

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

March 20, 2013 at 12:25pm

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## It's too early to draw solid conclusions on Pope Francis

by Robert McClory

NCR Today  
Pope Francis

On Saturday, I was on a panel on Chicago public radio. My subject was Pope Francis, and though I had little time, I tried to present him in a very positive light: a man who lived in his own home; cooked his own dinner; took the bus to work; embraced the poor, not just in words but in his presence among them; and made social justice a major theme of his episcopacy. I was in high spirits about this new leader, who seemed in so many ways to resemble our founder. Then I went home, read Jamie Manson's story about Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio's support and endorsement of Communion and Liberation, and immediately lapsed into depression.

What are we getting in this pope from Argentina -- a leader in the tradition of John XXIII or a less formal -- but no less strict -- enforcer of orthodoxy than his two immediate predecessors? As I read the avalanche of copy that keeps piling up on *NCR* online, I realized most contributors are struggling to put a positive spin on what they had gathered. What's the real story about Bergoglio's connection with a repressive Argentinian junta during the "Dirty War"? And what about his stiff opposition to liberation theology, his clashes with his Jesuit colleagues and his rigid (or maybe not so rigid) position on gay marriage?

Far more intriguing is the future. He seems to already have veteran Curia officials feeling insecure about their high lifestyle and their jobs. But can this elderly outsider reform the inner bureaucracy that has shown itself as solidly immune to overhaul as the ancient pyramids? And which way will he go on the Leadership Conference of Women Religious sisters, whose embrace of the poor would seem close to his heart, though their less-than-enthusiastic support of the previous administrations' obsession with pelvic issues does not sit well with Pope Francis' public positions on these issues.

I feel my delicate hold on reality starting to unravel, so I have decided to wait, to cease this ridiculous teeter-tottering between manic euphoria and hopeless depression. I remind myself that the Lord is in our midst, and the Holy Spirit will -- eventually -- bring something wonderful out of all this confusion. And all will be well. Next week, we will celebrate once again the mystery of Christianity, a belief system loaded with surprises and unexpected turns but always rich with joyful hope.

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