



The joy of business with soul: Fast & furious reaction to Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium*

Fast & Furious Forbes: Introduction

Last October 30, 2013, *Forbes* revealed its 2013 World's Most Powerful People with a very confident opening statement: "There are nearly 7.2 billion people in the planet. These are the 72 that mattered."¹ Just eight months on the job, the then 76 years old Pope Francis, former janitor and son of an accountant, found himself ranked 4th World's Most Powerful – more powerful than 68 other individuals including 27 CEO's and 28 billionaires.²

According to the gospel of *Forbes*, the Pope met its panel's four criteria of power: power over lots of people, power over financial resources, power exhibited in multiple spheres, and power actively used. Two weeks later, *Forbes* trumpeted the economic implications of the Pope's "meteoric rise" with the so-called "Pope Francis Effect" whose outcome "attributes" included a tourism boom in Italy and the "significant global rise in church attendance."³ *Forbes* concluded: "Imagine if this were a business. You could already start measuring the ROI of the 'Pope Francis Effect'."

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On November 26, 2013, Pope Francis' fast track to *Forbes*' sainthood veered towards weeks of furious reaction from the world's financial press. The day started innocently enough with a very early morning tweet by the Pope to his more than 10 million followers: "Church is missionary. Christ sends us forth to bring the joy of the Gospel to the whole world."⁴ The @Pontifex tweet came as a teaser to a press conference later that same day when some rather serious looking Vatican officials presented Pope Francis' new Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Joy of the Gospel) or "*alegría del Evangelio*" as it is called in the original Spanish.⁵

With the official press conference over, with his first solo apostolic exhortation available for downloading at the Vatican website,⁶ the Pope awaited the reaction of the world, perhaps with some trepidation, conscious, in his own words, that "nowadays documents do not arouse the same interest as in the past and that they are quickly forgotten" (EG 25). Will the 51,423-word document be beautiful enough to elicit a joyful reaction especially among the 1.2 billion Catholics

worldwide? Will *Evangelii Gaudium (EG)* go viral, fast and furiously?

As Europe started to sleep, the rest of the world, especially in the United States, started to wake up with news of the new Apostolic Exhortation, or, as John L. Allen, Jr. of the *National Catholic Reporter*, would call it, the Pope’s “I Have a Dream speech”.⁷ Using NVivo, we created a cloud chart (see figure 1) of the top 50 Most Frequent Words found in the Pope’s dream and found the Pope’s dream filled with words like god (n=291), church (n=253), people (n=253), faith (n=161), love (n=154), gospel (n=142), evangelization (n=111), and joy (n=110). There are no surprises here.

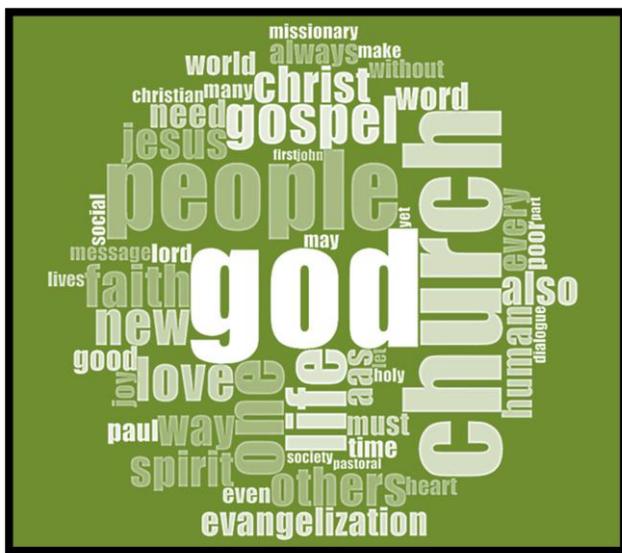


Figure 1. Top 50 most frequent words in *Evangelii Gaudium* using NVivo chart

However, for others, the Pope’s dream became their worst nightmare. *Forbes* contributor Tim Worstall, a Senior Fellow at the Adam Smith Institute in London, who called himself a “good Catholic gentleman,” threw the first stone while shouting at the Pope.⁸ Not shouting hymns of praise, but close to cursing the Pope’s name in vain. The self-confessed Benedictine educated economist included four charts to substantiate his point that the free market is the “greatest wealth producing machine that humans have created” so much so that “global inequality is falling” and that “global poverty has fallen in the past 30 years at the fastest rate in the history of our entire species.”

