NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Jesuit theologian: May Pope Francis expand women's role

James Keenan | Mar. 18, 2013
Pope Francis
Viewpoint

Editor's note: Fr. James Keenan is a moral theologian at Boston College and has been a member of the Society of Jesus since 1970. He is also the head of a growing global group of moral theologians called Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church. NCR *asked for his take on the election of fellow Jesuit Jorge Mario Bergoglio as Pope Francis.*

My thoughts on the election of Pope Francis? Absolutely stunned.

I only knew of the cardinal as the "other contender" in the previous conclave.

What do I think now?

I am simply watching him and trying to learn what I can understand. I watched him give his sermon [1] in Italian to the cardinals Thursday in the Sistine Chapel. I understood him to say that nothing we do means anything if we don't do it as a disciple of Christ, in the name of Christ crucified.

I resonated there with his Jesuit vocation. What we Jesuits share is the experience from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius that we are each personally called to follow Christ. The summons he received through the Exercises, he was reminding his brother bishops, is the fundamental call for each of us.

I also was struck by his choosing Francis as his name. I was reminded how Ignatius of Loyola's own conversion was initiated by his consideration of the life of Jesus and the lives of the saints and how among the latter, Francis was foremost. It is good for Jesuit humility to see him choose the name Francis.

More importantly, above all I am overwhelmed by his commitment to the poor. I cannot imagine anyone as dedicated to the poor who has been bishop of Rome in modern times. This is the game-changer. I wonder what St. Peter's will be like with him at the helm.

Obviously, his style is very impressive: the apartment, the bus, the carried bags and the bill. He is not one to stand on ceremony, from his bowing for a blessing from the People of God to his self-description as bishop of Rome and his reference to his predecessor as bishop emeritus of Rome.

I am struck by his personal freedom, by his daring pastoral sensibilities from washing the feet of HIV-positive Catholics to defending the concerns of unmarried mothers.

I hope when he reads the 300-page sealed document investigating the problems of the Vatican that he will hear the crucified Christ summon him as Christ once summoned Francis to rebuild his church. The entire Vatican needs to be rebuilt.

I hope he does not think that the way his ministry was shaped in Buenos Aires, Argentina, is the only way the

local or universal church should proceed. I hope he gets to know the local churches of Asia, Africa, Europe, North America and Oceania.

As he learns of the church from elsewhere, I hope he will be a good listener to others, especially to women. I hope he makes sure the conclave for his successor is not womanless.

In order to get to that place and time, I hope his leadership as bishop of Rome will prompt his brother bishops to expand the role and place of women in the church. I hope, in particular, that he gives women religious, especially in the United States, a well-deserved hearing.

In the Society of Jesus, we have an unwritten rule: A new superior should spend the first hundred days of his office learning about the community before making any changes. I wish him those first hundred days.

Most of all, I pray for him, that the evident generosity and courage that animates him may lead him to a new model of shepherding that distinguishes unity from uniformity and tolerance from either laxism or rigorism.

Source URL (retrieved on *07/10/2014 - 19:14*): http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/jesuit-theologian-may-pope-francis-expand-womens-role

Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/node/47591