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# Pope Francis's Leadership in the Time of Covid-19 Pandemic

by Sr. Hang T.H. Nguyen

## **ABSTRACT:**

The essay writes about the influences of the COVID-19 pandemic to human existence in various aspects, particularly Christian faith. In the darkness and hardship of life, believers and non-believers need the help of good leaders so that they can overcome the crisis, but not lose their faith in God. In order to achieve this purpose, the leaders both in the Church and in the world need to acquire some qualities. What are qualities of a good leader? The essay is an attempt to answer this question by reflection on Pope Francis' leadership. According to Orobator, Pope Francis is good leader who is always close to his people with consoling accompaniment to serve and protect them. Pope Francis' leadership modeled an example of good leadership for the leaders of the Church as well as the wider society.

## **SYNOD:**

The essay serves as a demonstration of Church's synodality. It speaks of the characteristics of the Church in the view of Pope Francis defined as communion, mercy, humble service, and the poor Church for the poor. In the essay, the ecclesiology of Pope Francis shows the three ways of life of the Church including communion, participation, and mission. Church's ways of life are also illustrated in Pope's actions in the time of coronavirus pandemic. Pope Francis' ecclesiology and his leadership in the time of COVID-19 crisis show his desire a Church in which the leaders are in consoling accompaniment with Church's members to forgive, to serve, and to protect them as well as to strengthen their faith.



## INTRODUCTION

The Church exists in a global world characterized by the effects of different crises, including terrorism, violence, injustice, poverty, and particularly the current crisis of COVID-19 pandemic, with which the global community have confronted. Coronavirus Pandemic has gravely threatened human existence in various levels: it caused death, immense suffering and anxiety, existential fear and agony, paralysation of livelihoods of millions of people, serious financial crisis of society, as well as spiritual challenge of believers. Its effects are on both individuals and communities.<sup>1</sup> Inevitably, it challenges the faith of believers with intensive questions: Where is God in the midst of all these? Does God care or share in these afflictions?<sup>2</sup> More than ever, the world and believers are looking forward to the guidance and help of their leaders. A. E. Orobator says: “the world urgently needs a few good women and men to model what good leadership look like.”<sup>3</sup> Hence, it is necessary to identify essential qualities of a leader in the time of crisis so that they can help Church’s members overcome the crisis and be faithful to their God. In particular by reflecting on Pope Francis’s style of leadership, one can draw important lessons for his/her leadership in the time of crisis. The essay will first present the ecclesiological spirit of Pope Francis, second examine his leadership dimensions during the COVID-19 crisis, and finally draw leadership lessons in a time of crisis learned from his example.

## POPE FRANCIS AND HIS ECCLESIOLOGICAL SPIRIT

Being a Jesuit, a Latin American Pope, and a pastor, Pope Francis’s words and deeds has drawn not only the attention of Catholics, but also that of other Christians, and many people of other religions all over the world. This is because he does not just talk, but acts like Jesus particularly by showing his humility and commitment to social justice and love for the poor. He stands on the sides of the poor and those at the margins. He emphasizes God’s mercy and therefore excluding no one. From social media, one can see that he communicates with ordinary people in a friendly way as if he is one of

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1 E. Orobator, *The Pope and the Pandemic: Lessons in Leadership in a Time of Crisis*, kindle edition, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2021), 11.

2 Ibid., 28.

3 Ibid., 8.

them, and expresses warmth and happiness as engaging with people in all communities. In this respect, the Pope consults widely in order to understand people from kinds of situations.

