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Pope Francis faces resistance to his agenda

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If you have not yet seen the interview with Italian historian Andrea Riccardi, it is definitely worth a look.

The indication is that there is and probably will continue to be a growing tug-of-war between the faithful and parts of the hierarchy when it comes to the papacy of Francis. There appears to be enduring strength in the favorable relationship that exists between Pope Francis and the people. At the same time, there is evidence of both a public and silent rift with members of the hierarchy who do not want to be challenged in the way they conduct their business.

There is a second article of interest that highlights concerns about the austerity Francis is bringing to the Vatican. He has implemented a freeze on new hires, wage increases, and overtime. There is no effort to seek increased revenues. Many, even some who support this pope, feel the situation could have been handled better.

Pope Francis has undoubtedly made mistakes, and he will continue to make mistakes. After all, he is only infallible when he speaks *ex cathedra*. His strengths lie in his commitment to collegiality and his connection to the faithful. Also, his emphasis on the poor prevents him from being seen as just some liberal pope. It is difficult to disagree with his focus on those in great need and the compassion he expects from all of us. In his interview, Riccardi says that when Francis' message gets through, "there is a really positive reaction and people's faith is revived." His message clearly resonates at the core of the universal message of Christianity.

What are the forces that work in favor of those who oppose this pope? One of the most frequently mentioned strategies is that opponents can wait out Francis and go back to business as usual when he leaves the scene. This approach may depend on how much Francis is able to accomplish in the next few years. Pope John Paul II was extremely successful in cementing his legacy through his appointments to

key positions, putting in place people loyal to his aims. His influence continues. How successful Francis will be in that regard remains to be seen.

A second strategy we are seeing appears to be to ignore the direction Francis is taking. Riccardi speaks of resistance through silence. Some bishops appear to be operating as if Francis is not around. One advantage these bishops may have is that with Francis embracing collegiality, bishops can feel free to run their dioceses as they see fit.

Collegiality, it must be noted, does enable bishops to make their own decisions without consulting Rome.

The wild card is really the laity. They support Francis. How far will they go in challenging their own bishops and pastors when they fail to embrace the vision of Francis? The last chapter in the Francis papacy is yet to be written. It may ultimately be up to all of us.

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