



CENTER FOR CATHOLIC STUDIES

TO: WBC AND MICAH PARTICIPANTS

FROM: MONSIGNOR RICHARD LIDDY

SUBJECT: *Introducing Pope Francis to America*

DATE: OCTOBER, 2015

- **Welcome and self introductions**
- **Woodstock Business Conference Mission Statement**

The mission of the Woodstock business Conference is to establish and lead a national and international network of business executives to explore their respective religious traditions in order to assist the individual executives:

- To integrate faith, family and professional life,
- To develop a corporate culture that is reflective of their religious faith and values, and
- To exercise a beneficial influence upon society at large

The Conference, grounded in the Roman Catholic tradition, welcomes believers who are open to and respectful of one another's religious tradition. It is committed to the conviction that ethics and values grow out of one's religious heritage.

- **Scripture Reading: Luke1: 67-80; Zakariah's Canticle**
- **Then Zechariah his father, filled with the Holy Spirit, uttered this prophecy: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel because he has visited and ransomed his people. He has raised a horn of saving strength for us in the house of David his servant. As he promised through the mouths of his holy ones, the prophets of ancient times. Salvation from our enemies and from the hands of all our foes. He has dealt mercifully with our fathers and remembered the holy covenant he made, the oath he swore to Abraham our father he would grant us; that rid of fear and delivered from the enemy. We should serve him devoutly and through all our days be holy in his sight. And you O child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High. For you shall go before the**

Lord to prepare a straight paths for him. Giving his people a knowledge of salvation in freedom from their sins. All this is the work of the kindness of our God; he, the Dayspring, shall visit us in his mercy to shine on those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace.” The child grew up and matured in spirit. He lived in the desert until the day when he made his public appearance in Israel

- **Quiet Reflection 5 minutes followed by sharing insights**

Introducing Pope Francis to America: Our first-time visitor will find a free-enterprise system that has lifted millions from poverty.

By JIM NICHOLSON And [NEWT GINGRICH](#)
Sept. 18, 2015 5:54 p.m. ET

As lay Catholics, one of us a “cradle” Catholic, and one of us a convert, we add our warm welcome to you, [Pope Francis](#), on your upcoming pastoral visit to the United States.

Americans deeply admire—and share—your commitment, as affirmed in your inaugural Mass, “to protect the whole of creation, to protect each person, especially the poorest.” In that same Mass you called on all of us to share in this service to the person “so that the star of hope will shine brightly.”

Americans know this service well. Our nation was founded precisely on the basis of protecting the person. Our founders proclaimed the “self-evident” truth that all men are created equal and endowed by our Creator with unalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Our form of government is often called an “experiment” because it was an exception to the prevailing practices of government everywhere else in the world in which rights of the person were defined (and routinely violated) by kings, despots and oligarchs. Here, God is the source of rights and the people govern. Government was designed to be the servant of the people, not their master.

Several decades later, an American president reflected on the explosion of prosperity that followed the establishment of this experiment. He wrote that it was not the result of accident but of something close to the human heart. “That something,” wrote Abraham Lincoln, “is the principle of ‘Liberty to

all’—the principle that clears the path for all—gives hope to all—and, by consequence, enterprise, and industry to all.”

In his search for understanding America, 19th-century French visitor Alexis de Tocqueville wrote of the deepest source of America’s capacity for renewal: “Religion in America takes no direct part in the government of society, but it must nevertheless be regarded as the foremost of the political institutions of that country; for if it does not impart a taste for freedom, it facilitates the use of free institutions.”

During his 2008 visit, Pope Benedict described the American experiment this way: “In a word, freedom is ever new. It is a challenge held out to each generation, and it must constantly be won over for the cause of good.”

This ever-present challenge of winning freedom for the cause of good is why all of America joyfully welcomes you and your ministry. You are clear about good and evil. You have met with the victims of priestly abuse and mafia violence. You speak of the devil as a reality to be confronted. We need your wisdom and prayerful guidance to meet the challenge of freedom for a new generation. What you will find is an America that never stops debating the best way to order freedom to the good for the benefit of all.

You have laudably made active outreach to the poorest and most vulnerable one of the pillars of your pontificate, inviting all people of good will to come to the aid of those in need. Care for the poor—understood not just as a socioeconomic class, but as all those who cannot fully care for themselves—is among the foundational values of this country. Having come from poverty to prosperity, Americans have not clung greedily to their wealth, but have shared prosperity with the rest of the world, both through direct aid and through investment in the ideas and initiatives of others.

Far more significantly, many of our young citizens in uniform have fought and died to free others from tyranny, and to make possible the opportunities that we have enjoyed.

We note, your Holiness, in your recent speech in Bolivia that it is your view that the predominant global economic system has the “mentality of profit at any price, with no concern for social exclusion or the destruction of nature.”

That is not the United States.