There has been ecclesial renewal from the very outset of Pope Francis's papacy. It can be said that Pope Francis has carried out a change in the understanding of the Catholic Church. Thus, the Catholics' view on the Church has been gradually more definable. In spite of having inherited issues from the ecclesiological vision of the Second Vatican Council and the teachings of the predecessors, Pope Francis has initiated significant changes which are different from the previous papacies. Gerard Mannion notes that Pope Francis's vision on the Church is "a conscious reordering of priorities – prioritizing practical, pastoral, social, and moral concerns over and against doctrinal, juridical, and fundamental theological considerations."<sup>4</sup> In this way, he has advanced in new ways that the Church does her mission with mercy, love and justice. His view on the Church can be identified with four main features: the Church as communion, the poor Church for the poor, the Church of mercy, and the Church of service. These characteristics, taken together, reflect his renewal vision on the Church.

First, the Pope is influenced by the understanding of the Church as communion, which was centered at the Second Vatican Council, but he made some changes. He emphasized the importance of fostering collegiality in the Church at all levels. To the Pope, the moment has come to make the collegiality posed at the Second Vatican Council, in which the Pope and Bishops worked together, like Peter and Apostles, sharing responsibility in governing the universal church.<sup>5</sup> Thus, he established a group of eight cardinals from five continents around the world to be his advisors on the governance of the universal Church and to help him revise the apostolic constitution on the Roman Curia, and further to manifest the communion of Bishops.<sup>6</sup> The Pope stressed more on the role of local churches. He said: "Each particular Church, as a portion of the Catholic Church under the leadership

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4 Gerard Mannion, *Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism: Evangelii Gaudium and the Papal Agenda* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 99.

5 Marco Politi, *Pope Francis Among the Wolves: The Inside Story of a Revolution*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 56-57.

6 *Ibid.*, 58-59.

of its Bishops, is likewise called to missionary conversion. It is the primary subject of evangelization, since it is the concrete manifestation of the one Church in one specific place, and in it 'the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative.'<sup>7</sup> The Pope also emphasized the responsibility of lay people for the Church and her mission because they are "the protagonists of the Church and the world."<sup>8</sup> He particularly featured the role of women in the Church,<sup>9</sup> when he affirmed: "It is necessary to broaden the opportunities for a stronger presence of women in the Church... the feminine genius is needed wherever we make important decisions."<sup>10</sup> In *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), he also wrote: "The Church acknowledges the indispensable contribution which women make to society through the sensitivity, intuition and other distinctive skills which they, more than men, tend to possess;" they can offer new contributions for activities and theological reflections in the Church.<sup>11</sup> Hence, the Church entails to foster the communion of her members at all levels.

Second, the Pope specially emphasized the poor and the suffering of the Church. Pope Francis makes an appeal that he wants a Church which is poor for the poor. The poor not only share in the *sensus fidei*, but also know the suffering Christ in their difficulties. For him, the new evangelization is to acknowledge the saving power at work in the life of the poor and to put them at the center of the Church. The Church is called to find Christ in them and be evangelized by them.<sup>12</sup> In the words of Stan C. Ilo, the Church of the poor refers to the identity and mission of the Church. It is an invitation to all Christians to return to true evangelization.<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis also reminds that the poor are central to the Gospel: "God's heart has a special place for the

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7 Pope Francis, "Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World," 30, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).

8 Joseph Xavier, "The Church of the People: Ecclesial Vision of Pope Francis," *VJTR* 80, no. 8 (August 2016), 607.

9 Pope Francis, *EG*, 103.

10 Politi, 95.

11 Pope Francis, *EG*, 103.

12 *Ibid.*, *EG*, 198

13 Stan Chu Ilo, *A Poor and Merciful Church: The Illuminative Ecclesiology of Pope Francis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 85.

poor, so much so that he himself 'became poor' (2 Cor 8:9).<sup>14</sup> In fact, from the first day of his pontificate, he has devoted himself to local churches that are poor and to the poor around the world. It shows that his preferential option is for the poor, especially associating with the Church in Latin America.<sup>15</sup> The Pope wants the Church to be poor so that She is truly free to witness the joy of the Gospel and to be God's instruments for the liberation and promotion of the poor.<sup>16</sup>

