

# THE WAY

*a review of Christian spirituality published by the British Jesuits*

October 2020

Volume 59, Number 4

## POPE FRANCIS PREPARING THE FUTURE



© Lawrence OP

*Pope Francis window, Manila  
Cathedral, Philippines*

**Foreword** 5–6***A Time of Choosing: Conversion and Discernment in the Mind of Pope Francis*** 7–12*Tim McEvoy*

It is often said that one of the distinguishing features of the current papacy is Pope Francis's employment of discernment in decision-making. Tim McEvoy here looks at what this means in practice, and how in the Pope's mind discernment is closely linked to the idea of conversion, something he believes is urgently needed in the contemporary world.

***Pope Francis: Reform and Resistance*** 13–28*Austen Ivereigh*

Austen Ivereigh is the author of two major studies of Pope Francis. In the first, from 2014, he now recognises that he presented the Pope as a heroic leader in a way that Francis himself would certainly reject. Here, by contrast, he views the current papacy through the lens of 'post-heroic discerning leadership'.

***Mothering Sundays: Pope Francis and the Challenge of Women's Role within the Church*** 29–39*Gemma Simmonds*

What Pope Francis has said and done about the role of women in the Church has attracted much attention, both from within the Church and outside it, since the earliest days of his papacy. Gemma Simmonds assesses his record, finding both light and shadow, and recognising that there is still much to be achieved.

***Protestants and Pope Francis: A View from outside the Roman Catholic Tradition*** 41–52*Elizabeth A. Hoare*

Robert Burns famously sought the gift of being able 'to see ourselves as others see us'. Here Elizabeth Hoare offers a view of Pope Francis from an evangelical Protestant perspective. While appreciating his teaching, she finds in the Pope's character, particularly in his humility, a source of encouragement not just for evangelical Protestants, but for those of other faiths and none.

***Papa Francesco: Quo vadis?*** 53–74*James Hanvey*

It is James Hanvey's belief that the papacy of Pope Francis 'marks a critical moment in the future direction of the Church'. In this article he outlines the key features of this critical moment. Central is placing a deepened sense of God's compassion and mercy at the heart of everything to which the Church is to bear witness, an outlook that Francis lives out as well as preaching.

***The Cross and the Mission***

75–83

*Jorge Mario Bergoglio*

In 1984 Jorge Bergoglio, later to become Pope Francis, was working as rector of the Colegio Máximo, the Jesuit house of studies in Argentina. This article, originally given as a retreat talk to the Mary Ward sisters, was published that year. In it he offers a personal reflection on the place of suffering in the life of one who is entrusted with a mission from God.

***The Spirit of Christ and of the Gospel in Pope Francis***

84–88

*Guillermo Randle*

By looking closely at both the actions and the teaching of Pope Francis, it is possible to come to a clearer view of the spirit that motivates and sustains him. For Guillermo Randle, two key aspects of that spirit are discernment and the cross. In this essay he traces the links between the two in the Pope's own spirituality.

***Synod and Synodality in Pope Francis's Words***

89–100

*Massimo Faggioli*

In his quest to help the Church as a whole become a more genuinely discerning body, Pope Francis has relied heavily on synods to gather information and reflect prayerfully on issues facing the People of God. Massimo Faggioli here sets out the ways in which the Pope has explained the significance of synodality, and the part that it plays in his ecclesiology.

***Pope Francis and Church Reform***

101–111

*Gerry O'Hanlon*

At least since the days of the Second Vatican Council it has been commonplace to speak of the need for renewal in the Church. However, Gerry O'Hanlon also sees in Francis's papacy an emphasis on reform, reviewing and updating the structures through which the Church carries out its mission. The next synod, itself focusing on synodality, could be vital in this regard.

***Christ is Alive: Preparing the Future***

112–122

*Dushan Croos*

In 2018 Pope Francis chaired a synod on 'Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment'. The following year he published a post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Christus vivit*. Dushan Croos, who works in a new Jesuit project with young adults in London, finds in the synod process the 'See, Judge, Act' methodology popularised by the Young Christian Workers.

***The Geography of Pope Francis***

123–132

*Pierre de Charentenay*

Unlike their predecessors, popes in the years after Vatican II have travelled widely throughout the world. Far from being mere tourist visits, these journeys have become a central part of the papal mission. Here Pierre de Charentenay suggests that tracing the places that he has chosen to visit reveals much about the apostolic priorities of Pope Francis.

***Another World Is Necessary: Proposals from Ignacio Ellacuría and Pope Francis for a New Global Civilisation***

133–147

*Martin Maier*

Ignacio Ellacuría was one of the six Jesuits murdered by government forces in El Salvador in 1989. He critiqued the present world economic order in ways that have much in common with the responses of Pope Francis. Here Martin Maier considers the alternative visions that these two Jesuits have put forward.

**FOR AUTHORS**

*The Way* warmly invites readers to submit articles with a view to publication. They should normally be about 4,000 words long, and be in keeping with the journal's aims. The Editor is always ready to discuss possible ideas. A Special Issue is planned for 2021 on Ignatian themes, so articles in this area will be particularly welcome.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We are grateful to the Centro de Espiritualidad Ignaciana de Argentina for permission to translate the article by Jorge Mario Bergoglio, and to the editors of *Études* for permission to translate that by Pierre de Charentenay. Particular thanks are due to Joseph A. Munitiz SJ for the many translations in this issue. Thanks also to Peter Brook SJ for the cover design; cover image © Mazur/catholicnews.org.uk. The scripture quotations herein are generally from the New Revised Standard Version Bible © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

**ABBREVIATIONS**

<i>Autobiography</i>	'Reminiscences (Autobiography)', in <i>Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings</i> , translated by Philip Endean and Joseph A. Munitiz (London: Penguin, 1996)
<i>Constitutions</i>	in <i>The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms</i> (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996)
<i>Diary</i>	'The Spiritual Diary', in <i>Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings</i> , translated by Philip Endean and Joseph A. Munitiz (London: Penguin, 1996)
<i>Dir</i>	<i>On Giving the Spiritual Exercises: The Early Manuscript Directories and the Official Directory of 1599</i> , translated and edited by Martin E. Palmer (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996)
<i>Exx</i>	<i>The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius</i> , translated by George E. Ganss (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992)
<i>GC</i>	General Congregation, in <i>Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees and Accompanying Documents of the 31st–35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus</i> (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009) and <i>Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees and Accompanying Documents of the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus</i> (Boston: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2017)
<i>MHSJ</i>	Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu, 157 volumes (Madrid and Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1898–)

*Papal documents may be found at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) and synodal documents at [www.synod.va](http://www.synod.va)*

## FOREWORD

‘BUONA SERA!’ The first words that the world heard from the newly Elected Pope Francis, on 13 March 2013, were a simple ‘good evening!’ In the seven years since then, he has continued to attract the world’s attention, by his words and by his actions. Among the words, his 2015 encyclical *Laudato si’*, putting care for the environment at the heart of church teaching, stands out. But perhaps his actions speak even louder. From carrying his own case, and washing the feet of women and Muslims on Holy Thursday, to standing alone to pray in a rainswept St Peter’s Square at the height of the pandemic lockdown, Jorge Bergoglio has an instinctive grasp of how to witness to the gospel that he preaches.

This special issue of *The Way* considers the work of Pope Francis to date, in both what he has said and what he has done, and looks at its impact on the Church of today and tomorrow. Writers from across the globe highlight different aspects of the impact that he has made. James Hanvey focuses on the ways that the Pope returns repeatedly to the experience of a compassionate and merciful God. It is his leadership style that has attracted the attention of Austen Ivereigh—in two full-length studies of this papacy, and here in a talk given originally at Campion Hall in Oxford. Gemma Simmonds offers a balanced critique of the Pope’s approach to the role of women in the Church, and Dushan Croos is particularly concerned with the ways in which he views young people.

Unsurprisingly, for a journal produced by Jesuits, *The Way* has a particular interest in Francis as the first Jesuit pope, not least in the way that he has emphasized the need for discernment in considering the current challenges that the Church faces. Tim McEvoy links this theme to that of conversion. A number of the articles here see the ways in which the Pope is using the regular synods that he has called as a key means of exercising discernment, a move likely to have a lasting impact on church structures. Massimo Faggioli, from a more theoretical point of view, and Gerry O’Hanlon, from a more practical one, both spell out the Pope’s ideas of synodality, and the effects that might be expected from implementing these ideas.

Pope Francis has faced, and continues to face, opposition in his attempts to reform the Church, and indeed he has been familiar with the suffering that this kind of opposition brings since long before he

became Pope. A talk, translated here, that he gave to the congregation of Mary Ward sisters while he was rector of a Jesuit theologate in Argentina, offers his understanding of the place of suffering in the lives of those dedicated to Christian mission, and Guillermo Randle links this experience closely to discernment. For Elizabeth Hoare, an evangelical Protestant, the humility with which Francis responds to the reactions he provokes is a source of encouragement even for those who do not fully share his faith.

Although the Pope is the bishop of Rome, a role that Francis takes with great seriousness, he also has responsibility for Roman Catholics worldwide. Two final articles here pick up on that aspect of his ministry. Pierre de Charentenay tracks the many trips he has made since his election to different countries, seeing in them a good way of analyzing the Pope's priorities. Martin Maier compares the Pope's thinking about alternatives to the present world economic order with those of Ignacio Ellacuría, a fellow Jesuit killed by government forces in El Salvador in 1989.

Since he was elected at the age of 76, there was speculation at the time that Pope Francis's papacy might be a short one, that he might in effect be a caretaker Pope soon making way for a successor. More than seven years later, he shows no sign of slowing down or losing momentum. Any presentation of his work and its impact can therefore be no more than a snapshot at a given moment. Around the time that you receive this edition of *The Way*, a new encyclical, *Fratelli tutti*, will have been published, and this will no doubt contribute further to this Pope's extraordinary legacy. The essays gathered here, though, offer a number of perspectives which, taken together, offer a compelling vision of the man who, in that first speech on the balcony in 2013, spoke of himself as having been brought to Rome almost from the ends of the earth.

**Paul Nicholson SJ**  
**Editor**

# A TIME OF CHOOSING

## Conversion and Discernment in the Mind of Pope Francis

Tim McEvoy

IN HIS EXTRAORDINARY DECISION to speak ‘to the city and to the world’ from St Peter’s Square at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, Pope Francis pointed his listeners and viewers to an urgent call to conversion:

You are calling on us to seize this time of trial as a time of choosing. It is not the time of your judgement, but of our judgement: a time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others.<sup>1</sup>

The image of Francis standing, frail and exposed, amid the dreary March rain and ambulance sirens of Rome in lockdown, is one that will stay with me for a very long time, and seemed to exemplify the closeness of this remarkable Pope to his people. At the darkest of times, he showed how the Church must stand, not aloof but in solidarity with others, holding out the hope of encountering grace and the Lord even from the cross of coronavirus. His papacy has been a model of that pastoral conversion ‘to show and live the way of mercy’ to which the Church has been called: drawing close to the people of God in the messy reality of their lives and getting his shoes dirty with the mud of the streets.<sup>2</sup>

Austen Ivereigh is quite right to compare Francis’s style of governance, revealed in a unique way during the pandemic, to that of a spiritual director accompanying the Church and helping it to navigate through the complex global crisis of our times in all its manifestations.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis’, *urbi et orbi*, ‘Extraordinary Moment of Prayer Presided over by Pope Francis’, 27 March 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *Misericordiae vultus*, n. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Austen Ivereigh, *Wounded Shepherd: Pope Francis and His Struggle to Convert the Catholic Church* (New York: Henry Holt, 2019); Austen Ivereigh, ‘Remembering Our Future: Pope Francis and the Corona Crisis’, *Thinking Faith* (8 April 2020), at <https://www.jesuit.org.uk/articles/remembering-our-future-pope-francis-and-corona-crisis>, accessed 17 July 2020.

Key to this navigation has been his astute discernment of spirits and his uncanny ability to point out the false consolations and temptations of the bad spirit. Discernment has not only been an important pastoral and formational need identified by Francis for the Church but it has shaped the processes of his pontificate, and indeed his life, in definitive ways, as many commentators have noted.<sup>4</sup> A synodal, journeying Church with Christ at its centre must be discerning at every level, individual and institutional, if it is not to get lost along the way, and is in need of continual reorientation and recentring.

For Francis, the themes of conversion and discernment appear to be inextricably linked, and I would like briefly to explore something of this overlapping relationship in his thought, particularly as it appears in his latest apostolic exhortation, *Christus vivit*, and to trace its roots back to his grounding in the Ignatian tradition of spiritual discernment. The word ‘roots’ has significance for Pope Francis in terms of how he views the world and the interconnected crises it currently faces, as has already been noted.<sup>5</sup> In an era of ‘liquid capitalism’, characterized by an ever more rapid pace of change and the loosening of traditional social, economic and political bonds, the image of roots conjures up neither artificial stability nor stubborn resistance to change but continued access to a deeper source of life and support.

Francis the spiritual director reminds us that, just as for the individual making a retreat and reviewing his or her ‘faith history’, the roots of a mature society and its ability to grow in a healthy direction lie in its collective ability to remember, to know and to judge past events—its ‘historical memory’.<sup>6</sup> Memory plays a crucial role in discernment for Francis, as it did for Ignatius. To be wise and discerning involves, in some sense, being ‘memory keepers’, as he puts it.<sup>7</sup>

It is interesting to note how Francis also uses the metaphor of roots in a discerning sense in reference to the COVID-19 pandemic and its graced opportunity for conversion. In his prophetic *urbi et orbi* he points out how the ‘tempest’ of the virus has exposed our vital need to be put ‘in touch with our roots’ and with all those things that truly ‘nourish, sustain and strengthen our lives and our communities’, recognising and

<sup>4</sup> See Nicholas Austin, ‘Francis: The Discerning Pope’, *Thinking Faith* (9 March 2018), at <https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/francis-discerning-pope>, accessed 15 July 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Ivereigh, ‘Remembering Our Future’.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, *Amoris laetitia*, n. 193.

<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, n. 196.





© Vatican Media

*Pope Francis's urbi et orbi in an empty St Peter's Square*

reintegrating the wisdom and memory of our elders and the vital work of those who are often unappreciated and hidden from view: cleaners, nurses, caregivers. These life-giving roots are also the 'antibodies we need to confront adversity', as opposed to all that is false and superficial in our daily lives. Francis's Lenten call to the Church to return wholeheartedly to God consists of making a comprehensive and compassionate review of our shared reality and choosing between what nourishes and what fails to nourish the soul.<sup>8</sup>

The twin threads of conversion and discernment, encountered throughout Francis's official writings, are expressed at some depth in the latest post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Christus vivit*, addressed 'to young people and to the entire People of God'. After *Amoris laetitia*—also the product of long processes of communal discernment—it is, significantly, the document in which the words 'discern' and 'discernment' appear most frequently in his writings to date, with 34 mentions in 74 pages and a dedicated chapter on the vocational discernment of young people.<sup>9</sup> In it we get a real sense of what both conversion and discernment mean in the mind of Francis and, in particular, how they relate to one another.

Conversion, for the Church, says Francis, can be summarised as 'renewal and a return to youth'. This is not youth in the false sense of a

<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, *urbi et orbi*, 27 March 2020.

<sup>9</sup> *Amoris laetitia* has 46 references in a whopping 364 pages.

culture obsessed with youthful beauty or novelty, but the true youthfulness, life and energy that spring from openness to the ever-new Risen Jesus. It is an ongoing process of transformation that involves holding in creative tension the best of what is old, the Church's life-nourishing roots, with an openness to embrace what is new in Christ. It means a constant readiness to respond to grace, to let go of what does not nourish and start again, returning to its 'first love': the source of the Church's youthfulness and unique identity. Christ's call to conversion, both to the Church as a body and to each individual member, is essentially the same. As Francis says, reaching out to each young person right at the start of his exhortation, the bottom line is that, 'Christ is alive and he wants you to be alive!'<sup>10</sup>

Conversion in this sense is not a discrete event but rather a continual call to renewal and remaining ever alive in Christ. Francis expresses it using another image later in the document as learning to live fully and fruitfully in 'the now of God'.<sup>11</sup> Living fully means being fully present to the grace and mercy of God in each moment and each situation, no matter how dark or difficult. We need to let ourselves be 'saved over and over again', says Francis, and to return, time and time again, to the God who 'always embraces us after every fall, helping us to rise and get back on our feet'.<sup>12</sup>

Much could be said about what Francis, in so many ways 'the discerning Pope', has to say about spiritual discernment: that means of distinguishing between grace and temptation, as he likes to call it.<sup>13</sup>

**A spiritual  
sense beyond  
mere reason  
or wisdom**

Fundamentally, he has sought to demystify and declericalise what has sometimes been seen as an abstruse art reserved for the spiritual elite (or copyrighted by Jesuits), regrounding the Church in its own tradition, and the ordinary people of God in their own daily experience, of discernment. Discernment is not a spiritual technique or tool for Francis, but something much deeper and broader. It has to do with the *sensus fidei*—a spiritual sense beyond mere reason or wisdom, gifted by the Holy Spirit to the faithful, intrinsic to discipleship for all and part of a wider 'formation of conscience'.<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately discernment is somehow both the seed and the fruit of an ongoing relationship of freedom, trust and receptivity to the Holy

<sup>10</sup> *Christus vivit*, nn. 34, 50, 1.

<sup>11</sup> This is used as the heading for chapter three in the document. See also *Christus vivit*, n. 178.

<sup>12</sup> *Christus vivit*, nn. 123, 120.

<sup>13</sup> Austin, 'Francis: The Discerning Pope'; for example, *Christus vivit*, n. 293.

<sup>14</sup> Compare *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 119; and also *Christus vivit*, n. 281.

Spirit: ‘the graced practice of letting go and letting God lead us’, as Nick Austin has put it so well.<sup>15</sup> It is a gift and a lifelong process of transformation by grace as we learn to become like the one we contemplate and ‘cultivate the very sentiments of Jesus Christ’.<sup>16</sup>

In *Christus vivit* we see a glimpse of how Francis perceives discernment in action in relation to the accompaniment of young people, which draws telling inspiration from his own Ignatian roots. Using the Emmaus story in Luke’s Gospel as a model for ministry, he points to how Jesus walks with his disciples, accompanying them along the way even while they head in the wrong direction:

He asks them questions and listens patiently to their version of events, and in this way he helps them *recognize* what they were experiencing. Then, with affection and power, he proclaims the word to them, leading them to *interpret* the events they had experienced in the light of the Scriptures .... They themselves *choose* to resume their journey at once in the opposite direction, to return to the community and to share the experience of their encounter with the risen Lord.<sup>17</sup>

This threefold movement of *recognising* experience, *interpreting* it in the light of scripture and *choosing* to respond to grace (rather than temptation), while reflecting the classic ‘See, Judge, Act’ cycle of Cardinal Cardijn, is grounded firmly in the Ignatian tradition of spiritual discernment.

The same dynamic can be observed in Ignatius’ title or preface to the Rules for Discernment of Spirits:

Rules to aid us towards perceiving and then understanding, at least to some extent, the various motions which are caused in the soul: the good motions that they may be received, and the bad that they may be rejected (Exx 313).

For Ignatius, discernment involves a similar threefold process: of *perceiving*—or recognising—the various threads of one’s experience as they are remembered and brought into consciousness; *understanding*—or interpreting—these in the light of the gospel, the Church’s tradition and previous experience; and finally *choosing* to respond to what seems to come from God and rejecting everything else as distraction or temptation. Choice and action are at the heart of the process: the essential task of

<sup>15</sup> Austin, ‘Francis: The Discerning Pope’.

<sup>16</sup> *Christus vivit*, n. 281.

<sup>17</sup> *Christus vivit*, n. 237, quoting ‘Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment: Final Document’ (27 October 2018), n. 4.

discernment being to receive the motions of the good spirit and to reject those of the bad, as Rob Marsh says.<sup>18</sup> With his characteristic and uncompromising clarity, Ignatius boils it down in the end to a stark choice between good and bad: between what leads to life—the place of encounter with the living God—and what leads to a dead end.

There is more than a touch of this Ignatian starkness in Pope Francis's vision of the world, in which discernment is 'a genuine means of spiritual combat, helping us to follow the Lord more faithfully'. In order to fulfil its mission, the Church must help others to recognise and interpret their experience, and to choose well in response: to learn, in other words, to tell apart the 'promptings of the good Spirit' from the 'traps laid by the evil spirit—his empty works and promises'.<sup>19</sup>

It finally comes down to a Moses-like choice of life over death, led and informed by the Spirit. At both the macro- and micro-levels, the ecclesial and the personal, discernment, for Francis, is essentially a God-given 'time of choosing' between 'what matters and what passes away'; between what helps us get back on track and stay there with regard to God, and all that derails or diverts us.<sup>20</sup> In returning to where we began, it appears not only that Francis perceives an urgent need for conversion to discernment in the Church but that he sees discernment *as* conversion: a moment-by-moment conversion to Christ and the life-leavings of the Spirit.

Intrinsic to discernment, whether at the individual or institutional level, is an ongoing surrender of our limited 'plans, certainties and agendas' to God and a willingness to be led into a new and larger horizon of life.<sup>21</sup> Discernment and conversion converge, it seems, in Francis's vision for a Christ-centred, Christ-contemplating Church: a Church that is called, and calls others, again and again, to turn back to God, confident in God's mercy, and to choose life 'so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days' (Deuteronomy 30: 19–20).

