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## Pope Francis and Theology

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Religions  
Philosophy  
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# *Telos*

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## EDITORIAL

Telos – in other words, the target, the goal, the destination, the end. A Greek word, rich in both philosophical and theological tradition. A title summed up in the action of the throwing of an arrow. The source is identified, the objective too. Telos is the journal of Domuni University. An international journal of theology, philosophy, history and social sciences, freely accessible and published on the internet, with the aim of stimulating thinking and contributing to the dialogue of thought.

Domuni University inherits two precious gifts from the Dominican tradition: the Faith and the intellectual life. By sharing the wealth of its educational and research networks, we desire to share these gifts with the widest possible audience of readers.

We have a wonderful tradition and a vast collection of documents but we do not wish to be simply heirs or even broadcasters. We want to think, communicate, and reflect together: theologians and philosophers, Christians of today and tomorrow.

We are on five continents. Our languages and situations are often very different, but the diversity converges with the internet and specifically through this journal of scientific level.

In each edition a single theme is addressed, but by three authors from three different linguistic and cultural areas. This naturally opens up bibliographies in English, French and Spanish.

Each article is available in its original language, and also translated into the two other languages, thus enabling the readers to enrich their own tradition with the other bibliographies, philosophies and theologies; references coming from beyond their traditional culture. We hope not only to build bridges, establish connections and create openings but primarily to mutually enrich individual reflections.

There could not be a better subject for this first issue – Pope Francis. He holds an office that concerns all of us, wherever we may be. His theology makes us look afresh as it breaks with the usual stereotypes whilst at the

same time showing a surprising consistency in his media actions and positions. Where is he coming from? What is his academic background? What inspires him? To what references relate his action and his thinking? Can we « understand » Pope Francis ?

Enjoy your reading!

Claire-Marie MONNET, op  
Editorial Director

## THEOLOGY OF POPE FRANCIS

### Introduction

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The theology of Pope Francis must be seen in the context of that hugely significant ecclesial event of our time, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), and the reception of its teachings over the subsequent fifty years, particularly in the church. Francis is the first pope since that event who was *not* a participant in the council. Indeed, his seminary formation would have had many characteristics of the neo-scholasticism that was rejected by the council, and his subsequent ministry as a Jesuit and a bishop in Argentina exposed him to much of the tensions occasioned by the upheavals of the council.

Most commentators agree that Jorge Bergoglio was a divisive figure, especially during his time as provincial of the Argentinian Jesuits, when he was deemed unsupportive of, and even opposed to, some of his fellow-Jesuits who had espoused the cause of the poor in the urban *barrios*. During his tenure as provincial he was perceived as being one of those church leaders who supported the powerful military dictatorship of Argentina and turned a blind eye to many of the regime's atrocities. Indeed one reputable commentator on Argentina called him a "major player" in the church's shameful complicity with the *junta*. Looking back on this time, Bergoglio himself spoke of "hundreds of errors" that could be partly due to his being thrust into leadership at too early an age.

However, there also seems no doubt that he subsequently underwent a conversion during the two years he spent in Cordoba when he was no longer provincial. While it would be too facile to suggest that his theological vision was turned on its head by this experience, the earlier authoritarian Bergoglio seems to have become a humbler and more compassionate person as a result of this time in Cordoba and then later in Buenos Aires among in the slums of his diocese. Over his 18 years as bishop and archbishop, one priest claimed that he must have personally talked to at least half the people in his slum parish: "he would just turn up, wander the alleyways, chat to the locals, drink mate, a local tea, with them". A measure

of this “turn-around” can be seen in his request, early in his pontificate, for help from Leonardo Boff, the “silenced” liberation theologian, in preparing an encyclical on environmental issues.

It is clear that any reflection on the theology of Pope Francis must factor in this personal experience of grace and conversion. It helps us understand his answer, on being asked who he was, that he is “a sinner who has known forgiveness”. It underlies his transparent humility in the face of human suffering, and even more, his courage to be himself within an ecclesiastical system – the Vatican – that is unaccustomed to such transparency. It gives the ring of authenticity to that graced moment when he emerged after being elected pope and bowed before the world to receive its blessing, and to the Holy Thursday washing and reverencing of prisoners’ feet. For the world at large, beyond the church, it is his person even more than his utterances that express his theology. And in what follows, this must be constantly borne in mind: the theology of Pope Francis is not something academic; it is the fruit of a graced life, it is theology *embodied*.

### ***In medio Ecclesiae* (at the heart of the Church)**

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In the Latin liturgy celebrating a confessor, the *introit* opens with the words, *in medio ecclesiae*, reminding us that the church is the special social context for the believer. Jorge Bergoglio was taught, especially by his Italian grandmother, to love the church. In her way, she sowed the seed of a respect for popular religion, which he would defend as an authentic way of belief, and which doubtless opened a window for him when he was in the company of the poor and the illiterate people of the *barrio*. In those communities of believers, he was ‘at the heart of the church’.

### **The Council & Pope Francis**

The Second Vatican Council has been called “a council like no other” (Cardinal Danneels), and was famously described by Karl Rahner as the great ecclesial event marking the end of the Constantinian church. Such an epoch-making council simply could not happen without considerable upheaval and resistance. When John XXIII called for the opening of the windows and a new relationship with the world, there were – and are – many who preferred the earlier “entrenched” church that under Pius IX had taken a consistently pessimistic view of the world. Indeed, many young people today feel anger at the “conciliar generation” for the confusion following on the council, and dream of a return to the old ways that may restore ecclesial

order. The new ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*, vigorously debated during the council, has subsequently been carefully “managed” by Paul VI, the pope of the council, and his successors John Paul II & Benedict XVI. Many have detected, particularly since the advent of John Paul II, a reining back of the direction of the council and a restoring of the centralism that had been challenged during the council.

Then Benedict resigned, and Francis was chosen. If Vatican II was the first council in history to have a majority of participants from outside Europe, marking the global character of the Catholic church, the election of an Argentinian (the first non-European in thirteen centuries!) was another instance of this shift from a dominantly- European to a worldwide church. A brother Jesuit, the widely-revered Cardinal Martini, shortly before Benedict’s resignation, spoke of the church in affluent Europe and America as “tired and out of date”. “How come it doesn’t rouse itself? Are we afraid? Fearful instead of courageous?” he asked. Within a year of Martini’s death, the newly-elected Pope Francis seemed to set himself to answer Martini’s challenge, clearly aligning his direction with the teaching of Vatican II. “The council was a beautiful work of the Holy Spirit”, he said on April 16, 2013, “but after 50 years, have we done everything the Holy Spirit in the council told us to do?”

### **Francis and his predecessors**

Comparisons have been made between Francis and John XXIII, and indeed both men have interesting similarities. John’s background as a professor of history and as a diplomat, Francis’ pastoral ministry in Buenos Aires: each brings an experience of church that transcends narrow cultural boundaries. Both are theologically conservative and pastorally courageous, and seemingly not strongly doctrinaire in the manner of John Paul and Benedict. The courage of John XXIII in calling the council is matched by the manner in which Francis is seeking to reform the curia, a goal which even John Paul II, the “dismantler” of soviet communism, failed to achieve. Perhaps most significantly, both John and Francis are driven by *a great hope for humanity*, in which hope the ministry of the church is situated. Paul VI, for all his theological learning, was timid and cautious and, in his latter years, burdened by anxiety, while John Paul II and Benedict XVI felt the need to mould the church in the form of their theological orthodoxy, often in the process being brutally intolerant of difference. Time will tell how the story of Francis Bergoglio unfolds, but at this juncture, the style of his life, the spirit of his first exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (hereafter EG), and his



impact across all boundaries, unfailingly recall the memorable words of John XXIII at the opening of the council:

In the daily exercise of our pastoral office, we sometimes have to listen, much to our regret, to voices of persons who, though burning with zeal, are not endowed with too much sense of discretion or measure. In these modern times they can see nothing but prevarication and ruin. They say that our era, in comparison with past eras, is getting worse, and they behave as though they had learned nothing from history, which is, none the less, the teacher of life. [...] We feel we must disagree with those prophets of gloom, who are always forecasting disaster, as though the end of the world were at hand. In the present order of things, Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations... (*Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*)

I believe that Pope Francis' theology has to be understood within this "new order of human relations", in his Christian anthropology, which suffuses all his thinking and breaks through in his behaviour.

## **The Anthropology of Francis**

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The solidarity with the poor experienced by Jorge Bergoglio in the slum parishes of Buenos Aires has had a profound effect on his whole way of thinking, as is clear from his many utterances, and especially his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. By all accounts, this pastoral conversion brought to the hitherto intransigent Jesuit provincial what Paul VI frequently called *novus habitus mentis*, "a new mindset", echoed by Francis (cf. EG 188). His humble lifestyle in the Vatican, his constant call on the church to be poor, his unveiled anger at clerical opulence, and his stance in the presence of others regardless of status: all clearly show that the gospel option for the poor is at the heart of his faith. His theology, and particularly his ecclesiology, are grounded in his haunting *sense of solidarity* with the poor and the suffering. In this he embodies the anthropology of the council, which unforgettably proclaims

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men and women. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for everyone. (GS 1)

These opening words of *Gaudium et Spes* could be a summary of the spirituality of Pope Francis.

## The spirit of Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council is the first council to elaborate a detailed anthropology, notably in its pastoral constitution on The Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*, hereafter GS) and the decree on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*, hereafter DH). For a church whose faith is incarnational, this belated sensitivity to the anthropological may seem strange, but there is no doubt that this has been spurred as a result of the church's renewed openness to secular trends, not least the insights of existentialist philosophers such as Buber, Marcel, and Levinas. It is a measure of the council's *aggiornamento* that she could be enriched and enlightened by dialogue with these and other thinkers of different faiths and traditions. The writings of John Paul II have been influential in opening up interest in this aspect of the council's teaching, particularly his theology of the body as set out in *Man & Woman He created Them*<sup>1</sup>.

## The 'open anthropology' of Francis

Francis has not elaborated an explicit anthropology in the manner of John Paul II. Rather is it something that is like a binding thread woven through his utterances, giving them sense and coherence. It is not so much a conceptual system of human interconnectedness, giving meaning to theology, as an experience of the "other" which is the constant referant of all Christian behaviour. "I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: 'Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the *encounter with an event*, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction'" (EG 7). In the *barrios* of Buenos Aires and in his daily prayer before dawn, Francis encountered the "other", and his world of administrative order and theological certainty was burst asunder. Far from being an event of his past, he sees this "openness" as a daily stance *and* a universal imperative: "I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an *openness* to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord" (EG 2). This *open attention* is the mark of Francis' anthropology, and as we shall see, it shapes his thinking on the church, and indeed his whole theology. In him, theology is inseparable from this

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<sup>1</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Man & Woman He created Them – a theology of the body*, (translated by Michael Waldstein) Boston 2006 : Pauline Books & Media.

spirituality; indeed any conceptual system of theology is secondary to it and dependent on it.

