

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
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Person of the Year

Pope Gets Attention for Paying Attention to Others

By Paul Asay

What Happened:

Right about now, most of us are spend at least a little time looking back on 2013 and thinking about what was most notable in the past 12 months. Nearly every news and entertainment outlet has released a slew of person-, thing- or story-of-the-year lists for users to discuss, argue and ponder.

The biggest news story was the government shutdown, according to *The World Almanac*. The year's biggest sports moment, according to *USA Today*, was the last few seconds of the Auburn-Alabama college football game.

Entertainment Weekly named *Gravity* actress Sandra Bullock as its Entertainer of the Year, while *Sports Illustrated* dubbed Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning as Sportsman of the Year.

Yet it's *Time* magazine that perennially gives away arguably the year's most important annual accolade: Person of the Year, which went to Pope Francis, dubbed by the magazine as "The People's Pope."

Francis' early months in office have been predicated on the Golden Rule: Love your neighbor as yourself. His first day as pope, he carried his own luggage out of the Vatican hotel, where he was staying, and paid his own bill. He's shunned papal luxury favored by predecessors and lives a fairly frugal lifestyle. He's washed the feet of prisoners (including a Muslim woman) and hugged a man with a horrible disfiguring disease without waiting to hear if he was contagious.

"In a matter of months, Francis has elevated the healing mission of the church—the church as servant and comforter of hurting people in an often harsh world—above the doctrinal police work so important to his recent predecessors," wrote *Time*'s Howard Chua-Eoan and Elizabeth Dias. "John Paul II and Benedict XVI were professors of theology. Francis is a former janitor, nightclub bouncer, chemical technician and literature teacher."

No world leader is free from controversy, and Pope Francis is not an exception. Some believe he is soft on some important moral issues, but Francis says he agrees with the church's teaching on things such as homosexuality; it's just a matter of emphasis. "The teaching of the church...is clear," he has said, "and I am a son of the church, but it is not necessary to talk about those issues all the time."

Time goes on to say, “We have a glut of problems to tackle. Francis says by example, Stop bickering and roll up your sleeves. Don’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good—an important thing for the world to hear.”

Talk About It

Most people would say Pope Francis impacted the world for the better. Do you think Christians can learn from his example? Do you think he’s changed the way non-Christians, or people who are critical of Christianity, view the Christian faith?

Some people believe Pope Francis doesn’t speak up enough about controversial moral issues. Would you agree? Or do you think his focus is where it should be?

Francis became *Time*’s Person of the Year because, in part, he spent so much time focusing on other people—a rare thing for which to be acknowledged. Indeed, most people who think more about other people don’t get much recognition at all. Can you think of anyone who deserves some praise for putting others ahead of him or herself? What could you do to show appreciation?

You may never be in a position to be named a Person of the Year, but you still could make a big difference in 2014. What could you do to help make the coming year better for your parents? Your brothers and sisters? Your friends? Your youth group? How could you set a better example for those around you?

What the Bible Says

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:12).

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Col. 3:12).

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8).

“If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?” (1 John 3:17).

Paul Asay has covered religion for *The Washington Post*, *Christianity Today*, Beliefnet.com, and *The (Colorado Springs) Gazette*. He writes about culture for *Plugged In* and wrote the Batman book, *God on the Streets of Gotham* (Tyndale). He lives in Colorado Springs with wife Wendy and his two children. Follow him on Twitter at @AsayPaul.