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# **MEDIA IMAGE OF POPE FRANCIS I**

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## **Abstract**

In connection with the message of the Pope's Office since the election of Pope Francis I, a lot of attention and space is paid to the issue of marketing and media communications in professional and mass media, at scientific events, or in various scientific papers. We were also addressed by this issue, so we decided to pay attention to it, this time with the emphasis on the image of Pope Francis I in the media. Our main objective is to identify the ways in which Pope Francis I has been changing the image of the Church and his papal authority in the media. Several of them refer to Pope Francis as a person, other refer to the Church and processes in it. Partial goals are to describe the image of the Catholic Church before the accession of the new pope, the election of the new pope and the first impression left by the new pope.

*Keywords:* Catholic Church, pope, changes

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## **1. Introduction**

For the first time, the world considers the pope to be the star worth the cover or the front page. He managed to gain glory and media attention by his utterances about homosexuals, criminals, or women who had gone to abortion. He does not judge anybody, instead he loves everybody. The magazine TIME and LGBT magazine *The Advocate* marked Pope Francis as the personality of the year in 2013. In 2014 he appeared on the cover of the magazine called Rolling Stone. TIME reasoned its choice as follows: „*What makes this Pope so important is the speed with which he has captured the imaginations of millions who had given up on hoping for the church at all*” [*Pope Francis has become the personality of the Year of the magazine TIME: He is with horns on the cover!*, <https://www.cas.sk/clanok/267548/papez-frantisek-sa-stal-osobnostou-roka-caso-pisu-time-na-titulke-je-s-rohmi/>, accessed on 4 February 2018]. At that time, TIME also reflected on why people turned away from the Church in the previous years. The editors came to the conclusion that the faithful people were tired of infinite holding forth on sexual ethics and internal disputes. In the course of a few months, Francis promoted the mission of the Church as a servant and comforter of the suffering people in the field of doctrinal policy, which had been so important for his predecessor Benedict XVI [*Pope Francis has become the*

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*personality of the Year of the magazine TIME: He is with horns on the cover!*, <https://www.cas.sk/clanok/267548/papez-frantisek-sa-stal-osobnostou-roka-caso-pisu-time-na-titulke-je-s-rohmi/>, accessed on 4 February 2018].

## 2. Background situation – Church in difficulties

The image of the Catholic Church before the accession of the Pope Francis was not very favourable in the society. Due to prohibitions, orders and accusations of mismanagement with the Church funds, or accusations of priests' sexual abuse of the youth and children, the Church operated as a religious community that did not meet current needs, whereas innovations do not come into consideration. This resulted into a sharp decline in the Catholic Church believers and the closure of churches in some Western European countries, as well as in the resignation of the Pope Benedict XVI. The Church and the new Pope were facing difficult tasks: to incite changes and to improve the reputation [1].

### 2.1. Election of the new pope

On March 13, 2013, the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, the Argentinian Jesuit Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected pope, who chose the name Francis as the Pope's name – after the saint founder of the Franciscan religious order. At the time, when the Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio (Pope Francis) was only one of the candidates for the Pope's throne, he was relatively little known to the believers (and the non-believers), compared to Joseph Ratzinger (the Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI). The world's media practically did not inform about him. Based on his work in Latin America, he was familiar and popular to the believers for the simplicity of this way of life and cheerfulness. Even after his appointment as the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, he continued to put the poor in the first place, he confessed in the cathedral as an ordinary priest, he cooked for himself and travelled by public transport [*Curriculum vitae of the Pope Francis, the first Jesuit Pope*, [http://sk.radiovaticana.va/storico/2013/03/14/%C5%BEivotopis\\_p%C3%A1pe%C5%BEa\\_franti%C5%A1ka%2C\\_prv%C3%A9ho\\_p%C3%A1pe%C5%BEa\\_jezuitu/slo-673328](http://sk.radiovaticana.va/storico/2013/03/14/%C5%BEivotopis_p%C3%A1pe%C5%BEa_franti%C5%A1ka%2C_prv%C3%A9ho_p%C3%A1pe%C5%BEa_jezuitu/slo-673328), accessed on 4 February 2018]. He was also known as a member of the religious order of the Jesuits, associated with the traditional values of the Church and with a reluctant attitude towards homosexuals. Doubts about the candidate's competence were raised by the information about his positive attitude to the military junta, which had reigned in a tough dictatorial way in Argentina from 1976 to 1983, as well as the information about the health complications related to the removal of the part of his lungs [P. Michl, *The best PR campaign of the last decade: Accession of the Pope Francis*, [http://www.m-journal.cz/cs/public-relations/nejlepsi-pr-kampan-posledni-dekady--nastup-papeze-frantiska\\_\\_s279x10101.html](http://www.m-journal.cz/cs/public-relations/nejlepsi-pr-kampan-posledni-dekady--nastup-papeze-frantiska__s279x10101.html), accessed on 12 February 2018]. In the final evaluation of this description, he seemed to be a modest and sympathetic candidate with the understanding for the poor,