### **Belief in the Human**

The conciliar decree *Dignitatis Humanae*, while it is mainly concerned with the political and social aspects of religious freedom, very clearly affirms the dignity of each human person: "A sense of the dignity of the human person has been impressing itself more and more deeply on the consciousness of contemporary man and woman, and the demand is increasingly made that people should act on their own judgment, enjoying and making use of a responsible freedom, not driven by coercion but motivated by a sense of duty." (DH 1). One commentator wryly remarked that it has taken this long for the church to believe in man, something which revelation attributes to God and which is uniquely manifest in the Incarnation.<sup>2</sup> Jesus believed in people, to the point of dying for us, and this belief in people is an overwhelming characteristic of Pope Francis. He is particularly sensitive about the role of conscience, that sacred place where each one takes responsibility for his/her eternal destiny, and he is consistent in calling for pastors to be understanding and merciful in discerning the morality of individual cases. He reminds us that "mercy", *misericordia*, means having a heart for the poor, whether that means the materially or spiritually impoverished, and he speaks of "processes of dehumanization" which exclude and neglect the most vulnerable (EG 51-75).

### **The Apocalyptic**

If there is a sense of destiny in Francis' utterances (cf EG 52), something that has given an urgency to his actions since becoming pontiff, it can be traced to this anthropology of *openness* – the vulnerable attention to the other, the "mystical adherence" which "never closes itself off, never retreats into its own security, never opts for rigidity and defensiveness [...] even if in the process, its shoes get soiled by the mud of the street" (EG 45). This is a clear correlative to the dynamic sense of divine revelation found in the conciliar constitution, *Dei Verbum*, of which Joseph Ratzinger said shortly after the council "[divine revelation is] a true dialogue which touches man in his totality, not only challenging his reason, but, as dialogue, addressing him

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<sup>2</sup> ORSY, Ladislav, s.j., "The Divine Dignity of Human Persons in *Dignitatis humanae*", *Theological Studies* 2014, vol 75(1), p. 8-22.

as a partner, indeed giving him his true nature for the first time<sup>3</sup>." This ongoing attention to the other in the thought of Francis carries implications for his theology:

A certain *wariness of systems* (including theological and ecclesiastical), which tend towards totality, closing off the "newness" of each encounter. These can simply be "carefully cultivated appearances" which insulate us to the immediacy of the "other". Rather, he says, "the only way is 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).

There is, in this dynamic openness, a certain apocalyptic sense of *the irruption of the other*. As individuals and as a community we are brought to the threshold of the mystery of *God-with-us*, especially in all situations of human need. In mystical language, this is the abyss, the wild unruly dancing God of Zephaniah (EG 4), the unpredictable other who refuses to be tamed by our theology or our rituals (cf EG 22), the One who is at the centre of all life and the source of all reality in its unfolding newness; "Jesus can break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him [...] The real newness is the newness which God himself mysteriously brings about and inspires, provokes, guides and accompanies in a thousand ways" (EG 11,12).

An authentic *Christian humanism* which is able to "run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others" (EG 88), humble before the wonder of each person and situation, is at the heart of Francis' spirit of evangelisation. And it is only in the light of this evangelisation that, in his view, the church has any meaning (cf EG 179).

## Francis' Theology of Church

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### ***Ecclesia semper reformanda***

From the outset of his pontificate, Pope Francis has been perceived as engaged with the reform of the church, and indeed he seems at his most eloquent when he speaks on this topic:

I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures [...] More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph RATZINGER, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Origin and Background" in: Herbert Vorgrimler (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 5 volumes (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967-1969), Vol. III, pp. 155-198, at p. 172.

harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving..(EG 49).

And while structural reforms are urgently needed, it is entirely in keeping with his anthropological approach that what Francis sees as more fundamental is “conversion” – and conversion is of the heart, on which structural reforms are built: “The Second Vatican Council presented *ecclesial conversion* as openness to a constant self-renewal born of fidelity to Jesus Christ” (EG 26). The dynamic of this conversion is set by the “other”, particularly through a solidarity with the poor and excluded. Without this solidarity any reform is ultimately futile: “Changing structures without generating new convictions and attitudes will only ensure that those same structures will become, sooner or later, corrupt, oppressive and ineffectual” (EG 189).

### **Collegiality and the Curia**

He links conversion of the papacy and the curia with the need to recover the council’s vision of collegiality, the communion of local churches – each of which realises the *ecclesia Dei* – with each other and with the bishop of Rome. From the outset of his exhortation, and indeed from his opening address when he called himself “bishop of Rome”, Pope Francis signals his intention to revisit this key teaching of *Lumen Gentium* which had been underplayed ever since Paul VI’s intervention at the fourth session of the council in 1965. He is clearly unhappy with the centralism that has grown in the church since Vatican I and with the tone of absolutism that has marked some ecclesial utterances since then.

Nor do I believe that the papal magisterium should be expected to offer a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world. It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound “decentralization”. (EG 16)

Referring to John Paul II’s appeal for help in the exercise of his office, Francis is clear that “little progress” has been made. And as for the council’s desire to promote the local churches, he says

this desire has not been fully realised, since a juridical status of episcopal conferences which would see them as subjects of specific attributions, including genuine doctrinal authority, has not yet been sufficiently elaborated. Excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church’s life and her missionary outreach (EG 32).

How this renewed sense of collegiality translates into reality will emerge with time, and particularly in the way the synod on the family works out later this year. No doubt the pope will be influenced by the “synodal” system’ that operates in the Orthodox Church (cf. EG 246).

### **“A Caravan of Solidarity”**

Even from within the text of *Evangelii Gaudium*, it is possible to elaborate a very definite ecclesiology but that is outside the scope of this short resume. Perhaps his remark early on in his pontificate serves as a pointer to his thinking on the church, when he warned against becoming “self-referential” and a “drift into a spiritual worldliness camouflaged by religious practices, unproductive meetings and empty talk” (EG 207). The church must view herself as part of the human pilgrimage, a “caravan of solidarity” (EG 87) in which trust and a “mystique of living together” replaces “all the defensive attitudes which today’s world imposes on us”.

We must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another. This means that we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicion or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking: the radiant peace of God’s face. Trusting others is an art and peace is an art. (EG 244).

In conclusion we may say that Pope Francis calls for conversion and a willingness to be evangelised, and in the process is elaborating a theology that is driven by the gospel. Coming from “far away”, he is bringing a fresh vision and language to the church, shaping it from the margins –something surely that goes back to her founder.

Joseph KAVANAGH, op  
Dublin (Ireland)

## TRACES OF SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS IN POPE FRANCIS' *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*<sup>4</sup>

Thomas Aquinas, one of the great masters of the Christian tradition, has become a key reference for understanding not only the thought of the followers of Jesus Christ, but also the thought of philosophers and theologians across time and place.

Specialists in the work of Aquinas frequently ask themselves about the relevance of his thought in today's world. This question, beyond all other considerations, allows me to ponder an issue that needs to be clarified from the beginning: Every author is socially and historically located. It cannot be otherwise. The historicity of the human condition is reflected, among other things, in the context of the concepts, ideas and arguments that individual authors, in every age, used to explain the world before their eyes<sup>5</sup>. In other words, an author's thought carries within itself traces of the author's world. Writers reflect in response to the unique challenges of a historical moment, and in so doing they make use of the resources available in their time.

Thomas Aquinas is a medieval man. He can be situated in a concrete historical moment. His view of the world responds to the challenges of his culture and time. The incursion of Aristotelianism in the Western world, facilitated by the hand of Arabic authors, triggered a philosophical and theological crisis of great proportions, to which our author dedicated a considerable amount of his best energies. The theological synthesis drawn from the Christian reading of Aristotle is likely one of the great contributions

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<sup>4</sup> This is a translation by José David Padilla, op, from a conference given by the author at the Campus Ministry from the Education Commission of the Archdiocese of Valencia, Spain, in the framework of the celebration of the Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas in 2014.

<sup>5</sup> That is why the theological thought is always situated (cf. J.-P. GABUS, *Critique du discours théologique*, Neuchâtel-Paris, 1977, pp.13-24).

of Thomas Aquinas to universal knowledge<sup>6</sup>. The historical moment provided the occasion, and our author took proper advantage of it.

Understandably, this dialogue between faith and reason bears the characteristics of the time in which it took place: the manner of posing questions; the hermeneutical keys by which reality is interpreted; language; method... Hence, whoever approaches the work of the Angelic Doctor in our day encounters a conceptual casing and methodology to which he or she is not accustomed. Thomas belongs to a cultural horizon different from ours. It is here, of course, that the question of his relevance becomes pertinent. Does the thomistic corpus have anything to do with the problems and questions we consider in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Does the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas have any relevance today?

I was confronted with this same question by those in charge of campus ministry for the Education Commission of the Archdiocese of Valencia, Spain, within the framework of the celebration of the Feast of St. Thomas in 2014. In order to respond properly, and given the scope of the topic, I thought it wise to narrow the field. To accomplish this, I thought Pope Francis' recent apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG)<sup>7</sup> would provide an appropriate resource. At different points in EG, Jorge Bergoglio uses the Angelic Doctor's teaching to invite the faithful to "embark upon a new chapter of evangelization ... while pointing out new paths for the Church's journey in years to come" (n. 1). It is my view that this is the surest means of establishing the contemporary relevance of our saint's thought, and it is by this means that I will explore this question.

The specific path that I will follow is: 1) statistical data concerning the presence of Aquinas in EG; 2) topics in EG in which the thought of Aquinas shows contemporary relevance, and 3) an assessment of the contemporary relevance of Aquinas in light of EG.

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<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that Thomas blindly follow Aristotle from whom he also critically separated in many cases. The idea that I want to highlight is the ability of our saint in providing a theological reading that enters widely and clearly in dialogue with the Aristotelian work (cf. G. CELADA, *Tomás de Aquino, testigo y maestro de la fe*, Salamanca, 1999, pp.180-192).

<sup>7</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013) is the result of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (7-28<sup>th</sup> October 2012), whose subject was "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of Faith". The Synod gave to Pope Benedict XVI 58 propositions. Of these, Pope Francis was inspired by 28 of them.



## 1. Statistical data concerning the presence of Aquinas in *Evangelii Gaudium*

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Figures have their magic; a magic that always springs from a reliable and objective source. Therefore, a survey of the data regarding the presence of Thomas Aquinas in EG yields interesting results; especially, for example, when compared with the number of references to the Angelic Doctor in Pope Francis' first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*. References to our saint in this latter document are minimal (2) when compared to the priority given to St. Augustine (11). In EG things are considerably different. Aquinas is the author most cited (18 times), just below the number of references to the teachings of John Paul II (50), Paul VI (25), Benedict XVI (24), and the number of references to Vatican II (20). St. Augustine, on the other hand, is cited on only 4 occasions. No doubt this change, along with other convergent data, corroborates a clear and obvious fact: the principle author of *Lumen Fidei* is not Pope Francis but Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, as is recognized at the beginning of the encyclical (n. 7). This difference in emphasis, in turn, gives rise to another intuition that can only be confirmed over time: Pope Bergoglio seems to have more confidence in the traditional and present value of the work of Thomas Aquinas than his predecessor.