**Tim McEvoy** holds a doctorate in early modern history from the University of Warwick and is a spiritual director at St Beuno's Jesuit Spirituality Centre in north Wales.

<sup>18</sup> Rob Marsh, 'Imagining Ignatian Spiritual Direction', *The Way*, 48/3 (July 2009), 38.

<sup>19</sup> *Christus vivit*, nn. 295, 293.

<sup>20</sup> Pope Francis, *urbi et orbi* blessing, 27 March 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Austin, 'Francis: The Discerning Pope'.

# POPE FRANCIS

## Reform and Resistance

*Austen Ivereigh*

The expense is reckoned,  
The enterprise is begun.  
It is of God.  
It cannot be withstood.  
So the faith was planted  
So it must be restored.<sup>1</sup>

THIS FAMOUSLY CONCLUDES St Edmund Campion's 'Challenge to the Privy Council', better known as 'Campion's Brag'. The scholar and Catholic convert penned his dazzling piece of Oxford rhetoric in 1580, shortly after returning to these shores as a Jesuit priest. His aim? To let the world know that far from being a traitor, he had come to England in peace, to preach the gospel and the traditional faith of England.

Campion brags not of his own powers, but of God's sovereignty. It is the brag of the high priest Gamaliel in the Gospel: that what is of God cannot be withstood, however hard it is opposed, even though along the road there will be defeats and reversals. It is that God is at work in the world, in charge of God's Church; but also that there is a battle, the one St Ignatius famously depicts in the *Spiritual Exercises*. In that battle, as Jorge Mario Bergoglio puts it in one of his early reflections on the Two Standards meditation, 'discernment is an instrument of struggle, and the struggle is to follow the Lord more closely'.<sup>2</sup>

My contention is that Campion's brag opens a window on to a papacy that has put discernment at its heart, and that Pope Francis's option accounts for the vehemence of the opposition to him. True reform is to take seriously that Christ is in charge of His Church; it is to make space for God to build God's people. It is a struggle because the goods of religion are vulnerable to being usurped and controlled, and harnessed

This article was given as the 2020 Campion Lecture at Campion Hall, Oxford, 23 January 2020.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Evelyn Waugh, *Edmund Campion* (London: Longmans Green, 1935), appendix 1, 222.

<sup>2</sup> Jorge Mario Bergoglio, 'Dos banderas', in *Meditaciones para religiosos* (Bilbao: Mensajero, 2014 [1982]), 160–166, here 163.

to purposes that are not of the gospel. Behind resistance to true reform is therefore an attempt to cling to the 'acquired fortune' of St Ignatius' 'Three Classes' (Exx 149–157).

Religion can be corrupted by this attempt to extract benefit from it: it can become a means of declaring ourselves innocent and others guilty, as Thomas Merton once put it.<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis often quotes Henri de Lubac's claim that the greatest danger that can befall the Church is spiritual worldliness: the harnessing of the gospel for purposes that are not those of God: the enrichment or prestige of the few.<sup>4</sup> Spiritual worldliness turns the Church from Christ even while it continues to speak of Him; it prevents the Church from evangelizing by reducing Christianity to an ideology or set of precepts safeguarded by an elite.

To live by discernment is to enter a place of combat, because spiritual worldliness resists exposure: it is to enter a world of angels of light, many of which are the bad spirit in disguise. Ignatius' Second Week rules are especially important in the reform of the Church because everyone claims to have the gospel and the good of the Church at heart. Yet as the clerical sex-abuse crisis has urgently shown, spiritual authority is sometimes used not to serve but exploit. In discernment, we must bargain for opposition and resistance: as *Campion's* brag says, *the expense is reckoned*. The expense is misunderstanding, rejection and persecution. To reckon that expense is to press ahead, regardless of what is thrown at you; to promise all unto the end, as *Campion* promises: 'while we have a man left to enjoy your Tyburn'.<sup>5</sup>

The Francis pontificate is the fruit of two principal discernments in his past: his navigation of an era of tribulation within the Society of Jesus in the late 1980s, and the Pentecost experience of the Latin American church meeting at Aparecida in 2007. Both were intense experiences of the movement of spirits within the ecclesial body: the first principally of desolation, the second mainly of consolation. But the pontificate is also the fruit of an ongoing apostolic discernment in common whose central locus is synodality, and in particular the reinvigorated synods of bishops that take place every two to three years in Rome. By considering in greater depth Francis's reliance on discernment, it will become clearer that the intensity of the resistance to Francis's pontificate shows forth precisely in those areas where discernment is at its heart.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Image, 1989 [1966]), 116.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Pope Francis, 'Christ Died and Rose for Us: The Only Medicine against the Worldly Spirit', homily, Rome, 16 May 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Waugh, *Edmund Campion*, 222.

### ***Francis's Discerning Leadership***

At the beginning of *Wounded Shepherd* I confessed that in my 2014 biography, *The Great Reformer*, I had unknowingly fed the idea of a superman Pope, the ecclesial counterpart of the myth of the heroic leader. Over the three years of writing *Wounded Shepherd* I came to understand that Francis is indeed a model leader, but of what might be called *post-heroic discerning leadership*.<sup>6</sup> The new understanding is reflected in the title. *Wounded Shepherd*, which comes from Francis telling clergy during the sex-abuse crisis in 2018 that they should not hide from the Church's wounds: they should not be lamenting those wounds but, by following them, they should be led to where Christ is—which is discernment. The title contains a further echo of an address by Francis in Santiago de Chile at the start of 2018, which stands as a summary of his reform: 'A wounded Church does not make herself the centre of things, does not believe that she is perfect, but puts at the centre the one who can heal those wounds, whose name is Jesus Christ'.<sup>7</sup>

Antonio Spadaro once told me once that he had asked Francis directly if he thought of himself as a 'great reformer'. The Pope had answered no. 'I think what I am doing is putting Christ at the centre, and the reforms follow', Spadaro reported him as saying.<sup>8</sup> It is not Francis who is the agent of conversion and change, but the centrality of Christ. But that does not reduce Francis's role. Like a spiritual director leading a person through an Ignatian retreat, helping the retreatant to centre him- or herself on Christ and God's will by understanding the movement of spirits, Francis is the spiritual director of the universal Church, guiding it to Christ by discernment.

As a discerning leader, Francis is not imposing a theological agenda or a



© Christoph Wäger

<sup>6</sup> Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (New York: Henry Holt, 2014) and *Wounded Shepherd: Pope Francis and His Struggle to Convert the Catholic Church* (New York: Henry Holt, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis, meeting with priests, consecrated men and women, and seminarians, Santiago de Chile, 16 January 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Antonio Spadaro, *Il nuovo mondo di Francesco. Come il Vaticano sta cambiando il mondo* (Venice: Marsilio, 2018), 12.

precooked plan; he accompanies, facilitates and enables a Spirit-led process, intervening when needed to confront obstacles or temptations that stand in the way of conversion. That means sometimes issuing challenges or sharp rebukes—to spiritual worldliness, clericalism, rigidity and so on—which then provoke revealing reactions. Francis learnt from his spiritual mentor, Miguel Ángel Fiorito, that the movement of the spirits is a good thing, a sign that spiritual struggle is under way, for unless the good spirit were involved, the bad spirit would not bother.<sup>9</sup> That is why Francis is untroubled by the signs of resistance. Asked about it he smiles, and likes to quote a phrase attributed to Cervantes's Don Quixote, that 'when the dogs are barking ... it is a sign we're moving ahead'.<sup>10</sup> Brought into the open and unmasked for what it is, opposition can be used to fulfil God's purposes. 'Opposition opens up a path, a way that can be followed', Francis told Spadaro. 'Speaking in general terms, I must say that I like opposition.'<sup>11</sup>

The paradox of the Francis papacy is that, while being deeply rooted in tradition and utterly faithful to the Church's teaching, he is generating seismic change even while decentralising the papacy and bolstering synodality and collegiality. The historian of church councils John O'Malley noted of the First Vatican Council that the difference between the ultramontanes and their opponents was that, for the first, the papacy was the centre from which everything flowed whereas, for the latter, it was the centre where everything came together.<sup>12</sup> Francis's exercise of the papacy is clearly the second, because it is neither centralist nor authoritarian. Yet, because of discernment, it has taken on something of the dynamism of the first. His reform opens the Church to new paths and new ways of seeing that rescue and renew tradition, never contradict it. As Francis likes to say, quoting Gustav Mahler: 'tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire'.<sup>13</sup>

Francis's discerning leadership is concerned less with changing structures than with reforming people, and then putting structures in place to support conversion. It is not a technocratic, functionalist kind of reform, but patient, operating within human limitations and concerned

<sup>9</sup> 'Father Miguel Ángel Fiorito: Pope Francis' Spiritual Director', *La Civiltà Cattolica* (22 December 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Ivereigh, *Wounded Shepherd*, 41.

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, conversation with Antonio Spadaro, in *En tus ojos está mi palabra. Homilías y discursos de Buenos Aires (1999–2013)*, edited by Antonio Spadaro (Madrid: Claretianas, 2018), 28.

<sup>12</sup> John O'Malley, *When Bishops Meet: An Essay Comparing Trent, Vatican I, and Vatican II* (Cambridge, Ma: Belknap, 2019), 72.

<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, concluding speech of the 2019 Amazon synod, 26 October 2019.



for building unity and communion. It is organic change, designed to last rather than to achieve immediate results. Above all, in the Vatican it is aimed at replacing a courtly, middleman culture with a culture of listening and service, and the progress in this regard has been remarkable, in spite of very few changes in personnel.<sup>14</sup>

A big part of the explanation for the Pope's dynamism is in his willingness to dwell in the tension of polarities, where discernment thrives. His leader's task is to sustain, in temporarily unresolved tension, the polarities of spirit and institution, tradition and newness, law and pastoral practice, truth and mercy, global and local, and so on. Keeping polarities in tension allows the Spirit to indicate, in the here and now, the path ahead—often a third possibility, unforeseen, that does not destroy the polar tension but renders it generative or creative. In *Evangelii gaudium* Francis describes this as a kind of peacemaking: 'it is the willingness to face conflict head on, to resolve it and make it a link in the chain of a new process' (n.227). This is not primarily an intellectual act but a spiritual one: by allowing for the resolution of what he calls 'contraposition' on a higher plane, through 'overflow', it is a response to conflict that takes seriously the incarnation and the Church as a *coincidentia oppositorum*.<sup>15</sup>

This discernment does not take place outside or apart from the broader Church, but through structures of deliberation and consultation that Pope Francis has created or reinvigorated. The so-called 'Council of Nine' cardinal advisors, the C9, as well as the college of cardinals and the reformed synods of bishops, have all become important mechanisms of discernment, framed by the sensibility of the people of God and their pastoral needs. Francis makes changes in pastoral practice and law only when a peaceful consensus has emerged and there is evidence of conversion—signs of the Spirit. Without them, Francis prefers not to act; but when he sees them he will proceed decisively, reckoning the expense of opposition.

The Family Synod of 2015, for example, ended with barely a two-thirds majority on the contentious question of communion for the divorced, but he moved ahead with *Amoris laetitia* (knowing the resistance it would

<sup>14</sup> See Ivireigh, *Wounded Shepherd*, chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>15</sup> Francis discusses this thinking in detail in part 2 of Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*. In *Conversation with Austen Ivireigh* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020). 'Overflow' (*desborde*) is Francis's term for the action of the Holy Spirit in moments of paralysis or conflict, 'one that invites us to look beyond and generates a "transcending" dynamic every time life seems to get bogged down in interpretations that contradict each other in mutual exclusion'. See Diego Fares, 'The Heart of Querida Amazonia: "Overflowing en route"', *La Civiltà Cattolica* (15 May 2020), 25.

provoke) because the signs of conversion and convergence were unmistakable at the end of the synod, when there was an unexpected breakthrough following weeks of apparently deepening polarization. ‘Many of us have felt the working of the Holy Spirit who is the real protagonist and guide of the Synod’, Francis told the bishops in his final speech.<sup>16</sup>

The resistance to the Francis pontificate is not to be found in this or that criticism or objection, but in a rejection of this way of proceeding. It is a rejection of discernment, which is misread as a dilution or obfuscation. The desire is for authoritarian leadership, but only to provide divine sanction for ideological world-views. If the Pope speaks boldly of ethical imperatives rejected by that ideology but demanded by the gospel—care for the earth and migrants, for example, or opposition to the death penalty—he is told he has no authority to speak of such matters.

There is a clear parallel with the nineteenth-century reaction to the aftermath of French Revolution, which looked to the papacy as a source of iron stability in the midst of political and social chaos, outside the vicissitudes of history. When Leo XIII, after 1891, broke the Church free from that reactionary movement and turned it to re-engage with modernity (arguing that democracy was in principle acceptable, and that workers should receive a just wage) he was the target of dismissive anger and scorn very similar to that endured now by Francis over his 2015 encyclical on ‘care for our common home’, *Laudato si’*.

This kind of resistance is not the normal stuff of intra-ecclesial debate: Catholics disagreeing with or criticising the Pope over ethical issues, ecclesiologies and theologies. The mobilisation and fury directed at Francis are different in kind, and of a different order. They are an attack, principally, on his authority to lead the Church through discernment, which is why the resistance has been most intense at those moments when the Pope has relied on discernment.

### ***A Lifetime Discerning***

The Pope likes to say that he was not expecting his change of diocese in March 2013. But he came to the role, above all, with a profound grasp of the reasons behind the Church’s failure to evangelize Western modernity. That discernment was powerfully expressed at the meeting of the Latin American bishops at Aparecida, Brazil, in May 2007, which is in many ways

<sup>16</sup> Pope Francis, concluding speech of the 2015 Family Synod, 24 October 2015. On the eleventh-hour resolution of the communion question, see *Wounded Shepherd*, chapter 9.

the basis for this pontificate. But Aparecida, in turn, must be understood in the light of the significance of the late 1980s in Bergoglio's life.

### *The Córdoba Exile*

Much has been written of Francis's so-called 'Córdoba exile', his period of desolation in 1990–1992. In reality, those two years were the culmination of a six-year period of profound tribulation in the Society of Jesus in Argentina, when Bergoglio was in his fifties. Blamed and rejected by the Argentinian provincial governance appointed by the new Superior General in Rome, Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, Bergoglio spent a number of years without a clear role in the Province, researching and writing up a thesis on Romano Guardini's theory of polar opposition.<sup>17</sup>

The main fruit of those years were some of his most sublime reflections on the temptations facing apostolic bodies in tribulation. Using the wisdom of Ignatius' Second Week rules in the *Spiritual Exercises*, he developed criteria to avoid being dragged down by institutional desolation. This means being aware of the evasions and temptations characteristic of times of stress, when God seems absent. These include: to debate ideas rather than discern the situation; to long for past glories or live in fantasy futures; to become fixated on enemies, developing a sense of persecution and an exaggerated feeling of victimhood, dividing the world into goodies (us) and baddies (them); and to live in a state of permanent anxiety and suspicion, seeing everything through a distorted lens. All are temptations to close ourselves off from Christ and the grace of conversion that He offers in such times; they are to stare fearfully at the waves and ignore Christ calling us out of the boat; to shrink back in horror into our comfort zones, like Jonah rushing back to the security of Tarshish.

Bergoglio wrote to the Chilean bishops in May 2018,

It is at times like this, when we are weak, frightened and armour-plated in our comfortable winter palaces, that God's love comes out to meet us, in order to purify our intentions, that we might love as free, mature and critical people.<sup>18</sup>

The word I have rendered as 'armour-plated', *abroquelados* (literally 'buckled-up') is the same one that he uses in his 1980s writings to describe

<sup>17</sup> On this difficult but fruitful period, see Ivereigh, *Great Reformer*, chapter 5. Bergoglio's thesis is described and discussed by Massimo Borghesi, *The Mind of Pope Francis: Jorge Mario Bergoglio's Intellectual Journey*, translated by Barry Hudock (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2017), chapter 3.

<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis, 'Letter Sent by the Holy Father to the Bishops of Chile Following the Report of Archbishop Charles J. Scicluna', 8 April 2018 (my translation).

this state of ‘beleaguered’ self-withholding. The temptation in tribulation is to refuse to discern—to ask, *What is the Holy Spirit asking of us? How must we change?*—but rather to lament our loss, to pine for old times and to condemn, and also to take refuge in ethicism and moralism rather than focusing on the person of Christ and His saving love and mercy. Applied to the Church, it is a mindset that is cold and remote, grim and joyless. It is a Christianity without the life-giving, joyful person of Christ, one reduced to what, in *Evangelii gaudium*, Francis calls *eticismo sin bondad*, a merciless moralism. Without the encounter with the person of Christ at the centre of our proclamation, he says, we end up offering charity without truth and truth without charity.<sup>19</sup>

### *Aparecida*

You can see this discernment at Aparecida in 2007. The final document, whose drafting was coordinated by Bergoglio, rejects attitudes that see only ‘confusion, danger and threats’ in modernity, or which seek to respond with ‘worn-out ideologies or irresponsible aggressions’: that is, a Church in desolation blaming the culture for its failure to evangelize.<sup>20</sup> In a letter written to catechists in Buenos Aires a few months after Aparecida, Bergoglio observed that perhaps the greatest threat to the Church lay not outside but within, from the ‘eternal and subtle temptation of beleaguered self-enclosure in order to feel more protected and secure’. (He again used the word *abroquelamiento*.)<sup>21</sup> This is a potent description of the Church in the secularising era of globalisation. Faced with the tribulation of the loss of support from law and culture, the Church has too often become haughty, distant, moralistic and reactionary.

Aparecida was a remarkable, Pentecost-like event. Just as in the upper room in Jerusalem, when the shattered and fearful disciples were visited by the Holy Spirit and emboldened for mission, the meeting of the Latin American bishops at the Brazilian shrine unleashed the missionary potential of the Church in Latin America, giving it new energy and direction at a time of fear and uncertainty.

The speech Bergoglio gave to the cardinals in March 2013 is well known: he talked about a self-referential Church needing to go out to the peripheries, to be a loving mother who lived from the sweet joy of

<sup>19</sup> *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 231. See also Pope Francis, meeting with priests, consecrated men and women, and seminarians, Santiago de Chile, 16 January 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Fifth Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, *Concluding Document*, n. 11, available at <https://www.celam.org/aparecida/Ingles.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Bergoglio, ‘Carta a los catequistas’, in *En tus ojos está mi palabra*, 692.

evangelization. Less well known is that six years earlier he said almost exactly the same in a homily at the Aparecida meeting, which made a very deep impression on those present. He used the same image of the Church as being like the crippled woman in the Gospel ‘who does no more than look at herself, with the people of God off somewhere else’.<sup>22</sup> The homily captivated his hearers, convincing many that Bergoglio was anointed to lead. In other words, to the same discernment, in 2007 and again in 2013, the bishops in Aparecida and the cardinals at the pre-conclave gathering in Rome five years later had precisely the same reaction.<sup>23</sup>

For anyone who knows St Ignatius’ discernment rules, this anointing and confirmation are highly significant. Thus, the election of Aparecida’s leading light, and the author of its concluding document in March 2013 seemed to confirm to many what those at the shrine had seen and felt. Francis has spoken often of the experience of peace and freedom on the night of his election as the reason for an unexpected joy and consolation which have never left him, despite his pontificate amply demonstrating what Hans Urs von Balthasar wrote of the Office of Peter, that ‘it will be the magnetic pole that attracts the darkest powers of world history’.<sup>24</sup>

The great achievement of Aparecida was not its analysis of the liquidity of contemporary globalised modernity but its recognition of the consequences for the Church’s evangelization: the dissolution of the bonds of belonging meant that the Church could no longer rely on Catholic structures buttressed by law and cultural affirmation, but must become like the early Church: poor, missionary, humble, grace-dependent, witnessing to Christ not as an idea but as an experience of encounter. Aparecida spoke much of the need for this *encuentro fundante*. Rather than lamenting and condemning, the bishops asked how the Church needed to change in order to respond to its new circumstances and to offer, at every turn, that founding encounter.

*Wounded Shepherd* is essentially the story of the implementation of this discernment in the pontificate. It is an account of the Latin American Pentecost spreading north to Rome, bringing about a new orientation, a change of source Church for a change of era. If in past eras the source for the universal Church was the Middle East, and later Western Europe—Spain and Italy at the time of Trent, Germany and France at

**Christ, not as an idea but as an experience of encounter**

<sup>22</sup> Jorge Mario Bergoglio, homily, shrine of Aparecida, 16 May 2007, in *En tus ojos está mi palabra*, 673–674.

<sup>23</sup> Ivereigh, *Wounded Shepherd*, 158–161.

<sup>24</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*, translated by Andrée Emery (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 19.



© Valter Campanato/ABr - Agência Brasil

*Benedict XVI opens the meeting of Latin American bishops at Aparecida, 13 May 2007*

Vatican II—now it is Latin America, expressed in the vision of Aparecida, reformulated for the universal Church in the magisterium of Francis.

At the same time Francis has engendered a new phase of the reception of Vatican II, implementing and expanding the council as Latin America has done, rather than trying to reinterpret or restrict it, as Europeans and North Americans have too often tried to do. The conservative political and cultural narrative of the 1960s as the origin of contemporary decline—with its corresponding Catholic conservative view of Vatican II as the cause of shrinking congregations—makes no sense in Latin America or in the global South generally. Rather, as I found in my interviews with them, Latin American church leaders are shocked and disappointed that the European Church, which lit the flame of the council, should have let the fire go out. They see the empty churches of Western Europe not as the product of the council but a retreat from it, and suggest that the Francis pontificate is enabling Europe to rekindle that fire.