however with a damaged image and he was not expected to be a major initiative to reform the Church. Thus, the new Holy Father was not in an enviable starting position. His main agenda, which he had masterfully emphasized from the very beginning, was the care for the poor and the dislike to the richness of the Church. In line with his personal philosophy, after having been elected, he addressed the faithful and asked them to pray for him in the following way: „*Let us pray one for another*“ [Pray for me, addresses the Pope Francis to the Catholics, <https://www.webnoviny.sk/modlite-sa-za-mna-odkazal-papez-frantis-ek-katolikom/>, accessed on 12 February 2018]. It is to be noted that the pope, as the direct follower of Saint Peter and the representative of God on Earth does not need people to pray for him, but it is him who is supposed to pray for them [[http://www.m-journal.cz/cs/public-relations/nejleps-i-pr-kampan-posledni-dekad-y--nastup-papeze-frantiska\\_\\_s279x10101.html](http://www.m-journal.cz/cs/public-relations/nejleps-i-pr-kampan-posledni-dekad-y--nastup-papeze-frantiska__s279x10101.html)].

## **2.2. First impression of the new Pope**

According to many survey and scientific research, first impression is of extreme importance not only in everyday life, but also in areas related to communication and marketing [2]. In harmony with his personal philosophy, the new pope addressed the crowds of the Roman Catholic pilgrims after having been elected, speaking to them and asking them to pray for him with following words: „*I would like to give the blessing, but first I want to ask you a favour. Before the bishop blesses the people, I ask that you would pray to the Lord to bless me*“ [<https://www.webnoviny.sk/modlite-sa-za-mna-odkazal-papez-frantis-ek-katolikom/>]. It is to be emphasized that the pope, as the direct successor of Saint Peter and the representative of God on Earth does not usually ask people to pray for him, on the contrary, he is supposed to pray for them [[http://www.m-journal.cz/cs/public-relations/nejleps-i-pr-kampan-posledni-dekad-y--nastup-papeze-frantiska\\_\\_s279x10101.html](http://www.m-journal.cz/cs/public-relations/nejleps-i-pr-kampan-posledni-dekad-y--nastup-papeze-frantiska__s279x10101.html)]. After his first speech, he did not get in the car that serves to the transport and protection of the pope (pope mobile), but he joined the bus together with other cardinals. It was exactly this absolutely new approach, which differs from the perception of the Church as a religious society that does not meet present-day needs, which ensured him with media attention, which led to the emergence of the new pope as a great event with a promise of changes. At the same time, it confirms that the first impression is extremely important and fundamentally influences the way in which media provide information on the Church and its representative in the future. The meaning of the name Francis (free) and the range of professions, conditions and activities that Francis covers as a patron gave rise to speculations immediately after the election, about what actually was the intention of the new pope with the Church [1]. Moreover, this name is much closer to the public than for example in the past common papal names like Clement, Innocent, or Pius, which are not commonly found in the population. With his follow-up behaviour he also confirmed and has still been confirming his emphasis on the modesty. Media reported that during his transition from South America to Europe he was able to

cancel subscriptions to the newspapers, pick up luggage and pay for the accommodation – all on his own. For ordinary believers no extraordinary acts, but for the Pope's position it proves that the life of ordinary people is not uncommon to him and that he can get by [[http://www.m-journal.cz/cs/public-relations/nejlepsipr-kampan-posledni-dekady--nastup-papeze-frantiska\\_\\_s279x10101.html](http://www.m-journal.cz/cs/public-relations/nejlepsipr-kampan-posledni-dekady--nastup-papeze-frantiska__s279x10101.html)].

### **3. Changes - simple and effective**

The ways in which Pope Francis changes the Church are simple and effective. Some of them relate to the Pope Francis as a person, others to the Church and processes in it. In the following lines, we will try to approach the most widely discussed changes.

#### ***3.1. Simple language and personal contact***

The language of Pope Francis is characterized by simplicity and common expressions from the beginning of his pontificate. For many believers, the Pope's communication style is a complete novelty, since they were used with demanding, sophisticated language and often complicated terms. In his speech, the pope follows the style of Jesus's preaching, full of images and examples of everyday life that are read according to the God's view [[http://www.m-journal.cz/cs/public-relations/nejlepsipr-kampan-posledni-dekady--nastup-papeze-frantiska\\_\\_s279x10101.html](http://www.m-journal.cz/cs/public-relations/nejlepsipr-kampan-posledni-dekady--nastup-papeze-frantiska__s279x10101.html)]. Similarly to John Paul II, he returned to personal encounters with people: talks to them, shakes hands with them, blesses them [1], and even exchanges his white circular cap with them during general audiences.