Focusing on the generic statistics of the presence of St. Thomas Aquinas in the EG, I found the following results:

a. In the text there are 18 references to the thought of Thomas Aquinas taken from two of his major works: the *Summa Theologiae* (17) and the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (1)<sup>8</sup>.

The 17 references to the *Summa Theologiae* are:

I, q. 37, a 1, ad 3 (n.117, note 93), I, q. 39, a 8 cons. 2 (n. 117, note 93); I, q. 47, a 1 (n. 40, note 44), I, q. 47, a 2, ad 1 (n. 40, note 44), I, q. 47, 3 (n. 40, note 44); I-II, q. 26, a 3 (n. 199, note 168); I-II, q. 65, a 3, ad 2 (n. 171, note 133); I-II, q. 66, a 4-6 (n. 37, note 39); I-II, q. 107 a 4 (2) (n. 43, note 47 y 48); I-II, q. 108, a 1 (n. 37, note 40); I-II, q. 110, a 1 (n. 199, note 167); II-II, q. 2, a 2 (n. 124, note 105); II-II, q. 27, a 2 (n. 199, note 166); II-II, q. 30, a 4 (n. 37, note 41); II-II, q. 30, a 4, ad 1 (n. 37, note 41); II-II, q. 188, a 6 (n. 150, note 117)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> One of the quotes from the *Summa* is doubled, as it appears inside the text in English (n. 171) and the footnote n.133, in the same number, recorded the same phrase in Latin. If these two were counted separately, we would have then 19 references to the work of Aquinas.

<sup>9</sup> 5 quotes from the *Ia* of the *Summa*, 7 quotes from the *I-IIae*, and 5 from the *II-IIae*.

The question most often cited by the Pope (3 times) is I q. 47, which deals with the distinction of things in general, under the Tractate of Creation<sup>10</sup>.

The articles most referenced are: 1) "Whether the New Law is More Burdensome than the Old?" (I-II q. 107, 4), and 2) "Whether Mercy is the Greatest of the Virtues?" (II-II q. 30, 4).

The reference to the *Summa Contra Gentiles* is: I VIII (EG 242, note 191).

b. If we take a look at the way the chapters of EG are arranged, the number of references to St. Thomas Aquinas are as follows: In the first chapter 9 times; in the third chapter 5 times, and in the fourth chapter, 4 times. Therefore, Thomas is most present in the Exhortation when the Pope speaks of "The Church's Missionary Transformation" (9 times); next, when he reflects on "The Proclamation of the Gospel" (5 times); and finally, when he considers "The Social Dimension of Evangelization" (4 times).

The references to Thomas Aquinas in chapter three are distributed as follows: in the first section "The Entire people of God Proclaims the Gospel", n. 117 (2 references), and in n. 124 (1 reference); in the third section "Preparation to Preach", n. 150 (1 reference); and in the fourth section "Evangelization and the Deeper Understanding of the Kerygma" n. 171 (1 reference).

Finally, in the fourth chapter the references to Aquinas are distributed as follows: in the second section "The Inclusion of the Poor in Society", n. 199 (3 references); and the fourth section "Social dialogue as a contribution to peace", n. 242 (1 reference).

c. Also, in the chapter on statistics, it should be emphasized that the Pope expressly names Saint Thomas Aquinas 3 times in the text<sup>11</sup> and cites his thought literally 13 times (10 times in the text<sup>12</sup>, and 3 times in the notes<sup>13</sup>).

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<sup>10</sup> If we consider the statistics of the Theological tractate referred from the Summa, we find these results: the Tractate on the Old and the New Law (3 times); the Tractate on charity (3 times); the Tractate on Creation (3 times); the Tractate on Virtues in general (2 times); the Tractate on the Trinity (2 times); the Tractate on the Passions (1 time), the Tractate on Grace (1 time), the Tractate on faith (1 time), the Tractate on the states of the Christian Life (1 time).

<sup>11</sup> n. 37, 43, and 171

<sup>12</sup> n. 37, 43, 117, 171, 199, and 242.

<sup>13</sup> n. 41, 44, and 133 (which is the same text cited inside the text in 171 but, this time, in Latin).

## 2. Topics in *Evangelii Gaudium* in Which the Thought of Aquinas Shows Contemporary Relevance

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The statistical analysis of the previous section has set the groundwork for a closer look at the particular themes in Pope Francis' exhortation that have been informed by the Angelic Doctor's teaching. The present section will allow a closer look at the relevance of his thought to such current themes as a new stage of evangelization in the life of the Church.

To achieve this goal we can look at the thematic contexts in which the Pope uses Aquinas. These themes are indicated by each chapter of the exhortation, and by its corresponding subsections.

a. In the first chapter, titled "The Church's Missionary Transformation", Aquinas is quoted in two very significant sections: the third, which is titled "From the heart of the Gospel", and the fourth, "A mission embodied within human limits".

Number 37 of EG very clearly expresses the heart of the Gospel, and this section is completely based on the teaching of Aquinas. His teaching is discernible in the previous sections. Therefore, it must be kept in mind that, at this stage of the exhortation (n.36), the theme of the papal argument is the assertion of the existence of "a 'hierarchy' of truths, since they vary in their relation to the foundation of the Christian faith" (UR 11). According to Vatican II, even though all the truths of faith come from the same source and are to be believed, some are more important than others due to the order in which they are arranged in relation to the center or the heart of the Gospel. In light of this approach, the Pope claimed the balance and equanimity in the Gospel proclamation; a balance and fairness that has been noted, among other things, by the frequency with which some issues are cited, and the accents that predominate in the Church's preaching (cf. EG 38).

Moreover, in this same number 37, the Pope illustrates more concretely the orderly vision of Christian truths in the area of morals, paving the way for its consistent application in missionary preaching. This way, we know, has already been paved in the preceding numbers, in which the Pope discusses the hierarchy of truths, emphasizing that it "holds true as much for the dogmas of faith as for the whole corpus of the Church's teaching, including her moral teaching" (EG 36). It is precisely in the teaching of the Angelic Doctor that the Pope grounds the application of this principle to moral teaching. He says, "Saint Thomas Aquinas taught that the Church's

moral teaching has its own “hierarchy”, in the virtues and in the acts which proceed from them”, citing the *Summa* I-II q. 66, where Aquinas asks: Can one virtue be greater or less than another? (a. 1); Are all the virtues existing together in one subject equal? (a. 2); are Moral virtues better in comparison with intellectual virtues? (a. 3); is Justice the chief of the moral virtues? (a. 4); is wisdom the greatest of the intellectual virtues? (a. 5); and, finally, is Charity the greatest of the theological virtues? (a. 6). Indeed, Thomas Aquinas answers all these questions with method and a rigorous reasoning, establishing in its place a gradual, and related order among the diverse virtues.

However, if EG is properly read, the formal distinctions and organization of the virtues is not what primarily interests the Pope in the work of St. Thomas Aquinas. What truly interests him, once the possibility of this hierarchy is established, is to point out the core of the Christian moral order. Indeed, in reading Saint Paul who said that what really matters is “faith which works by love” (Gal 5:9), Bergoglio enters deeply into the thought of the Angelic Doctor, who clearly stated, “the New Law consists chiefly in the grace of the Holy Ghost, which is shown forth by faith which works through love” (*Summa* I-II, q.108, a 1). Of course, once Aquinas unveils the heart of the moral law, his discourse logically leads the reader to consider the greatest of all virtues in its dynamic relationship to all others. This is what Francis, guided by our saint, seems to do in his exhortation. He points out that such virtue is mercy, and clarifies that, because of its primacy, this virtue specifically is the greatest, and therefore, greatly befits God. In the words of Thomas Aquinas, “On itself, mercy takes precedence of other virtues, for it belongs to mercy to be bountiful to others, and, what is more, to succor others in their wants, which pertains chiefly to one who stands above. Hence mercy is accounted as being proper to God: and therein His omnipotence is declared to be chiefly manifested” (*Summa* II-II, q.30 a 4).

Having demonstrated the existence of a core in moral teaching and action, the Pope goes on to enumerate its apostolic effects in the following numbers of his exhortation: The missionary preacher, according to a principle of proportionality, must insist more on teaching what is closest to the moral center than what is far from it (n. 38). But this statement, of course, has to be well understood, avoiding any unilateral and self-interested interpretation of this message. Indeed, the order and hierarchy within the Christian moral truth is proof of its harmony and integrity. Pope Bergoglio states, “When preaching is faithful to the Gospel, the centrality of

certain truths is evident ... the Gospel invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others ... All of the virtues are at the service of this response of love" (EG 39).

Section four begins with number 40. In it, the exhortation tries to explain how the universality and grandeur of Christian mission occur within the limits of human understanding in relationship to time, space, culture and finitude. These limits explain, among other things, the plurality of philosophical, theological and pastoral thought that accompany the missionary adventure of the Church in history. The work of exegetes, theologians and scholars of other sciences has contributed to this plurality of thought. Bearing in mind this reality, the text seems to take a clear position on it, because such plurality could be judged as an advantage or as a stumbling block. The Pope has a clear understanding of this and states that plurality of thought is, in fact, an opportunity, since such variety serves to bring out and develop different facets of the inexhaustible riches of the Gospel. He is also aware that "for those who long for a monolithic body of doctrine guarded by all and leaving no room for nuance, this might appear as undesirable and leading to confusion".

Curiously, support for this idea, as it appears in the exhortation, comes from Aquinas' theology of creation. Indeed, in footnote 44, the Pope quotes the *Summa* (I q.47 art.1-3), in which Thomas deals with "the distinction of things in general" as follows: Whether the multitude and distinction of things come from God? (a. 1); whether the inequality of things is from God? (a. 2); and, whether there is only one world? (a. 3). In his argument the Pope draws an analogy between what happens among different aspects of the one Gospel captured by different theologies, and Thomas' explanation of creaturely diversification, which holds that multiplicity and variety "were the intention of the first agent", who wished that "what each individual thing lacked in order to reflect the divine goodness would be made up for by other things", since the Creator's goodness "could not be fittingly reflected by just one creature". As noted, the Pope's epistemological argument, explicit in the text, corresponds to the ontological argument of St. Thomas Aquinas, which is cited in the notes. Bergoglio observes and accepts this correspondence between being and knowing and, therefore, states that "we need to grasp the variety of things in their multiple relationships". From this perspective, he concludes his argument saying that, "by analogy, we need to listen to and complement one another in our partial reception of reality and the Gospel".