Much of the opportunity that characterizes our nation, a nation of immigrants, flows from a political and economic system that rewards hard work and creativity. We strive to put the well-being of the human person at the center of economic activity. You will find a free enterprise system that has lifted millions from poverty and has made America unique among nations. Though it has flaws, our economic system is not some savage jungle. Instead, it is founded on the rule of law and sustained by a strong national ethic of honesty, responsibility, thriftiness and care for one's neighbor—virtues prized and propagated by the Catholic Church and by America's Founding Fathers, as well.

Finally, Your Holiness, as faithful Catholics, we have read your recent encyclical, "[Laudato Si'](#)," and note your sincere concern for the human condition and our habitat. Your compassionate prose is inspiring, especially when addressing human trafficking, food and stewardship of the environment. You acknowledge that the Catholic Church "does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics" and call for an open dialogue.

It is in that spirit that we urge you to speak out against those who would deny the use of fossil fuels to bring electricity to the billion-plus people who still do not have this basic prerequisite for a better life. We would not deny food or water to the poor. So too we must not deny fossil fuels to the poor. When people can refrigerate medicine, pump water and read in the dark they have a dramatically better chance at escaping poverty, and the degradation of dignity that goes with it.

In the debate about global climate change, we continue to have the obligation to protect each person, especially the poorest. America used to be poor and polluted. It is now more prosperous and much cleaner. The two correlate.

You can tell, Holy Father, we are proud of our country and we hope your first visit will afford you the chance, as it did for de Tocqueville, to see that this experiment in freedom and opportunity is working. We pray it will continue. *Benvenuto!*

Mr. Nicholson was U.S. ambassador to the Holy See (2001-05). Mr. Gingrich was speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives (1995-99).

The Two Sides of Pope Francis

His speech to Congress was spiritual and not pointedly political, which came as a relief.

By [PEGGY NOONAN](#)

Updated Sept. 25, 2015 6:08 p.m. ET

Washington

The pope I love embraces the hideously deformed man. He sees the modern world for what it is, “a field hospital after battle.” We’re in triage: “The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds.” This pope calls the woman who wrote him that her lover had left but she was having the baby. He tracked her down on her cellphone. “It’s Francis!” She said he told her he’d baptize the baby. This pope fills my eyes with tears. He loves the poor. He pays his own hotel bill. He had a return ticket home from the conclave because it wouldn’t be him. When he was elected he came out on the balcony and stood awkwardly, like Alec Guinness playing the part of a humble cardinal who, to his shock, had been chosen to lead the greatest institution in history. He stood there blank-faced, not equal to the moment, then saved the moment not by giving his prayer but by asking for prayers.

The pope I love tells comfortable cardinals that they are suffering from “spiritual Alzheimer’s.” Of those working within the church whose orientation is homosexual, he says: “Who am I to judge them if they’re seeking the Lord in good faith?” He instructs priests and bishops to give absolution through confession to the contrite and remorseful who have had abortions. Like most American Catholics I didn’t think he was saying anything new here. But he wanted to make it clear. Good, these things should be made clear.

The Francis I love is against materialism because he knows it is hollow and soul-crushing. He knows wealth and power are a moral hazard. He does not want man reduced to a commodity. He is for the little guy. He opposes the throwaway culture in which the old and the vulnerable are expendable. He wants you to be a saint, not a Scrooge.

He wades into the great spiritual questions.

That pope has captured the imagination of the world.

Is what he does merely symbolic? Nothing at his level is merely symbolic. He is acting in a Christlike way: His actions are lessons, reminders, intimations. Inspirations.

The less lovable pope is—well, and I say this still with love, Uncle Frank in the attic. This is the one who endorses secular political agendas, who castigates capitalism in language that is both imprecise and heavily loaded. He doesn't, actually, seem to know a lot about capitalism or markets, or even what economic freedom has given—and is giving—his own church.

For one small example, the other day Stephen Schwarzman of the [Blackstone Group](#) gave \$40 million to the Catholic schools of New York, meaning he is giving his personal wealth to pay for the education of children, many of whom are recent immigrants and some of whom sleep in cars. Last I looked Mr. Schwarzman was not a monk or a mystic but a businessman in private equity. This is not abusing, ignoring or dehumanizing the poor. This is lifting them up, helping them in a concrete way that will change their lives.

Political Francis seems not spiritual but strangely earthbound, like the pontiff of the Church of What's Happening Now, a super-groovy pope acting on some antique ideological biases and assumptions.

On Thursday in the Capitol, as Francis made the first-ever speech by a pope to the U.S. Congress, the nature of the historic moment was sharpened by this question: Which Francis would show up—the one who makes me think of Heaven, or the earthbound one?

The speech was spiritual and not pointedly political, which came as a relief. He spoke of America with a certain reserved warmth, but a warmth nonetheless. As rhetoric it was high-class boilerplate, but its messages were useful. I wondered if the recent criticism of his secular political stands had led him to soften or refigure his speech. I wondered: Having just met America for the first time, and experienced all its variety and affection, how is he feeling about America now? I bet it has nothing to do with the cartoon, comic-book, dumbed-down Marxist stereotypes some of his friends and followers peddle.