#### ***3.2. Clothes***

The best dressed man of the year 2013 - this is the way the magazine *Esquire* awarded the Pope Francis [*Elite tailors: What everything is related to the sewing for the Pope?*, <http://www.zivot.sk/clanok/16698/elitni-krajciri-co-vsetko-sa-spaja-so-sitim-pre-papeza>, accessed on 31 March 2018] although he is significantly different from his predecessors, who were well known by spectacular clothing with many patterns. He normally wears a modest, simple white vestment. In celebration of worships and various liturgical acts, he uses simpler types of mass vestments and a liturgical cloak of various colours. Modest clothing is completed by a cross on a short chain, which is made of iron and not of gold. Not only from Benedict XVI, but also from John Paul II, the new head of the Church is distinguished by the fact that he does not use traditional red varnished papal shoes, but only simple black shoes with shoe laces. On a wide strip of cloth surrounding the vestment around the waist, the end of which freely merges with the left leg of the white vestment, Francis I does not have an embroidered blazon. At the same time, the Pope is the only

Church dignitary, who is entitled to wear his coat of arms highlighted as part of the vestment [I. Gazda, *Liturgical specifics of the Pope Francis*, <https://svetkrestanstva.postoj.sk/3293/liturgicke-specifika-papeza-frantiska>, accessed on 31 March 2018].

### **3.3. Accommodation**

He himself does not have a liking for the life of luxury and the use of material benefits associated with the high ecclesiastical function [[http://www.m-journal.cz/cs/public-relations/nejeplesi-pr-kampan-posledni-dekady--nastup-papeze-frantiska\\_s279x10101.html](http://www.m-journal.cz/cs/public-relations/nejeplesi-pr-kampan-posledni-dekady--nastup-papeze-frantiska_s279x10101.html)]. Pope Francis – in accordance with his desire to have a poor Church for the poor – decided to live in a simply furnished apartment in the Domus Sanctae Marthae. In comparison, since Pius X (1903-1914) every pope used to live in the Apostolic Palace in a luxurious apartment with more than ten rooms, staff spaces, a terrace and a view of Rome. However, since the election, Pope Frank has been living in a two-room apartment in a Vatican hotel built on the initiative of the Pope John Paul II. According to the spokesman of the Holy See, the Pope plans to live and eat there with the other clergy in the common dining room, among other things also to avoid losing contact with the outside world. The magnificent papal apartment in the Apostolic Palace is used only for official visits and every Sunday he appears at the window for the Sunday Angelus. *“With his decision, he broke more than a century-long tradition and repeatedly underlined his humble reputation”* [The Pope broke a century-long tradition, he refused another luxury, <https://www.dobrenoviny.sk/c/10100/papez-porusil-storocnu-tradiciju-odmietol-dalsi-luxus>, accessed on 31 March 2018].

### **3.4. News in liturgy**

From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis brought along many changes into Church services. Although they are not so distinct from the Pope Benedict XVI, they are discussed among the liturgists. Let us mention several of them, as follows:

- *“Francis never sings in his liturgical celebrations, as well as in his apostolic blessings.”* [<https://svetkrestanstva.postoj.sk/3293/liturgicke-specifika-papeza-frantiska>]
- *“At the mass celebrated by the Pope, he does not give Holy Communion to the laymen.”* [<https://svetkrestanstva.postoj.sk/3293/liturgicke-specifika-papeza-frantiska>]
- During the preaching given at the mass, the pope does not sit in his chair, but he stands while using a mobile wooden stump.
- He likes exchanging his white circular cap with the believers gathered at the Saint Peter’s Square on the occasion of general audiences.
- Francis prefers the expression the Roman Bishop to the term the Pope when talking about himself.

- When celebrating mass and various liturgical acts, he uses simpler types of mass vestments and a liturgical cloak of different colours [<https://svetkrestanstva.postoj.sk/3293/liturgicke-specifika-papeza-frantiska>].

### 3.5. *Unpopular topics*

Despite the fact that before the election – as the Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio – he was recognized with a rather reluctant attitude towards homosexuals, as the Pope Francis he does not hesitate to discuss controversial issues such as homosexuality, clerical celibacy, use of contraception, abortions, the exclusion of divorced Catholics living in the second marriage from the Church, or coexistence with other religions, and so on.