But human limitations in understanding and expressing the one Gospel sometimes have a dark side, which instead of adding value, can diminish it. The Pope is aware of this and does not let it go unaddressed. He does so in number 43: Here the Pope speaks of a necessary ecclesial discernment that, in light of mission, first facilitates a recognition of those customs that have no connection to heart of the Gospel, and which today are difficult to understand; and secondly, recognizes those ecclesial norms that were once effective but no longer possess any formative value. In both cases the Pope's counsel is emphatic: "We should not be afraid to re-examine them". To support this approach, he proposes the clarifying insight of St. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa* I-II, Q.107, 4), who once more demonstrates his mastery of the distinction between the essential and the accessory. Specifically, the Pope recalls our saint's assertion that the precepts which Christ and the apostles gave to the people of God "are very few", and, therefore, the precepts subsequently enjoined by the Church should be insisted upon with moderation "so as not to burden the lives of the faithful" and make our religion a form of servitude, since "God's mercy has willed that we should be free."

b. The third chapter of EG takes us to the subject of "The Proclamation of the Gospel." Thomas Aquinas is present here in three sections: The first, "The entire people of God proclaims the Gospel"; the third, "Preparing to preach"; and the fourth, "Evangelization and the deeper understanding of the kerygma."

In the first section, which talks about the involvement of the whole Church in mission, the Pope uses the teaching of Thomas Aquinas on a familiar theme, the unity and diversity of creation; but now applying it to the Church. Interpreting the logic of the discourse of EG one could say that the missionary efforts of the whole Church relate naturally to its universality (catholicity). In this context, the Pope explains that the Church is one, but by becoming present through evangelization in varied cultural contexts, it acquires different faces (nn.115-118). This variety, rather than contradicting or posing a threat to the life of the Church, qualifies and strengthens its communion, reflecting in itself the very being of the Triune God. Precisely at this point, Aquinas comes to the aid of the Pope's teaching, explaining the role of the Spirit at the center of Trinitarian and ecclesial communion. Indeed, we are reminded that the Holy Spirit is the builder of communion and harmony in the Church, because the Spirit is "that harmony, just as he is the bond of love between the Father and the Son". The citations from the

*Summa* by the Pope reinforce this understanding of the role of the Spirit, both within the Trinity and in the history of salvation (n.117).

In this first section, n. 124 contains a reference to Aquinas, this time regarding popular religiosity or piety. The Pope has at hand the *Document of Aparecida from the fifth General Conference of Latin American Bishops and the Caribbean* that makes a very positive assessment of popular piety and popular mysticism (“a spirituality incarnated in the culture of the lowly”). The Pope’s discussion of this document highlights two of its key points: a) Popular piety captures and expresses spiritual content through symbols rather than by the use of instrumental reason; b) in the act of faith, popular piety emphasizes the *credere in Deum* more than *credere Deum*. Precisely, the language used to present this second feature of popular religiosity takes us to Aquinas’ theology of faith. What Francis wants to emphasize with this Thomistic terminology, which traditionally has been attributed to St. Augustine, is that the dimension of the perfect Good (God) is more predominant in the act of faith in popular spirituality. Indeed, in popular piety, the final object of faith (*credere in Deum*) is more important than the considerations of God as a material object (truth) of that same faith (*credere Deum*). In other words popular piety, more than simply emphasizing adherence to the truths of the Christian faith, adheres to the truthful and sincere movement that leads to the Christian God, a dynamic in which that very God is already present.

In the third section, “Preparing to preach”, there is another allusion to Saint Thomas Aquinas in n. 150. The issue is the consistency that must exist in the life of the preacher of the Gospel. The Pope says, “Whoever wants to preach must be the first to let the word of God move him deeply and become incarnate in his daily life”. The Pope adds that whoever does this will discover that preaching becomes so intense and fruitful, that it is “communicating to others what one has contemplated”. This last phrase was taken from the *Summa* (II-II q. 188 a. 6), where Aquinas asks whether “a religious order that is devoted to the contemplative life is more excellent than one that is given to the active life?” For a friar preacher, the phrase of St. Thomas referred to by Pope Francis in the exhortation has a special significance. It is nothing more and nothing less than a careful synthesis of

the charism of the Order of Preachers: To contemplate and to give to others what is contemplated<sup>14</sup>.

Finally, in the fourth section of chapter three (*Evangelization and the deeper understanding of the kerygma*), another reference to Saint Thomas Aquinas appears in n. 171. The subject now is that of *Personal accompaniment in processes of growth*. Francis, specifying the qualities of a good companion, insists on his proximity and ability to listen, also keeping in mind the importance of being patient. The Pope's notion of the qualities of a good companion are attributable to the thought of the Angelic Doctor in the treatise in the *Summa* that deals with *the interrelationship of virtues in general*. More specifically the article that asks "whether charity can be without moral virtue?" (I-II q. 65 a.3). The Pope turns his attention to the reply to the second objection in which Aquinas argues that sometimes, the holder of a habit of an infused moral virtue experiences difficulties in the act "by reason of certain ordinary dispositions remaining from previous acts". The Pope follows his discourse as follows: "The organic unity of the virtues always and necessarily exists *in habitu*, even though forms of conditioning can hinder the operations of those virtuous habits" (n. 171). What Pope Francis wants to emphasize is the need for patience in the process of growing in faith. Therefore, as the Angelic Doctor expresses it, if in the development of the moral life these situations occur, then both progress and stagnation are for the believer a normal part of the overall dynamic of growing in faith. That is the reason why the patience of a companion is essential. This is how EG expresses it: "Reaching a level of maturity where individuals can make truly free and responsible decisions calls for much time and patience" (n. 171).

c. In the fourth chapter of EG, titled *The Social Dimension of Evangelization*, two references to Saint Thomas Aquinas can be found. The first one is in n. 199 of the section titled "The special place of the poor in God's people", and in n. 242 of the section titled "Social dialogue as a contribution to peace."

EG delves into the social dimension of evangelization in its fourth chapter. A primordial issue here is the place of the poor in evangelization (second section). In n. 197 the Pope clearly states that "God's heart has a special place for the poor, so much so that he himself 'became poor' (2 Cor

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<sup>14</sup> This theme responds to the assertion of St. Thomas Aquinas about the religious life called "mixed" because its root or mode of being consists of both contemplation and apostolic activity. In this phrase the expression "to contemplate" should not be deleted because it is intrinsically connected to what follows: "to give what is contemplated". St. Thomas says: "For even as it is better to enlighten than merely to shine, so is it better to give to others the fruits of one's contemplation than merely to contemplate" (*Summa* II-II, q.188, a.6,c.).



8:9)". The following number reminds the reader that the Church has made an option for the poor and explains its meaning: "For the Church, the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one. God shows the poor 'his first mercy'... [It] is understood as a 'special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness'". In the same number, the Pope ratifies that he wants a Church which is poor and for the poor, welcoming the idea of letting us be taught by them. In the next number (n. 199), the Pope bases his reflection on the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas, and most importantly, he does so to clarify the consideration, the value and the dignity of the poor for a truly evangelical Church.

In his argument, the Pope declares that the evangelical commitment to the poor is not exclusively about social action or assistance programs. The work of the Spirit is not limited to activism or social mobilization, but is above all a perception, a discovery, a special consideration of impoverished persons that ultimately differentiates the authentic option for the poor from any other ideology. The pontiff this thought with the words of Aquinas in the treatise of the *Summa* where he ponders "whether to love considered as an act of charity is the same as goodwill?" (II-II q. 27, a 2). Here Pope Francis underlines the fact that, in matters of evangelization, the work of the Spirit in relationship to the poor must be led by love that "denotes a certain union of affections between the lover and the beloved, in as much as the lover deems the beloved as somewhat united to him"<sup>15</sup>. The evangelizer must discover the poor and must have a true concern for them as persons which inspires him or her to effectively seek their good.

In this same number, the Pope continues his commentary on this view of the poor, which is as contemplative as is genuine love. This insight moves the evangelizer to serve the poor, not out of necessity or moved by the missionary's own vanity, but moved by what the poor person really is, for her or his own value and dignity. Once again, the theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas gives a solid foundation to the Pope's reflection. The first citation comes from the treatise on grace in the *Summa*, in which our saint ponders *the grace of God as regards its essence*, and more precisely the question "whether grace implies anything in the soul?" (I-II, q. 110, a 1). Here Pope Francis affirms that "the love by which we find the other pleasing leads us

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<sup>15</sup> The title of the treatise in II-II q. 27 is *The Principle Act of Charity, Which Is To love*, and the article 2 is the one that concentrates in "whether to love considered as an act of charity is the same as goodwill?"

to offer him something freely" (n. 199). The second allusion to Aquinas in the same number of the EG comes from the treatise of the *Summa* that deals with the issue of *the passions of the soul, beginning with love*. More precisely where our saint asks "whether love is the same as dilection?" he said that "Charity denotes, in addition to love, a certain perfection of love, in so far as that which is loved is held to be of great price, as the word itself implies" (I-II, q. 26, a 3).

The final mention of Aquinas in chapter four of EG is in the fourth section titled, "Social dialogue as a contribution to peace". Here Pope Francis maintains that evangelization also implies a path of dialogue. He even points out the three most significant areas of dialogue in which the Church must be present today in order to fulfill her service in favor of humankind and the common good. Those areas are: "Dialogue with states, dialogue with society – including dialogue with cultures and the sciences – and dialogue with other believers who are not part of the Catholic Church" (n. 238). When EG deals with the dialogue between faith and reason in n. 242, the Pontiff refers once more to the teaching of Aquinas. This time he cites the *Summa contra Gentiles*.

Francis begins his argument by framing the dialogue between faith and science in the context of an evangelization that pacifies. Indeed, the fruit that this dialogue is called to bear is peace. N. 242 ends with the statement: "This too is a path of harmony and peace". This search for peace presupposes the existence of a tension between two different forms of knowledge in our society: "positivism and scientism" versus faith itself. According to the Pope, the first is an extremist posture because it refuses to admit the validity of forms of knowledge other than those of the positive sciences, including knowledge born of faith. Faith, on the other hand, cannot hold back the marvelous progress of science (n. 243). Against all extremist stances relation to knowledge, EG states that the Church advocates a pathway in which an encounter between faith and reason is possible: "The Church proposes another path, which calls for a synthesis between the responsible use of methods proper to the empirical sciences and other areas of knowledge such as philosophy, theology, as well as faith itself, which elevates us to the mystery transcending nature and human intelligence" (n. 242). This path presupposes one of the well-known convictions of Saint Thomas Aquinas, a conviction cited in the same text of the Apostolic Exhortation<sup>16</sup>: faith should trust reason, for both have a

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<sup>16</sup> *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, VII.

common origin in the Creator (“faith is not fearful of reason; on the contrary, it seeks and trusts reason, since “the light of reason and the light of faith both come from God, and cannot contradict each other”).

### **3. An Assessment of the Contemporary Relevance of Aquinas in Light of *Evangelii Gaudium***

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Following this overview of the presence of St. Thomas in EG, a brief reflection follows in answer to the question of the relevance of our saint's thought today.