Third, Pope Francis's spirit is notably inspired by the insight that God is mercy. Mercy is a fundamental value in his spirituality, as W. Kasper notes that mercy is the keyword of his papacy.<sup>17</sup> For the Pope, mercy stands at the center of Christian life. The Church cannot exist without this virtue. In his *Misericordiae Vultus*, the Pope writes: "mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life... nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church's very credibility is seen how she shows merciful and compassionate love."<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the Church must be in communion with others, especially the poor and suffering of the world.<sup>19</sup> Thereby the Church expresses herself as a *mother* and *shepherd* who always welcomes, loves, and walks with those who seek God.<sup>20</sup> For the sinners and the excluded, the Church must be like the father in the Parable of the Lost Son, taking the first step to forgive and opening the door to await her children's return.<sup>21</sup>

Fourth, Pope Francis centers on the matter of service—the call for humble service to Church's members and to the wider world. The Church of service is manifested not only by the words and teachings of the Church, but also

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14 Pope Francis, *EG*, 197.

15 Bradford E. Hinze, "The Ecclesiology of Pope Francis and the Future of the Church in Africa," *Journal of Global Catholicism* 2, no. 1 (December 2017), 8.

16 Pope Francis, *EG*, 187.

17 Mozes Noda, "Religion, Liturgy and Ethics, at the Intersection Between Theory and Practice. The Revolution of Pope Francis," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, no. 46 (2017), 25. Cited in Walter Kasper, *Papst Franziskus – Revolution der Zärtlichkeit und der Liebe. Theologische Wurzeln und pastorale Perspektiven*, (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2015).

18 Pope Francis, "Misericordiae Vultus: Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy," 10. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_letters/documents/papa-francesco\\_bolla\\_20150411\\_misericordiae-vultus.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html).

19 Robin Ryan, "Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis," *New Theology Review* 27, no. 2 (March 2015) 85.

20 Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy: A Vision for the Church* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2014), 85-86.

21 Pope Francis, *EG*, 46.

by her actions and witnesses. The Church, first and foremost, is responsible for the minister of the Gospel (Eph 3:7; Col 1:23), then to all people by accompaniment, walking with others, journeying alongside them. Regarding the Church's leaders, the Pope appealed them to "go out" to serve the poor and the suffering.<sup>22</sup> They must take on the "smell of the sheep" and let themselves permeate their smell.<sup>23</sup> They should not control people, but must accompany and walk with them in order to guide, encourage, support, and to keep them united.<sup>24</sup> The Church of service is also taking part in the new ministry of "going forth." The Church is not sitting still and waiting for others to come to her, but rather She is "going from our own comfort zone to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel."<sup>25</sup> The Pope desires "a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security."<sup>26</sup> The Pope refers to the Church as a "field hospital," which is close to the wounded and humiliated of history.<sup>27</sup>

The Church in the vision of Pope Francis consists of reforming the Roman Curia, caring for all her members, outlining new directions for Church ministry, and encouraging and accompanying all her members, especially the poor and neglected. Pope Francis's view on the Church may arouse a hope for deep reflection on the Church and people in today's world. From his ecclesiology, one can find that the Church is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone with different problems and there are opening doors to welcome not only Catholics, but everyone.

## POPE FRANCIS'S LEADERSHIP IN THE TIME OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Pope Francis's leadership is fundamentally exposed by his words and deeds, particularly from his renewal vision on the Church. It can be said that his dynamic personality, great heart, profound wisdom, and ecclesiological

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22 Maryanne Loughry, "A Church of and for the Poor," in *Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism*, ed. Gerard Mannion (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 167. Cited in Pope Francis, Homily for the Mass of Chrism 2013, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130328\\_messa-crismale.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130328_messa-crismale.html).