Various other financial & business media organizations joined in a fast & furious frenzy of criticism, disapproval

and rejection of the Pope’s Joy of the Gospel. The venerable *Wall Street Journal* bannered that Pope Francis “Attacks Global Capitalism”⁹ while the *Harvard Business Review* noted that the Pope just declared “War on Capitalism”. The 125-year-old *Financial Times* remained diplomatic, acknowledging that Pope Francis provided so far the “boldest papal critique” of capitalism.¹⁰ Eight days after the release of the papal memo, another *Forbes* contributor, Louis Woodhill, remained furious enough to point out that the Pope should have issued a papal bull, rather than an apostolic exhortation, because “that is what it is a load of”.¹¹ On December 5, 2013, Alejandro Chafuen, another *Forbes* contributor, asked if Pope Francis was “Espousing A Peronist Rather Than A Marxist Liberation Theology?” “Peronist who?” asks the young people? Shall we cue the musical track of Andrew Lloyd Weber and Tim Rice’s Don’t Cry for Me Argentina? Better yet, let’s all march to the chant of the *Economist’s* Erasmus Religion & Policy November 28, 2013 column: “Left, Right, Left, Left.”¹²

Soon, aside from the financial press, other political and culture media organizations offered their fast and furious reactions. The *Foreign Policy*, with her 3.5 million online readers, carried a December 6, 2013 story of the “heretical pope vs. Rush Limbaugh”,¹³ the radio commentator who said that the words coming out of Pope Francis were “pure Marxism”.¹⁴ George Zornik, in his November 30, 2013 column for *The Nation*, “The Pope versus Unfettered Capitalism,” imagined the two sides confronting each other:

“On one side are the billionaires and their political pawns, angling for more of the income inequality that has so benefited them. On the other side are labor unions, anti-poverty campaigners, Occupy activists—and a pope who argues that “money must serve, not rule!”¹⁵

By December 3, the *Catholic News Service* concluded that the “Pope’s words on economy stirred controversy between Wall Street and Main Street”.¹⁶ Even *Time Magazine*, who chose Pope Francis as 2013 Person of the Year, recognized that the Pope’s “focus on the poor and the fact that the world’s poorest 50% control barely 1% of its wealth unsettles those who defend capitalism as the most successful antipoverty program in history.”¹⁷ Talking about unsettling billionaires, on December 30, 2013, *CNBC* headlined that the Pope’s “sharp words make a wealthy donor hesitate” to donate a seven-figure amount to the effort to raise \$180 million for the renovation of St. Patrick’s cathedral in New York, the sacred center of the

financial gods. Ken Langone, himself a billionaire and founder of Home Depot, reportedly complained to Cardinal Timothy Dolan, archbishop of New York, that people need to be careful about generalities especially when talking about how rich people behave (or misbehave).¹⁸

Was the American billionaire on the money regarding his perception of the Argentinian pope? Was the financial press correct in concluding that Pope Francis is anti-capitalist, anti-free market, and anti-business? If, not, how then should we read Pope's Francis Gospel of Joy in light of the fast and furious reaction of the world's financial press? As an interpretative key, let us consider the Three Nots: EG is not an economic treatise, not a Catholic social doctrine document, and not a perfect communication.

The Three Nots and the Four Nos

Not an Economic Treatise. EG is a pastoral document focused on the Pope's dream of a missionary option: "I dream of a missionary option, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything," (EG 27). Everything includes the economic sphere of life. However, the Joy of the Gospel contains only eight paragraphs, out of 288 paragraphs, which directly critiques the economic condition of contemporary society. In addition, Pope Francis also stated that "...neither the Pope nor the Church have a monopoly on the interpretation of social realities or the proposal of solutions to contemporary problems (EG 184). Nevertheless, the Pope did unleash the Four No's: No to an economy of exclusion (EG 53-54), No to the new idolatry of money (EG 55-56), No to a financial system which rules rather than serves (EG 57-58), and No to the inequality which spawns violence (EG 59-60). The Four No's of the Financial Apocalypse responsible for agitating the acolytes of the financial gods.