Highlights of the speech:

The job of lawmakers “is to enable this country, by your legislative activity, to grow as a nation.” The “chief aim of all politics” is “the pursuit of the common good.” The four American lives that have most touched him, that most embody the nation’s “dreams,” are Abraham Lincoln, who stood for “liberty”; Martin Luther King, who stood for “liberty . . . and nonexclusion”; Dorothy Day, the activist, who stood for “social justice”; and Thomas Merton, the monk and writer, who stood for “dialogue and

openness to God.” These were four interesting choices, especially the last two, who don’t occupy a large place in the public imagination. But Day should be considered for sainthood, and one guesses that under Francis she may be. Merton wrote a spiritual masterpiece, “The Seven Storey Mountain,” that is important to many who experience Catholic conversions.

Democracy is “deeply rooted in the mind of the American people.” Politics is “an expression of our compelling need to live as one.” Americans should not be “fearful of foreigners,” because “most of us were once foreigners.” We must respond to immigrants in a way that is “humane, just and fraternal.” We must remember the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

He delightfully took a moment to nod to the creation of wealth: “Business is a noble vocation, directed to producing wealth and improving the world.” (That may have been his way of saying, “Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Schwarzman!”) “It can be a fruitful source of prosperity for the area in which it operates, especially if it sees the creation of jobs as an essential part of its service. . . . The fight against poverty and hunger must be fought constantly and on many fronts.”

You can believe there are two Francises and still feel an integrated affection and admiration for this man who stands for so much that is good, and tries to encourage the good. Who is in many ways great. Who has filled the world with more than his portion of sweetness, and who has drawn the affection and regard of non-Catholics around the world. He has even made left-wing American Catholics, a grumpy lot, happy. For at least 30 years they were frustrated and depressed by John Paul II and Benedict XVI. I guess it’s their turn.

They were sometimes graceless and grudging toward past popes. I don’t see what conservatives gain by playing that part now. When a much-loved pope comes to visit there’s a kind of moral imperative to good cheer.

I close with the words of a New York businessman, a capitalist and Catholic. I asked him Wednesday how he was feeling about Francis. “If he lives he’ll change the world,” he said.

For the better? “I think so, hopefully in an aspirational way. Don’t tax me to death helping the less fortunate. Urge me to do good. And I will. And many will. For him.

“A *Friendly, Modest Truth-Teller*”
David O'Brien | [SEPTEMBER 24, 2015](#)

The attentiveness of Congress and the transpartisan rhetorical brilliance of the speech were remarkable—the use of Lincoln and King provided an avenue to some of the U.S. public’s best ideals of solidarity, persistent hopefulness—the dream—and shared responsibility, a word used to set the tone right at the start of the speech. Reference to Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton before the Congress stunned all of us who have studied and loved them. Cardinal Timothy Dolan recently called Day’s canonization process to the pope’s attention. Merton is still widely read across the Christian world.

U.S. historians, I am sure, admire the way the pope gently used shared memories of earlier prejudice and violence aimed at immigrants like our forebears to frame our response to refugees and immigrants today. Then there was his unexpected, sharp—“it’s all about money”—appeal to end the global arms trade which called attention to an issue central to advocates of peace through international cooperation across the world, all but invisible in the United States. The pope’s strong standard reminder of “our responsibility to defend and protect human life at every stage of its development” led not to abortion as expected but to the death penalty, while his moving appeal regarding the importance of families to human well-being led not to criticism of gay marriage but to widely shared worries about young people of all classes not getting married and thus missing out—their themselves and their children—on the supports and joys and social benefits of family life.

How many of us have wanted to rally people to a good cause without getting them angry or depressed or coming across as self-righteous or naive? A friend used to complain about “grim-faced do-gooders.” Here in front of us is a friendly, modest truth-teller who makes us all want to do good. There will be many jokes about Congress and its response, but the laughter will probably be a cover for our own uneasiness in the presence of this living witness to that golden rule he spoke of. He put hosts John Boehner and Joe Biden on the spot, but he made room there for all of us!

(David O'Brien is professor emeritus of Roman Catholic studies at the College of the Holy Cross)

Questions for Reflection:

Be Attentive: What was your experience of the Pope's visit to the Americas? What did you notice around you in terms of buzz from other people? What themes of his visit resonated with you?

Be Intelligent: Two Historian's Newt Gingrich & David O'Brien and the WSJ Saturday columnist and former Reagan speechwriter Peggy Noonan all shared Catholic viewpoints what are your thoughts and insights on reading these articles?

Be Reasonable: How do you assess the short and long term impact of Pope Francis's visit? What is his impact on your human spirit? Commonweal Magazine asked if people were suffering from "pope-partum depression"?

Be Responsible: How will the conversation this morning affect your work day? What will you carry with you? What memories will you carry forward? Will you seek to dialogue more? Will you experience the "Joy of the Gospels"? And will it inform action?

John J. Fontana

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