The contemporary relevance of St. Thomas is strongly tied to an underlying manner of approaching each of the subjects he studied. Therefore, what is truly relevant today in Aquinas is the manner or method of his work, more than a specific theme or a particular idea or treatise. From this perspective, what still provokes admiration and remains appealing about the Angelic Doctor is the coherence in his thought of a holistic vision of faith that makes possible a profound theological system. This can be corroborated in the way that Francis cites Aquinas at very specific points in his exhortation. The Pope shows clear confidence in the systematic reasoning of this Dominican saint, particularly in his prioritization of key principles which, in my humble opinion, should center the arguments of any theological discourse): the distinction between what is essential and what is secondary; the gradual pace of the acquisition of the capacities to grow in faith and to act morally, a vision of the faith rooted in communion and sustained by the image of unity in diversity, a call to mutual understanding between reason and faith, coherence and the possibility of synthesis.

a. One point of relevance I noticed while reading EG is that, when the Pope cites St. Thomas, he is often interested in determining *what is fundamental about the matter treated by him, so that the core of the matter cannot be hidden or obscured by secondary issues*. Francis knows very well that Aquinas is a master at distinguishing between what is fundamental and what is secondary. It bears remembering that St. Thomas's reflection is characterized by an order that arranges every element in its right place in a clear and reasonable way. This makes possible the necessary distinction between what is fundamental and what is secondary; perceiving, at the same time, the possible connections that may exist between them. In a system built in this way nothing is excluded and everything is considered,

keeping in mind the real value that each item has, so that the harmony of the discourse as a whole will not be distorted.

This can be seen in the way the Pope reminds the reader of his exhortation that the heart of the Gospel must take first place in the Church's proclamation of its message (n. 34-36). In the development of a plan of evangelization, a law of gradualness and proportionality coherent with the fundamentals of faith must be taken into consideration. This can also be applied in matters of morals (n. 37). On this point Francis also seeks the insight of Aquinas, whom, with admirable rigor, distinguished between the moral virtues in order to highlight which is the most relevant. In the same manner the Pope cites St. Thomas to justify his arguments about the discernment of customs and ecclesiastical norms that were significant in other times but are not as relevant today. This discernment will facilitate a revision and change that will lead us to hold on to what is essential and meaningful, keeping in mind, as Aquinas said, that Christ and the Apostles left but a few precepts to the Church, and those proposed by the Church later on, should be required with moderation lest they become a burden that enslaves the life of the faithful. On the contrary, he has the conviction that the life of the believer should reflect always the freedom and the mercy given by God. This is what the Pope says, referring to St. Thomas Aquinas: "His warning, issued many centuries ago, is most timely today. It ought to be one of the criteria to be taken into account in considering a reform of the Church and her preaching which would enable it to reach everyone" (n. 43). In synthesis, in remaining always in contact with the center, one can easily ordain and simplify any issue following the law of gradualness and progression. For this reason, this law has to be applied not only in the understanding and transmission of faith, but also in the concrete implementations of the process of maturity of the faithful. Concerning this last point, the law of gradualness supposes an accommodation to a low pace in which the virtue of patience will play a significant role (n. 171). In this sense gradualness could easily mean a progressive humanization. Aquinas knows and teaches all this. That is why his methodology and thought continues to be of significant relevance today.

b. A second point of relevance in the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas, as Francis reveals it, is the organized, complete, and logical manner in which he arbitrates the relationship between unity and diversity in the area of faith. This is a complex issue and the source of all manner of misunderstandings and tensions. In any case, the correct comprehension of

this binomial requires a clear distinction between what is primary and what is secondary, without losing sight of the overall unity of the faith.

This issue is discussed in the section of the exhortation that speaks of human limits when grasping and explaining the depth of the mystery of faith. The embodied nature of the Gospel carries with it the distance between its content and its expression. This brings, as a possible consequence, a diversity of theological proposals bound to their time and culture. This diversity, the Pope states, is proof of the unfathomable richness of the Gospel more than an obstacle. Moreover, this is a harmonious diversity thanks to the same Spirit that leads to the conquest of new perspectives and developments of faith (n. 40). Consequently, the Pontiff shows himself to be contrary to monolithic forms of thought and doctrine. Aquinas has helped Francis to explain this vision of Christian truth (unity in diversity), in reference to the comprehension of faith as well as the missionary inculturation of new contexts (cf. n. 40 and 117). The Pope's inspiration is the theology of creation and of the Trinity in Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*. From him, the Pope learns, on the one hand, that the Holy Spirit is the loving bond that guarantees the communion and unity of the Godhead as well as of creation. On the other hand, the Pontiff adopts the idea that the body of a diverse creation allows clearer contemplation of the goodness of God than would the individuality of each creature. For this reason, the Pope postulates the necessity of openness to others in order to ameliorate our partial understanding of reality and of the Gospel (note 44). Communion, then, implies an encounter with the other in dialogue. To dialogue is always relevant.

c. Precisely, dialogue is the third point of relevance in the thought of the Angelic Doctor. Francis speaks of it in the fourth chapter of EG as a constitutive element of social peace. He says that, in its humanizing promotion of the common good, the Church's dialogue should contemplate three areas (n. 238). One of them is the dialogue between faith and reason (science). Here, Aquinas' thought is, indeed, relevant today. He affirmed that a contradiction between faith and reason cannot be possible because both proceed from the same source (God). The trust of St. Thomas Aquinas in reason is total and sincere. That is why his philosophy and theology is in a free and constant dialogue with everyone, despise their origin, who can offer him a speck of truth. Communion, the comprehension of Truth (with capital letters) is the perspective that orientates this dynamic that the Pope wishes to incorporate into the new evangelization of the

Church. Indeed, to evangelize implies openness to a dialogue that achieves communion with others.

d. The final point in which the Pope presents the relevance of the Angelic Doctor in his exhortation is the most important principle: the principle of coherence. The one who evangelizes cannot justify living in a manner inconsistent with the message transmitted. Such incoherence affects the mission because, otherwise, it will lead the preacher's audience to an inconsistency between life and message.

Therefore, and in accordance with what has been expressed about the relevance of the thought of Aquinas in the EG, mission that is grounded in a harmonious union between what is central and what is accidental, between unity and diversity, between faith and reason demands a total coherence between the message and the messenger. There are obvious reasons for this: There is no worse discredit to the truth communicated to the believer than someone who denies with his life what he affirms with his words. This principle of coherence, easily understood as a testimony, must be demanded of the one who goes out to evangelize. The Pontiff himself demands it: "Whoever wants to preach must be the first to let the word of God move him deeply and become incarnate in his daily life" (n. 150); and he supports this demand by citing the phrase of St. Thomas, "communicating to others what one has contemplated". This final phrase brilliantly summarizes the coherence that must accompany the task of preaching.

In conclusion, the contemporary relevance of Saint Thomas Aquinas is a fact that can be seen easily in Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. To speak of the relevance of Aquinas today does not mean that every time the Pontiff speaks about missiology and evangelization, he will systematically appeal to Aquinas' ideas; in fact, there are few direct citations from him. Instead, the Pope brings to light some of the principles that our saint elaborated his wonderful *Summa Theologiae*. Furthermore, it is evident that the lucidity of the principles that inform Thomas' work can also be used and applied in other times and to subjects other than the ones that concerned St. Thomas Aquinas, as can be clearly seen in Francis' exhortation. Indeed, EG is proof of the relevance of the Angelic Doctor for forming contemporary minds in the rigorous equilibrium needed for any theological enterprise. Therefore, Saint Thomas Aquinas remains greatly relevant today, provided that there is clarity regarding what is truly relevant about his thought. This point is well made by another Dominican

Theologian, Yves Congar, whose insightful words, immediately following the conclusion of Vatican II, will bring this presentation to an end:

There is a Saint Thomas set into a set of theses taken materially. It is the Thomas of Billuart and of the manuals. These authors convey a Thomistic material of great value and are useful to get the spirit used to a rigorous logic of great precision. However, this is not enough to initiate to the personal thought nor to capture the originality and the depth of Aquinas in front of real issues. In order to do so, you need either a personal and prolonged contact with his original works... or a good historical knowledge of the original efforts of Saint Thomas, or both. For about forty years, historical study of Saint Thomas has led us to a better understanding of the powerful originality of St. Thomas, beyond the scholarly theses lacking freshness so much...

At the Council, during the discussion on priestly training, in november 1964, we could hear two of Cardinals most listened by the Assembly; one said, 'we need more of St. Thomas', and the other said : 'we need much less'... If by 'Saint Thomas' the Cardinals refer to a set of abstractions and prefabricated solutions, then, yes, we need less of Saint Thomas! But this is not the real St. Thomas, which has been and still is the very openness to reality, to dialogue, to human questioning. If, on the other hand, we refer to St. Thomas as what truly is, that is, a master of thought that helps us to structure our spirit; a master of loyalty, of a rigorous work, of respect for every speck of truth in what is it holds as true, then yes, give us back Saint Thomas and may he be friend and master to as many minds as possible<sup>17</sup>!

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<sup>17</sup> *Situation et tâches présentes de la théologie*, Paris, Cerf, 1967, p 54-55.

## " A POOR CHURCH, A CHURCH FOR THE POOR ": THE THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF THE WISH EXPRESSED BY POPE FRANCIS

### *Introduction*

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In a way entirely his own, Pope Francis touches hearts across the world. Nothing has seemed quite the same within the Church since the moment of his first appearance on the balcony of St Peter's basilica. Before the new Bishop of Rome had even addressed a few words to the crowd massed on St Peter's Square, his name was being chanted enthusiastically. The Pope's express identification with the much loved saint of Assisi, whose charisma has impregnated popular piety like no other saint before him, is promising. The name Francis is itself a program: "How I desire a poor Church, a Church for the poor<sup>18</sup>". The first practical applications appeared at once: Pope Francis chose simplicity in public representations and elected not to live in the papal palace. This new pontificate comes across as a pontificate of reforms. There is a breath of renewal in the air and, in keeping with this atmosphere, a certain euphoria.

Pope Francis' first gestures are impressive; they are so unaccustomedly fresh. Nonetheless, they can give rise to wrong interpretations. The public at large had the impression, for example, that Francis' overriding concern was related to the subject of poverty, neglected for so long, and that he had the firm intention of rehabilitating "Liberation Theology". The reason for this present article, therefore, is to clarify the Pope's expressed wish by placing it within the theological and personal contexts which have informed him. What is the theological base for Francis' declaration of poverty as his pontifical program? In this way, freed from imaginary speculations, the Pope's message to the entire world can be understood in a new way and can bear its true fruit for the people of God.

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<sup>18</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Press Conference*, 16 March 2013; cf. IDEM, *The Joy of the Gospel* - Apostolic Exhortation, Paris 2013, n. 198, p.179.



