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Analysis



Pope Leo XIV greets the local community during a parish visit to the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome, Italy, March 15, 2026. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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Pope Leo XIV's one-on-one meeting with British journalist Gareth Gore laid bare a defining pattern of his pontificate: Before making a decision, the pope wants to listen widely.

Amid a schedule typically dominated by church officials, heads of state and ecclesial organizations, the March 16 meeting stood out. Gore, a non-Catholic and financial journalist, has emerged as one of the most vocal critics of Opus Dei following his five-year investigation into the conservative Catholic organization.

And given that the revision of Opus Dei's statutes is currently on the pope's desk, the pope's desire to meet individually with one of the organization's fiercest critics raised eyebrows around Rome.

Gore's recent book, *Opus: The Cult of Dark Money, Human Trafficking and Right-Wing Conspiracy Inside the Catholic Church*, took yet another stab at peeling back the secrecy, exploitation and manipulation alleged against Opus Dei.

Opus Dei said the book gives a false picture of the organization "based on distorted facts, conspiracy theories and outright lies."

Yet, according to Gore, Leo called the book a "rigorous piece of work."



Gareth Gore, author of *Opus*, is pictured in an undated photo. (OSV News/Rachel Ferriman via Simon & Schuster)

In an account of the meeting republished by National Catholic Reporter, Gore said he told the pope about patterns of grooming, manipulation, spiritual and psychiatric abuse within Opus Dei, as well as claims of trafficking and cover-up.

"I ended the meeting by imploring Pope Leo to take action against this abusive group," he wrote, including an investigation and, if necessary, its suppression.

While Leo's response is unknown, the circumstances of the meeting may be even more revealing about Leo's governing style than its content.

Gore said he was approached through fellow journalist Pedro Salinas, who told him the pope was "well aware of my own work on Opus Dei" and "keen to speak with me in a private audience, just the two of us."

Salinas is widely credited with exposing abuses within the now-suppressed Peruvian movement Sodalitium Christianae Vitae, an effort which put him in close contact with then-Bishop Robert Prevost of Chiclayo, the future Pope Leo XIV.

Taken together, Leo's relationship with Salinas and his outreach to Gore reveal the pope's propensity for bringing unsettling perspectives directly into his field of vision. As he continues to shape his inner circle at the Vatican, Leo appears inclined to bypass traditional channels of information and hear firsthand accounts on the state of the church, even from its critics.



Pope Leo XVI arrives for an audience March 16, 2026, with broadcast journalists who produce the TG2 news programs for the Italian state-owned television channel, Rai

2, in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican. (OSV News/Vatican Media/Elisabetta Trevisan)

That instinct, however, should not be confused with alignment.

The pope had already met with the moderator of Opus Dei just six days after his election, and again in February. In those meetings, according to Opus Dei, they discussed the revision of Opus Dei's statutes, ordered by Pope Francis in July 2022. Though publication of the new statutes has been long expected, Leo's meeting with Gore suggests he is continuing a broad consultancy phase before taking decisive action.

The contrast between the characters on Leo's agenda is reminiscent of his meetings, just 10 days apart, with Cardinal Raymond Burke, considered the face of clerical resistance against Francis-era reforms advancing inclusivity, and Fr. James Martin, synonymous with the church's outreach to the LGBTQ community.

Listening about Latin Mass

In another unexpected meeting, the pope received on March 5 scholars studying sensitive fault lines in contemporary Catholicism: Stephen Bullivant, a professor of theology and sociology of religion at St. Mary's University London, and Stephen Cranney, a data scientist at the Catholic University of America.

The pair are co-authors of *Trads: Latin Mass Catholics in the United States*, due out in November, a data-driven portrait of U.S. Catholics who attend the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass and the implications of that community for the future of the church.

Even if Leo has not shown any intention to peel back the restrictions on the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass instituted by Francis, the encounter suggests an effort to better understand the communities attached to it.

The initial findings by Cranney, a non-Catholic, and Bullivant, who attends the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass, indicate that while such Catholics tend to lean politically conservative, they broadly accept papal authority, even as their reception of Vatican II remains mixed.



Cardinal Arthur Roche, prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, walks along a Rome street May 5, 2025, on the day of the general congregation meeting ahead of the conclave to elect the next pope. (OSV News/Reuters/Marko Djurica)

Their meeting with the pope came after Cardinal Arthur Roche, prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship, circulated a text to cardinals reaffirming the reformed liturgy as the sole expression of the Roman rite.

Leo, however, has not publicly taken a position in the debate on how to handle the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass, which has become a flashpoint around Catholic identity in the United States. The pope received the 76-year-old Roche in an audience March 21; the fate of the cardinal, already past the retirement age of 75, could signal where Leo wants the church to go on the issue.

Asked about the issue in his only media interview to date last July, Leo said he had "not had the chance to really sit down with a group of people who are advocating for

the Tridentine rite."

Since then he has met with Burke — whom he allowed to celebrate a Mass in the old rite in St. Peter's Basilica — as well as with Brazilian Bishop Fernando Arêas Rifan, 75, who oversees a church jurisdiction in eastern Brazil which exclusively celebrates the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass.

Though no immediate decision on the liturgy appears forthcoming, Leo's outreach suggests that Catholics attached to the old rite, and who often felt dismissed by Francis, once again have a seat at the table.

Germany's synodal debate

In a meeting which flew further under the radar and was not listed on the pope's formal agenda, Leo met with the editor-in-chief of the conservative German Catholic weekly Die Tagespost and members of the "Neuer Anfang" ("New Beginning") initiative which is critical of the country's synodal way.

The German Synodal Way, a reform process launched in 2019, has sparked debate between those who view its proposed structures as a threat to the authority of bishops and those who see its redistribution of power as a necessary check on the church's centralization which they argue can enable abuse.

The German bishops' conference sent the statutes for creating a standing "Synodal Conference" of bishops and laypeople for approval by the Vatican last month. Critics of the Synodal Way say they have not been fully heard in voicing their resistance to its development.



People attend the German Catholic Church's fifth synodal assembly in Frankfurt, March 9, 2023. (OSV News/Reuters/Heiko Becker)

How Rome responds may reveal how Leo understands synodality's tension between authority and participation.

The group of German Catholics who met with Leo Jan. 7 presented him with 20 pages of letters from Catholics in their country. They reported that upon sharing their concerns with Germany's Synodal Way, the pope replied, "Yes ... I share your concerns."

The pope had previously noted how for some German Catholics, aspects of Germany's Synodal Way "do not represent their own hope for the church or their own way of living the church."

"So there is a need for further dialogue and listening within Germany itself, so that no one's voice is excluded," he said.

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Listening as governance

Across those encounters, the 70-year-old Leo is showing that he is in no rush to make tough decisions or stake public positions on controversial matters.

Even if it is difficult to determine where Leo falls on any given hot-button issue, his proclivity for broad consultation is itself a signal of how he intends to govern.

That method is not likely to generate headlines in the short-term, but it reflects a pope committed to understanding all sides of church debates before wading into them himself.

Leo's listening is less a sign of disengagement than of deliberation, but when the decisions do come his approach may prove them all the more consequential.

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