Because it does not have a pessimistic narrative linking modernity to decline, Francis's pontificate is free of the neo-Constantinian, integralist yearnings of reactionary Catholicism in Europe and North America. The attraction of populist nationalism for beleaguered Christians in Europe is, according to Francis, an example of 'false consolation'—a way of avoiding evangelizing modernity by retreating into fantasies of restoration. Christianity will revive as soon as it focuses not on its loss of power but the needs of its people. *Evangelii gaudium* is an attempt to shake the Church free of false consolations, of its excuses not to evangelize. *Laudato si'* demands action now, in the world-as-it-is, to deal with the concrete emergency that is the social and economic devastation brought about by

technocracy and build an alternative modernity. *Amoris laetitia* is a bid to rescue Catholicism from the false consolation of nominalism and legalism.

Thus Francis, in *Amoris laetitia*, regrets that ‘we have long thought that simply by stressing doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues, without encouraging openness to grace, we were providing sufficient support to families, strengthening the marriage bond and giving meaning to marital life’, and says the Church has to learn to communicate marriage as ‘a dynamic path to personal development and fulfilment’, rather than as ‘a lifelong burden’ (n.37). Rather than simply denouncing divorce and same-sex marriage, the Church has to walk with people, facilitating the grace that will enable them to commit themselves and stay together.<sup>25</sup>

Aparecida represented a shift in self-understanding. In theological terms, it is arguably a definitive move away from a deductive, neo-classicist epistemology to an inductive, pastoral approach characteristic of Latin American Catholicism. All Francis’s teaching documents use the so-called ‘See, Judge, Act’ method—reformulated by Francis as ‘Contemplate, Discern, Propose’—to make clear that we look with the eyes of the disciple and the Good Shepherd, rather than imposing abstract and universal ideas typical of ideologies. Of course, this is the approach of Vatican II. But in the epistemologies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI there persisted what Gerard Whelan calls ‘a perceptualism with roots in classicism’, which pays little attention to the process of discovery and moral growth in human lives and which assumes that the truth clearly explained is easy to see and that the choice is whether or not to comply with it.<sup>26</sup>

The critical realist or inductive pastoral approach of Pope Francis, on the other hand, starts by attending to pastoral realities and the operation of grace in people’s lives. It is conscious of culture, and of limits and frailties, especially of the poor; and it understands the Church’s task as helping people respond better to grace within the concrete circumstances of their lives. It assumes that the Church needs, like Jesus, to be more interested in sinners’ desire for conversion than their sin, and that it is Pharisaical to lay down the law but not help people live it by opening them to God’s grace. It implies a decentralised ecclesiology which takes the people of God seriously as an evangelizing subject, and a Samaritan, pastoral, missionary outlook which takes seriously gradualism in moral development.

<sup>25</sup> On the shift performed in *Amoris laetitia* and its impact on church praxis, see *Alegria e Misericórdia. A teologia do Papa Francisco para las familias*, edited by Miguel Almeida (Braga: Frente e Verso, 2020).

<sup>26</sup> Gerard Whelan, *A Discerning Church: Pope Francis, Lonergan, and a Theological Method for the Future* (New York: Paulist, 2019), 75.

*Amoris laetitia* says that ‘we have been called to form consciences, not replace them’ (n.37). The moral theologian James Keenan calls this a ‘sensational phrase’, meaning that from now on pastors and theologians must accompany and form consciences: it is not enough to regurgitate doctrines; pastors must help people understand what God is asking them to do in the concrete here-and-now of the world-as-it-is rather than the world-as-it-should-be of neo-Scholastic categories.<sup>27</sup> As Francis once pointed out in a homily in Medellín, Colombia, Jesus took his disciples out to the lepers and the lame so that they would deal in human realities rather than take refuge in legal categories.<sup>28</sup>

Aparecida understood that, in an era of globalisation, the Church had to be, above all, close and concrete, if it is to witness to the incarnation.<sup>29</sup> The weakening of institutions, the dissolution of the bonds of belonging and the degradation of nature all crippled the poor especially, but produced a deep anguish in wider humanity: *affective*, in the sense of suffering the loss of ties of love and trust that sustain a healthy existence; *existential*, in that the impermanence of contemporary life made it hard to plan and commit; and *spiritual*, in that the geography and architecture of modernity were increasingly empty of signs of the transcendent, deprived of sanctuaries where people might know themselves as beloved of God.

What technocracy has dissolved by the logic of power, the Church is called to rebuild, not through alliances with new Constantines, but from below, in actions and movements that restore bonds of trust and belonging in the fresh light of the gospel. Speaking in Paraguay in July 2015, Francis said the Lord was speaking very clearly today to the Church: ‘in the mentality of the Gospel, you do not convince people with arguments, strategies or tactics. You convince them by simply learning how to welcome them’.<sup>30</sup> The Church is called to be ‘a mother who reaches out, a welcoming home, a constant school of missionary communion’, as Aparecida puts it.<sup>31</sup>

This is really the heart of the pontificate. It sounds simple, but is the fruit of a profound discernment. To evangelize is to offer the founding encounter with the mercy of Christ; to be saved is to experience that encounter. God’s love is not a reward for conversion and ethical

<sup>27</sup> James F. Keenan, ‘Reading “Amoris laetitia” in the New Light of Easter’, *Cruix* (21 April 2017), at <https://cruixnow.com/vatican/2017/04/reading-amoris-laetitia-new-light-easter/>, accessed 8 September 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Pope Francis, ‘The Christian Life as Discipleship’, homily, Medellín, 9 September 2017.

<sup>29</sup> For ‘close and concrete’, see Pope Francis, homily for World Youth Day, Panama, 27 January 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Pope Francis, homily, Nu Guazú, Asunción, Paraguay, 12 July 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Fifth Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, *Concluding Document*, n. 370.



transformation but what triggers them; in a liquid world of sink-or-swim competitiveness, where we are never good enough, it is God's shocking mercy, not a moral code, that captivates us, and allows us to be fruitful even when we are not productive. Only a Church that is close and concrete can perform that mercy.

### ***Resistance and Reckoning***

Having sketched some areas that illustrate how the pontificate is a fruit of discernment, it remains to argue that resistance to the pontificate shows forth precisely in those areas where discernment is at its heart.

To be clear, resistance is not criticism. But sometimes criticism contains resistance. Francis himself distinguishes between criticism from people of good will and bad-spirit resistance. You can discern them partly by the way they manifest themselves. Thus, good-will criticism is transparent and open to dialogue—a speech or an article, say. Bad-spirit resistance, on the other hand, is an attack on the Pope's authority: either covertly, by those who throw stones but then hide their hand, or the full-frontal assault of those who brazenly denounce and accuse while claiming the mantle of tradition or orthodoxy. Good-will criticism is healthy and welcome, and needs a response; but the appropriate response to the second is silence: you do not negotiate with the bad spirit.<sup>32</sup>

One of the ways in which the enemy of human nature seduces Catholics is to persuade them that the Church is being denatured, and that the Church needs in some way to be saved from itself—or from whichever group is seen to be corrupting it. Such attitudes always conceal a doubt that God is really in charge of God's Church. The other thing to consider is effects. A bad-spirit attack divides, and what is divided is the body. But it is also true to say that it involves a separation from the body—a distrustful self-withholding, an aloofness, a repulsion, all characteristics of the bad spirit. On a flight from Africa in 2019, Francis spoke about the bad-spirit resistance as schismatic, and said: 'The schismatics always have one thing in common: they separate themselves from the people, from the faith of the people of God'.<sup>33</sup>

In his Jesuit writings, Bergoglio called this the 'isolated conscience'. In an interview in 2007 he spoke of Jonah fleeing from the mission that the Lord had given him to evangelize Nineveh because God's mercy did

<sup>32</sup> Ivereigh, *Wounded Shepherd*, 84–85.

<sup>33</sup> Pope Francis, press conference on his flight from Madagascar, 11 September 2019.

not fit in with his plans. 'How the isolated conscience heartens the heart! Jonah knew nothing of God's ability to lead his people with the heart of the Father.'<sup>34</sup> In the 1970s Bergoglio spoke of 'the conscience isolated from the march of the people of God', manifest in the ideological rigidity of enlightened intellectuals, of left or right, who fail to see,

... the real movement going on among God's faithful people .... Thus they fail to join in the march of history where God is saving us, God is making us a body, an institution, God's power enters history so as to make of human beings a single body.<sup>35</sup>

This is key to understanding Francis's own understanding of the origins of bad-spirit resistance: an aristocratic mindset that sees itself as separate from and superior to the body of the people of God, and which blocks the divine action building that body. This is the isolated conscience.

In one early Jesuit essay Francis describes how Jesus avoided the elite religious groups of his time and went straight to the people. The Pharisees, Saducees and zealots of the time suffered from an isolated conscience. They denied God agency by thinking on behalf of the people and for the people, but never *with* the people. They were arrogant, in the true sense of the word, in wanting to arrogate God's power and glory to build themselves up, rather than letting God build up the people. They hated Jesus because he was essentially denying them that power; so they were consumed by *invidia*, envy, which literally means a not-seeing—they saw not salvation but a threat to their interests. Because they were caught in the logic of power and control, they could not respect or recognise the divine being born in the culture of ordinary people, in a Kingdom where the poor and sinners are protagonists.

For Bergoglio then and Francis now, this is precisely the terrain of the spiritual combat within the Church: God is working through the Church to build the people of God, while Satan works to subvert that mission. The mission is manifest, like the incarnation, in closeness and concreteness, the *syncatabasis*; the mission is subverted by clericalism (which is not just a vice of clerics)—rigidity, remoteness, the isolated conscience.

As a Jesuit, Bergoglio wrote that at the origin of the isolated conscience there is always a desire to cling to something: a wealth, a privilege, a

<sup>34</sup> Stefania Felasca, 'Quello che avrei detto al consistoro: Intervista con il cardinale Jorge Mario Bergoglio', *30Giorni* (November 2007), at [http://www.30giorni.it/articoli\\_id\\_15978\\_11.htm](http://www.30giorni.it/articoli_id_15978_11.htm), accessed 9 September 2020.

<sup>35</sup> Jorge Mario Bergoglio, 'Formación permanente y reconciliación', in *Meditaciones para religiosos*, 89.

benefit.<sup>36</sup> To use a famous Bergoglio distinction, rather than mediators, expending themselves for the sake of others (*ministerium*), clericalists are intermediaries, enriching themselves at the expense of others (*potestas*). The perversion ends in the clerical sex-abuse crisis, which is the revelation of pastors who were pledged to serving the vulnerable exploiting them for gratification. That is why Francis refers to the root of the crisis as power, and the shocking revelations by victims as the Spirit exposing the action of the Lord of the World.<sup>37</sup>

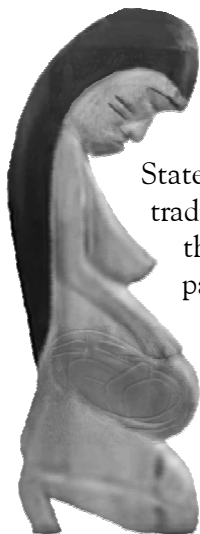
Against this background, we can see why the synod of bishops has become so important to the vision and mission of this pontificate. Francis's dynamic, reformed synods are a mechanism of ecclesial discernment in common. They are also a means of pastoral conversion, a chance to replace the narrow, myopic spectacles of the doctors of the law with the wide-angled lens of the heart of the Good Shepherd.

You can see the effect of discernment in the synods of this pontificate. What is exposed is what keeps the Church from pastoral proximity. The object is for pastors to be better present to those situations (closeness) through a dialogue within the people of God; its fruit is inculturation, allowing God to enter into the life of a people, forming it, by bringing to fruition the Seeds of the Word already present there, through discernment in common: not questioning or debating doctrine, but allowing the Spirit to reveal what the Church needs to change to help people live that doctrine. Hence almost all the most ferocious attacks under Francis have taken place at or around the synods, and are aimed precisely at undermining this process of inculturation. The argument is always that there is nothing to discern; law and doctrine are clear, unchanged, and only in need of clear defence and explanation. Any talk of discernment is a cover for the dilution of the law. The only possible role for the people of God is to obey the law.

In *Wounded Shepherd*, I dedicate a chapter (nine) to the Family Synods of 2014 and 2015 where all this is described. The synod on the Amazon in October 2019 was an even more vivid example of how resistance to Francis is a rejection of the people of God as discerning subjects—denying them agency. The preparation involved in the synod was amazing: a two-year process of meetings and dialogue, more than 60,000 people giving their views, meetings across the region of pastors and people, indigenous

<sup>36</sup> Jorge Mario Bergoglio, 'Tres binarios', in *Meditaciones para religiosos*, 175.

<sup>37</sup> *Wounded Shepherd*, chapter 5.



communities and missionaries. The organizers were consoled: the Spirit was speaking to the whole of humanity through the plight of the native peoples and the destruction of the nature around them.

Yet for parts of the ideological Catholic media in the United States the whole exercise was seen as a conspiracy to subvert the tradition of celibacy. Inculturation was dismissed as syncretism. When the indigenous people were given the chance to speak, they were painted as unorthodox. When they prayed in the Vatican with artefacts of their culture—a canoe, and some simple carvings of a pregnant Amazonian woman—they were told they were pagans. EWTN even described the carvings as idols, raising a firestorm on social media and inspiring an Austrian integralist to steal the figurines from a church and throw them into the Tiber.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, the synod proceeded calmly, serenely, and reached consensus on many topics despite lingering disagreements over the *virī probatī* issue. Francis was careful never to engage with the attacks, quietly restoring the carvings (rescued by the police) to the church and asking the Church to focus on the diagnosis the synod made: in other words, the human and natural realities. Francis meanwhile made clear where he stood: processing in among the native delegation, the pastor with his people, across St Peter's Square to the synod hall.

Even when discernment itself is attacked and questioned, the Pope never stops discerning and helping others to discern. His capacity to resist the mimetic contagion of accusation and counter-accusation is remarkable. He is convinced that reform and resistance are part of the same dynamic—the spiritual combat provoked by discernment itself. If he is a great reformer, it is because of Campion's brag: his total confidence that God is in charge and what is of God cannot be withstood. The expense is reckoned; the shepherd carries the wounds of the attacks, but is never diverted. So the faith is planted; so must it be restored.

**Austen Ivereigh** is a writer, journalist, papal biographer and fellow in contemporary church history at Campion Hall, Oxford. He is author of *The Great Reformer* (2014), and *Wounded Shepherd* (2019). Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream: The Road to a Better Future*. *In conversation with Austen Ivereigh* will be published in early December 2020.

<sup>38</sup> See Mitch Pacwa, *Scripture and Tradition*, episode 44, available at <https://listen.ewtn.com/STP/STP18083.mp3>, accessed 8 September 2020.

# MOTHERING SUNDAYS

## Pope Francis and the Challenge of Women's Role within the Church

*Gemma Simmonds*

IN MANY WAYS POPE FRANCIS has been a reforming pope, if not a revolutionary. From the beginning of his papacy he has waged an unrelenting war against the abuse of power within the world and especially within the Church. He has advocated a Church whose central message is God's mercy and whose model of authentic power is service. He himself has incarnated this in his abandonment of significant signs of privilege attached to his own office, whether as Pope or, previously, as archbishop of Buenos Aires. Photographs of the Pope kneeling and washing the feet of women and non-Christians or embracing people with deformities have gone viral, and he has made clear the distinction he wishes to have made between God-given authority and secular projections of idolatrous power. His willingness to ride roughshod over papal protocol and to open up dialogue over such neuralgic topics as the climate crisis, same-sex attraction, abortion, capital punishment and the global plight of migrants shows him to be a man of courage as well as humility, willing to apologise for the Church's institutional failings and to put himself in the firing line of his vociferous conservative critics.

But an appraisal of his record to date on root-and-branch reform within the Church regarding the role of women is less easy to bring into clear and coherent focus. If we look at his pronouncements about women in the Church and within wider society, they can be outspoken and challenging, but they can also appear to many feminists as hopelessly essentialist and sentimental. Many people on both the liberal and the conservative sides of the ecclesial spectrum have expressed their disappointment at Pope Francis's refusal to operate out of a model of leadership that imposes global solutions on local and particularised situations. They want him to take a stand and either reinforce the rules of what they deem 'Catholic tradition' or to change them radically. Instead he has repeatedly suggested that the faithful act as adults and find their own solutions to the questions that challenge them. Insisting on the principle

of subsidiarity and advocating a synodal approach to many ecclesial questions, he has attempted to devolve power back to local pastors and to the *sensus fidelium* of the people of God in conversation with them.

There is one area, however, where this principle has not been applied and where a categorical refusal to enter into a dialogue open to structural change has been clear, namely that of women's role in the Church. Pope Francis has not been immune from speaking of women as a unified, global category, despite the fact that such a category cannot helpfully be claimed to exist. There is as much difference between a white, middle-aged European female academic, a poverty-stricken African widow and a young single mother in a Syrian refugee camp as there is between a man and a woman.

The exclusion from the 2015 Synod on the Family of all but a handful of women (many of them included only in the context of their relationship with their husbands) and the continuing talk of 'women's role' in the Church, of 'women's issues' and the 'feminine genius' is problematic. When Francis talks, even in a benign way, of women's genius, and says that 'we have not yet come up with a profound theology of womanhood in the Church', it reinforces the notion of a Church of 'we/us', meaning men, the mainstream—or, as Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza calls it, male-stream—members and the 'others': women, reduced to a category, an object of study or specialist concern.<sup>1</sup>

### **Power Relationships**

For an understanding of Pope Francis and his attitude to women it is perhaps easier to approach from an oblique angle, concentrating less on his direct pronouncements about them and more on what he has said and done within the wider context of relationships of power. His extended and unrelenting critique of clericalism in all its forms has been well documented. In a meeting with religious superiors in November 2013 he called for a formation of the heart for future priests, warning that without it they would be formed into 'little monsters' who would in turn mould the people of God in their own image.<sup>2</sup> To the clergy he has

<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, press conference on his return flight from Rio de Janeiro, 28 July 2019. For more on this see Gemma Simmonds, 'Women at the Grassroots Level of Church Leadership', in *Towards Just Gender Relations: Rethinking the Role of Women in Church and Society*, edited by Gunter Prüller-Jagenteufel and others (Vienna: Vienna U, 2019), 29–36.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Antonio Spadaro, "'Svegliate il mondo!'" Colloquio di Papa Francesco con i Superiori Generali', *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 3925 (4 January 2014), 3–17, here 11.

offered as a specific model St Joseph, the embodiment of the 'lowly, concrete and faithful service' which he sees as the foundation of the 'revolution of tenderness' to which the whole Church is summoned by the incarnate Son of God.<sup>3</sup>

Francis has also shown himself, in practical terms, to be sensitive to issues of the abuse of power specifically involving women. While some commentators depict Francis as backing the Vatican's catastrophically clumsy attempt to control the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in the USA, he is widely credited among women religious with having brought about a much-needed and generally pacific end to this unseemly power struggle.<sup>4</sup> He has nevertheless been sensitive also to the abuses of power revealed within women's religious communities themselves, where sisters from the global South have been brought to the global North in what Francis has described as an implicit form of trafficking, serving to prop up failing structures and institutions at considerable personal cost while being denied the necessary forms of support, training and agency to develop their capacity for autonomy and full human flourishing. This is not his only critique of the structural abuse of power to be found in religious life; elsewhere he cites a desire for domination and a lack of dialogue, accountability and transparency as the culprits.<sup>5</sup>

On the domestic front he has been equally forceful in favour of women. Visiting a shrine in Peru in 2018 he called for an end to femicide and to a culture of *machismo* in his native Latin America that is deeply dangerous to women. Calling women, mothers and grandmothers, the guiding force for families, he urged changes in the law and in culture to protect women, end the scourge of domestic violence and increase the social and ecclesial responsibilities of women in a way that allows their voices to be heard while being in harmony with family life.<sup>6</sup>

Supporters of Francis point to his repeated expressions of a desire for a more inclusive Church in which the role of women in decision-making is promoted and encouraged, citing the need for the 'feminine genius' when it comes to important decision-making. But his catechesis during the general audience of 15 April 2015 was a brief but trenchant critique of

<sup>3</sup> *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 88.

<sup>4</sup> Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (London: Allen and Unwin, 2014), 385.

<sup>5</sup> Alejandro Labajos, 'Abusos de poder y de conciencia en la vida consagrada', *Vida Nueva*, 3/191, (12–18 September, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, greeting of the Holy Father, Puerto Maldonado, Peru, 19 January 2018.

gender theory, as he understands it, emphasizing the complementarity of gender difference. While underlining the need for gender reciprocity he also says:

There is no doubt that we must do far more to advance women, if we want to give more strength to the reciprocity between man and woman. In fact, it is necessary that woman not only be listened to more, but that her voice carry real weight, a recognized authority in society and in the Church.

