

Pope Francis, Vatican II, and the Way Forward
Loyola University Chicago
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Panel: “Pastoral-Theological Ideas for Affective Collegiality with Pope Francis and Receiving Vatican II”

Saturday, March 26, 2022

Hosffman Ospino’s remarks:

Dime con quien andas y te diré quién eres. This is a most popular expression in Spanish, the equivalent to what we say in English, “You are judged by the company you keep.” A literal rendering of the expression is necessary to highlight perhaps its most important verb: “tell me who you **walk** with, and I will tell you who you are.” Walking with others defines us. Who do we choose to journey along with and where we do this shape our identity.

Much can be said about the complex realities associated with the opposition of significant sectors of our Catholic community -- in the United States and other parts of the world -- to embracing Pope Francis, both as a person and his ecclesial vision, and the wisdom of the Second Vatican Council. Let’s not forget the personal dimensions of some of the opposition to Pope Francis as his persona is often under scrutiny: he is not really a “theologian;” he is “too pastoral;” he is from Latin America; and, rather common; some find personal fault in his being a Jesuit.

I enter this conversation with a sense of pastoral hope. As we imagine the way forward, I want to reflect on the *locus* of our pastoral action and those we encounter. Where we do our theology and who we choose to engage and serve ministerially matter significantly. This is perhaps one of the greatest contributions of Pope Francis’ pontificate. Pope Francis, echoing the spirit of Medellín, Puebla, Santo Domingo and Aparecida, and most importantly the pastoral vision of the Council, particularly, *Gaudium et Spes*, has introduced us to what one could call **a theology of place**.

Space matters. Location matters. Notice for instance some of those most remarkable moments of Pope Francis’ pontificate: Lampedusa, the U.S. Mexican Border, Iraq, Myanmar, the empty St. Peter’s Square at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and many others. Notice the locations he has chosen to select a diverse and sui generis body of Cardinals, who today reflect more the global church than ever before. Notice his insistence in embracing a vision for evangelization that goes to the physical and existential peripheries. Space matters. Location matters.

It seems to me that at the heart of any opposition or misunderstanding or unwillingness to embrace Pope Francis’s person and vision is the inability of many Catholics to think beyond the places and spaces that we have inhabited for far too long. We are too comfortable in our centers. We like the status quo too much. We want people to come to us, and yet we fail to go to them, including those who do not agree with us, with a missionary spirit. We still have a difficult time to be *una Iglesia en salida* – a church that goes forth.

Attention to place and space is important if we are willing to do things differently. This applies to everyone in our church: Catholic lay women and men, clergy, vowed religious, theologians, intellectuals, pundits, artists, communicators, writers, politicians, etc. The vision of the Second Vatican Council, channeled at this time by Pope Francis' invitation to missionary discipleship, demands an ecclesial repositioning not only of pastoral priorities, but also of bodies and how we engage those bodies.

Let me say more about bodies. Many times when we speak about ministry, we tend to do it in a disembodied manner. We want to accompany souls, we want to cultivate the spiritual life, but we often fail to acknowledge sufficiently that we are enfleshed beings. Our bodies are white, black, brown. Our bodies are gendered and sexual. Our bodies are strong and weak, able and disabled. Our bodies cross borders and seek shelter and refuge. Our bodies are young and old. Our bodies need sustenance and care. Our bodies need love. No evangelization or pastoral care action would be credible if it ignores the fact that we are embodied, enfleshed beings who live and journey in particular places. And yet, far too many Catholics manage to ignore, bypass, dismiss the bodily dimensions of evangelization as we fall into the "isms" that lurk around: racism, classism, sexism, ablism, and others.

I currently serve as the President of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS). Last year I organized our annual meeting in which I wanted to bring attention precisely to this reality. Usually when we invite theologians to meetings and conversations, we focus on those who write the books, who advance theories, and who spend countless hours in the library and the classroom. I am aware that at least half, maybe more, of Hispanic Catholic theologians in the United States do not work in universities, or seminaries or research institutes. They are in the trenches: parishes, diocesan offices, hospitals, non-profit organizations; *con la gente en las bases*, with the people at the grassroots. Most of these colleagues have chosen to do so. They repositioned themselves and in doing so they repositioned their theology and their reflections. These theologians seldom get invited to academic conferences, or any conferences at all. They were half of the presenters at this meeting of Hispanic Catholic theologians.

Many theologians, Hispanic and others, are committed to walking with our faith communities, and we do it as organic intellectuals. It is a characteristic of our scholarship that I hope we can cultivate. This type of doing theology reminds me of Pope Francis' words to the Grand Chancellor of the Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina on the 100th Anniversary of the Founding of the Faculty of Theology: "At this time theology must address conflicts: not only those that we experience within the Church, but also those that concern the world as a whole and those which are lived on the streets of Latin America. Do not settle for a desktop theology. Your place for reflection is the frontier. Do not fall into the temptation to embellish, to add fragrance, to adjust them to some degree and domesticate them. Even good theologians, like good shepherds, have the odour of the people and of the street and, by their reflection, pour oil and wine onto the wounds of mankind."

Affective collegiality -- among bishops; among bishops and theologians; among bishops, theologians, and faith communities with their leaders; among bishops, theologians, faith communities and the rest of society -- will only happen if we accept the demands and the risk of repositioning ourselves. That includes embracing the idea that the places where we have been,

our traditional interlocutors, the questions that have occupied our minds and hearts until now, may not necessarily be those that will define our ministry and our theology in the following years.

Affective collegiality will only happen if we allow ourselves to enter in relationship with the enfleshed reality of those who seek God, especially those living in the peripheries of church, society and life. Affective collegiality will only happen if we retrieve the value of the senses in evangelization truly seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching. Affective collegiality will only happen if we decide to reach out to those who may not think like us and offer our loving embrace because we all are part of the same family. May the Holy Spirit give us the wisdom to be led in humility for the good of God's people, our church and the world.