### 3.6. *Secretariat for Communications*

Pope Francis has set up a new office that brings together all the parts of the Vatican media, including the printer, the photographic service and the publishing house: the Secretariat for Communications. His decision was motivated by the presence and development of digital media, the convergence and interactivity factors that require a re-evaluation of the information system of the Holy See [*Holy Father has joined Vatican media under new Secretariat for Communications*, [http://sk.radiovaticana.va/storico/2015/06/27/sv%C3%A4t%C3%BD\\_otec\\_zdru%C5%BEil\\_vatik%C3%A1nske\\_m%C3%A9di%C3%A1\\_od\\_nov%C3%BD\\_sekretari%C3%A1t\\_pre/sk-1154584](http://sk.radiovaticana.va/storico/2015/06/27/sv%C3%A4t%C3%BD_otec_zdru%C5%BEil_vatik%C3%A1nske_m%C3%A9di%C3%A1_od_nov%C3%BD_sekretari%C3%A1t_pre/sk-1154584), accessed on 1 April 2018].

The status of the Secretariat for Communications defines the tasks and competences of the office. Among other things, the tasks and competencies of the secretariat include the strategic development of new forms of communication (including those that may arise in the future) and integration of traditional media into the digital world [*Papa Francesco. Statuto della segreteria per la comunicazione*, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/motu\\_proprio/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160906\\_statuto-segreteria-comunicazione.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco_20160906_statuto-segreteria-comunicazione.html), accessed on 1 April 2018]. The new secretariat also took over the administration of the institutional website of the Holy See [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) and the twitter service of the pope: @pontifex [*Ettera apostolica in forma di «motuproprio» del sommo pontefice Francesco, Istituzione della segreteria per la comunicazione*, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/motu\\_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio\\_20150627\\_segreteria-comunicazione.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio_20150627_segreteria-comunicazione.html), accessed on 1 April 2018].

## 4. **Conclusions**

The effect of the abovementioned changes is the object of exploring not only by the Church itself, but also by various commercial and non-commercial

institutions. For example, in 2015 the Gallup International Association surveyed the opinion on the Pope Francis among 63,272 respondents from 70 countries of the world, regardless their religion. The main finding was that the Pope Francis is a leader who crosses the boundaries of his own Church. The results showed that a large part of the respondents had a favourable opinion on the Pope, especially with the increasing age. However, there were considerable differences in views among the continents: positive view on the pope was highest in Latin America (77%), followed by North America (63%), and Europe (62%) [*Image of Pope Francis. Gallup International Association opinion poll in 64 countries across the globe*, [http://www.gallup-international.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2015\\_Pope-Francis-Image.pdf](http://www.gallup-international.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2015_Pope-Francis-Image.pdf), accessed on 27 April 2018]. On the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the accession, the Pew Research Centre released in March 2018 poll results that describe six facts on how the pope is perceived by the American Catholics. Pope Francis remains very popular among the American Catholics; they describe him as sympathetic, modest, and liberal. His popularity, however, did not lead to a significant rise in Catholics attending the mass [D. Masci, *6 facts about how U. S. Catholics see Pope Francis*, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/06/facts-about-how-u-s-catholics-see-pope-francis/>, accessed on 27 April 2018].

The election and accession of the new pope was commented at a rate of 135 thousand tweets per minute in the social media environment. More tweets in the entire history of the micro-blogging network Twitter were recorded only in connection with the election of Barack Obama as the President of the United States of America. The pace in which Pope Francis gained favour of the public and the media, as well as the position he has taken in their minds, is also documented by words that people used to search for on Google: modest pope, humble pope or a pope who cares. For comparison/interest, Pope Benedict XVI, on the other hand, was connected with rather negative word phrases: pope and evil, pope and conservative, pope and power [[http://www.m-journal.cz/cs/public-relations/nejlepsi-pr-kampan-posledni-dekady--nastup-pape-ze-frantiska\\_\\_s279x10101.html](http://www.m-journal.cz/cs/public-relations/nejlepsi-pr-kampan-posledni-dekady--nastup-pape-ze-frantiska__s279x10101.html), accessed on 12. February 2018].

Not only the arrival of the new pope on the Pope's throne, but also his subsequent steps, have become an object of mass media attention by introducing topics to both believers and non-believers, as well as the object of investigation for many scientists around the world, which is proven by numerous media outputs, case studies or research studies, similar to ours. However, the interpreted issue still remains a challenge for the future (e.g. new cases of the alleged sexual abuse from the side of the clergy and the associated cover-up and the way the pope reacts, issues related to new opportunities in Medicine and Bioethics, etc.) [3, 4].

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