Not a Catholic Social Doctrine document. While the Pope dreams of a transformative evangelization full of enthusiasm and vitality, EG is not an in-depth analysis of all the social problems of the contemporary world. In the hierarchical world of the Catholic Church, the exhortation would be below an encyclical but still aims to inspire social reflection and action: "This Exhortation is not a social document, and for reflection on those different themes, we have a most suitable tool in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, whose study I highly recommend," the Pope said (EG 184). In EG, the Pope chose to limit his reflection on seven (7) themes of which only two (inclusion of the poor, peace & dialogue) covers the usual topics under CDS/CST. However, let me clarify, while not a social doctrine, the Pope quotes from selected



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works from the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (*Mater et magistra, Gaudium et spes, Populorum progressio, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, Centesimus annus*). Furthermore, in his first interview after the publication of the Joy of the Gospel, the Pope denied that he is a Marxist and emphasized that there "is nothing in the exhortation that cannot be found in the social doctrine of the Church." I was not speaking from a technical point of view, what I was trying to do was to give a picture of what is going on. The only specific quote I used was the one regarding the "trickle-down theories" which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and social inclusiveness in the world. The promise was that when the glass was full, it would overflow, benefiting the poor. However, what happens instead is that when the glass is full, it magically gets bigger; nothing ever comes out for the poor. This was the only reference to a specific theory. I was not, I repeat, speaking from a technical point of view but according to the Church's social doctrine. This does not mean being a Marxist."¹⁹ Talking about Marx, the German Cardinal Reinhard Marx that is, defended the Pope stating that the Pope "does not want to write a social encyclical, it is not an economic treatise: he is driven by evangelization" and that "his style is more similar to a prophetic exhortation, to an encouragement to think and to act in a new world."²⁰

Not a perfect communication. While the Holy Spirit could have very well inspired Pope Francis when he was writing EG, there's no guarantee that the document will not get "lost in translation". Even the Pope acknowledged the danger of possible misinterpretation due to the nature of today's fast communication medium: "In today's world of instant communication and occasionally biased media coverage, the message we preach runs a greater risk of being distorted or reduced to some of its secondary aspects" (EG 34). With five (5) chapters, 288 paragraphs, 224 pages, 51,422 words, and 217 footnotes, reading EG requires, in the Pope's own words, "patient expectation and apostolic endurance" and "disregard for constraints of time" (EG 24). However, be not afraid, Pope Francis employs a non-academic writing style and avoids heavy theological or abstract language. Pope Francis employs a very simple, personal, and approachable style. I encourage everyone to read the document for what it is, a pastoral document, and not a research or scientific paper: more formational, than informational.

In summary: EG is not economic, it is pastoral; EG is not social doctrine, it critiques current social conditions; EG is not a perfect (closed) communication, it is open to dialogue. To proceed to the second part of our reaction, I add a counterpoint to Pope Francis' question: "How many words prove irksome to this system!"(EG 203): how many words prove inspirational to us as we envision bridging faith and business management?

Business with Soul: 6P Model

Truly, what words can inspire us and give us joy? Based on our fast and furious reflection, let me suggest the following 6Ps of the Joy of Business with Soul: Passion & Poverty, Prosperity & Peace, Power & Partnership.

Passion & Poverty: We are all on a mission. Pope Francis defines the very nature of a person as being a mission – a mission of "being in the heart of people," (EG 273) where we can fulfil our mission by helping others, even just one, to have a "better life" (EG 274). If an economy can kill, then a businessperson with a soul is on a mission to save lives. While Pope Francis contemplated the profound integration of a person's mission and work, he saw all around him people with soul: people witnessing the "...mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing" (EG 273). Who are these people with people? Nurses with soul, the Pope said. Teachers, of course, and politicians, why not? These are the people with soul, the "people who have chosen deep down to be with others and for others." Why did the Pope not mention businesspersons as people with soul? Is the Pope anti-business people? Certainly not, as he reiterates that "business is a vocation, and a noble vocation, provided that those engage in it see themselves challenged by a greater meaning in life; this will enable them truly to serve the common good by striving to increase the goods of this world and to make them more accessible to all" (EG 203).