He points to the inclusive ministry of Jesus as a model for the Church, while elsewhere he stresses the key role of women as the first witnesses to the resurrection (Luke 24: 1–10) and as co-evangelizers with Paul and those who first spread the gospel. Once more he refers to ‘the feminine genius’, calling for greater creativity and courage in making space for women’s particular gifts within the Church and the world.<sup>7</sup>

In his ‘Letter to the People of God’ of 20 August 2018, Francis again points out the vital need for a more widespread and active participation by women in key decision-making moments within the Church if it is to be healthy, stating,

Without the active participation of all the Church’s members, everything being done to uproot the culture of abuse in our communities will not be successful in generating the necessary dynamics for sound and realistic change.<sup>8</sup>

His linking of the issue of the empowerment of women to that of clerical abuse of power is a hopeful sign for the reform of the Church, but those hoping to see concrete changes offering scope to its female members have largely been disappointed. The linking of these two issues, indeed, has proved the foundation of Francis’ insistent arguments against the ordination of women to the diaconate, having raised the hopes of many when he called together a theological commission to advise him on this issue.

Other concrete reforms remain pitifully slow. Some see this as a sign that Pope Francis’s reforms go some way but that they are little more than a cosmetic change to an otherwise fundamentally similar ecclesiological outlook to that of his immediate predecessors. Seven years into his papacy, how can we assess his track record as Pope where

<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis, general audience, 15 April 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, ‘Letter to the People of God’, 20 August 2018.





*Pope Francis greets religious sisters before a special audience at the Vatican*

women are concerned? If Francis has been genuine in his expressed desire to see an increased representation of women in the Church's ministries, he has not been successful in finding a way to concretise that desire in widespread effective action.

### ***Female Agency***

There have been some appointments of symbolic significance. During the time of his papacy he has hired over a thousand women, making up 22 per cent of all Vatican employees.<sup>9</sup> That, in itself, is a distinct shift. But the appointments have been in departments such as the Vatican library, the museums and the finance department. Appointments carrying more theological weight are still the preserve of clerics, and therefore of men. If women's voices are truly to be listened to more, if their voices are to carry real weight so that women's experience and ways of thinking come to carry a recognised authority in society and in the Church, it is well over time for there to be further shifts.

Like his immediate predecessors, Pope Francis has been incisive in his analysis of the need for the world's governments to improve the socio-economic lot of women, stating that bettering women's lives indirectly enriches the quality of life for all citizens. As the UN

<sup>9</sup> Gudrun Sailer, 'Number of Women Employees in the Vatican on the Rise', *Vatican News* (6 March 2020), at <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2020-03/number-of-women-employees-in-the-vatican-on-the-rise.html>.

Sustainable Development Goals have demonstrated, women worldwide carry an especially heavy burden in the face of endemic sickness and poverty, as well as of ecological degradation.<sup>10</sup> The education of women empowers them to participate in decision-making and in the economic well-being of their family as well as in reducing child mortality and improving maternal health.

But education is not enough. The economic and social contribution that women can make within wider society cannot come about without increasing the female power of agency.<sup>11</sup> If this is clear in the secular sphere, then it is also clear within the Church, but Pope Francis has given little clear indication, beyond hopeful exhortation, of what that increased agency might look like, and without changes in structures there is unlikely to be much change in the prevailing culture. Women feature predominantly as catechists and evangelizers of children, but less frequently do women's voices reach a wider, adult audience. As preaching is chiefly a clerical preserve, the concerns and perceptions of lay women, and men, have less public traction and where there are issues concerning family life, where women are particularly vulnerable, their voices are seldom heard proclaiming and commenting on the gospel in a way that proves liberating and empowering.

Paragraphs 99–105 of *Querida Amazonia* are specially dedicated to consideration of the strength and gift of women. Pope Francis points to the fact that the faith has long been preserved and handed on in Amazonian communities despite their not having seen a priest for years, even for decades. He attributes this to the presence of strong and generous women who have responded to the Spirit's call to work as missionaries, baptizing, catechizing and praying. The devotion and faith of these women has kept the Church alive within their communities for centuries. Praising this devotion and acknowledging its implicit role in broadening the general vision of what ecclesial leadership means, Francis nonetheless warns against restricting the understanding of the Church to its functional structures. He sees this as a form of reductionism leading to the belief that women will only be granted greater status and participation in the Church through ordination. This

<sup>10</sup> See 'Sustainable Development Goals', *United Nations*, at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>, accessed 17 September 2020.

<sup>11</sup> See Marcel Uwizeza, 'Pope Francis, Women and the Rwandan Experience', Georgetown University, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, at <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/pope-francis-women-and-the-rwandan-experience>, accessed 17 September 2020.

narrowing of vision to a single issue risks clericalising women, diminishing the value of what they have already accomplished and rendering their contribution less effective.

### ***The Proper Contribution of Women***

Phyllis Zagano, a renowned scholar and one of the world's foremost experts in the history of the diaconate, refutes this view. She was appointed in 2016 to the original twelve-person commission researching the history and theology of the early Church on the status of women so that the Pope could subsequently discern the issue himself. Differentiating in kind between the sacramental ordination of a person into the diaconate and into the priesthood, she contends that the ordination of women deacons need not imply the possibility of their being ordained to the priesthood and argues that there is historical evidence for the ordination of women as permanent deacons alongside their male counterparts.<sup>12</sup>

Zagano's commission was disbanded in 2018, unable to agree on what conclusions to draw from their research. It was replaced in April 2020 by a new ten-member commission explicitly tasked with making recommendations to the Pope. To the disappointment of many he subsequently avoided making a statement in *Querida Amazonia* either on the question of ordaining married *virī probati* (men of proven virtue) to the priesthood or on ordaining women as deacons. Deeply concerned as Francis is with the plight of the poor and the impending ecological catastrophe in the Amazon and elsewhere in the global south, he cannot bring himself to engage passionately with what he clearly views as a comparatively minor concern deriving largely from privileged interests in the developed world.

In paragraph 101 he presents a theology of priesthood that has a man presiding at the Eucharist in which Jesus Christ appears as the 'Spouse of the community'. He warns against getting trapped in partial conceptions of power in the Church, setting 'the inmost structure of the Church' against a functional approach, since God's power and love are revealed distinctly and differently through the two human faces of the male Christ and his mother.

He describes the proper contribution of women to the Church as presenting Mary's tender maternal strength, and claims that the

<sup>12</sup> Phyllis Zagano, *Women: Icons of Christ* (New York: Paulist, 2020).

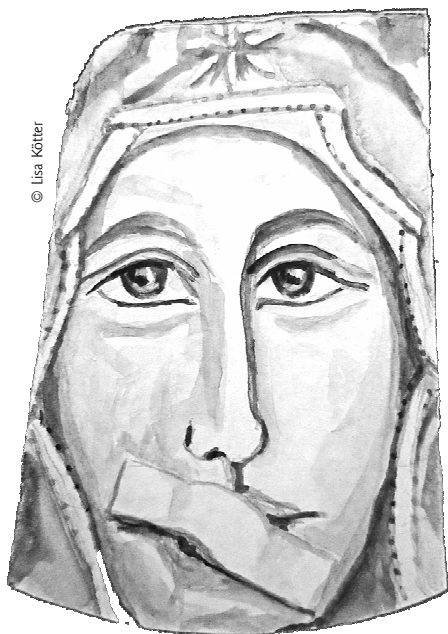
communities of the Amazon would have collapsed without that strength. Praising the women's 'simple and straightforward gifts' he also calls, in the face of emerging threats to the peoples and environments of the Amazon region, for the encouragement of other forms of service and charisms proper to women. A synodal Church should acknowledge the central part that women have to play, including ecclesial services which entail stability, public recognition and a commission from the bishop. This, he says, 'would also allow women to have a real and effective impact on the organization, the most important decisions and the direction of communities, while continuing to do so in a way that reflects their womanhood'.<sup>13</sup>

### **Virgins and Mothers**

This assignment of gender-related roles to women and men in the church remains deeply problematic for many, even among those who are generally supporters of Francis. It is possible to see how his views are driven by his concern about clericalism and the abuse of power and by his desire not simply to clericalise a different sector of the wider community. However, his views on the maternal strength of women are

rejected by those who see this as simply a different brand of the very functionalism he himself criticizes. Many women are not mothers, and the service of men within the Church is not generally predicated on their capacity for fatherhood to the exclusion of all else. This view of women is seen as unhelpfully essentialist and in direct contrast to Jesus' own recorded views of his mother's role.

Like many of his predecessors, Pope Francis has cited his own mother as a key influence on his personal faith and has underlined the impact that women have in bringing their families to faith and sustaining them in it. This is a fair appreciation both in personal and in more



© Lisa Köttler

<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, *Querida Amazonia*, n. 103.

general terms, but the figure of the motherly woman is an overworked topos in papal pronouncements about the Church and the idealization of women as virgins and mothers has all too frequently been used as a device for keeping them in a safe and unchallenging place. This idealization has not generally been supported by concrete action towards changing structures of power and agency within the Church so as to give women's voices the hearing for which Pope Francis has called. It often directly works against the full participation of women in the Church's life and decision-making processes.

In view of the desperate plight of so many women and girls across the world, and of the waste of their talents in providing solutions to questions of poverty and social deprivation, it has to be acknowledged that ordination to some part of the clerical state is hardly likely to make a significant difference. But given that so much agency within the ecclesial body is bound up with the clerical state, including the power of using one's voice in preaching a more radical and inclusive gospel based on a profoundly different experience of what it is to be a member of a given society, the silence about ordaining women to the diaconate was for many simply the same misogyny in a different guise.

If being motherly is such a key element in women's service within the Church, then issues affecting childbirth, motherhood and domestic abuse should be an essential part of the preaching of the gospel and the catechesis behind what it means to be a new human being in Christ through baptism. Nothing short of a revolution of tenderness within human relationships will bring about the much-needed changes. Women's agency and authority are unlikely to be taken seriously when they largely remain without a voice unless it is graciously granted to them by those who have one by right through their clerical status, and who are, by definition, always male. This also has implications for how communities are evangelized with regard to gendered understandings around sexual behaviour.

Ours is above all a sacramental Church in which the saving power of Christ is made manifest in and through human bodies. The Church can survive without the sacraments, as has been shown within its history both in the Amazon and in Japan, and other places of historic persecution. Nevertheless, the Church does not flourish without the sacraments, and the rapid spread of Pentecostalism in Latin America and parts of Africa is at least partly fuelled by the diminishment of sacramental life within communities deprived of priests. In *Laudato si'*

Francis says, 'It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation'.<sup>14</sup>

If this is so, then ensuring access to the Eucharist of communities in all parts of the world is an essential part of the Church's life. Clericalism flourishes, alongside the infantilisation of the laity, where agency within the faith community is largely limited to those whose voice is heard within its public assembly and who are perceived as the controllers of grace. This can also encourage a drastically limited understanding of where the sacred is to be encountered, with sexual bodiliness and the domestic sphere coming very low down in the scale of spiritual value.

Jesus himself appears to have fought shy of attributing essentialist value to his own mother. In Luke's Gospel we hear,

While he was saying this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!' But he said, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!' (Luke 11:27–28)

Earlier in Luke we have another example of Jesus avoiding the attribution of power or privilege on account of family relationship:

And he was told, 'Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you'. But he said to them, 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it'. (Luke 8:20–21)

He avoids attributing his mother's role in salvation to a biological function but draws attention to her as one who has treasured all the words given to her about her Son and pondered them in her heart. It is the capacity to hear God's word clearly and to act on it in embodied gestures that reflect God's salvific and loving will for the world that marks us out, women and men, as the family of Jesus.

### ***Magnificat***

It is for this reason that many women hear Pope Francis's comments about the maternal role of women within the Church or about their 'feminine genius' with an element of bafflement and resistance. In her *Magnificat*, Mary exults in the strength of a God who reverses the exercise of privilege based on unrestrained power and a belief in unassailable

<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, n. 236.

and exclusive authority. The incarnation is predicated on God's unique act of self-emptying, not as a model of self-rejection or of assumed subordination but as a supreme act of freedom. She acknowledges the position she occupies as a 'lowly handmaid'. As an unmarried woman she has no status in her own society whatsoever, not even that conferred upon her by the fulfilment of her biological function as a producer of future workers and fighters. She is, quite literally, no one, yet God's saving act depends on her consent and the free gift of her own will. Her understanding of this gives her a voice to proclaim God's transformative deed and the liberation that it brings.

Mary's Magnificat is the antithesis of essentialist claims that the value of women in God's saving plan lies in one particular characteristic. This is not to say that maternal tenderness is not a God-given grace, nor to underplay the role of nurturing and loving kindness in the transformation of brutalised societies and human relationships. The very future of our planet depends on human beings developing a greater sense of responsibility for the gift of life and all that sustains it. An attitude towards our mother earth that abuses it at will, plundering it for our own pleasure without thought of sustainability, is a form of globalised domestic abuse.<sup>15</sup>

In *Evangelii gaudium* Francis claims,

... because the 'feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society, the presence of women must also be guaranteed in the workplace' and in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures.<sup>16</sup>

If he is right in describing the Church as a field hospital where the wounds of our present world can receive adequate attention, we need women to have equal access to equal positions of leadership within it. We are, despite his positive rhetoric, nowhere near.

**Gemma Simmonds CJ** is a sister of the Congregation of Jesus and director of the Religious Life Institute at the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology in Cambridge.

<sup>15</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato si'* n. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n.103, quoting *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 295.

# St BEUNO'S

## JESUIT SPIRITUALITY CENTRE



A place of peace, prayer and beauty in North Wales

*Away in the loveable west,  
On a pastoral forehead of Wales,  
I was under a roof here, I was at rest*

Gerard Manley Hopkins, Jesuit poet

St Beunos is a Jesuit retreat house offering the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, silent individually guided retreats and various themed retreats. We also provide courses and training in spiritual accompaniment.

For the full programme of retreats and courses, see [www.beunos.com](http://www.beunos.com)

Contact: The Secretary, St Beuno's, St Asaph,  
Denbighshire, N. Wales, LL17 0AS

Tel: +44 (0)1745 583444

[secretary@beunos.com](mailto:secretary@beunos.com)



# PROTESTANTS AND POPE FRANCIS

## A View from outside the Roman Catholic Tradition

Elizabeth A. Hoare

I HAD NOT GOT VERY FAR with reading *Evangelii gaudium* before being struck by the thought that this could have been written by one of the Nonconformist preachers I had been used to hearing as I grew up in the 1970s and 1980s. The topics, tone and language all resonated. The opening words, ‘the joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus’ (n.1) are what every evangelical Protestant testifies to believing and wants the whole world to hear and believe too. Pope Francis’s ‘offer of salvation’, ‘set free from sin’ (n.1), the warnings about the dangers of consumerism both to those inside and those outside the Church, the invitation to a ‘personal encounter with Jesus Christ’ (n.3)—for everyone, with no exceptions—are all familiar phrases to worshippers in the Protestant evangelical Church. Until recently, we may have talked more about ‘evangelism’ than ‘evangelization’ but the vision of *Evangelii gaudium* is clear, and a vision that is shared.

Francis talks of sharing a faith that is life-transforming: something that affects every part of existence and every moment. This is not a faith to be kept for Sundays or reduced to moralising, and it evokes a resounding Yes from the evangelical and charismatic parts of the contemporary Protestant Church. Indeed it is noteworthy that the emphasis on evangelization has been an important unifying factor. Thus the bishop of Oxford, the Right Reverend Steven Croft—who has called on his diocese to explore what it means to be more Christlike for the sake of the world, adopting the strapline ‘more contemplative, more compassionate, more courageous’—wrote in his blog in 2019 about the way he had been influenced by *Evangelii gaudium*. He commented:

Every member ... would benefit from reading at least the opening chapters of *The Joy of the Gospel* in preparation for General Synod ... to catch a sense of the wonder of Christ and of the message of life entrusted to the Church.<sup>1</sup>

I am writing as an evangelical Protestant, now from within the Anglican tradition rather than the Free Church, but all those to whom I have spoken are agreed that, with a few exceptions, most Protestants are aware of Pope Francis's priorities, they warm to them and are glad that he is so open about them. In particular, his desire that all should hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and know that they are included in the invitation, his commitment to caring for the earth, his authenticity and his apparent radical approach to the traditional image of the Roman Catholic Church all stand out as deeply attractive.

For charismatic Protestants there are further positive aspects to this Pope, especially his emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, his exuberant and evident personal joy in knowing Jesus Christ, and the way he has reached out to them publicly and in affirmative ways. Both these groups will be reassured that Pope Francis is steeped in biblical reflection—as both *Evangelii gaudium* and *Laudato si'* demonstrate, with scriptural quotations and allusions on practically every page. These are the two documents with which most Protestants are likely to be familiar, and which they may possibly have read—a notable point in itself, since most papal writings would pass unnoticed among ordinary lay people.

Warmth towards Pope Francis does not necessarily extend to the rest of the Roman Catholic Church, of course. The cover story of the influential magazine *Christianity Today* in December 2014, for example, which was enthusiastic about the recently elected pontiff, noted that while people were 'overwhelmingly positive' about Pope Francis, they were generally negative about the Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup> For some Protestants, especially evangelicals steeped in the Reformation tradition, the papacy will always be problematic, whoever holds the office, simply because it is Roman Catholic. No matter what the Pope says or does, being Roman Catholic is too damaging in their minds for him to have any positive impact. The continued dominance of reformed theology in this group

<sup>1</sup> Steven Croft, 'Rethinking Evangelism', *Diocese of Oxford: Bishop Steven's Blog*, at <https://blogs.oxford.anglican.org/rethinking-evangelism/>, accessed 10 September 2020.

<sup>2</sup> R. R. Reno, 'Pop Francis: Why Everyone Loves the Pope', *Christianity Today* (2 December 2014), available at <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/december/pop-francis.html>, accessed 10 September 2020 (paywall).

that traces its roots to the sixteenth century ensures that Catholicism remains the enemy.

That said, there are plenty of Protestants who might have been expected to be negative towards anything with the tag Roman Catholic, but who are on record as saying positive things about this Pope, from the very start of his papacy. Timothy George, for example, the dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in the USA and author of *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, points to his name as a bridge between Catholics and Protestants.<sup>3</sup> Rick Warren, an influential US church leader with a following in the UK, went on record as describing Francis as ‘our new Pope’ (emphasis mine).<sup>4</sup> Luis Palau, seen by some as successor to Billy Graham, and therefore highly respected as an effective evangelist, has drawn attention to the Pope’s personal lifestyle as an important reason why evangelicals respect him.<sup>5</sup> Other prominent names in the charismatic evangelical world who are content to be known as having fraternised with the Pope include John Arnott (of ‘Catch the Fire’ in Toronto), Joel Osteen and Kenneth Copeland.

An equally big hurdle for a few Protestants to get over, especially very conservative evangelicals, is the fact that Francis is a Jesuit. The Jesuits were traditionally seen as the ‘shock troops’ of the Counter-Reformation, created expressly to win back the supposed ‘heretics’ who had embraced the ideas of Luther and other sixteenth-century reformers instead of remaining loyal to the mother Church. The Jesuits were regarded as ruthless and sinister then, and that view has not changed among such Protestant evangelicals.

The fact that the Jesuits are also regarded as those who sit on the margins, however, has an appeal for certain Protestants. St Ignatius of Loyola himself offered the insight that the truth of God resides not just in the teaching of authority, but rather in an interplay between tradition and human experience, so many people have warmed to Francis’s recognition of the vital link between faith and culture. Protestant churches, like Roman Catholic ones, are experiencing an alarming haemorrhage of worshippers. Many of the people who leave church are not departing

<sup>3</sup> See Timothy George, ‘Our Francis Too’, *Christianity Today* (4 June 2013), available at <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/june/our-francis-too.html>, accessed 10 September 2020 (paywall).

<sup>4</sup> Rick Warren, interview with Raymond Arroyo, *The World Over* (EWTN, 14 April 2014).

<sup>5</sup> ‘Why It Matters that Pope Francis Drinks Mate with Evangelicals’, Luis Palau, interview with Melissa Steffan, *Christianity Today* (14 March 2013), available at <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/march-web-only/luis-palau-pope-francis-drinks-mate-evangelicals-bergoglio.html>, accessed 10 September 2020 (paywall).



Pope Francis at an ecumenical event celebrating the Reformation in Malmö, October 2016

because they have lost their faith in God, but because they have lost their faith in the Church. They are disillusioned.

Others who do hang in there are looking for a fresh vision of God at work beyond the walls of the churches. This group has found much in the writings and demeanour of Pope Francis to inspire them. In *Evangelii gaudium*, he critiques not only society but the Church itself, acknowledging, for example, that while certain customs may be beautiful, they no longer serve as means of communicating the gospel.<sup>6</sup> This resonates deeply with contemporary approaches among thinkers and practitioners of mission. The Church Mission Society, for instance, has embraced Francis's call in *Evangelii gaudium* to explore how the Holy Spirit is at work in our rapidly changing culture and find ways of growing and expressing faith that transform everything in alignment with the gospel.<sup>7</sup>

Attending to what God is doing in the world through the Spirit, the healing of all creation and the newness of life that Christ brings takes the focus away from institutions. The emphasis in *Evangelii gaudium* on Jesus as the model for mission, along with reliance on the Holy Spirit and intercession, are key to building communities of faith outside the

<sup>6</sup> See *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 43.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Jonny Baker, 'Yes to Mission Spirituality', *International Review of Mission*, 104/2, (November 2014), 393–402.

traditional boundaries of the Church.<sup>8</sup> The vision of going out to where people are in their cultures, rather than expecting them to come to church and join us, is a mission imperative that those involved in new initiatives in sharing the gospel realise is vital if the gospel is to thrive.