23 Pope Francis, *EG*, 24.

24 Ryan, "Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis," 87.

25 Pope Francis, *EG*, 20.

26 *Ibid.*, *EG*, 49

27 Xavier, 606. Cited in Pope Francis, "Salute negate." *L'Osservatore Romano*, 8 May 2016, 1.

vision all served him well as a leader.<sup>28</sup> At the harsh time of the coronavirus catastrophe, which left the global world in a state of great anguish, his handling of the crisis exemplified a specific style of leadership and addressed constitutive elements of good leadership, being a model for leaders both in the Church and in the broader society. In fact, during the time of the coronavirus crisis, some governments used their authority and brutal force in restricting the pandemic<sup>29</sup> whereas the Pope desired political authority to exercise “a service to solidarity, the common good, and the advancement of human dignity.”<sup>30</sup> To the Pope, the time of hardship reminds leaders of the superficial the importance and necessity of solidarity with other people and service for others. It also awakens leaders to injustice and the cries of the poor.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the Pope prioritizes the needs and protection of the vulnerable victims.

The first constitutive dimension of Pope Francis’s leadership in the crisis is defined as a consoling accompaniment embodied in poignant gestures and symbols that communicate compassion, mercy, and hope. According to saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), consolation is simply defined as an increase of hope, faith, and love. The consolation as an experience of hope, faith, and love is significant for believers and non-believers. This is because these three elements would form the first causality of harsh experience of the crisis, like COVID-19, which brings fear, sorrow, suffering, death, and paralysation to people on a global level. This posed a question about the existence and love of God. It was a fundamental test of faith for many believers,<sup>32</sup> so the Pope focused on Christian hope. In his homily at the chapel at Casa Santa Marta on May 8, 2020, he gave hope to people by identifying and elaborating “the three marks” of Christ, a Consoler. First, the Pope affirms that the consolation of Christ is true, not “deceiving,” and is a consolation in closeness and silence. Second, it is neither “anesthesia” nor a provision of a false comfort that makes suffering become disguised and paralyzed. Third, it opens “the door of hope” that Christ walks with people through from their painful realities into God’s

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28 Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, SJ, *The Pope and the Pandemic: Lessons in the Leadership in a Time of Crisis*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021), 13.

29 Ibid., 19-20.

30 Ibid., 21.

31 Pope Francis, *A Christian Response to Covid-19*, ed. Walter Kasper, George Augustine, forward by Pope Francis (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2020), v.

32 St. Ignatius. Cited in Orobator, 28.



consolation and peace. Pope Francis applied this three-step consolation to his ministry in the time of pandemic. Through means of media, he expressed his solidarity with frontline health care workers and spiritually supported them. He emphasized that the reality of the passion, suffering, and death of Christ has no “quick fix” or “happy ending.” In his explanation, the end of Easter will be in the resurrection and in peace; yet it does not mean “a happy ending but a loving commitment that makes you tread a difficult path. But He trod it first. This comforts us and gives us strength.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, the crucial quality of leadership in the time of crisis is the ability to maintain a realistic view toward the pandemic and to prevent false assurances mimicking an authenticity of purpose.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, Pope Francis’s consolation is expressed in new way of being close. Accompaniment with the suffered is always the option of the Pope. He suggested that Church’s leaders must be physically close to people, walking with them on their path of pain and suffering.<sup>35</sup> This echoes his ecclesiological view writtent in the *Evangelii Gaudium* that Church ministers must take on the “smell of the sheep” (EG, 24). It implies that Church ministers need to be close to their sheep to care for and to protect them so that the smell of the sheep permeates the shepherd’s body. Pope Francis addresses ecclesial leadership with his favorite words: “accompaniment,” “walking with others,” and “journeying alongside them.” In the words of R. Ryan, Church leaders must walk with the people – “walk in front in order to guide the community, in the middle in order to encourage and support, and at the back so that no one lags too far behind, to keep them united.”<sup>36</sup> Despite the coronavirus pandemic causing social distance, the Pope was not apart from his people. He opted for a socially distanced accompaniment: “I will accompany you from here.”<sup>37</sup> His accompaniment in this time of crisis reveals a new way of being close. In the interview with Paolo Rodari, the Pope emphasized the crucial need of “discovering a new closeness,” in which closeness is understood in terms of spiritual, not physical. The new way of closeness exemplifies Pope Francis’s leadership in the time of the pandemic and he expressed his desire to lead through pastoral leadership, stating that

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33 Orobator, 30.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ryan, 87.