## A Renaissance of Liberation Theology?

Under Pope Francis, and after a certain calming of the quarrels surrounding it in the 1980s, Liberation Theology has again become a subject of current and intense interest. This has enabled Leonardo Boff to remind his public of his own personal interpretation of Liberation Theology. The starting-point of his book *François de Rome et François d'Assise*<sup>19</sup> is that of the apparent parallels between the historic figure of St Francis of Assisi and the new pope, who without a shadow of doubt is "for the liberation of the oppressed, the poor, and those who suffer injustice"<sup>20</sup>. In his continuation of this evaluation, Boff presents Pope Francis in accordance with the socio-practice of his own understanding and interpretation of Liberation Theology:

In the first place, there is the concrete freedom from hunger, destitution, moral degradation and the separation from God. This authentic freedom belongs to the gifts of the Kingdom of God and to what Jesus wanted. Only after, and therefore in second place, comes reflection on this reality, reflection on the question: how is the Kingdom of God concretely prefigured in the here and now? (...) This later reflection, what we call Theology, may or may not take place. What is decisive is that there should be a real liberation<sup>21</sup>.

For Leonardo Boff, Theology in itself is not of primary importance. It is considered only in the context of the practical application of the freedom of the poor from material want, thus serving as a sort of alibi. The Instruction *Libertatis Nuntius* of August 6<sup>th</sup> 1984 expressly distances itself (though without condemning it in its totality) from such a narrow view of Liberation Theology, perceived as a kind of religious Marxism<sup>22</sup>. Theology cannot be used as a call to class-war because Theology is oriented, first and foremost, to Christ. In opposition to Leonardo Boff, Pope John-Paul II distinguished the three pillars on which a true Theology of Liberation rests: the truth concerning Jesus Christ, from which flow the truth concerning the Church

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<sup>19</sup> L. BOFF, *Franziskus aus Rom und Franz von Assisi – Ein neuer Frühling für die Kirche*, Kevelaer, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p.79.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Libertatis Nuntius*, Introduction ; cf. J. RATZINGER, " La théologie : un état des lieux – Conference given during the reunion of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the presence of the presidents of the doctrinal commissions of the Bishops' Conference, Guadalajara, Mexico, May 1996 ", in *Communio* XXII, 1 (1997), p. 69-88.

and the truth concerning mankind<sup>23</sup>. The "option for the poor"<sup>24</sup> is not doubted in this context<sup>25</sup>; nonetheless, it cannot be understood in the fullness of its true and universal dimension outside its theological context.<sup>26</sup> A true renaissance of Liberation Theology is possible precisely if the "option for the poor" is not divorced from theology, as in Leonardo Boff's proposal. Instead of separating theology from this option, these two dimensions of reality should be united, their internal unity underlined and brought to fruition through the new evangelisation. The theological sources of Pope Francis are imbued with this intention.

## Liberation Theology the Argentinian Way

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As Leonardo Boff's vision clearly shows, the problem inherent to Liberation Theology is the difficulty of coherently conjoining theology and social liberation. There exist various currents of the Theology of Liberation<sup>27</sup>, and within these the Argentinian has "developed a completely independent perspective on theological thought"<sup>28</sup>. The thinker *hors pair* of this approach is Lucio Gera (born January 16 1924<sup>29</sup>), the Theology Master of Pope Francis. Lucio Gera did not live to see the papal election of his most famous student. He died on August 7 2012 in Buenos Aires, in the Carmelite convent where he was chaplain. Against strong opposition, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio insisted that Gera be buried in the cathedral beside his predecessors. "Master of Theology" is engraved on his tombstone. With the election of Bergoglio,

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<sup>23</sup> *Libertatis Nuntius*, N. V, 8; cf. AAS 71 (1979), p. 188-196. The Instruction *Libertatis Conscientia* of 22 March 1986 deals with the Theology of Liberation and its link to theological and philosophical truth.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. for the problematic of the expression "option for the poor", E. GRIEU, " 'Option pour les pauvres' : quoi de neuf ? ", in " *Ces gens ne sont-ils pas des hommes ?* " - *Évangile et prophétie* - Colloquium of the Faculty of Theology, Fribourg (1-4 Decembre 2011), M. DELGADO (ed.), Fribourg 2013, p. 86-102.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Libertatis Nuntius*, Introduction.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Libertatis Nuntius*, n. XI, 1 and 2.

<sup>27</sup> It is not possible to deal here in detail with all the currents of the Theology of Liberation; cf. for this J.C. SCANNONE, "Theologie der Befreiung - Charakterisierung, Strömungen, Etappen", in *Probleme und Perspektiven dogmatischer Theologie*, K.H. NEUFELD (ed.), Düsseldorf 1986, p. 401-459.

<sup>28</sup> V.R. AZCUY, "Theologie vor der Herausforderung der Armut - Eine lateinamerikanische Perspektive aus der Sicht der Frauen", *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 87 (2003), p. 264-281, 264. J.C. SCANNONE agrees with AZCUY, but continues with the question if it is still possible to call the Argentinian conception a true Theology of Liberation. However, he has no wish to enter into debate in his article and leaves the question open; cf. on this question and on the Argentinian conception of the "Theology of the People", IDEM, "Theologie der Befreiung - Charakterisierung, Strömungen, Etappen", *op. cit.*, p. 422-426.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. for L. GERA and his connection with Pope Francis the article of M. ECKHOLT, " '... bei mir erwächst die Theologie aus der Pastoral' - Lucio Gera - ein 'Lehrer in Theologie' von Papst Franziskus ", in *Stimmen der Zeit* (2014/3), p. 157-172. M. ECKHOLT is to be thanked for having made available the original text of L. Gera's Spanish quotations.

this mark of deep respect acquired a prophetic character for, with Pope Francis, Argentinian theology has spread in a universal manner to the entire Church. Without doubt, Yves Congar waited for such a moment in the universal Church when he published his book *Pour une Église servante et pauvre*<sup>30</sup>. His theological preparation of the vision of Gera is undeniable, and it is found equally in the declarations of Pope Francis. A brief presentation of Congar's theological teaching on this subject will complete our understanding of the theological sources of the new pope.

### **The Theology of Liberation as "Theology of the People "**

Lucio Gera is considered the founder of Argentinian Liberation Theology<sup>31</sup>. His theological starting point is to be found in his search to rediscover the spiritual unity between theology and popular piety:

I believe my generation has inherited a deep disassociation between theology, pastoral care and spirituality. (...) On the one hand, pastoral care has suffered from being considered in purely pragmatic terms or, at a pinch, as an art or a conjuncture of norms leading to knowledge and practical application, but nothing more. On the other hand, theology has suffered from a failure to be nourished by the mission of evangelisation. This has also been the case for spirituality. Theology suffered by not being fed by spirituality. At the same time, piety suffered from a lack of spirituality, for it had come to be understood in the sense of nothing more than a repetition of prayers (...) I believe that the fundamental disassociation transmitted to us is that between the religious and the secular, between God and the world.<sup>32</sup>

Gera conceives of a unity of theology and popular piety which, through reciprocal influence, creates the unique people of God, the mystical body of Christ. In this context, for Gera, liberation does not signify primarily a social liberation but rather a freedom from intellectual boundaries, themselves provoked by social constraints. Thus, in Gera's thinking, the link between theology and popular piety is the base for a renewal of the internal unity of the people and of the people of God.

The concept of the people is essential to the understanding of Gera's thought. "The people" signifies "the common subject of a history and a culture"<sup>33</sup>. In this definition, the emphasis is on the indefinite articles. Thus, the concept of the people can be understood as referring to the individual

<sup>30</sup> Y.M.J. CONGAR, *Pour une Eglise servante et pauvre – Le livre-programme du pape François*, Paris 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. J.C SCANNONE, " Probleme und Perspektiven dogmatischer Theologie ", *op. cit.*, p. 422.

<sup>32</sup> L. GERA, quoted in M. GONZÁLEZ, " Prólogo ", p. 13-22, p. 16, in *Escritos teológico-pastorales de Lucio Gera*, V.R. AZCUY, C.M. GALLI, C. CAAMAÑO (ed.), t. 1, *Del Preconcilio a la Conferencia del Pueblo (1956-1981)*, Buenos Aires, 2006.

<sup>33</sup> J.C SCANNONE, " Probleme und Perspektiven dogmatischer Theologie ", *op. cit.*, p. 423.

personality of each people. The personal unity and identity of a people is the result of its common history, lived as a community, manifested in a shared life-style and nourished by the wealth of its culture in conjunction with its religious roots. It is thanks to this historico-cultural interaction that the soul of a people – its specific identity – evolves and takes clear shape. Liberation comes into play to the degree that this identity is put at risk of deformation by exterior factors (wars) or by interior ones (the abuse of power), so creating the need for a renewal of the identity. This is the reason why the identity of a people is most clearly seen where it is lived in its original and purest form – among the poor:

Amongst them, the common and community aspect of historical, religious, ethical and cultural values finds its right place and its greatest transparency, free of the disfigurements resulting from the privileges of possession, from power or from intellectual knowledge.<sup>34</sup>

In this manner, poverty becomes the essential reflection of the identity of a people, not because poverty is desirable in itself or because it focalises the force of the people in a social struggle of the Marxist mould. Rather than becoming an external aim, poverty becomes the ideal of a life-choice and an interior disposition. The disposition of poverty is the personal attitude which discovers its own existence as a gift. This gift can be – in each and every existential situation – accepted with humility and joy. It is this existential joy which is seen most particularly, and in a mysterious way, on the faces of the poor. And it is then, in this context of the visibility and the original transparency of the identity of a people, that popular piety and religiosity play a particular role, for they correspond

to the culture which is the people's own. Religiosity is an attitude typical among the poor, and the poor form in a priority manner a people. It is the poor who manifest, in a way both dense and typical, the religion of a people.<sup>35</sup>

For it is in popular religiosity that we discern most unmistakably the originality of faith, to the point that a theologian could never fail to integrate this experience of reality into his theological reflection. Theology never means a kind of cerebral gymnastics; it is always essentially and existentially oriented towards the person. If it is to touch the hearts of men, the material content of theology needs to be translated into pastoral care accessible to the people, while losing neither its depth nor its existential flavour. It is in this way that the riches of theology can be shared with the people. The

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 424.

<sup>35</sup> L. GERA, " Pueblo, Religión del pueblo y Iglesia ", in *Escritos teológico-pastorales de Lucio Gera*, t. 1: *op. cit.*, p. 717-744, p. 731.

people benefit from the theologian, who supplies the nourishment which popular piety needs for the strengthening of its identity; the theologian benefits as well, when he turns his attention to the religiosity of the people, because his theology is enriched by new perspectives which cannot fail to affect him. Theologian and people open themselves to each other, sharing their particular riches so as to give these to the poor who stand before them. This interdependence creates the unity and the identity of the people, to which and in which each contributes and participates, each in his own way. The theological motor of Gera's evangelisation theology was born in the context of this perspective:

Theology has its roots and inspiration in pastoral care and preaching; the question is: how to preach, what to preach, how to enflame minds and hearts, how to place the pastoral challenge at the forefront?<sup>36</sup>

In no way does this imply that theological study and continuous formation can be neglected in favour of the need for pastoral care. On the contrary, academic theology benefits dynamically from its contact with the people. And, by understanding its theological roots, popular piety gains in depth. The concept of liberation is found here, in the reciprocal intention to escape from closed individual structures, to open one's mind and self to other realities and to let oneself be enriched by them. The foundation of such an opening is the acceptance of one's own existential poverty and the turning towards one's fellow-men in the imitation of the person of Christ.