Evangelism is not a quick fix. It ‘consists mostly of patience and disregard for constraints of time’ (*Evangelii gaudium*, n.24). There are things to be learnt from the wisdom of the people as well as things to recognise and affirm. The search for the magic formula that will bring people back to church is always a temptation and simply does not work. Evangelicals, known for their activism, need to heed the fact that not only does God go ahead of us in mission, but God is not in a hurry. Current initiatives include Fresh Expressions, pioneer communities, and the church planting and emerging church movements, but it is not only here that common ground has been celebrated and hope for the future expressed.<sup>9</sup> The secretary general of the World Evangelical Alliance, a group made up of Pentecostals, Baptists, and members of the Reformed and Independent traditions, visited the Pope in 2014 and subsequently said that a ‘new era in evangelical and Catholic relations’ had begun.<sup>10</sup>

What are the characteristics of Pope Francis that appeal to evangelical Protestants? I shall turn to these now so as to fill out the picture of how he is perceived by them.

### ***Biblical and Charismatic***

The Pope’s advocacy of bible reading and prayer as vital spiritual practices is prominent in what he says and writes; and his personal spirituality suggests that he practises what he preaches. Evangelicals of all kinds warm to this kind of spirituality. Whereas the papacy has traditionally been distasteful and something of a mystery to most evangelicals, schooled to disregard pomp and ceremony in religion as well as sitting lightly to liturgical worship, Francis’s attitude has come as a breath of fresh air, offering the possibility of more shared ground to be discovered. They love stories that portray his humanity—a man who enjoys a cup

<sup>8</sup> See *Evangelii gaudium*, nn. 269, 279–283; and Cathy Ross, ‘The Joy of the Gospel: From a Theology of the Balcony to a Theology of the Road’, *Anvil*, 33/2 (n.d.), available at <https://churchmissionsociety.org/resources/joy-gospel-cathy-ross-anvil-vol-33-issue-2/>, accessed 10 September 2020.

<sup>9</sup> See *Fresh Expressions*, at <https://freshexpressions.org.uk/about/>.

<sup>10</sup> ‘WEA Secretary General Visits Pope Francis, Sees “New Era in Evangelical and Roman Catholic Relations”’, *World Evangelical Alliance*, at <https://worldea.org/fr/news/wea-secretary-general-visits-pope-francis-sees-new-era-in-evangelical-and-roman-catholic-relations/>, accessed 10 September 2020.

of coffee and wearing casual clothes—but it has to go deeper if there is to be a spiritual connection.

Evangelicals of a more conservative nature stress the supremacy of the Bible in all things pertaining to salvation, while charismatics emphasize a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit. Francis's spirituality has much to commend itself to both groups. Encouraging all Christians to read their Bibles is music to every evangelical's ear. For them, supreme authority rests in the Bible, not in a Church or tradition, so they may well be hoping for further changes to ensue in a Roman Catholic Church that has returned to its roots in scripture. The expectation that God will speak through God's word is not confined by any human-constructed boundaries, and so a Roman Catholic may sit down with a Protestant to read the same scripture and see the same light shine out of it. A serious concern for evangelicals is the fragile state of the traditional family, so Pope Francis's encouragement to husbands and wives, parents and children to read the Bible together at the start of the Synod on the Family in 2014 makes for common cause.

The Pope's emphasis on the Holy Spirit endears him to charismatics, for it is the key characteristic of this branch of Protestantism. The charismatic movement, from the 1960s onwards, had already drawn Roman Catholics and Protestants together in ways that were hitherto inconceivable. The common ground of experience of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts has broken down barriers, enabling the two sides to pray together and build lasting friendships. We might therefore anticipate Francis being viewed sympathetically by charismatic Christians, with an overcoming of prejudice towards the Catholic Church.

Nicky Gumbel, leader of the large charismatic Anglican church Holy Trinity Brompton in London, was quoted in *Christian Today* magazine as saying how much he loved the Catholic Church, because it was leading the way in evangelism. He added that *Evangelii gaudium* was key to his current thinking on evangelism. From the person who heads up the Alpha evangelism course, used in Catholic parishes as well as many Protestant ones, this is significant. In the same article, Gumbel highlighted friendship, personal experience of the Holy Spirit and going to people outside the Church as essential to evangelism if it is to be effective.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See Ruth Gledhill, 'Nicky Gumbel: "The Catholic Church Is Leading the Way in Evangelisation"', *Christian Today* (12 July 2015), at <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/nicky.gumbel.the.catholic.church.is.leading.the.way.in.evangelisation/58774.htm>, accessed 10 September 2020.

The quality of friendship seems to be embodied by Pope Francis in his relational way of dealing with situations and issues, which encourages efforts on both sides of the divide to reach out and overcome differences for the sake of the gospel.<sup>12</sup>

### **Care for the Earth**

Ask any young person what is the most important issue facing the world today and he or she will say that it is the desperate state of planet Earth. Protestants have no better track record on caring for the Earth than Catholics, historically speaking. But Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato si'* offers a sustained reflection on how, together, we can make a vital contribution to change.

The document shows a Church in touch with current thinking on environmental issues. Evangelicals are reassured by the biblical basis provided for action. This biblical material helps us to ground belief in the dignity of all human beings theologically and to speak up on behalf of those most vulnerable to climate change. The same material also teaches about our responsibility towards creation. Both are gospel principles that all Christians must espouse and live out as witnesses to God's purpose for the world. Francis speaks from the start of 'our common home', a vital truth, but one that is weakened by a divided Church. 'Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator.' (n.83) As with *Evangelii gaudium*, the focus on full life in Christ is one that evangelicals can share, with confidence in the hope that together we may learn how to 'live wisely, to think deeply and to love generously' (n.47).

The Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent book for 2020, *Saying Yes to Life* by Ruth Valerio, addresses many of the same themes as *Laudato si'*, including the emphasis on the poor and what it means to be a follower of Jesus, the giver of life.<sup>13</sup> It is a reminder that not only do the two church traditions share many of the same concerns, but that there are global issues that we cannot tackle alone.

### **Authentic Humanity and Radical Discipleship**

Over and over again it is the character of Pope Francis, the man himself, that is remarked upon by evangelicals, who see something of Christ in

<sup>12</sup> See *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 245. The Pope regards ecumenism as imperative for evangelization.

<sup>13</sup> Ruth Valerio, *Saying Yes to Life* (London: SPCK, 2020), 155–156.

him. Words such as ‘kind’, ‘compassionate’, ‘humble’ and ‘authentic’ are frequently used of him. Young people are said to value authenticity above other qualities, and Francis would seem to have this in spades. In *Evangelii gaudium* the Pope wrote that he must practise what he preaches and be bold in seeking to reform the papacy (n. 24). He criticises clericalism and stresses the message of the gospel over the institution of the Church. He talks about all members of the Church being ‘missionary disciples’ and repeatedly stresses the inclusive nature of the Good News of Jesus (n. 120).

Pope Francis has been seen as bringing a new model of authority to his role, characterized by humility and compassion, but also by radical attitudes reminiscent of his namesake St Francis of Assisi. Everyone loves the saint who rejected the expectations of his family and culture; and his youthful zeal and unconventional style continue to draw Protestant Christians frustrated with the way the traditional Church is. St Francis also transcends party divisions within Christianity—especially, but not exclusively, among younger Christians, for whom he may be the only saint they can name with confidence. Such Christians also relate to him today, perhaps more than ever before, because of the attention drawn to the plight of the created world. Francis of Assisi was a radical who lived a counter-cultural life that challenged so many of the world’s values. He brings together a Jesus-centred faith and care for creation. This is what evangelicals are taught to seek in their spirituality. ‘Do not be confirmed to this world, but be transformed’, as Romans 12 says. These younger Christians, who discuss their views and ideas on social media,



© Mazur/catholicnews.org.uk



see Pope Francis as a reformer and someone trying to take the Church in the direction they feel it ought to go. They like the fact that he tries to speak to those outside the Church as well as inside.

There are a number of new communities springing up, often ecumenical in nature, which draw inspiration from desert and monastic spirituality. One of these is the Northumbria Community, which has been around since the 1980s and continues to grow. They speak of being a 'church without walls', and are greatly encouraged by the example of Francis.<sup>14</sup> Catherine Askew, a co-leader of the Northumbria Community, wrote,

Having a monk with a heart for the poor at the heart of the Roman Catholic Church has shown us that another way is possible. Pope Francis' commitment to the monastic life has grounded him in simplicity and kept him connected to the marginalised, even while he is holding the centre. What a gift for our times!<sup>15</sup>

When he first became Pope, Francis was seen as challenging even his own Church by resisting the pomp and monarchical authority associated with the papacy, along with seeming to shift the debates around sexuality, money, power and the urgent need to combat climate change. That this dismays some Catholics may be beyond the interests of Protestant Christians, who focus on what they see as echoing their own concerns. Thus the qualities of Francis of Assisi crystallizing in his commitment to poverty, reform of the Church and devotion to the natural world are easily transferred to the contemporary Francis and applauded by observers.

Evangelicals appreciate the stories told of Francis refusing to sleep in the papal apartments or wear his cassock at all times, or instances of him noticing those who serve him and paying attention to their needs even as they waited on his own. They may not know much about the politics of the Vatican, but they see the pomp and ceremony and do not find it in the gospels. Charismatics set little store by ceremony of any kind in church life. Their leaders will often shun liturgical robes and any kind of ritual. Francis is thus an ally in the efforts to make the gospel accessible to all. His informality and spontaneity are attractive to charismatic Protestants, with their more unstructured way of being Church. These Christians expect their leaders to speak from the heart

<sup>14</sup> See 'Our Rule of Life', *The Northumbria Community*, at <https://www.northumbriacommunity.org/who-we-are/our-rule-of-life/>, accessed 10 September 2020.

<sup>15</sup> In an e-mail to the author.

as led by the Holy Spirit and examples quoted above bear this out as a quality evident in Francis too. His call to discard what is no longer useful is heard gladly by Protestant Christians longing for change.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Protestant Spirituality and the Pope***

Perceptions of the Jesuits have changed a great deal since the Second Vatican Council. The opening up of guided retreats to laity has coincided with a much greater openness towards practices such as spiritual direction and retreats among Protestants. Discovering Ignatian prayer has helped many Protestants of all traditions to deepen their devotional lives, rooting them more deeply in scripture.<sup>17</sup> Evangelicals in particular, already committed to bible reading and prayer as fundamental to being disciples of Jesus, have embraced Ignatian-style meditation on the Bible and found it life-giving. It has helped to get them out of their heads and in touch with their feelings, as well as teaching them to use their senses in prayer. The Examen is widely used in all kinds of settings—theological colleges, small groups, youth groups and discipleship training. Many Protestants of all persuasions have made their way to St Beuno's Jesuit Spirituality Centre for retreats and have returned again and again. Ignatian retreats now feature in many, if not most, Anglican retreat centres; and many Protestant spiritual directors have an Ignatian training. To such well-prepared believers, Pope Francis could only be good news.

For more traditional evangelicals, who are perhaps suspicious of Jesuit practices, the words written to preachers in *Evangelii gaudium* may come as a happy surprise. The Catholic Church has not been the go-to source of guidance for most Protestants eager to learn homiletical techniques, yet the principles enunciated there would sit comfortably in most evangelical theological colleges: pray; read the bible text for the occasion; pause to reflect and seek to understand; give it 'time, interest and undivided attention' (n.146). Above all, preachers must know the truth that they aim to preach themselves first and share the lives of those to whom they seek to communicate God's word (n.150). The lovely phrase that evangelizers must 'take on the "smell of the sheep"' (n.24) is much repeated in Protestant educational circles, both lay and ordained. Francis's insistence that lay Christians are as important

<sup>16</sup> See *Evangelii gaudium*, n.27.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Anne Netherwood, *The Voice of This Calling: An Evangelical Encounters the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola* (London: SPCK, 1990).

as the clergy, who are there to serve, and that therefore all are called to grow in their discipleship, puts spirituality firmly on the agenda of the whole Church and chimes with the evangelical emphasis too.

### ***Marriage, Family and Sexuality***

There have been differing responses to Francis's statements on issues to do with marriage, sexuality and the family. On the one hand, young people, especially, are glad that he has expressed an accepting and inclusive attitude towards the LGBT+ community, although there has been criticism of his words concerning transgender people. Francis's advocacy of the admission into church of divorcees is less of an issue for most Protestants but it points to his compassion and desire to include. There is disappointment among evangelical Churches that have revised their attitudes towards women in leadership and hope to see greater equality across the wider Church. It is clear, however, that he has a fan club among younger evangelicals that is not put off by the apparent hesitation on this issue. It seems that they can separate the personal appeal of Francis from the institution he leads.

On the other hand, there are those who cry with relief at his clarity of teaching on marriage and the family. The fact that *The Churchman*, a Reformed Protestant journal not known for its friendliness towards the Catholic Church, carried a review of *Amoris laetitia* by Andrew Atherstone is itself worthy of note, but the reviewer's generally positive piece concluded with the words: 'it would be a cause for celebration if any member of the Anglican episcopate were to publish an exhortation containing half as much classic Christian doctrine and biblical sense'.<sup>18</sup>

### ***The Challenge to All Christians***

Cynics might say that a shrinking Church in Western post-Christendom inevitably makes increasingly desperate Protestants seek to make common cause with a pope who speaks the same language. The emphasis on evangelization on both sides does, indeed, suggest that it would be foolish to work in opposition when Christians are increasingly in the minority. The lack of unity among Protestants is a scandal that diminishes the impact of the Good News we profess to proclaim. The further scandal and ensuing pain of being out of communion with Rome is a sharp

<sup>18</sup> *The Churchman*, 131/4 (Winter 2017), 369.

reminder of how we must appear to the rest of the world. How may we expect a divided and broken world to be able to take the gospel message seriously while these divisions last?

Of course, it is not enough to like someone just for saying the things we want to hear. Many of Pope Francis's concerns come as a challenge to all Christians, Protestants included, and yet they strike a chord because we know he is right. He is right, especially, to prioritise the needs of the poor of the world. When the Pope launched Charis at Pentecost 2019, he stressed three priorities: evangelization, Christian unity and service of the poor.<sup>19</sup> Austen Ivereigh has explained how Charis ensures that charismatic renewal faces firmly outwards.<sup>20</sup> The temptation to turn inwards when the going gets tough cannot be tolerated if Christians are to remain faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ, but each of the three priorities brings demands and will stretch the Church beyond its comfort zones. This applies no less to Protestants than Catholics.

All this is not to deny the conflicted nature of so much of church life, both Protestant and Roman Catholic. Internal divisions and the clerical abuse scandal have afflicted both, for example. Catholics and Anglicans are both facing similar global issues as global institutions trying to hold together vastly different cultures and perceptions of what it means to follow Jesus. It is perhaps above all the humility of Pope Francis in the face of the greatness of the task of bearing witness to the Good News that is such an encouragement. His contemplative stance towards the world, his palpable love for Jesus and his hope that transformation is possible make him someone who is taken seriously not only by evangelical Protestants but also by many of all faiths and none in our troubled world.

**Elizabeth A. Hoare** is tutor in spiritual formation at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford. After studying at Durham, she taught history at secondary school level. Following a PhD in history she trained for the ministry at Ridley Hall, Cambridge. She then had a curacy in the East Riding of Yorkshire and following three years teaching church history at Cranmer Hall, she became priest-in-charge of a parish also in the East Riding. Throughout this time she was developing an interest in accompanying people in prayer through the ministry of spiritual direction.

<sup>19</sup> See Pope Francis, address to the leaders of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal International Service, 8 June 2019; and <https://www.charis.international/en/home/>, accessed 11 September 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Austin Ivereigh, 'Is Francis Our First Charismatic Pope?', *America* (14 June 2019).

# PAPA FRANCESCO

## *Quo vadis?*

*James Hanvey*

AT THE BEGINNING OF 2006, the then General of the Society of Jesus decided to convoke its 35th General Congregation. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach had worked hard to restore relations between the Society and the Vatican after the traumatic intervention of Pope John Paul II and the suspension of the normal governance of the Society.<sup>1</sup> Even so, there were still those in the Vatican who wanted another visitation of the Order. The name of the archbishop of Buenos Aires, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, was mentioned as a possible candidate for overseeing such a process. As well as being a Jesuit with considerable experience of government in the Society, Monsignor Bergoglio was seen by many in the Vatican as conservative and orthodox enough to be trusted with such a task.<sup>2</sup> Bergoglio himself was opposed to such a decision, and Kolvenbach managed to persuade Benedict XVI to proceed with the congregation in 2008 under the Society's own Constitutions. One could be forgiven for taking some pleasure in the irony that Jorge Mario Bergoglio was to become Pope Francis. He enjoys very good relations with the Society, and many in the Vatican now think he is exactly the opposite of what they thought twelve years ago. I do not think that Francis has changed in those twelve years. In his thinking and in his actions one can see a continuity between the Jesuit archbishop of Buenos Aires and the bishop of Rome.<sup>3</sup>

The opposition to Francis's papacy, largely a Western phenomenon, is well orchestrated, although the amplification of the media makes it appear more significant and substantial than it actually is. Notwithstanding the way in which his decisions, actions and teachings are 'spun', there is something unprecedented about the resistance to the renewal of the

<sup>1</sup> The Pope had appointed his own delegate, Paulo Dezza, to lead the Society after Pedro Arrupe was incapacitated by a stroke in 1981.

<sup>2</sup> See Gianni La Bella, *I Gesuiti. Dal Vaticano II a Papa Francesco* (Milan: Guerini, 2019), 296 following.

<sup>3</sup> For important discussions of Francis's history and background, and discussion of his programme, see Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (New York: Henry Holt, 2014); also Elizabetta Piqué, *Francis: Life and Revolution. A Biography of Jorge Bergoglio*, translated by Anna Mazzotti and Lydia Colin (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2014).

Church for which Pope Francis is asking.<sup>4</sup> It would be naïve to think that the opposition stems from purely theological concerns. His consistent critique of economic systems that create large inequalities and exploit vulnerable peoples and environments, as well as his vision of a more just and fraternal world order, inevitably produce opposition from those who have political and financial interests vested in maintaining the status quo or further reshaping it to their advantage.

***A critical moment in the future direction of the Church***

Not since the early years of the pontificate of John Paul II and the collapse of the Soviet Union has the papacy been seen to play such a decisive international role in addressing the faultlines of a changing geopolitical and economic order. In the sombre silence of an empty St Peter's Square, the Pope stood alone addressing a world confused and confronting the growing threat of COVID-19. He not only sought to offer consolation to those who were suffering and the families of the dead; he also held out a vision of cooperation between nations in which the much-needed resources of medicine and science could be shared to the benefit of all. While each nation and its government were focused on their own immediate COVID-19 crisis, here was leadership which could see beyond the moment to what will be needed to secure the well-being of humanity. Whatever one's views of Francis's vision and approach, this suggests a papacy that marks a critical moment in the future direction of the Church. Having some sense of this moment is important for understanding the significance of Francis's papacy, his vision and the durability of the strategy he is developing.

***The Complexities of Living 'After'***

It is always dangerous to speak in generalisations, especially when addressing the complex and plural situations of a global Church. Yet, wherever one looks, it is hard to avoid the sense that we are now living in the 'after' or the 'post-'. This periodising prefix has come to describe not only Western and North American cultures but also the globalisation of certain intellectual strategies of deconstruction and resistance. It marks the moment when the brief interlude of modernity's recovery from the moral and material devastation of two World Wars came to an end. Now even the postmodern has itself succumbed to periodisation

<sup>4</sup> See Christopher Lamb, *The Outsider* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2020), which gives a perceptive account of Francis's push for the renewal of the Church and its mission and a detailed examination of the unprecedented public campaign within the Church opposing it.

in the struggle for each generation to establish its hegemony over the past and claim the future.

The rise of the fourth industrial-technological revolution (accelerated by COVID-19), the precariousness of international economic, legal and humanitarian systems, and the emergence of new (or old) political movements that use democratic institutions while undermining them, further increase the sense of a precarious order, in transition if not dissolution.<sup>5</sup> All this is heightened by the complex effects of the climate crisis and the apparent inability of government and international institutions to address these urgent problems beyond producing well-intentioned aspirations and goal-setting.

The Church is not immune from the tensions and ambiguities of these major shifts. Indeed, its own life, practice and teachings have been shaped by them since the close of the Second Vatican Council in 1965. Vatican II provides the context and the orientating point for understanding how the Church and the papacy have navigated these changes. Many commentators read Pope Francis's papacy in terms of the council's programme of renewal—a sort of *aggiornamento* of the *aggiornamento*. Although Francis is the first pope not to have attended the council, his is not a simple reprise of Vatican II. The Franciscan papacy inhabits a different world from that in which Vatican II took place. It inherits a Church shaped not only by the profound changes of the last 65 years, but by the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI and their critical engagements with these changes.<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, while advancing and developing the council's social teaching and aspects of its ecclesiology, also felt it necessary to rein in post-conciliar experimentation. In his long pontificate, whatever his theology of the post-conciliar papacy may have been, operationally he returned to its ultramontanist practice.

