiquing capitalism and supporting the poor. Yet Bretzke convincingly argues that "reading the tea leaves" requires much more than comparing authoritative teachings.

He also highlights *actions* of Pope Francis, such as choices about what not to wear and how to begin his papacy, important appointments from different ideological factions and geographic regions who were given the task of enacting significant Curia reforms, the appointment of progressive bishops in four US cities who have been the subject of conservative ire, more serious confrontation of the clericalism that enabled the sexual abuse crisis than previous popes were willing to mount, the calling of lay people to the sexual abuse commission as well as the acceptance of Bishop Finn's resignation (the first time a bishop has been forced out because of his role in facilitating clerical sexual abuse), the maintenance of his chosen agenda for the synod even when it meant marginalizing critics like Cardinal Raymond Burke, and the reintegration of moderate theologians and bishops who had been pushed to the sidelines in previous papacies.

Beneath these significant actions is a more subtle change in priorities that is indicative of what Bretzke characterizes as a "paradigm shift." Though both previous popes wrote important social encyclicals and often modeled humility, Pope Benedict is remembered for his advocacy of theological orthodoxy and Pope John Paul II for his Theology of the Body. Francis has recentered the church on mercy, justice, and healing. In his papal bull, he places mercy at the heart of Christianity, saying, "Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life." In his writings, especially *Laudato Si'* (2015) and *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013),¹⁰⁶ he has repeatedly emphasized the church's responsibility to the weak and vulnerable and his desire to reach out to those who feel excluded. Though little here is completely new, the choice of what to say frequently

¹⁰⁶ Pope Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, May 24, 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html; Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 24, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

(Bretzke notes that Pope Francis is remarkably “on message”) and what not to say at all speaks volumes about priorities. More than Benedict XVI or John Paul II, Francis has managed to convince large majorities of Christians and non-Christians that the church aspires to be an institution centered on mercy and justice.

While Bretzke attempts to include the pope’s treatment of gender in his argument for the Francis Effect, here the evidence is weaker and the limits of change are evident. Bretzke emphasizes hopeful signs: an end to the LWCR visitation; staffing decisions suggesting that while women’s ordination is not on the table, opposition to it is not a litmus test; appointments of women to key positions; and a call for equal pay rooted in the concept of equality of persons.

However, the pope’s attempts to use changes in tone and personnel to new effect on gender issues have been more limited and less successful. On these issues, there is less understanding of the difficulty an all-male clergy presents for contemporary men and women and less sensitivity to the effects of lingering patriarchy in the church.¹⁰⁷ While the pope engages the sciences when writing on environmental justice, social science is not explicitly engaged when he speaks or writes about sex and gender. Rather, vague references to “gender ideology” or “gender theory” serve to marginalize whole discourses and block conversation.¹⁰⁸ Calls for a new “theology of women” fail to recognize the wealth of feminist theology that exists, and seem to reaffirm the idea that women are different and in need of special analysis.¹⁰⁹ While theologians such as Walter Kasper and Gustavo Gutiérrez are re-emerging, women theologians, especially those with feminist sensibilities, remain largely absent from public ecclesial discussion. The pope’s references to the “feminine genius” of women theologians, who, he famously said, are “the strawberry on the cake,” have only rarely translated into respect for feminist expertise in theological discussions of sex and gender.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ For feminist appreciation and critique of Pope Francis, see, e.g., Emily Reimer-Barry, “On Naming God: Gendered God-Talk in *Laudato Si’*,” *Catholic Moral Theology*, June 30, 2015, <http://catholicmoraltheology.com/on-naming-god-gendered-god-talk-in-laudato-si/>.

¹⁰⁸ Joshua J. McElwee, “Francis Strongly Criticizes Gender Theory, Comparing It to Nuclear Arms,” *National Catholic Reporter*, February 13, 2015, <http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/francis-strongly-criticizes-gender-theory-comparing-nuclear-arms>.

¹⁰⁹ Megan Fincher and Colleen Dunne, “Women Resistant to Pope Francis’ Call for New Theology,” *National Catholic Reporter*, November 4, 2013, <http://ncronline.org/news/women-resist-call-new-theology>.

¹¹⁰ Hannah Roberts, “Women Theologians Are ‘The Strawberry on the Cake,’ Says Pope Francis,” *The Tablet*, December 11, 2014, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/1508/o/-women-theologians-are-the-strawberry-on-the-cake-says-pope>.

While many Catholic men and women were invited to contribute to the preparation for the Synod of the Family by responding the Vatican's survey, the few women who actually spoke at the synod were those involved in lay family organizations.¹¹¹ Women theologians who have devoted a lifetime to scholarship on sex and gender issues from a feminist perspective (e.g., Margaret Farley, Lisa Sowle Cahill, Susan Ross, Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, Christine Firer Hinze, Patricia Beattie Jung, Cristina Traina) were not named as public consultants to the synod, appointed to the committee that drafted the synod documents, included in the colloquium on marriage that followed the synod, or invited to speak at the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia in October 2015.¹¹² At the colloquium on marriage, an international group of scholars and pastors committed to the traditional family gathered, and Pope Francis spoke of the enduring relevance of complementarity with no reference to the work of women theologians who have been critical of it.¹¹³ When it comes to sex and gender issues, the attention to mercy, justice, and humility that mark Pope Francis' approach to other issues is less evident and the paradigm of church remains largely the same. This limits the "Francis Effect."