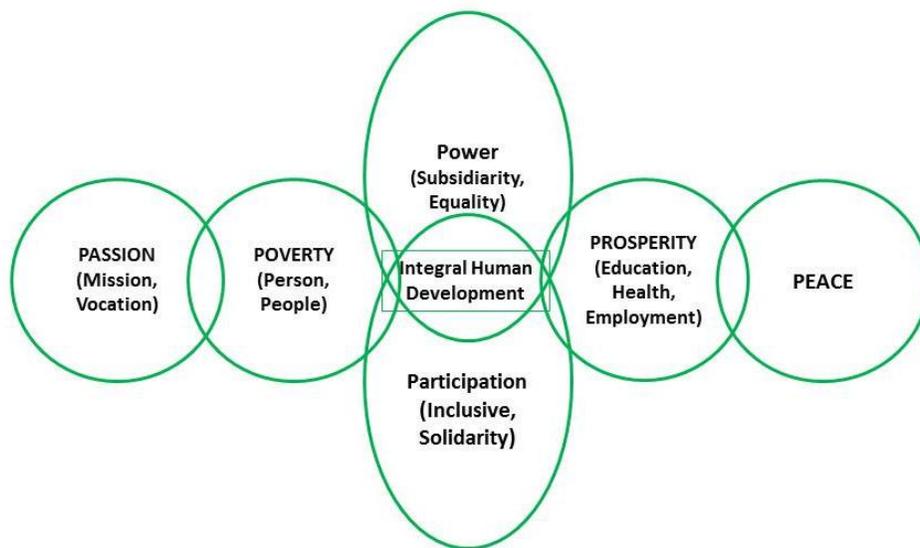


Figure 2. Six Ps model of the joy of business with soul based on *Evangelii Gaudium*

Again, we ask, “Is the Pope anti-rich?” In this regard, Pope Francis reiterated that the “Pope loves everyone, rich and poor alike, but he is obliged in the name of Christ to remind all that the rich must help, respect and promote the poor. I exhort you to generous solidarity and to the return of economics and finance to an ethical approach which favours human beings” (EG 58).

In his January 17, 2014 message to the rich and powerful attending the 2014 World Economic Conference in Davos, Switzerland, Pope Francis praised the improvement in people’s welfare around the world and reaffirmed “the fundamental role that modern business activity has had in bringing about these changes, by stimulating and developing the immense resources of human intelligence.”²¹ However, he took the occasion to remind his listeners of the need for a “new business mentality” which is “open to the transcendent” and capable of “guiding all economic and financial activity within the horizon of an ethical approach which is truly humane”.

Prosperity & Peace: the One and the Many. Pope Francis, while calling our attention to the negative effects of the “culture of prosperity where, as an example, “...the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few,” envisions prosperity not just for the one, but for the many. The business with a soul has a passion for prosperity especially of the poor. In addition, he clarifies that he is “not simply talking about ensuring nourishment or a “dignified sustenance” for all people, but also their “general temporal welfare and prosperity” (EG 159). The Pope lists three dimensions of prosperity (education, health care, and employment). For employment, the Pope adds a “...just wage” which enables the poor to access goods for the common good. In addition, the Pope calls for a prosperity which bring “sustainable development and peace” (EG59) or peace which is a “result of integral development” (EG 219). From a mission perspective, the Pope calls on us to be peacemakers (EG 239) even in the world of business and finance.

Power & Partnership: According to Pope Francis, everyone, including business leaders, is “called to care for the vulnerable of the earth. But the current model, with its emphasis on success and self-reliance, does not appear to favour an investment in efforts to help the slow, the weak or the less talented to find opportunities in life” (EG 209). In addition, he notes “... everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without

any means of escape” (EG 53).

The business with soul envisions collaborating and empowering the other as it is “...through free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive labour that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives” (EG 192). Aside from using the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, the Pope calls for developing “means for building consensus and agreement while seeking the goal of a just, responsive and inclusive society” (EG 239). In addition, in building partnership, the Pope challenges us “to learn how to encounter others with the right attitude, which is to accept and esteem them as companions along the way, without interior resistance” (EG 91).

In closing, any business person who takes on Pope Francis’ call to evangelize the business world needs to do so with the missionary passion to uplift people out of poverty, to help the excluded regain a sense of dignity and power via meaningful participation, and to drive integral human development towards sustainable prosperity and peace. Consequently, even if only one business person can “help at least one person to have a better life” (EG 274) then we can truly justify that we witnessed the joy of business with soul.

Conclusion

Almost two months after *Evangelii Gaudium’s* publication, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines issued a January 28, 2014 pastoral statement reiterating the Pope’s statements about the “economy of exclusion” and the “idolatry of money” applied to the Philippine context.²² While not specifically mentioning business people, the bishops did take to task the country’s “wealthy” and “economic elite” to help uplift the lives of their fellow Filipinos. Two or three years from now when Pope Francis visits the Philippines, I wonder who among the Filipinos included in Forbes list of Top 50 Richest People in the Philippines will be ready to affirm: Yes, I witnessed my mission, my vocation, bringing the joy of business with soul, not just to the top one, but to the many.

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