This quasi-mystical elevation of the office was effectively deconstructed by the resignation of Benedict XVI. Although Benedict opened the way to a more modest and collegial vision of the papacy, his ecclesial and liturgical restorationist instincts continued the practice of his predecessor. These arose from a certain disillusionment with Vatican II's rapprochement with contemporary culture. Like John Paul II, Benedict was a staunch defender of the Christian humanism forged in the

<sup>5</sup> See Nadia Urbinati, 'Political Theory of Populism', *Annual Review of Political Science* (November 2018).

<sup>6</sup> We must remember that Benedict XVI's influence is much greater and of longer duration than his short pontificate but must include his time as Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith from 1981.

council by appropriating much of modernity's faith in humanity, freedom, progress and reason. Postmodernity threatens this no less than it deconstructed and subverted modernity.<sup>7</sup>

While registering his own cultural and historical situation, Francis's papacy is less concerned with the 'culture wars' of the West that so preoccupied his predecessors. His own emphasis on the Church's evangelizing and humanising mission recovers the dynamic ecclesiology of the council while integrating the post-conciliar insights and experience of the Latin American Church. The Aparecida document of the Latin American bishops can be seen as marking out the main lines of his papacy there is also something more.

No pope has been so directly and actively involved in the plight of the poor and the marginalised, especially refugees. This is the principal hermeneutic of Francis' papacy. It is not simply a concern for social and economic justice, it is a performance of the gospel. In raising the poor to such public and universal visibility, Francis presents a powerful witness



*Pope Francis with Syrian refugee children, August 2016*

<sup>7</sup> For discussion and evaluation of these changes see Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (New York: Paulist, 2012); also James Hanvey, 'For the Life of the World', in *The Second Vatican Council: Celebrating Its Achievements and the Future*, edited by Gavin D'Costa and Emma Jane Harris (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 45–68; James Hanvey, 'The Challenge and Hope of *Gaudium et spes*', in *The Church in the Modern World: Fifty Years after Gaudium et spes*, edited by Erin Brigham (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 3–42. Among a vast literature on Vatican II and the post-Vatican II Church, see an insightful and useful collection of essays, *Chi ha paura del Vaticano II?* edited by Alberto Melloni and Giuseppe Ruggieri (Rome: Carocci, 2009); and *The Contested Legacy of Vatican II: Lessons and Prospects*, edited by Lieve Boeve, Mathijs Lamberigts and Terrence Merrigan (Leuven: Peeters, 2015).



to the materialist and reductionist value systems that dominate so much political and economic thinking. In Francis's love of the poor, we see a challenging performative theology of mercy. Mercy is not only at the heart of Jesus' teaching: it is at the centre of his person. Wherever we encounter mercy, we encounter God's healing and regenerative love in action. It is making God present in mercy that is a response to the secular attempts to exile God from human life, while also meeting the deepest human need. When we experience mercy and compassion, we experience the gracious touch of Christ. Life and humanity are restored, and a new way opens up.

It is facile for Francis's critics to attempt to weaken the power of these two evangelical movements by describing them as 'pastoral', as if this made them an inferior form of theology compared to the mighty systems of philosophers and academic theologians. These critics only expose their own impoverished theology, which has forgotten that the work of the greatest theological masters does not separate itself from prayer and experience: they developed their ideas to serve the realities of Christian existence. A theology which is separated from living compassion and practical love can only ossify into ideology, a product of human pride rather than the light of faith.

Like the council, Francis refuses the easy counter-cultural option of the Church as 'the resident alien', but chooses the more challenging counter-cultural option: the Church that lives the gospel, suffering with the suffering world. It is an active soteriological option of compassionate and transformative solidarity, undertaken in the realism and joy of the risen Christ. In order to appreciate the significance of Francis's strategy of encounter with the world *ad extra* and renewal of the Church *ad intra*, we need to understand that, while it is certainly in a faithful and dynamic continuity with the council, it is not a return to the council. It is an evangelical renewal which recognises that the world itself has changed and must now discover the healing power of the gospel and the attractiveness of Christ in a new, immediate and personal way.

This is not a new mission for the Church; it is already mapped in the whole arc of the incarnation. Nor is today's Church one in which the inspired vision of Vatican II has become redundant or irrelevant; rather, the resources of the council must be deepened and developed to meet the needs of a fragile and precarious world. Although Francis brings his own homely images to describe what this means in practice, his pastoral-performative approach gives effective and affective developmental substance to one of the central insights of the council: that Church flows

from the Trinitarian mystery of God's salvific love and is the universal sacrament of salvation.<sup>8</sup> It is the well of God's mercy. Thus, the recovery of mission beyond the oppositional binary of Church and world, and the debilitating entanglements of the West's culture wars, calls for a renewal of the Church's own life and structures if it is to live God's life-giving love for the world.

### ***Towards the Church's Mission of Healing in the World***

Francis comes to the papal office with considerable pastoral experience and with a deeply integrated Ignatian spirituality which guides his thinking and apostolic drive. From the beginning, his vision of a joyful, evangelical and compassionate Church, forged in the experiences of ministry in Argentina and Latin America, was a challenge to a Church which had become overdetermined by the culture wars and ideologies of Western secularism. It was also a liberation.

#### *The God of the Poor, the God of Mercy*

Francis's vision of the Church and of the office of the papacy, which shows preferential love of the poor and the abundance of God's mercy, is well suited to the current realities of the contemporary world. Reconciliation is the goal of God's mercy, so in the papacy of Francis we see this enacted as part of the Church's mission in the world. Reconciliation is integral to the inner life of the Christian community itself, hence his emphasis on ecumenism and building practical relations with other religions for the common good of humanity.

The pastoral form that the Pope has given to his ministry of service will make his papacy a different experience from those of his immediate predecessors. Francis's teaching and ministry can be seen to be in continuity with theirs, and a necessary and legitimate development of many key aspects, but this papacy has chosen not to be caught in defensive operations but to defend the truth by letting it live in joyful mission from Christ, who is its life. Mercy brings a new and personal transcendence to the world in its woundedness. Francis's approach and practices can be seen in the teachings of John Paul II, for example *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* (1984), especially the section on how 'social sin' can be said to manifest itself without detracting from the responsibility of every moral agent (chapter 1).

<sup>8</sup> See *Lumen gentium*, nn.1, 48. This is an ancient patristic theme in ecclesiology; compare Johann Auer, *The Church: The Universal Sacrament of Salvation*, translated by Michael Waldstein (Washington, DC: Catholic U. of America, 1993).

Likewise, Francis, in his vision of the interrelationality and dependence of all the complex systems of the biosphere, also expands and enriches the theology of solidarity in both John Paul II and Benedict XVI. In terms of the Church's own life and structures, Francis's development of the theology of the laity clearly expands on the teaching of the council and John Paul II, as does his renewal of the practice and structures of synodality. Similarly, his ecumenism and commitment to interreligious dialogue, and especially the way in which these are linked to the promotion of peace and religious freedom within and between nations are another example. Of course, the Pope's commitment to addressing the abuse crisis within the Church continues, in a more forceful way, that undertaken by Benedict XVI, and his emphasis on the need for the reform and renewal of priestly culture as well as that of the Vatican stand out as a significant feature. What is not always appreciated, however, is that Francis's practice flows from a theological, cultural and spiritual depth which is different in expression and form from those of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, but does not lack their profundity; nor is it so conditioned by European assumptions and crises in European history and culture as theirs.

Pope Francis comes to the papacy with two firsts: he is a Jesuit and he is not European. Not only are these significant personal factors, they are important for the perspective he brings and the resources of mind, heart and vision he has been encouraging the Church to develop. The concerns of the Latin American Church are not those of the Western one. The effects of economic poverty, political struggles and environmental exploitation are all too immediate. To respond to them requires a transformation of social and economic structures which is grounded in a systemic conversion of relationships and values. This, too, requires a new way of thinking and of seeing.

Two distinct epistemological perspectives are always present in the performative theology of the Franciscan papacy: the view from the periphery and the determination to think things through in their relationality. Both challenge the orthodox systems of intellectual and social power. Yet they do not arise primarily from a priori principles of intellectual analysis and critique. Rather, they stem from the reality of the precarious lives of people on the margins and from the nature of the relationality and dependence that emerge from being 'situated'.

Although the influences are clearly those of liberation theology, especially the Argentinian version, which does not rely on Marxist analysis, they are inspired and shaped by the gospel, which privileges those

on the social, economic and religious margins.<sup>9</sup> In making those on the periphery of society visible, not only restoring them to community, but actually making them the first recipients of the Kingdom, Jesus offers a radical and subversive challenge to the status quo of his time. However, the Kingdom that Jesus brings and the person he is go much deeper than social transformation.

The Kingdom of God enters history but is never subject to it; it is always generative, sometimes appearing as an interruption and new beginning, or it can remain the hidden source of hope that quietly continues to capture and disturb the human imagination, holding out alternative ways of seeing and understanding, shaping new possibilities of living and relating. The Church that takes up this mission, drawing its understanding from the person and action of Christ, will find itself simultaneously more inserted into history and more deeply counter-culturally graced than one that seeks only to defend its own purity and aesthetics. The Church that lives from God's glory, revealed in the crucified and risen Christ and sealed with the life of the Holy Spirit, does not need to manufacture transcendence, itself a worldly seduction. It will find it shining out in the poverty of Bethlehem, the silence of Gethsemane, the dereliction of Calvary, or daybreak in the garden. In Christ, God breaks free of the religious and philosophical constructs of transcendence to reveal that only in humility, powerlessness and loving service is the transcendence of the living God to be found.

The evangelical mission of Francis's papacy is presented not as one that converts the gospel into an apologetic dialogue with culture, but one that chooses to be immersed in it as a servant. It seeks to recover the intrinsic value of all human beings, setting aside the social hierarchies of encoded power and privilege, to open up new spaces for society to recover its humanity and escape the prison of ideology, materialism and consumerist illusions. It is important to see that Francis's consistent criticism of the neo-liberal, free-market capitalist systems is perfectly consonant with Catholic social teaching, especially Benedict's important encyclical on the economy, *Caritas in veritate*. However, it does not spring from a technical analysis of economic systems—though this is readily available—but from the reality of their effects on people and the

<sup>9</sup> See Juan Carlos Scannone, 'Pope Francis and the Theology of the People', *Theological Studies*, 77/1 (2016), 118–135.

environment.<sup>10</sup> In starting from the reality of people's lives, the evangelical dynamism of the Franciscan papacy is not just critical but creative, patiently insisting that it is possible to imagine another way and put it into practice.

*A Common Home and a Common Humanity*

If this feeling with the poor (compassion and companionship) is one of the most recognisable dimensions of Francis's papacy, the other is the break from the lingering Cartesianism of the Enlightenment, which gets transposed into the expressive individualism of modernity and its credo of autonomy served by an instrumental reason. Francis teaches and practises, in his thinking and in his reaching out, a vision of interrelationality and the *koinonia* or *communio* of creation and the responsibilities that this brings. This finds its fullest expression to date in *Laudato si'*.

Contemporary culture tends to make autonomy into a cardinal value and benchmark for a full humanity. Autonomy not only expresses a self-sufficient freedom; it guarantees agency to realise the self in choices. Freedom comes to be equated with the power to subject others and nature itself to the sovereign will of the individual. Not only does this produce its own layers of alienation (self, society, the natural world), it also weakens the moral ties of obligation and responsibility. Exploitation in the cause of self-interest becomes a plausible demonstration of an effective autonomy. Francis's consistent pursuit of an integral way of being and living offers a way out of this destructive circle. Dependence is not a threat but a liberation from the prison of the self and the tyranny of a false and destructive notion of freedom.

The Pope's vision of an integral universe is not an exercise in spiritual romanticism or magical thinking. It expresses a participative ontology of interrelationality in which there is no 'I' without 'we'. Not only does this require a willingness to think things through in their multidimensional relationalities socially and ecologically, it places humanity in a moral universe of co-responsibility: accountable to God, to others and to the whole of creation. The natural world is not a gift simply to be plundered and exploited to meet our desires; it is the community of life of which we are a dependent part, and there can be no flourishing without it. Interdependence now becomes a source of freedom, the very possibility of which cannot be realised outside relationships: it allows for a creative

<sup>10</sup> See *Sorella economia. Da Francesco di Assisi a Papa Francesco: un'altra economia è possibile*, edited by Marco Asselle and Andrea Piccaluga (Assisi: Porziuncola, 2020); also Matthew T. Eggemeier and Peter Joseph Fritz, *Send Lazarus: Catholicism and the Crises of Neoliberalism* (New York: Fordham U, 2020).



© Helge V. Ketel

responsibility. This is the only way to live happily and fruitfully in ‘our common home’. The goods of creation are given by God to be shared, cherished and used for the well-being and life of all.

The vision of *Laudato si’* offers this alternative way of understanding and living in a balanced and responsible communion. It spells out the human and environmental consequences of failure to live this ‘integral ecology’. The encyclical goes beyond notions of stewardship and conservation, though they obviously enter into sound ecological practices. It points to a new ‘cosmic covenant’ in which humanity cannot stand apart from creation (the technological paradigm) but must move to a deeper appreciation of the soteriological dimension of the Anthropocene. Humanity does have immense power, but that power carries an ethical responsibility; it does not constitute humanity as a sovereign lord of creation but a servant and nurturer.

This conversion in perception and moral imagination will not be effective unless humanity also lives the spiritual and sacred realities of all created things. There is much here to be recovered and learnt from non-Christian traditions—there is a profound ecumenism and interreligious dimension to the breadth of Francis’s ecological vision. But, in Christian terms, it is the realisation of the priesthood of all believers who, by their intelligence, moral status and practice, are called to consecrate, sanctify and celebrate the continuing and evolving grace of creation.

In his resurrection Christ shows us that the whole of the material world is more than matter. It lives with its own telos and hope for the fullness of life. Creation has a soteriological status and there is no redemption that does not include it. This is the unique knowledge that Christian revelation brings to the benefit of all created reality.<sup>11</sup> Although not explicit in *Laudato si’*, there is a tacit mysticism which is lived in these quotidian life-giving, life-sanctifying relationships of gratitude,

<sup>11</sup> To appreciate how deeply this theology is embedded in the Christian tradition see Paul Blowers, *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety* (Oxford: OUP, 2013); also James Hanvey, ‘*Laudato si’* and the Renewal of Theologies of Creation’, *Heythrop Journal*, 59/6 (2018), 1022–1035.

responsibility and care.<sup>12</sup> Put succinctly, *Laudato si'* calls us into the transcendence of loving all things, looking with the new eyes of mercy and humble wonder, with the redeemed freedom to be part of creation's own unfinished journey: to serve it and assist it with all our intelligence and capability so that it may truly sing its own song of praise to God's glory.<sup>13</sup>

Obviously, such transformation is not only material and behavioural but spiritual, for it is spirituality that nourishes inspiration, opens us in attentiveness to the whole community of life in which we live, and makes us creative in expressing and developing our relationships with it. Spirituality provides the resources of mind and heart to sustain us. If we truly wish to address the crisis of climate change and its complex consequences so that we can change our systems to contribute to a more sustainable and enriched ecological balance, we need the vision and hope that faith—in all its forms—can bring.

*Laudato si'* is not only a visionary treatment of the ecological crisis facing the world; it is practical and political. Again, Francis's understanding of the precariousness and vulnerability of the poor—especially those indigenous peoples for whom their environment is not only a means of survival but the source of culture, history and religious identity—informs the encyclical. Integral ecology is a delicate balance, and it is something we must learn through living and practising; it is performed as well as conceptualised. This will require a new sort of politics to match the new economics and science.

It is in this context that we should also see the innovation of the Amazon Synod. Although the synod had to deal with questions of ecclesial life and practice, these could not be separated from the sociopolitical and economic situation of the Amazonian peoples. Their lives have a naturally integral character because the ecology of life in these regions cannot be compartmentalised. We cannot apply the logic of urban life to the ecologies of these unique and vital worlds. The media tended to focus on the questions of church life and discipline, ignoring the attempts of other economic and political interests that were threatened by the synod and sought to diminish its outcomes and distract from the

<sup>12</sup> See Xavier Pikaza, 'Mística y ecología. Papa Francisco, Francisco de Asís y Juan de la Cruz', *Revista de Espiritualidad*, 314 (January–March 2020), 47–86. For the place of *Laudato si'* in over a hundred years of Catholic teaching, see Jaime Tatay, *Ecología integral. La recepción católica del reto de la sostenibilidad* (Madrid: BAC, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> For a useful treatment of all these themes see Martín Carbajo, *Raíces de la Laudato si'*. *Ecología franciscana* (Oñati: Ediciones Franciscanas Arantzazu, 2016).

cause and rights of the Amazonian peoples. However, it did reveal an important aspect of Francis's leadership: it refuses to be distracted from its mission and its focus. It will not be drawn into the agenda of those who do not serve the interests of the *pauperes Christi*.

The theme of interrelationality and the whole community of life also finds expression in Francis's work for reconciliation between religions and nations. Violence is destructive not only for humanity but for the planet; it produces a history in which we all become trapped. The Joint Statement on Human Fraternity is a highly significant act of reconciliation and common commitment to universal peace and human flourishing.<sup>14</sup> In keeping with the whole method and practice of Francis's papacy, this document seeks first to build the possibility of relationship on a shared vision of the human and ecological good. It eschews religious and political ideologies and the bellicose rhetoric that has come to dominate relations between East and West. It starts by reaching out towards the other in good faith, seeking to recognise and understand them first on their own terms, refusing to be held hostage by fear, prejudice and caricature. Essentially, it maps out a process; it does not seek first to reach a conclusion but to find the common starting point for journeying together. It sets out a challenging and transformational vision for the cultures shaped by Islam and Christianity, but it is also a testimony to their faith in humanity and the power of God's omnipotent mercy.

In this and in other ways, Francis shows a refreshing freedom which demonstrates the prophetic leadership that the papacy can bring to a world desperately in need of it: leadership and statesmanship that can transcend its own interests, opening up new capabilities and offering a well-founded hope in humanity and in God's loving purpose for it. "The primary need today is for the whole People of God to be ready to embark upon a new stage of "Spirit-filled" evangelization. This calls for "a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform".<sup>15</sup>

At the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis continued a practice which he had initiated when he was archbishop of Buenos Aires. On 28 March 2013, he went to the youth detention centre Casal del Marmo to celebrate the Holy Thursday at the beginning of the Easter Triduum. There he washed the feet of twelve offenders, who included women

<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis and Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, *A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* (4 February 2019).

<sup>15</sup> Pope Francis, *Veritatis gaudium*, n. 3.



and Muslims. It was an act which broke with the tradition of popes performing the liturgy at the Lateran Basilica. One of the longest-serving detainees was present. He was Orthodox but had given up his place to a young Italian Catholic woman so that she could have the Pope wash her feet. He said, 'Before last Easter I had never even seen a Pope. It was beautiful. An honour. He was really kind. I may be Orthodox, but I believe.'<sup>16</sup> The action drew a great deal of approval and admiration, but it also incurred criticism.

In this one act, we can see the link Francis makes between the Church's mission of compassion and mercy *ad extra* and its life of service *ad intra*. The only way to offer salvation to the world is to serve it. This requires the Church to renew its understanding of leadership, power and witness, not only in teaching but in 'doing the truth in love' as John XXIII saw so clearly.<sup>17</sup> If mercy is the truth of God's universal and irrevocable love for all women and men, it is manifest in actions: *caritas Christi urget nos* is the urgent missionary impulse of all Christian existence.

Such loving compassion is indiscriminate, and for that reason it cannot be bounded and confined. The Church, even in its sacramental life and its holiness, is not the keeper of God's love but its servant. This, too, is the disturbing yet ever-creative transcendent freedom of the Holy Spirit, which does not run

***The only way to offer salvation to the world is to serve it***

counter to the institutional and historical structures that it itself forms, but always reminds us that they serve God's salvific purpose and cannot become ends in themselves: that would submit it to the logic and values of the secular world. There are three broad areas in which we can see the shape and the character of Francis's renewal of the internal life of the Church: integrating its mission with its way of leading, living communion; and discerning and addressing its own woundedness in truth and justice.

### *Renewing Peter*

The liturgy of the washing of the feet stands as the beginning of the Church's celebration of the Lord's passion, death and resurrection. It is placed in the context of the institution of the Eucharist. Given its position at this sacred time, it carries more than just scriptural memory from John's Gospel. It is an extraordinary liturgical enactment of the christological

<sup>16</sup> 'The Pope Washes the Feet of Young Offenders in Rome', *The Guardian* (29 December 2013).

<sup>17</sup> The quotation is from the Vulgate, Ephesians 4:15: 'veritatem autem facientes in caritate crescimus in illo per omnia qui est caput Christus'. Compare Benedict XVI's important encyclical on the relation between truth and charity, *Caritas in veritate* (2009).

character of power in the community of Christ. The washing of the feet stands as an immanent critique of power and office in the life of the Church. Certainly, it recalls Christ's own teaching and example that power and office are a gift to be exercised in loving service. The gift lives and is effective only in humility. More than a memory to be recalled once each year during the Easter Triduum, it is the living anamnesis of the Spirit which measures, shapes and judges all claims to authority, whether ecclesial or secular. In this one controversial, yet totally orthodox, gesture Francis not only expressed his own way of wanting to exercise the ministry of the papacy, he indicated how all offices in the Church must act for God's people. It was another deeply counter-cultural statement about how power in the world and in the Church needs to be redeemed and reordered.