### **Poverty as Imitation of Christ – Christological Foundations in the Writing of Yves Congar**

In his book *Pour une Église servante et pauvre*,<sup>37</sup> Yves Congar describes the essential vocation of the Church as that of service towards our fellow-men in direct connection with a love of poverty. The Dominican who took part in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council stresses the historical aspect of the problems which concern the relation of the Church to poverty and service. He makes explicit reference to the contrast often present in the history of the Church between a Church called to be poor like Christ and the external image of a rich Church as purveyed by its representatives. During the Council, in a conference addressed to a group of bishops studying the doctrinal aspects of this problem, Congar based the Church's vocation to poverty in the very

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<sup>36</sup> L. GERA, quoted by V.R. AZCUY, "Una biografía teológica de Lucio Gera", in *Escritos teológico-pastorales de Lucio Gera*, V. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 23-57, p. 32.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Y.M.J. CONGAR, *Pour une Eglise servante et pauvre*, *op. cit.*

mystery of God and of Christ.<sup>38</sup> Lucio Gera knew Congar's theology very well and spread it in South America. Congar's teaching can be considered the Christological basis of Gera's own pastoral approach.

It is in the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Redemption - the manifestations of the love of Christ for all men - that Yves Congar situates the theological foundations of the Church's special concern for the poor. Particular attention should be paid to the connection that Congar discerns theologically between the event of Salvation and the concrete reality of the world:

In Jesus Christ, God truly united Himself to human nature; by so doing, He has made all men His brothers. The divine choice for the redemptive Incarnation determines the existence of a special solidarity between humanity and Christ, God made man, which, moreover, responds to the exigencies of the nature of the realities in question. By reason of this solidarity, Jesus, God made man, draws humanity to become with him the heirs of God (provided men accept the gift of God by a personal and free act of living faith). It is the foundation of the People of God under the new dispensation, which makes of this People the Body of Christ. The consequence of this solidarity rendered effective by God is that whatever is done to human beings is done, in a certain way, to Christ.<sup>39</sup>

Through solidarity and united in their faith in Christ, human beings form a divine people. Christ approaches humanity to attract it to himself and unite it to and in himself. This new social order then works in the people itself a dynamic analogous to that initiated by Christ at his Incarnation. As the creator turns towards and unites with the created, so human beings are called to come together and help each other mutually. Thus, the concept of poverty has to be understood in its universal sense. We are all the poor:

These are not only the economically deprived; they are not only the poor in spirit. The poor are all those who suffer poverty in the broadest sense of the word.<sup>40</sup>

No-one is excluded from poverty. Every member of the people is, by nature of their created condition, truly poor and, by this very fact, in need of help. Congar deepens this concept of the unity of the people, the source of which is to be found in their common poverty, by inviting us to dare to look beyond the world and to not be limited by the simple visibility of the suffering of the world which returns us to the presence of God.

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<sup>38</sup> Y.M.J. CONGAR, "Jalons d'une réflexion sur le mystère des pauvres - Son fondement dans le mystère de Dieu et du Christ", in P. GAUTHIER, " *Consolez mon peuple* " - *Le Concile et l'Église des pauvres*, Paris, 1965, p. 307-327.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 316 s.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p. 327.

What is important for our present reflection is to see the existence of an encounter with God under forms other than He, and that a link, a certain continuity exists between our everyday experiences and God Himself, and that the reality of these proceed from Him, active in all things for our salvation, and though these encounters appear under the guise of creatures and events, we stand in the presence of God and take our position from Him.<sup>41</sup>

The reality of creaturely poverty implies the unity of the people and renders accessible the presence of God in the world. It is both the horizontal and the vertical link between the world and its creator. This link impels to action. It is the poor in particular who motivate Christian action, from which praxis evolves. The poor

seemed to us initially as an occasion, an opportunity, a sort of sacrament of the encounter with God. They even appeared as identical, in a certain way, to Jesus Christ. Our path to God passes through them ...<sup>42</sup>

To encounter the poor is to encounter Christ himself. Conversely, he who encounters and helps the poor is acting in the place and in the person of Christ and thus can become, for that person, the occasion of an encounter with Christ:

To love with the love with which God has loved us is to love *as* Jesus loved – it is precisely on this " *as* " that the *new* commandment, *his* commandment hinges ... that is to say, to love with a love that searches out by choice the unimportant, the needy...<sup>43</sup>

His thought is above all for those "who suffer destitution in all its forms"<sup>44</sup> or even more precisely for "so many poor people who, throughout the centuries, have been beaten, hanged, crucified"<sup>45</sup>. Starting from a universal perspective of poverty, Congar finishes by turning more towards its material and practical aspect. At the start, poverty is taken in its broadest sense and placed within its Christological context; at the end, however, in the praxis, it receives a more unilateral interpretation. In comparison to Congar, the approach adopted by Gera has the advantage of having held the theological concept to the end: in his own way, every human being is counted among the poor, just as every human being is, at the same time and in his own way, counted among the rich. Every poor person represents the figure of Christ, as every rich person acts towards the poor in the image

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* p. 313 s.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* p. 319.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p. 318.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

of Christ. Thus, the person of Christ can be touched in everyone, for each person not only needs love but can also give love. Theologically, Congar prepared the opening to the world, in order to break out of the "closed world structures"<sup>46</sup> and reach a "theologically grounded world view"<sup>47</sup> which finds its practical completion in Gera's approach. It is not difficult to feel Gera's influence on Pope Francis. With Francis, the emphasis is on the personal aspect, which he links to that of the people.

## **The "Theology of the People " is founded in Personal Relationship**

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The theological elements from Gera and Congar which have been employed in this interpretation of Pope Francis' wish for a poor Church for the poor can be clearly recognized in Francis' recent declarations. Francis has a very special place for the subject of the people of God.

The image of the Church which I like is that of the people of God, holy and faithful. It is the definition I often use, and it is that of *Lumen gentium*, number 12. Belonging to a people has a strong theological value: in the history of salvation, God saved a people. There is no full and complete identity without belonging to a people. No-one saves himself alone, as an isolated individual, but God draws us to Himself through the complex framework of interpersonal relationships which are formed in the human community. God enters into this popular dynamic<sup>48</sup>.

In this quotation, Francis returns to the mutual dependence and mutual influence of personal identity and the identity of the people, for they are interconnected in a natural way. In such a context, totally isolated individuals are not possible, for the members of a people are already, without having been consulted, linked together by birth and social relations. It is through this intertwining of individuals that history and culture are transmitted. The very fact of existence already has an influence on everything, without one's being able to foresee or name the consequences in all their detail. Conscious of the vertical dimension of the people, by which Christ has entered into the people and is considered from now on as part of that people, the existence and the action of the individual have already moved beyond and outside themselves and brought their particular and

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Ch. TAYLOR, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge 2007, p. 551-592

<sup>47</sup> "theologisch gegründete Weltlichkeit", J. PIEPER, "Das Zeugnis des Thomas von Aquin" (1959), in *Miszellen, Werke in 11 Bänden*, B. WALD (ed.), Hamburg 1995-2008, Bd. 8/1, p. 66-72, p. 71; IDEM, "Was heißt christliches Abendland?" (1957), in *Miszellen, op. cit.*, p. 444-451, p. 446.

<sup>48</sup> Pope FRANCIS, *L'Église que j'espère – Entretien avec le Père Spadaro*, sj, translated from the Italian by Fr. EUVÉ, H. NICQ, F. LIVI, Paris, 2013, p. 63.



holy dynamic to the people. Pope Francis stresses the transparency of this dynamic. It is visible to those who watch attentively:

I see holiness in the patience of the people of God: a woman bringing up her children, a man working to feed his family, the sick, the elderly priests who have been so wounded yet still smile because they have served the Lord, the Sisters who work so hard and live a hidden holiness. For me, this is shared sanctity.<sup>49</sup>

This shared sanctity of the people of God reveals the divine in a world which is not God Himself – Yves Congar has already drawn attention to this approach.<sup>50</sup> For Francis, this holiness is diffused on all the people of God. This is why everyone can be encouraged and comforted by the holiness of his 'neighbour'. In Francis' reflection, the theological consequence of *Sentire cum ecclesia* is based on this understanding of shared holiness. Yet again, it is the reciprocity between the individuals forming a people and theology which enables the people of God to progress:

The subject is the people. And the Church is the people of God advancing through history, with their joys and their sorrows. *Sentire cum Ecclesia* (to feel with the Church) is, for me, to be at the heart of this people. The people as a whole is infallible in its faith, and demonstrates this *infallibilitas in credendo* through the supernatural sense of faith of the entire people as it journeys forward. This is for me the "to feel with the Church" of which St Ignatius speaks. When the dialogue between the people, the bishops and the pope moves in this direction and is loyal, then it is assisted by the Holy Spirit<sup>51</sup>.

The Pope continues:

It is the same with Mary: if we want to know who she is, we ask the theologians; if we want to know how she loved, we have to ask the people. Mary herself loved Jesus with the heart of the people, as we read in the Magnificat. Therefore, we must not think that the understanding of "to feel with the Church" refers only to the Church's hierarchical dimension<sup>52</sup>.

Francis explicitly distances himself from a populist interpretation of the vocation of the people for theology.<sup>53</sup> His aim is to underline the reciprocal and fertile interdependence of theology and the people. "The Church as the people of God" signifies the "priests and the people all together"<sup>54</sup>, who, in their unity and their totality, lead theology forward.

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* p. 65.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *supra*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* p. 64.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

Theology thus undertaken within the totality of the people cannot stop at its own frontiers. Interpersonal openings and encounters within the people of God united in Christ create a dynamic able to touch even those who do not share this mystical popular identity. For Francis, this ability to go beyond its own boundaries is a call to evangelisation:

We should announce the Gospel on every road, preaching the good news of the Kingdom and caring, also by our preaching, for all kinds of illnesses and wounds. In Buenos Aires, I received letters from homosexuals, who are "socially wounded" because they have always felt condemned by the Church. But this is not what the Church wants<sup>55</sup>.

The condemnation of those who do not share one's own convictions can only block the ability to look beyond one's own limitations. Francis cannot condemn others, towards whom he steps forward, because he is too aware of his own poverty.

I am a sinner. This is the most exact definition ... It is not a manner of speaking, a literary genre. I am a sinner<sup>56</sup>.