Still, the paradigm shift Bretzke documents is significant, and it appears that with the Synod on the Family, significant dialogue is happening now that simply was not possible before. Bretzke notes with interest that as traditionalist Catholics are now having to defend their disagreements with Pope Francis, progressives may justly hope for shared acknowledgment of the reality that all knowledge is, at least in part, "culturally conditioned and paradigm dependent." But are traditionalists who find themselves at odds with the pope really coming to more readily perceive the limits of papal wisdom, and thus to scale back what some have called "creeping infallibility"? If so, what does this mean for progressives who are currently having a field day quoting papal pronouncements, if not seeing all the change for which they

¹¹¹ Carol Glatz, "Pope Appoints 14 Couples to Attend Synod of Bishops on Family," *National Catholic Reporter*, September 9, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/pope-appoints-14-couples-attend-synod-bishops-family>.

¹¹² The schedule of speakers for the World Meeting of Families is available at <http://www.worldmeeting2015.org/about-the-event/adult-congress-sessions-thursday-friday/>. For a summary of the colloquium on gender, see Michael Severance, "Vatican's Colloquium on Marriage Focuses on Universal Right, Complementarity, Anthropology, and Strategy," *Catholic World Report*, November 19, 2014, http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/3524/vaticans_colloquium_on_marriage_focuses_on_universal_right_complementarity_anthropology_and_strategy.aspx. A small number of women scholars are included, but there is little diversity in this group.

¹¹³ The full text of the pope's speech is available at http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/11/17/pope_francis_marriage_and_the_family_are_in_crisis/1111371.

have been waiting? Bretzke seems willing to grant that the Francis Effect is not a “progressives win” story. Rather, as we all perceive a paradigm shift, some Catholics celebrate while others worry about the future of the church. No one is completely happy, but there is space for greater humility all around.

As Bretzke clearly shows, ours is an interesting moment. The church of mercy, humility, and inclusion is just taking shape. These marks require the church to acknowledge its limits, just as each Catholic is mindful of hers or his. It is not so much that the progressive wing of the church has re-emerged with the Francis Effect or that the traditionalists still have doctrine on their side, but that mercy wins. Progressive Catholics are deeply grateful for the shift in tone, the broad understanding of the church, and the focus on gospel-inspired priorities. A small number of the most traditional Catholics are distraught. However, given the pope’s sky-high approval ratings, it is clear that most traditional Catholics side with progressive Catholics in affirming many aspects of the paradigm shift.¹¹⁴ But we all will have to live with mercy and inclusion for everyone.

Pope Francis’ closing speech at the 2014 Synod is perhaps our best indication of what a church of mercy and inclusion will look like. In it, he praised all of the bishops for their frank dialogue, told them he understood the worries of both sides, insisted that “it would have been disappointing not to have debate like this,” and encouraged them to continue the challenge of being one church. Aware that critics accuse him of destabilizing the church by inviting dialogue, he suggested that the messiness of the process he encouraged was a faithful way of being the church in the world:

And this is the Church, the vineyard of the Lord, the fertile Mother and the caring Teacher, who is not afraid to roll up her sleeves to pour oil and wine on people’s wounds; who doesn’t see humanity as a house of glass to judge or categorize people. This is the Church, One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and composed of sinners, needful of God’s mercy. This is the Church, the true bride of Christ, who seeks to be faithful to her spouse and to her doctrine. It is the Church that is not afraid to eat and drink with prostitutes and publicans. The Church that has the doors wide open to receive the needy, the penitent, and not only the just or those who believe they are perfect!¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Pew Research Center, “In U.S., Pope’s Popularity Continues to Grow,” *Pew Forum*, March 15, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/03/05/in-u-s-popes-popularity-continues-to-grow/>. Favorability ratings are highest among those who attend Mass regularly. The ratings are about the same for Democrats and Republicans. Ninety-four percent of conservatives and 87 percent of liberals hold a favorable view of Pope Francis.

¹¹⁵ Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Conclusion of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops,” October 18, 2014, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141018_conclusionone-sinodo-dei-vescovi.html.

Though the Francis Effect is not uniform and is only just beginning to take shape, this is a promising direction.

JULIE HANLON RUBIO
St. Louis University

What on Earth (or Heaven) Is the “Francis Effect”? A Response to James T. Bretzke, SJ

James Bretzke notes the ambiguity of the term “Francis Effect” and the difficulty of applying any measures to it. At the root of this difficulty is an ambiguity in the word *effect* itself. If by this term we mean that some things have transpired as a result of the election of Jorge Maria Bergoglio as the bishop of Rome, then this is trivially true. Had Bergoglio suffered cardiac arrest immediately upon selecting the name Francis (God forbid), even that would have yielded some Francis Effect. Of course, in the media and in Bretzke’s essay, the term refers to more than this. For the purposes of this response, I am borrowing three ecclesiastical terms to flesh out possible understandings of this “more”: *ordinary*, *extraordinary*, and *modal*. I take up each of these in turn.

The “Ordinary” Francis Effect

The Vatican I document *Pastor Aeternus* begins its vigorous defense of the papal office with a brief description of its purpose in the life of the church:

In order, then, that the episcopal office should be one and undivided and that, by the union of the clergy, the whole multitude of believers should be held together in the unity of faith and communion, [Christ] set blessed Peter over the rest of the apostles and instituted in him the permanent principle of both unities and their visible foundation.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ First Vatican Council, *First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ (Pastor Aeternus)*, prologue, in Norman P. Tanner, SJ, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London: Sheed & Ward; Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 2:812–13 (Latin-English).

Reid B. Locklin is Associate Professor of Christianity and the Intellectual Tradition at the University of Toronto, a joint appointment with St. Michael's College and the Department for the Study of Religion. His research focuses on a range of issues in Comparative Theology and Hindu-Christian Studies, particularly the engagement between Christian thought and the Hindu tradition of Advaita Vedanta. He also writes on the scholarship of teaching and learning in theology and religion. He received his PhD in Theology from Boston College in 2003.