At the heart of Francis's leadership is a dynamic of kenosis. It is in this context that we must understand his critique of clericalism, which is not just about style. Clericalism entails a certain mentality and practice which embed privilege and exception; it assumes entitlement. Appearing to defend and restore priesthood, in fact it turns the sacrament from a grace to a type of class. While it pretends to resist the desacralisation of priestly ministry and secularisation, it actually works with the very values it claims to reject.<sup>18</sup> The Pope is fond of the image of the shepherd when describing priesthood and priestly ministry. When Christ speaks about 'the good shepherd' who lays down his life for his sheep, it is not just in the moment of martyrdom but in the daily sacrifice of care.

That this is centred on and draws strength from prayer and the Eucharist is a given, but the sacramental and liturgical care of God's people will also extend practically to the corporal works of mercy—tending the sick, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving drink to the thirsty, sheltering the traveller, visiting the prisoner and burying the dead—all aspects of Francis's performative theology of mercy. This entails the prophetic service of speaking against injustice, against the inherent inequality that preserves oppressive social and economic systems. Essentially, it must also mean being with one's people, whatever their state or circumstance. The loving service to which every office is called cannot be effective if it puts its own status, acceptability and security before that of the people of God. The sacrament of priesthood confers a grace, it does not need to be wrapped in watered silk and swathed in

<sup>18</sup> Compare Christ's criticism of the Scribes and Pharisees: Luke 11: 37–54; 20: 45–47; Matthew 23: 1–39; Mark 12: 35–40.



© Centro Televisivo Vaticano

*Pope Francis washing the feet of migrants at Castelnuovo di Porto in 2016*

incense to enhance or project that grace. It only needs to ‘wash feet’ with Christ and cover itself in the humility of the Saviour be the true *alter Christus* for God’s people. All the expensive theatrics simply reveal a worldly mind-set and an ideology dressed as theology.

The logic applies also to the papacy. The temptation for the Church and the ultramontanist view of the papacy is to mimic secular power and monarchy. This is a refusal—implicit and explicit—to enter into the way of the cross and, at least at this level, it can be a fear of losing power and influence. The Church cannot escape the same temptations that faced Christ at the threshold of his ministry and, as then, there can be only one answer to all the seductive offers of security, recognition, power and success: God alone. The transformation of the ultramontanist theology of the papacy did not begin with Francis but at the council. With the resignation of Benedict XVI, the papacy was demythologised so that its spiritual and ecclesial gift might be renewed, its authority flowing from its humility of service and its prophetic *parrhesia* to speak the truth in love to a fragile, corrupt but redeemed, world in which goodness can prevail over evil.

#### *A Synodal Church*

In the simple preference for the title ‘bishop of Rome’, Francis is placing himself not above but within the college of bishops. This is also apparent in his demonstrable capacity to listen attentively to the other, even the hostile other, but especially the suffering other, and to respond even if

that means accepting his own failure.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, he is not afraid astutely to use the enormous symbolic and operative power of the papacy with subtlety and decisiveness when required. The form of Franciscan leadership is not only grounded in a christology but in a spirituality, which integrates it in person and action. It is not perfect—few popes have so openly spoken about their own failures and mistakes—but it is leadership which allows for other voices, insights and authorities. As it reaches out to the world in fraternal love and concern, so it also reaches into the community, making space and developing new processes.

The principle of looking to the periphery is not just an expression of a dynamic *communio* and a reordering of power, it is also epistemological. If we wish to understand the complexity of people's lives and the circumstances that they face, if we wish to know the impact of decisions and policies, then we must look to those people and those situations that are furthest from the centre or from the apex of the hierarchy. Practically, we can see how Francis has begun the process of renewal and rebalancing by widening the college of cardinals and bringing the insights of the episcopal conferences into his teaching. He has not only given them a voice; he has been their voice, and this is an experiential and practical realisation of communion and synodality.

The development of synodality, which, in many ways, was simply outlined at the council, has been one of the most significant dimensions of Francis's papacy and the resourcing of the universal Church for its mission. Beyond the extended consultation of the laity, they have been actively included and represented in synodal sessions. This is been especially fruitful, not only in the two synods on marriage and family but also in those on youth and the Amazon. Here we can see evidence of Francis's roots in the practices of Ignatian spirituality, especially discernment.

### *A Discerning Church*

A Church which lives in history must be a discerning Church. Discernment is not only needed for extraordinary times, but it is the *habitus* of Christian life and action:

We need it at all times, to help us recognise God's timetable, lest we fail to heed the promptings of his grace and disregard his invitation to grow .... Discernment also enables us to recognise the concrete

<sup>19</sup> Compare Austen Ivereigh, *Wounded Shepherd: Pope Francis and His Struggle to Convert the Catholic Church* (New York: Henry Holt, 2019).

means that the Lord provides in his mysterious and loving plan, to make us move beyond mere good intentions.<sup>20</sup>

Although all deliberative meetings will entail some form of politics, synods and councils do not function (at least in theory) like political forums. They are essentially gatherings of the Church seeking to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit and to find what best expresses the truth of God's revelation in a given situation or with regard to a particular question.<sup>21</sup>

Discernment is a theological act; it cannot be reduced to a series of formulae or protocols. It is not a management exercise. It requires a sense of our own situatedness—our determining histories, desires, prejudices, fears and hopes—so that where they are obstacles to discerning God's truth or path they can be acknowledged and removed if possible. Discernment requires a profound attentiveness to all the movements of the Spirit and the different voices in which it may come to expression.<sup>22</sup> It requires an interior freedom and openness as well as generosity, trust and faith that Christ is present and active in his Church and that, even through limited and imperfect instruments, the Spirit can still speak and wisdom can emerge. The process of discernment allows the movement of the Holy Spirit in the *sensus fidelium* to have an active and participative voice. It opens the way for the Church to move beyond the *ecclesia docens, ecclesia discens* binary to a more complete ecclesial *communio*.

Discernment, especially at this level of the Church's life, also requires that we inhabit time and history in a different way; it lives with a historical consciousness that is always *sub specie aeternitatis*. This asks us to develop two attitudes: first, not simply to see things in terms of the immediate but also in terms of salvation history. It requires the wisdom of Gamaliel, to let things emerge and bear their fruit in God's time. Second, we need to recognise that not all discerned things carry the same weight. What is right for this moment and in these circumstances can develop in the light of future questions and situations.

<sup>20</sup> *Gaudete et exsultate*, n. 169. Compare particularly the pastoral use of discernment in *Amoris laetitia* especially nn. 37 and 79; and the whole chapter in *Christus vivit*, nn. 278–282, which maps out the process of discernment and formation in terms of vocation.

<sup>21</sup> From the beginning in *Evangelii gaudium*, the theme of discernment is introduced as the 'modus' for the mission and life of the Church, 'evangelical discernment' nn. 133 and 180, especially in response to different cultures and ecclesial circumstances.

<sup>22</sup> Compare Marcello Semeraro, *Ascoltare e curare il cuore. Il discernimento nella vita dei pastori della Chiesa* (Vatican City: Biber, 2019), especially 165. In this book Semeraro develops discernment as a disposition of the habitus of priesthood.

This is not the same as the normal historical contingency, rather it is knowing that our present always stands within a living tradition, conscious of its responsibilities to those who have gone before and to those who are still to come. What matters is that in our formulae and decisions Christ is not diminished or the Spirit's voice silenced: 'what wisdom brings is not the ability to see into the future but openness to see into the present, and recognise the Spirit in the present in whatever manner he manifests himself'.<sup>23</sup> A discerning Church needs to be a listening Church: one that continues to learn the depth, beauty and power of life unfolding within it, and one attentive to the pain and the suffering that exists in its members and to which it can sometimes contribute.<sup>24</sup>

If discernment has always been part of the Church's tradition and life, Francis has now made it formally part of its spiritual tradition, a necessary exercise of its desire to be sent by Christ into the world. He has also shown that the Pope, even as teacher, is also a facilitator of discernment in the Body of Christ. This is a recovery of the spiritual service of the episcopal office. Part of discerning is the wisdom to judge 'readiness': when things have matured sufficiently to bring consolation, clarity and life. This takes time. It is not easy to resist the pressures of insatiable and distorting media, hungry for news and events, or to avoid criticism from those who seem already to know the right answers in advance, who want the Pope and the synods to endorse their positions.

What emerges through the inclusive and discerning processes of the Franciscan papacy is that these parties (whatever their position on the ecclesial spectrum) appear to have an impoverished ecclesiology. They appear united in wanting the Pope to act to support their position without respecting the synodal process of discernment or, at least, wanting to short-circuit it. In other words, they want the papacy to return to the preconciliar model, provided theirs is the voice that is dominant. What Francis is asking for is a Church of real synodality, walking together even if it means walking at a slower pace, until the whole Body of Christ can come to live with a decision and find it fruitful for their life and mission.

Even so, this does not preclude the Church from responding to the real needs of people while *in via*. Compassion and care, especially when they lift a burden, heal a wound or open up a new possibility of living,

<sup>23</sup> John Mahoney, *Seeking the Spirit: Essays in Moral and Pastoral Theology* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1981), 94.

<sup>24</sup> *Gaudete et exsultate*, n. 170.

are always blessed and grace-filled. Neither the Church's life nor its witness is ever diminished by them. If the Church can make the gift of discernment part of its normal 'way of proceeding'—to borrow an Ignatian expression—then it will be a Church that is renewed in the Spirit; it will have a freedom to serve the world and help it to understand that seeking God's will is not subjection but liberation and the fullness of life.

Discernment, then, is not a solipsistic self-analysis or a form of egotistical introspection, but an authentic process of leaving ourselves behind in order to approach the mystery of God, who helps us to carry out the mission to which he has called us, for the good of our brothers and sisters.<sup>25</sup>

### *The Scandalous Wound of Abuse.*

However, if the world is to trust the Church, then the Church must first address its own woundedness. No doubt one could draft a long list of wounds and scandals, but the one that cries out to us in this moment is that of sexual abuse and the underlying corruption of power that it signifies. The way in which Francis has acted to reform the canonical procedures, open the Church to greater transparency and require that the ecclesial authorities make situations and perpetrators known to public law enforcement agencies has been relatively swift and necessary. There is still much more to do, for abuse can never be properly addressed unless there is a complete change of culture throughout the whole Church.<sup>26</sup>

One of the most significant actions of Francis in this regard—which needs to be a model in the practice of the local churches—is to place the survivors of abuse at the centre and let their own voices be heard. Again, we see Francis's pastoral practice of beginning with an open attentiveness, not presuming to know in advance what the other's experience is or what he or she might say. At the four-day summit meeting held at the Vatican in February 2019 this was the practice that was adopted.<sup>27</sup> It was organized

<sup>25</sup> *Gaudete et exsultate*, n. 175. Part of any discernment process is recognising 'readiness' and having the freedom for that moment to arrive. Francis has opened up areas of the Church's life which have pastoral and personal urgency but are also neuralgic, such as matters around divorce and remarriage or the ordination of married men. A discerning Church has to learn to live without a formal resolution of such questions until they mature, and the Church can come to decisions and practices which it believes express its faith and enhance its life. This is not to dismiss or undervalue the real personal stress and suffering that giving time to mature can cause.

<sup>26</sup> Consider Francis's attempts to repair the mistakes he made regarding the allegations of abuse in Chile; see James Hanvey, 'The Spirit and the Letter', *Thinking Faith* (24 August 2018), at <https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/spirit-and-letter>.

<sup>27</sup> 'Protection of Minors in the Church', 21–24 February 2019.

around the themes of responsibility, accountability and transparency, and the testimonies of those who had been abused were at its heart.

Abuse is a profound trauma which continues to have effects throughout a life. Although patterns may be identified, it is unique to each individual. One of the most devastating experiences is to be silenced, not only by the abuser but the very institution that claims to value you. In giving the survivors their own voice and space, the summit was not only a moment when bishops were confronted with the personal realities of abuse, it was also a new beginning. The only way in which the Church can come to those who have been abused by its priests and office-holders, is to stand before their searing truth.

Many considered the Pope's closing address, although sincere, to be too weak and spiritual. Throughout the Church what is needed is decisive action and policies *now*. Once more, without diminishing the urgency of the issue, the Pope recognised that in a complex and universal, culturally diverse Church, a process of assimilation and appropriation is needed if change is to be more deeply founded. This is not avoidance, but a test of leadership that can continue to hold fast to the process, not slackening the momentum for reform, both at the level of the Vatican and within local hierarchies. In fact, a month after the summit, the Pope issued three laws which introduced significant positive changes in the Church's practice.<sup>28</sup>

### ***The Joy of Mercy***

'Knowing Jesus Christ by faith is our joy; following him is a grace, and passing on this treasure to others is a task entrusted to us by the Lord, in calling and choosing us.'<sup>29</sup> These words come at the end of the introduction to the Aparecida document which, in many ways, has been the blueprint for the papacy of Pope Francis. The papacy is as much about a person as it is about an office and, even from a brief and selective overview, we can see the extent to which they interact. The astonishing feature of this ancient and unique institution is its ability to be a guarantor of fidelity and stability, not only for Christian faith, but also for the hope that resides in humanity and in history, while also retaining the capacity for change and surprise.

<sup>28</sup> Vatican Law CCXCVII, 'On the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons'; a Moto Proprio, 'On The Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons'; and guidelines for the vicariate of the Vatican City on the protection of minors and vulnerable adults, all 26 March 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Fifth Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, *Concluding Document*, available at <https://www.celam.org/aparecida/Ingles.pdf>, n. 18.



We can see all of these aspects in the Franciscan papacy. It would be premature to think that it is a papacy that has arrived at its definitive form or has no more surprises. Nevertheless, it is possible to summarise and identify those enduring features which have entered into the life of the Church. They are enduring not because they originate with Francis, but because they are the movements of the Spirit always present in the Church, which he has brought to light at this moment. They are the necessary resources—spiritual, theological, pastoral, human and imaginative—which the Church needs if it is to respond to the urgent challenges of humanity and the world order at this time of change.

Although the emphasis has been on the pastoral, we see a papacy which is sophisticated and nuanced both in its *realpolitik* and in its *theopolitik*.<sup>30</sup> It is a papacy which has helped move the Church out of its captivity to European thought and its pathologies, towards the ways in which the Spirit is speaking in other parts of the Church and the world. This has increased the Church's intellectual and spiritual resources, especially its pastoral imagination. In his understanding and practice of the office of Peter, Francis has given an example of humble and inclusive service, sensitive to the realities of people's lives—especially those of the marginal, abandoned, lost and vulnerable. He has been their voice in the forum of the nations.

In many ways, his ministry has brought to the surface the essence of the Church's pastoral compassion—that deep charismatic stream which has never ceased to flow and is needed now more than ever. In all of this, the Franciscan papacy has shown a charismatic *parrhesia* of vision and action, especially in terms of building justice; equitable economic and political structures; reaching out in peace and reconciliation to other Christian communities and religions; and mobilising our humanitarian instincts to create and sustain a more interconnected and secure world. Above all, Francis has placed 'our common home' at the centre of the world's thinking and the Church's life. This has both recovered and revived the Christian theology of creation, and connected it to practical ecological outcomes.

For all this, however, the deepest renewal will come from placing God's compassion and mercy at the centre of the Church's life and mission. It is essentially a strategy of self-forgetfulness: not to let the problems and

<sup>30</sup> See Massimo Borghesi, *The Mind of Pope Francis: Jorge Mario Bergoglio's Intellectual Journey*, translated by Barry Hudock (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2017).

anxieties of the institution occlude the majesty of God's mercy given in Christ and the life-giving gift of the Holy Spirit. There is no human being who, at some point, does not need to experience the gift of mercy. This universal need and universal sacrament open the way to healing and salvation. Without mercy, the Church has nothing to offer the world. With compassion and mercy comes the grace of discernment, which Francis has made central to the pilgrimage of God's people in history. When the Church ceases to be a discerning body, it has ceased to trust the Holy Spirit; it gives itself as prey to other alien voices. A Church that lives from its mission to demonstrate God's mercy and cultivates a discerning attentiveness to Christ's presence in the world, need not fear secularisation or predictions of its own irrelevance.

Whatever the limitations of the Franciscan papacy may be, these seem to me to be the graces and the resources with which it has gifted the Church for its life and mission. They all flow from a personal spirituality of encounter with Christ and the desire to serve him.<sup>31</sup> For Francis, the truth is not a series of propositions to be defended but an encounter with a person, with Christ, to be loved and followed. This is the reality for every disciple, but maybe especially for a Jesuit one:

Lord, meditating on 'our way of proceeding', I have discovered that the ideal way of our way of acting is your way of acting.

Give me that *sensus Christi* that I may feel with your feelings, with the sentiments of your heart, which basically are love for your Father and love for all men and women.

Teach me how to be compassionate to the suffering, to the poor, the blind, the lame and the lepers.

Teach us your way so that it becomes our way today, so that we may come closer to the great ideal of Saint Ignatius: to be companions of Jesus, collaborators in the work of redemption.<sup>32</sup>

**James Hanvey SJ** has been head of the theology department at Heythrop College and director of the Heythrop Institute for Religion, Ethics and Public Life. He has held the Veal Chair in Ignatian Spirituality (Milltown, Dublin) and the Lo Schiavo Chair in Catholic Social Thought (University of San Francisco). He was master of Campion Hall, Oxford, from 2013 to 2018. He now lives and works in Rome.

<sup>31</sup> See the introduction to *Veritatis gaudium*, nn. 1–6. This is arguably the most succinct statement of the theological rationale of Francis' understanding of the Church's mission and the purpose of his own papacy.

<sup>32</sup> Prayer of Pedro Arrupe, quoted in GC 34, decree 26, n. 29.

# THE CROSS AND THE MISSION

*Jorge Mario Bergoglio*

**W**E CAN TAKE AS a ‘composition of place’ for our thoughts today the utter loneliness of the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 19:4). He had just fulfilled his mission, the victory over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:20–40) and, despite the successful result, he felt solitary and *wished he were dead*. It so happened that his mission had not finished. He was invited to an encounter with the living God (1 Kings 19:9–14) and into the rich apostolic flowering that lay ahead (1 Kings 19:19–21): a mighty undertaking, but one marked out with *the experience of abandonment and of the cross*. Another image that can help us is that of Jonah: in his egoistic loneliness he wants to die, because his human plans did not coincide with those of God (Jonah 4:1–11).

These are two men who suffer abandonment and loneliness while in the middle of a mission with which they have been entrusted, and which they resist in one way or another, yet are invited to go ahead. Let us ask for the grace to accept the dimension of the cross which goes with every mission.

## ***Fear of the Mission***

A peculiar relationship exists between the Lord and the person whom He sends on mission: Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joseph, John the Baptist .... All have felt the inadequacy of their own possibilities when faced with the Lord’s request: ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?’ (Exodus 3:11); ‘Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips!’ (Isaiah 6:5); ‘Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy’ (Jeremiah 1:6); ‘I need to be baptized

Points for reflection given to the Mary Ward sisters, known then in Argentina as the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Words in *italics* are underlined in the original text. Published as ‘Cruz y la misión’, *Boletín de Espiritualidad*, 89 (September–October 1984), 1–8; more articles by Fr Bergoglio from *Boletín de Espiritualidad* were translated by Philip Endean, ‘Jorge Mario Bergoglio: Writings on Jesuit Spirituality I and II’, *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 45/3 and 45/4 (Autumn and Winter 2013).

by you, and do you come to me?' (Matthew 3:14). And Joseph with Mary 'planned to dismiss her quietly' (Matthew 1:19).

At first there is resistance, the inability to understand the greatness of the call, *fear of the mission*. This sign is from the good spirit, especially if it does not stop there but allows the Lord's strength to speak about that weakness, and give it consistency and a foundation: 'I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain' (Exodus 3:12); 'Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out' (Isaiah 6:7); 'Do not say, "I am only a boy"; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.' (Jeremiah 1:7–8); 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness' (Matthew 3:15); 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 1:20).

What happened to our ancestors can serve as *an example for us*. On being chosen, we feel that the weight is enormous, we feel fear (and in some cases panic). That is how the cross begins. And, nevertheless, we feel at the same time the deep attraction of the Lord who, by the very fact that he calls us, seduces us with a burning fire to follow him (compare Jeremiah 20:7–18). The two feelings go together because—from the epoch of the patriarchs—they forecast the abandonment of Christ on the cross, placed there to fulfil to the end the Will of the Father. The mission places us out of necessity upon the wood of the cross: this is the sign that the mission received is in accordance with the Spirit of God and not of the flesh.

In the loneliness of whomever is missioned there is an initial renouncement ('they left everything and followed him'; Luke 5:11), which will increase in strength all through life into old age ('when you grow old ... someone else will ... take you where you do not wish to go'; John 21:18). When we accept a mission there is some dimension of total renouncement, similar to that of the dying. And it is only in that dimension, that of the 'moribund', that we grasp the real reach of what is being asked of us, and can hit on the right path: 'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies [and this happens only in loneliness], it bears much fruit' (John 12:24).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is why Ignatius considers that an excellent viewpoint when making an election is the moment of one's death: 'If I were at the point of death, consider what procedure and what criteria I would then



The Mission of the Apostles, by Giovanni Battista Bissoni, 1631

### ***The Dialectic of Fear and Seduction***

When Jesus sends out his disciples (when he gives them their mission) two themes are woven together.<sup>2</sup> The first warns them of the struggle they will have to undergo, the reality of their situation:

See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. (Matthew 10:16–18)

Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 10:21–22)

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household. (Matthew 10:34–36)

... those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God (John 16:2).

wish to have followed in making the present election. Make my own decision entirely according to this rule.' (Exx 186) One finds here once more the theology of 'as if' which was so dear to Ignatius.

