

## **Listening, Learning, and Dialoguing: Reflections on the Naming of New Cardinals**

Since the publication of my [book on Pope Francis](#) in 2016 I have closely followed the developments of his energetic pontificate. In my view this consistory confirms and advances the stunning vision of reform and renewal more than any other convened under Pope Francis. The news of Archbishop Victor Manuel Fernandez being entrusted with the direction of a reformed Dicastery on the Doctrine of the Faith and the elevation of Fernandez to the cardinalate a week later dramatize the transcendent meaning of these recent decisions by the Pope. Cardinal-elect Fernandez is surely the first PASTORAL theologian to be given charge of the Vatican's office on doctrine.

The personal letter Pope Francis sent Fernandez with his marching orders clearly stated the change of approach and style Francis desires for the office that for centuries has tended to define how the Church asserts its mission and identity in the world and is perceived. Well, Pope Francis has now clearly put in place the mechanism that will hopefully characterize the Church in these stressful times of epochal change moving forward: listening, learning, dialoguing rather than judging, condemning, complaining.

This important change in approach from doctrine to pastoral practice was sanctioned by Vatican II but never quite realized. The way I like to put it is: Holy Mother Church has been trying to turn the corner onto the busy and admittedly chaotic avenue of the new epoch but we kept putting on the brakes. Well, with Francis we are now turning that corner and beginning to assess the way ahead with all its challenges and promises.

The synodal process so ardently proposed by Francis is the capstone instrument for assisting us along the way indicated by the Holy Spirit. Francis has been planting all kinds of seeds of reform leading to a Church that is open to the world, joyful and engaging. Five hundred years of defensiveness and ecclesial introversion are coming to an end. The backgrounds and contexts from which the new cardinals come speak to us of new generations, people, times and places that will constitute the Church's ethos moving forward as the Holy, faithful People of God whose integral participation and mission is being confirmed and encouraged as in the early days of the Church. The Gospel is being communicated with vitality and freshness.

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