37 Orobator, 30.

“the people of God need their pastor to be close to them, not to over-protect himself. The people of God need their pastors to be self-sacrificing.”<sup>38</sup> In addition, compassion and mercy are also components of consolation. Compassion is identified in one’s ability to live in difficult and challenging situations as a shared experience. To Pope Francis, compassion means “to suffer with, to suffer together, to not remain indifferent to the pain and suffering of others.”<sup>39</sup> Compassion surpasses empathy. It motivates an action in response to an unjust and unworthy structure of the world. It urges people to figure out the way of structuring the world and making it better. In the time of crisis, compassion reflects a way of life that tends to the wounds and pains of others in order to bring them consolation and to inspire the establishment of common good, just structures, and living conditions.<sup>40</sup> Another component of consolation is mercy. To the Pope, mercy is a way of life that originates in the tenderness of God. It is a manifestation of concrete responses that touch the hearts of others in their pain and eventually becomes actions of justice. The Pope believes that mercy is the divine attitude, the healing power of the cross that enables people to overcome fear and to maintain a compassionate accompaniment for the suffering people. Compassion and mercy are defined as a fundamental engagement inspired by love and a radical solidarity with the vulnerable. Compassion and mercy are marked as the exercise of the ministry of consolation, the option to stand on the side of the vulnerable, which defines characteristics of Pope Francis’s leadership in the time of crisis. For him, leadership in a time of crisis requires a radical manifestation of mercy which is expressed in a compassionate and merciful commitment for the healing of pain and the conversion of unjust structures.<sup>41</sup> This reflects his ecclesiological vision, in which the primary task of the Church is affirmed “to bear witness to the mercy of God and to encourage generous reactions of solidarity in order to open a future of hope. For where hope increases, energy and commitment to building a more human and just social order also grows, and new possibilities for sustainable and healthy development emerge.”<sup>42</sup>

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38 Ibid., 31.

39 Ibid., 35.

40 Ibid., 36-37.

41 Orobator, 37-38.

42 Pope Francis, “Official Visit of the Holy Father to H.E. Mr Giorgio Napolitano, President of the Republic of Italy: Address of Pope Francis,” Vatican (14 November 2013), Official Visit to the President of the Republic of Italy at the Quirinal Palace (14 November 2013) | Francis (vatican.va).

The second constitutive attributes of Pope Francis's leadership in the time of crisis is his love for the poor, the marginalized, and the vulnerable. The Church of Pope Francis is for the poor, serves the poor, and centers on the poor.<sup>43</sup> Thus, in his leadership, the Pope always demonstrates his option to stand with the poor and the vulnerable in solidarity, compassion, and mercy.<sup>44</sup> His deep concern for workers' rights and conditions shows that he stands with them, particularly demonstrating another aspect of good leadership in a time of crisis when the rights of vulnerable workers are ignored or violated.<sup>45</sup> During the coronavirus pandemic, the Pope preferentially loves and cares for the people at the margins and peripheries. In preferential choice for the poor and vulnerable, the Pope refers to locate at existential peripheries to protect and advocate for them.<sup>46</sup> The Pope also stands closely with migrants and refugees by upholding moral behaviors and preventing tragedies in the time of crisis. He called for an ethical practice of the international migration with four words: "welcome, *protect*, *promote*, and *integrate*." He also encouraged the generosity of individuals, communities, and societies to welcome the refugees for their human dignity.<sup>47</sup> For prisoners and detainees, the Pope worried about the risk of Covid-19 infection among them because of their limited space of social distance and he passionately appealed for their safety.<sup>48</sup> He called prisoners and detainees his "friends" and assured them with his care, compassion, and closeness. In the context of the coronavirus pandemic, the Pope called the world's attention to the people living in the peripheries. Thus, a good leader must take this manner of the Pope to show a preference of love for those who are most affected, vulnerable, and marginalized during this time.<sup>49</sup>