Francis tells how, at the moment of his election, he thought of a painting by Caravaggio : "Jesus' finger ...pointing at Mathew. That's what I am, me. That's how I feel, like Mathew<sup>57</sup>". It is the expression of amazement, of having been chosen, a sinner, as the successor to St Peter: " I am a sinner on whom the Lord has looked "<sup>58</sup>. It is exactly this intimate look of Christ's that he would like to transmit in his own personal manner to the whole world, even if he is surrounded by large crowds:

I am able to look at people individually, (...) to enter into personal contact with those facing me. I am not a man of crowds<sup>59</sup>.

In this knowledge of himself as a sinner, the Pope can dare this personal approach with everyone. He feels like one of them, of those whose gaze he seeks. He sees this personal relationship existing in the totality of the people of God as the link uniting men among themselves and with their common creator. The unity of the people is forged in this interpersonal relationship, the origin and the foundation of which is Christ. Christ's gaze towards the world and the world's gaze towards Christ connect the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the kingdom of God. It is the eminent task of theology

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* p. 70.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* p. 31.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* p. 32.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* p. 22.

to continuously rediscover this meeting- point and to let itself be infused by it:

Structural or organisational reforms are secondary; that is, they will come in due course. The first reform must be that of our manner of being, of ourselves<sup>60</sup>.

Existential reform is seen in the change in the way of looking at the other and in the personal relationship which results:

One day someone asked me in a provocative way if I approved of homosexuality. I answered with a different question: "Tell me; when God looks at a homosexual person, does He approve that person's existence with affection or does He reject that person's existence while condemning him?" The person must always be considered. Here we enter into the human mystery. In everyday life, God accompanies each person and we must accompany them from within their condition. Accompany with mercy<sup>61</sup>.

Francis' wish is to transmit Christ's gaze, which has already permeated him, to everyone. In Christ, he would wish to become everything for everyone. "Christ has assumed everything. Only what has already been assumed can be redeemed"<sup>62</sup>. This positive turning towards humanity opens up the possibility of showing each person that they have already been looked upon by Christ, without perhaps their having been aware. Within each personal relationship there thus develops a reciprocal connection of natural humanity and of grace. The fundamental condition for this reciprocal relationship is the acceptance of one's own insufficiency, of one's own existential poverty, and that it is only in Christ that an existence finds its true plenitude.

## Perspectives

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We have looked at the theological sources of Pope Francis in connection with his own declarations; perhaps an attempt may now be made at a conclusive interpretation which seeks to be as true as possible to the intentions of the Pope. There is no lack of interpretations and speculations concerning his wish for a poor Church for the poor<sup>63</sup>. Francis himself, however, has

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* p. 69.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* p. 71.

<sup>62</sup> Pope FRANCIS, *Je crois en l'homme – Conversations avec Jorge Bergoglio*, by S. RUBIN, F. AMBROGETTI, Paris, 2013, p. 86.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. J. ALT, K. VÄTHRÖDER (ed.), *Arme Kirche – Kirche für die Armen : ein Widerspruch ?* Würzburg 2014. While the editors recognise the fundamentally theological intention of the Pope's wish for a poor Church for the poor

offered a short, precise interpretation, which is, furthermore, completely in line with the teaching of his predecessor Benedict XVI:

For the Church, the option for the poor is a theological category before being a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one. [...] This option – Benedict XVI taught – is implicit in Christological faith in the God who made Himself poor for us, to enrich us with His poverty<sup>64</sup>. This is the reason why I wish for a poor Church for the poor<sup>65</sup>.

In Francis' wish for a poor Church for the poor, the personal and popular dimensions of individuals are theologically united. In their reciprocal connection, both dimensions are filled with the consciousness of existential poverty and the desire to engage in solidarity in their historical and cultural context. Each person is poor by nature. Solidarity towards the poor implies, therefore, not only the strictly material aspect but above all the existential and theological dimension. This is why poverty is the unifying link of all the people and of the people of God; its very grounding is in the created condition of humanity. The Pope desires for all humanity the existential realization of this interior attitude of poverty which knows how to reach out by love, in the image of Christ, to all the poor.

Our engagement does not consist exclusively in actions or in aid programs; what the Spirit infuses is not an outburst of activism but, above all, an attention to the other " who he considers as one with himself ".<sup>66</sup> This loving attention is the start of a real concern for the other, for his person, and it is from this moment that I actively seek his good. This means valuing each member of the poor in his own goodness, in his own way of being, with his culture and his way of living his faith. Real love is always contemplative; it allows us to serve the other not by necessity or vanity but because the other is beautiful, irrespective of appearances<sup>67</sup>.

The beauty of service and of poverty is based on the beauty of the imitation of Christ. He who is fully aware of his existential poverty shares in the beauty of Christ, even if external appearances render this difficult to

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(cf. p. 11), the articles here collected seek to find a connection between the wish expressed by the Pope and the socio-political problematic of poverty.

<sup>64</sup> BENEDICT XVI, "Discourse at the inaugural session of Vth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean", 13 May 2007, Aparecida.

<sup>65</sup> Pope FRANCIS, *The Joy of the Gospel*, *op. cit.*, n. 198, p. 179; in opposition to Francis' personal interpretation of his desire for a poor Church for the poor is that of L. Boff: " Pope Francis presents his theology on a sweeter note, so that liberation resounds even more strongly, as consolation for the oppressed and as a call to conscience for the powerful. Here at last is what we want: less theology and more liberation.", *Franziskus aus Rom*, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>66</sup> THOMAS AQUINUS, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 27, a. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Pope FRANCIS, *The Joy of the Gospel*, *op. cit.*, n. 199, p. 180.

presume. Beauty is deeper than appearance. This is why beauty is sometimes considered paradoxical, if the exterior appearance fails to correspond to the interior beauty. Existential beauty, however, is always the revelation of divine love<sup>68</sup>. The true resemblance between the children of God and their creator always shines out in the acceptance of one's own poverty and in the engagement for the poor. It is the continuing revelation to the world of this interior beauty that the Pope wishes.

In such a context, it is no exaggeration to call Pope Francis a prophet of creaturely and existential poverty. With his desire for a poor Church for the poor, he has raised a debate which seems to have fallen today somewhat into disuse. Modern man seeks his independence, to its very limits. The acceptance of one's own poverty implies the precise opposite of autonomy. Humanity is in danger of closing itself within a kind of auto-sufficiency, thus becoming existentially poor through an increasing loss of resemblance to the divine image. The Pope's call appears to fade into the distance, like the voice crying in the wilderness. True prophets are not appreciated by their times. However, as Congar says, the dangers to which the prophet is exposed may come from the prophet himself:

The prophet, (...), does not bother to balance or to harmonise his message; rather, he delivers it in its absolute form. Thus, he is always in danger of falling into unilateralism, of seeing only one side of things, and, if he systematises or even simply formulates his conviction, of founding a " unitraditionalism ". Without going as far as Luther, who is an extreme example, we can think of the exclusivity of a Peter Damian or a St Bernard, and of the possibilities of gathering everything into one unique theme as with a St Francis. The great reformers are usually simplifiers. This is both a strength and a danger.<sup>69</sup>

Pope Francis has not fallen into this danger. The difference between a St Francis and Pope Francis is that the latter has not declared poverty a goal in itself but the condition and prerequisite for a new evangelisation. That is to say, he demands the recognition and acceptance of our own poverty and weakness as the start of both a true Christian life and of the possibility of converting the world, in this spirit, to Christ. Poverty is the starting-point and the existential anchor of evangelization. It is conceived of universally, but is not a goal.

Through his existential approach which spreads the concept of poverty into all areas of life, the Pope has also succeeded in considering the social question in its unity with the Church, and in overcoming the apparent

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. J. RATZINGER, " Blessé par la flèche de ce qui est beau ", in *Chemins vers Jésus*, Paris, 2004, p. 31-40.

<sup>69</sup> Y. CONGAR, *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Église*, Paris, 1950, p. 248.

separation between theology on the one hand and the social doctrine of the Church on the other. In the past, the impression was created that the Church took care of social questions coming from the outside but without being truly touched by them itself, as in institution, in its own life and its own context.<sup>70</sup> By considering this problematic of poverty as an integral part of the Church, Pope Francis has moved it into the Church's very heart.

The reform of the Church proposed by Pope Francis, therefore, is one which starts with its understanding of itself. Exterior reforms will only be possible in union with this interior renewal. In this sense, Francis sees himself in direct continuity with his predecessor. His expressed wish reflects a request made by Pope Benedict XVI. On 25 September 2011, at a conference in Freiburg-in-Brisgau for Catholics engaged in the Church and in society, Benedict XVI stated:

There is a further reason for estimating that it is again topical to rediscover true "de-mondanisation", to courageously remove what is "worldly" in the Church. Naturally, this does not mean retiring from the world, quite the contrary. A Church relieved of its "worldly" elements is able to communicate the vital force of the Christian faith to all – to those who suffer as well as to those who help, precisely in the socio-caritative domain, as well<sup>71</sup>.

By his remark concerning the universal and existential importance of this "de-mondanisation", Benedict XVI provoked the Church in Germany<sup>72</sup>. Pope Francis is on the same path; his wish for a poor Church for the poor has given a decisive push to the dynamic activated by Benedict XVI. In this sense, Pope Francis resembles "the rich man, who knows how to bring both new and old things out of his treasure-house"<sup>73</sup>. Poverty in its many and various forms is as old as creation itself. From the beginning, it has been inherent to humanity and can only be comprehended in its universal dimension by reference to Christ. At the same time, Pope Francis has propounded, at the universal ecclesial level, a new perspective on poverty, which has not always been present to the spirit of the Church in this way,

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. G.L. MÜLLER. "Befreiungstheologie im Meinungsstreit", in G. GUTIÉRREZ, G.L. MÜLLER, *An der Seite der Armen – Theologie der Befreiung*, Augsburg 2004, p. 79-109, particularly p. 82-90.

<sup>71</sup> BENEDICT XVI, "Conference on the occasion of the meeting with Catholics engaged in the Church and in society", Freiburg-in-Brisgau, 25 September 2011.

<sup>72</sup> "If it was not possible to consciously avert the discourse given at Fribourg, there remained as the last escape-route from this dangerous speech the affirmation that, in his discourse at Freiburg, Pope Benedict XVI had been speaking as pope of the universal church. Clearly, he had not been referring specifically to the German situation, nor to the Church tithe, nor the institution of the Church, nor Church-State relations. The argument went so far as to claim that a German pope, speaking to Germans in a German city and in the German language was referring above all to Latin America... The absurdity was flagrant.", P.J. CORDES, M. LÜTZ, *Benedikts Vermächtnis und Franziskus' Auftrag*, Freiburg-in-Breisgau, 2013, p. 15.

<sup>73</sup> Mt 13, 51.

even though it has always been present latently. Today's Church has been waiting for the impetus which has come from Pope Francis. Poverty excludes no-one, but enriches everyone. The wish of Pope Francis inspires hope and joy.

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