A celebration of goodness is also defined as the third constitutive dimension of Pope Francis's leadership. The Pope prefers to prioritize dignity, rights, and justice for people, which entails a recognition and celebration of the inherent goodness of humanity. Since the sadness and darkness of a crisis can overshadow the light of human goodness, he suggests celebrating the

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43 Pope Francis, *EG*, 198.

44 Orobator, 48.

45 *Ibid.*, 49.

46 Orobator, 51.

47 *Ibid.*, 52.

48 *Ibid.*, 54-55.

49 *Ibid.*, 56.

goodness to appreciate human dignity. He found it necessary to have a conscientious and compassionate leader so that human dignity could be preserved. The Pope praised those who had sacrificed, conquered difficulties, and shown true qualities of humanity. They are frontline health care workers, medical doctors, nurses, religious sisters, and priests who have exemplified the worthiest manifestations of the humanity during the pandemic. The Pope says that these people who have died on the frontlines are “crucified people,” “soldiers,” –“soldiers of love.” He praised them as “pastor doctors” and “good shepherds” who, like Jesus Christ, lay down their lives to save others. The Pope said to them that they had done the good in a time of great challenge.<sup>50</sup> He viewed them as people who emptied themselves to care for and save the lives of the sick; therefore, we need to recognize, value and celebrate them. Likewise, the Pope praised the roles and duties of women as “the embodiment of goodness” in the time of the pandemic. Their effort to serve the sick bears witness to God’s love, self-sacrificing love, tenderness, and compassion.<sup>51</sup> Also, the Pope praised many priests who died while serving the sick in hospitals. Like other heroes, they poured out their lives to bring consolation to the sick. He also celebrated the courage, patience, and sacrifice of parents, teachers, children, caretakers, cleaners, police, and soldiers; and essential services such as pharmacies, supermarkets, and transportation. Thus, a good leader has to celebrate goodness and denounce selfishness.

The three constitutive elements (consoling accompaniment, preferential love for the poor, and the celebration of human goodness) qualify Pope Francis’s style of leadership as a good leadership in a time of crisis that people expect. This signifies the saying of Orobator: “the world urgently needs a few good women and men to model what good leadership looks like, especially in a time of crisis.”<sup>52</sup> Pope Francis is one who had exemplified this mode of leadership during the time of pandemic.

## LESSONS FOR LEADERSHIP IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

At the harsh time of coronavirus pandemic, Pope Francis offers a concrete mode of leadership that is necessary not just in the Church but also in the whole world. From the characteristics and qualities of Pope Francis’s leadership

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50 Orobator, 65.

51 Ibid., 68.

52 Ibid., 8.

in the time of crisis, one can learn that a good leader should be a leader of compassion, flexibility and adaptability, and a bridge-builder.

A good leader, first of all, must possess compassion. In a time of crisis, compassion does not mean an abolishment of sentimentality, but it generates the requirement of passion. It is neither “naive sentimentality nor religious complacency;” but rather it inspires action in response to an unjust and unworthy world. It urges people to do something better for the world, to eliminate injustice in social structures, to build up common good, and to heal the wounds of vulnerable people.<sup>53</sup> Through this way, one can become a leader of a community or a nation. Moreover, Pope Francis gave a powerful message of hope to the world in the darkness of the pandemic by his words and deeds, which reminded leaders to be a bearer of hope for the vulnerable. To the Pope, hope is a fundamental right of people. Hope is not only a destination; but also is a force driving a journey. The gospel of hope is based on the triumph of love over the source of evil, a victory that does not avoid suffering and death, but encountering and passing through them, creating a way in the “abyss,” and “transforming evil into good.” Through this manner of the Pope, the leader could learn to avoid any appearance of “circumventing harsh and painful realities,” at the same time asserting the priority of “life over death, light over darkness, and hope over despair” –the central messages in a time of crisis.<sup>54</sup>

Second, a good leader must demonstrate the need for building bridges and connecting people together. Orobator claims that bridge-building is seen as a core component of Pope Francis’ style of leadership that he always practices. Pope Francis reminded the leaders of building bridges, establishing connections, and creating fraternity, for then people can confidently encounter the crisis together through the bridge-building process. The Latin term *Pontifex Maximus*, which means “Greatest Bridge Builder,” is a Latin epithet conferred on Popes. In fact, @Pontifex is also the Twitter username of Pope Francis’s official Twitter page, which has more than eighteen million followers. It is not only about constructing bridges but also about forming

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53 Orobator, 36-37.

54 Ibid., 39.

a clear focus and goal. It is leading “somewhere” rather than “nowhere.”<sup>55</sup> The strategic goal of the Pope throughout the worldwide coronavirus pandemic is promoting the Church’s ideals and principles, particularly solidarity, dialogue, seeking peace, and the common good. At the moments of the pandemic, the Pope has exercised a kind of prophetic and pastoral leadership by reminding the world’s leaders of their human existence and emphasizing the existential connection among people across geographical, economic, political, and social boundaries.<sup>56</sup>

Third, flexibility and adaptability are also necessary for a good leader. The pandemic has affected all parts of human community and made the world be in disorder. The conditions of human life have changed. Thus, creative and alternative ways of handling the crisis are essential qualities that any leader should possess. Orobator claims that the crisis addresses the leader’s ability to engage in the process of adapting to change with flexibility and creativity—this is demonstrated in Pope Francis’s leadership.<sup>57</sup> For instance, the spread of coronavirus pandemic banned any public gatherings of people. This implies that all churches were shut down as ritual celebrations of communities were not permitted. It was impossible for the Church’s congregation to celebrate their ritual worship. Thus, the Pope granted permission for online masses and various alternative ways of carrying religious activities and ministry.<sup>58</sup> However, the changes have become complicated and messy because of the failures of leadership in the time of coronavirus pandemic.<sup>59</sup> It became problematic in the solution of change occurring in a traditional institution like the Church, which does not adapt easily to change. There was a tension between the authority of the states and that of the Church on the principle of religious freedom.<sup>60</sup> In the face of the pandemic, Pope Francis’s actions demonstrate his leadership skill of creating opportunities, instead of challenges. Church leaders should be responsible for protecting her members by working with the states.

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55 Orobator, 95.

56 Ibid., 99.

57 Ibid., 114.

58 Ibid., 72, 77, 81.

59 Ibid., 113.

60 Orobator, 103-104.

## CONCLUSION

Pope Francis's leadership seeks communion of all the Church's members and reforms the pastoral practices of the Catholic Church. His voice is authoritative over a global community addressing people at all levels. Particularly, in the harsh time of the COVID-19 crisis, the Pope modeled an example of good leadership for the leaders of the Church as well as the wider society. This leadership embodies closeness, empathy, compassion, and love. It addresses that a true leader must be close to the victims of the crisis and be in empathetical solidarity with them. He/she needs to pay attention to the values and priorities that uphold the needs and rights of people and try to protect their livelihood conditions. Furthermore, he/she must prioritize compassionate consolation to the victims for their faith and hope, as Orobator says: "true leadership prioritizes the well-being of others and resolutely and compassionately ministers consolation with the aim of strengthening faith, hope, and love."<sup>61</sup> Thus, Pope Francis's leadership speaks of the prophetic and pastoral manner, which is an example for a global audience in leadership positions both in the Church and in the world. His example of leadership needs to be widely carried by the world's leaders.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 41.

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