<sup>2</sup> See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, translated by Richard Beckley (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994).

The second series of instructions brings fortitude and consolation:

When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you (Matthew 10:19–20).

Have no fear of them (Matthew 10:26).

Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28).

So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows (Matthew 10:31).

The mission is to be found *in the dialectic* of these two series of instructions—a restatement of *the fear and the seduction* which could be seen in the calling of the patriarchs and prophets. Many years after Jesus had spoken, the first Christians would focus on this special feature which characterizes those sent on mission: these were men,

... who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. (Hebrews 11:33–38)

And that is so because the mission of the apostle participates in the mission of Jesus Christ, the Son of God: ‘Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me’ (Matthew 10:40). The dialectic between the promise of persecution and death and the promise of consolation is of *the essence* of anyone sent on mission, because it is of the essence *of Christ Himself*, missioned by the Father, who went to his death out of obedience, and there—for ‘you will not ... let your Holy One experience corruption’ (Acts 2:27)—was appointed Lord. It is in contemplating the Lord Jesus, the Lordship of Christ, that one understands the true reach of a vocation to mission. The bold proclamation of the letter to the Hebrews is no anachronism:

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward. (Hebrews 11:24–26).

Someone sent on mission is *appointed* for two things: *to be with Christ* (including on the cross) and *to preach*. These are inseparable, as is clear from the text of Mark (3:13–19): being with Christ will be genuine if it leads into preaching, and this will be authentic if it is purified by being on the cross with Christ. That is why, when Jesus selects he *appoints*: the mission is an appointment, one for which we have to care, but of which we are not owners such that we can adjust it to suit ourselves. It is an institution in accord with *the essence of Christ*.

### ***The Institution of the Mission***

The mission *places us there* where Jesus Christ is, on the cross.

If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you (John 15:18).

Remember the word that I said to you, 'Servants are not greater than their master'. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. (John 15:20–21; compare Matthew 10:24)

If someone were to complain, any reply would not refer to the freedom with which the following of Jesus began: you followed me because you chose freely and you wanted to do so. That is true, but it is not the reply which carries with it fortitude at the moment of the cross. The reply points rather to the *institution* of the mission: 'You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last ....' (John 15:16)

This reference to what serves as our foundation, to what institutionalises us as 'missioned', can only have one issue: we must try, by all means possible, not to come down from the cross, but to take on the 'essence of Christ':<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Bergoglio uses the Latin phrase 'formalitas Christi', which had been hinted at earlier, above 78, by the Spanish 'fomalidad de Cristo', which was translated into English as 'of the essence'.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5–8)

And this is no simple piece of advice. St Paul is speaking from the depth of a conviction which takes on majestic expression: ‘if then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete’ (Philippians 2:1–2).

The apostle is someone who is qualified as having ‘died with Christ’ (Romans 6:3, 4, 8). Such a person belongs no longer to him- or herself, but is ‘buried with him’ (Colossians 2:12). To follow any other path implies being ashamed of Christ, and for such a person there is reserved the eschatological shame of the Lord: ‘Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels’ (Mark 8:38). The cross, then, takes on the dimension of witness and is—at the same time—the place to which we are led when our testimony is authentic.

St Ignatius noted how difficulties arose when he undertook the apostolate, that is when he was fulfilling his mission (*Autobiography*, n.82), and in a letter to Isabel Roser he writes:

From the moment that anyone has deliberately chosen and is utterly resolved to engage themselves on behalf of God Our Lord’s glory, honour, and service, they have declared war on the world and lifted their banner against this age. They are prepared to reject what is highly regarded, and to welcome what is low. They are willing to make no distinction between high and low, honour or dishonour, riches or poverty, affection or dislike, welcome or rejection, in a word, the glory of the world or all the insults of our age. In future, no importance can be given to those affronts in this life that remain mere words and fail to hurt a hair of our heads. Insinuations, slurs and calumnies are painful or laughable in proportion to the desire we have for them; if our wish is to have absolute respect from, and glory among, our equals, then our roots cannot be very deep in God Our Lord, nor can we fail to suffer hurt when insults come our way. Even the joy I felt at first that the world was insulting you was offset by my sorrow on learning that you had been forced to look for medical remedies in face of the pain and worry brought on by



those adversities. Provided that you can acquire real patience and resolution, bearing in mind the greater injuries and insults that Christ Our Lord underwent on our behalf and to stop others from sinning, I would pray to the mother of God that greater insults might come your way so that your merit might be greater and greater. On the other hand, if we do not acquire this patience, it would be better for us to blame ourselves for our own bodily sensuality, and because we are not as insensible and mortified in relation to the things of this world as we should be, rather than to blame those who are doing the insulting. They are providing us with the opportunities to win profits that no businessman of this world could ever have gained, and to heap up riches beyond those of anybody in this life.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Apostolic Courage and Constancy***

This letter from St Ignatius provides an occasion to describe *two attitudes* that are the sign that the person entrusted with the mission has taken up that mission on the cross of the Lord. Both have to go together and they delineate the outline of the man or woman who—once the mission is received—does everything to have the mind of the Lord who sends them on mission: *apostolic courage and constancy*.

Mary Ward also says as much, but by pointing in the opposite direction, towards the defects that are opposed to these two attitudes of courage and constancy: presumption and an evil fear. ‘Timid persons’, she says, ‘will never ascend very high in the path of virtue, nor work anything great in the religious state, but the presumptuous will not persevere to the end’.<sup>5</sup> These two attitudes, courage and constancy (*parrhesia* and *hypomone*), go together, as each presupposes the other:

Do not, therefore, abandon that *confidence* [*parrhesia*] of yours; it brings a great reward. For you need *endurance* [*hypomone*], so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet ‘in a very little while, the one who is coming will come and will not delay; but my righteous one will live by faith. My soul takes no pleasure in anyone who shrinks back.’ But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved. (Hebrews 10:35–39)

<sup>4</sup> Ignatius to Isabel Roser, 10 November 1532, in *Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings*, translated by Philip Endean and Joseph A. Munitiz (London: Penguin, 1996), 126; MHSJ EI 1, 83–88.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Ward, *Instituto*, 72: this work does not exist in English, but this and other quotations are found in *The Heart and Mind of Mary Ward*, edited by Anthony Clarke (Wheatthampstead: Anthony Clarke, 1985), 65. The translator is grateful to Gemma Simmonds for these references.

Cowardice is to *shrink back and so be lost*: that lack of constancy and patience, which on meeting the first challenge, makes us come down from the cross in order to engage in battle in our own way and not that of the Lord.

For Mary Ward, *parrhesia* presumed constancy and was what made us 'team' members caught up by an ideal:

Remain steadfastly in the service of God until the end and do not trouble where you will end your life, for it little matters whether it is behind a bush or in a ditch or in your bed so long as you are found faithful.<sup>6</sup>

Regarding constancy she tells us: 'Do not be inconstant, but persevere firmly in the path of virtue; for it is not those who start well, but those who persevere to the end who will be blessed'.<sup>7</sup> 'The ways of virtue endure no standing still; whoever does not go forward goes back.'<sup>8</sup> For Mary Ward another name for 'courage' is 'trust in God'. Here she is simply following the tradition which often translates *parrhesia* with the word *fiducia*. For example:

Whoever would work much good in this company must have a total distrust of herself and great confidence in God .... Mistrust in God, as it were, ties his hands, so that He cannot bestow upon us His blessing and His divine gifts .... It is a great ingratitude and one of the greatest to think that all things come by chance ... and not to make our benefits of all things that happen as coming from the hand of God; for ... a sparrow falleth to the ground, but by the special prudence of God .... It very ill becomes a religious person to be faint-hearted, for she knows well that God is omnipotent, and that He loves her infinitely, and therefore will permit nothing which could hurt her .... A troubled, dejected spirit will never love God perfectly, nor do much good to His honour.<sup>9</sup>

Courage is needed to embrace the cross; and to remain upon it to the end requires constancy. There are Christians who boldly take up apostolic works but, when a difficulty arises, they lose heart. They do not know what patience is. In the end, what purifies courage is to suffer

<sup>6</sup> Mary Ward, *Instituto*, 66; *Heart and Mind of Mary Ward*, 57.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Ward, *Instituto*, 72; *Heart and Mind of Mary Ward*, 72.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Ward, *Instituto*, 73; *Heart and Mind of Mary Ward*, 70.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Ward, *Instituto*, 64–65; *Heart and Mind of Mary Ward*, 54–55; and Immolata Wetter, *Mary Ward in Her Own Words*, (Rome: IBVM, 1997), 47.

with and for Christ. That is why these two virtues, patience and courage, are so pre-eminently apostolic. Both are practised with the cross and both are an indication that we have accepted a mission with the 'essence of Christ'.

### Conclusion

In the course of these reflections we have been able to see how 'receiving a mission' is intimately connected to 'being nailed to the cross'. The Christian mission, which we have received from Christ Our Lord, cannot be conceived without reference to the cross. Even more, it cannot be conceived without the cross. If we forget that truth we become obsessed with triumph. But the triumphalist attitude is not always obvious. Most often it appears *sub angelo lucis* ('disguised as an angel of light'), as being a choice of our own pastoral methods. But these always come down to being a descent from the cross: 'You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' (Matthew 27:40)

But anyone who has a share in the cross has no need to shore up this activity with triumphs because such a person knows that the cross itself is the triumph, and to that extent it is our only hope (*Salve Crux, spes unica!* ['Hail, O Cross, our only hope!']). Though challenged by the worries that indiscreet pastoral anxieties may level against us, the only reply will be the sign of Jonah. We will not come down from the cross. Rather with patience and courage, feeling as Jesus Christ felt, we will continue to carry on the mission entrusted to us.

**Jorge Mario Bergoglio SJ** was elected Pope in 2013. At the time of writing this article he was rector of the Colegio Máximo in San José, Argentina, where he was in charge of Jesuit formation.

*translated by Joseph A. Munitiz SJ*

# THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST AND OF THE GOSPEL IN POPE FRANCIS

Guillermo Randle

WHEN ONE APPROACHES Pope Francis in his life in the Spirit, two lines of strength can be seen to emerge.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, there is his personal relation with God, which, when authentic, can lead him to take action. On the other hand, there is the discernment that comes into play with that action, the exercise of Wisdom: ‘the mysterious logic that is not of this world: “This is our logic”, says Saint Bonaventure, pointing to the cross’.<sup>2</sup> At that point, it is not reason that predominates, but knowledge of the Spirit that is within us. In this way, Francis draws together two aspects of Wisdom: discernment, which is its proper exercise; and the cross, which is its criterion and the Wisdom of God. To understand what is inspiring Pope Francis, both of these aspects have to be borne in mind. The intimate relationship between them becomes obvious in his writings and in his personal testimony; it can be seen continuously from his early articles to the recent apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*. For our present purposes we will limit ourselves to two articles from 1984.<sup>3</sup>

As we begin our search and go back in time, a striking aspect of the spirit of Pope Francis emerges from the article, ‘Cruz y sentido bélico de la vida’. Written by the then Fr Jorge Bergoglio, it shows that life in the Spirit can be seen as a war-like struggle between the spirit of Christ and its opposite, the enemy defeated on the cross. In other words, this is a struggle between spirits.

Consequently, implicit in the struggle is the discernment needed to win freedom from the slavery to confusion at the heart of this inner combat. As he claims on another occasion, life in the Spirit ‘consists of

<sup>1</sup> The phrase ‘life in the Spirit’ appeals to us rather than the term ‘spirituality’, which seems both too abstract and too applicable in any religious setting.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate*, n. 174, quoting Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaemeron*, 1.30.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Cruz y sentido bélico de la vida’, *Boletín de Espiritualidad* (February 1984), 1–10; ‘Cruz y la misión’, *Boletín de Espiritualidad* (September–October, 1984), 1–8 (see ‘The Cross and the Mission’, 75–83 above). Both reprinted in Jorge Bergoglio, *Mente abierta, corazón creyente* (Buenos Aires: Claretiana, 2014).

a combat with our desire to find God more in our human imprints than in His divine footsteps'.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, as he explains further in his article 'Cruz y sentido bélico de la vida', at the same time it supplies the parameters and the criterion for any discernment, because, 'To cling to the cross with radical force will be, in final terms, what signals the criterion of truth for any faithful follower of the Master'.<sup>5</sup> We see here the intimate relationship that Francis establishes between discernment and the cross, which is for him the 'criterion of truth' for anyone who wishes faithfully to discern the way to be followed.

Both discernment and the cross re-echo in the testimony given by the life of Pope Francis and in the words found in the other article mentioned, 'The Cross and the Mission'. He gives a picture of the spirit that has inspired both his past life and his life today when he writes:



The Crucifixion, by Simon Vouet, 1622

The Christian mission, which we have received from Christ Our Lord, cannot be conceived without reference to the cross. Even more, it cannot be conceived without the cross. If we forget that truth we become obsessed with triumph .... But anyone who has a share in the cross has no need to shore up his activity with triumphs because such a person knows that the cross itself is the triumph, and to that extent it is our only hope .... Though challenged by the worries that indiscreet pastoral anxieties may level against us .... We will not come down from the cross. Rather with patience and courage, feeling as Jesus Christ felt, we will continue to carry on the mission entrusted to us.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Jorge Mario Bergoglio, preface, in Miguel Ángel Fiorito, *Discernimiento y lucha espiritual* (Buenos Aires: Diego de Torres, 1985).

<sup>5</sup> Bergoglio, 'Cruz y sentido bélico de la vida'.

<sup>6</sup> Bergoglio, 'The Cross and the Mission', 83.

If there is anything about Pope Francis that really strikes home it is, surely, the seal set by the spirit of Christ and the gospel which is embodied in his patience and courage; he himself does not come down from the cross, 'because he knows that the cross itself is a triumph'. From the cross he can transmit the liberating message that it itself is. The cross stands in opposition to the spirit that traps us in our own egoistic self-satisfactions, which frustrate us as human beings and as followers of Christ.

\* \* \*

In his apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, Francis is even more explicit about the spirit that is moving him, especially in the first chapter: here in making a call to holiness; he insists that it should take flesh 'in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities' (n.2), the ones that, as shepherd and servant of the people of God, he now has to face today. For this reason he insists that in reaching out to others, the smell should be more that of the sheep than the aroma of incense.<sup>7</sup>

There can be no doubt that the spirit of Francis is, on the one hand, that of a man of the future and not of the past. For him, however, to change is to remain faithful to tradition, which is not the preservation of ashes but rather the setting alight of the Spirit.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, his spirit is one that does not get involved in party quarrels, nor is hedged in by groups imbued with a worldly spirit. Instead it takes its motivation from the Spirit itself: it tries to build bridges rather than walls, to delve into the heart of conflicts in order to discern what the spirits are impelling different attitudes. It tries to free itself from confused thinking and find the path that leads more closely to Christ. This puzzles those who are looking for definite positions in what are sterile conflicts; they try to appropriate him to one or another party, and they label as ideology what is simple Christianity.

Francis knows, moreover, that the Church is not the Kingdom of God, even if it is in the Church that the revelation of the Kingdom should take place. This is the new revelation deep at the heart of the Church, a clear manifestation of the spirit of Christ and of the gospel as a way of life for the people of God, which is a community of faithful open to the world. More than an institution, the Church is the realisation of what is prophetic in Christianity.

<sup>7</sup> See Pope Francis, homily at Chrism Mass, 28 March 2013.

<sup>8</sup> See Pope Francis, closing speech of the 2019 Amazon Synod, 26 October 2019.

It is because of this same spirit that some fail to understand Pope Francis or even know how to oppose him. They have remained enclosed within a static and clerical Church, one ever sure of itself and lacking the openness to learn from the very people to whom it goes out to preach. Moreover, some of those who speak negatively or indiscreetly about Francis display a certain immaturity of spirit: they fail to discern that the division of feelings they are producing in the Body of Christ does not lead to God. In addition, there is, among quite a few of them, a sort of ignorance of the gospel: they seem unaware of the central evangelical value of the human person, the goal of redemption, and so they react negatively to certain attitudes adopted by Francis that are fully in line with the Gospels, just as the Jews of Jericho were scandalized when they saw Jesus enter the house of Zacchaeus: 'he has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner' (Luke 19:7).

The apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate* also reveals the spirit of Francis when it returns to discernment as something especially needed at the beginning of the turn of an epoch—a time of profound transformation, such as we are experiencing today. This requires, 'that we examine what is within us—our desires, anxieties, fears and questions—and what takes place all around us .... to follow the Lord more faithfully' (nn.168–169). Similarly, 'prayerful discernment must be born of a readiness to listen: to the Lord and to others, and to reality itself, which always challenges us in new ways' (n.172), while at the same time it 'liberates us from rigidity' (n.173), that is, from the fear of change.

What it asks of us is conversion and a change in those structures that impede both compliance with the action of the Spirit and the creativity that the present moment imposes, something indispensable if we are to follow Christ. It shows us,

... how we can better accomplish the mission entrusted to us ... an authentic process of leaving ourselves behind in order to approach the mystery of God, who helps us to carry out the mission to which he has called us, for the good of our brothers and sisters (nn. 174–175).

This is the mission of moving outwards that Francis is seeking by all means possible: it is to help us grow as persons and as Christians as we move from our egos to God and to others. It is to use discernment in order to become in spirit thinking grown-ups, as Paul says (1 Corinthians 14:20).

One year after *Gaudete et exsultate*, Francis, imbued with the same spirit, returned to the theme in the preface he wrote for a book by

Marcello Semeraro, bishop of Albano, entitled *Ascoltare e curare il cuore*. He stresses there the importance of discernment in the life of the Church's pastors when he writes: 'A conviction which I have expressed on many occasions and in many ways is that the Church needs to grow in her capacity of discernment'.<sup>9</sup> In this way he gives ever more depth to his pastoral and missionary perspective, which echoes so clearly the spirit of Christ and the gospel as summarised by St Mark: 'to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message' (Mark 3:14). Linked here inseparably are 'being with Christ' and 'being sent out', the deep gospel foundations at the base of the missionary spirit of Francis—but also of the missionary transformation that he is seeking. He would want us to be both ready to set out to others, and to do this while in intimate personal relationship with God. From the very start, the pastoral focus of Pope Francis makes quite clear what, deep down, motivates him to move into action. Its genuine authenticity is shown by deeds according to the Spirit, proof of a living faith.

In coherence with his spirit, Francis ends his apostolic exhortation with a reference to the cross (n. 174), the criterion for discernment, since this, like the other, 'is our logic', the exercise of wisdom in the Spirit: 'Thus ... people were taught what pleases you' (Wisdom 9:18). This is to discover 'how to follow the Lord more closely' on the right personal path along which He is calling us today, as a united people, in order to be of service to Him in others.

**Guillermo Randle SJ** was born in Buenos Aires, and holds a licentiate in theology and spirituality from ITEPAL-CELAM, Bogotá and the Catholic University of Córdoba, where he teaches. He is a founder member of the International Meetings on the History and Spirituality of the Society of Jesus, and of the Centro de Espiritualidad Ignaciana de Argentina. He has published thirteen studies, *Ensayos de vida en el Espíritu*, lectured and organized workshops in many South American countries, Mexico and the Caribbean.

*translated by Joseph A. Munitiz SJ*

<sup>9</sup> Marcello Semeraro, *Ascoltare e curare il cuore. Il discernimento nella vita dei pastori della Chiesa* (Vatican City: Vaticana, 2019).



# SYNOD AND SYNODALITY IN POPE FRANCIS'S WORDS

Massimo Faggioli

**A**N EMPHASIS ON SYNODALITY is one of the markers of Francis's pontificate, together with a renewed reliance on the bishops' synods, the first of which he announced a few months after his election, in October 2013.<sup>1</sup> By making synodality a recurring term in papal teaching in an unprecedented way, Francis has brought about the revival of a conciliar and post-conciliar ecclesiological theme in the Roman Catholic Church, in an act of reception of a theological debate arising out of the post-Vatican II development of Vatican II ecclesiology.<sup>2</sup>

But there are also significant nuances in Francis's language on synodality. In order to understand the presence in papal language of this theological motif, with vast institutional consequences, I shall analyze some of his most important statements on synods and synodality in the context of the bishops' synods celebrated in the Vatican between 2014 and 2019. This is necessary not only to understanding a key aspect of the pontificate, but also to prepare for the bishops' synod of October 2022, which will be on the theme of synodality itself, as Pope Francis announced on 7 March 2020: 'For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission' (sixteenth ordinary general assembly of the synod of bishops).

## **Synodality ante litteram: The Year 2013**

The ecclesiology of the synodal Church is visible in the very first few words pronounced by Pope Francis immediately after his election in St

<sup>1</sup> See *A cinquant'anni dall'Apostolica sollicitudo. Il Sinodo dei Vescovi al servizio di una Chiesa sinodale*, edited by Lorenzo Baldisseri (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2016). For the debate before Francis, see *L'Année Canonique*, special issue, 'La Synodalité. La Participation au gouvernement dans l'Église' (1992); *Synod and Synodality: Theology, History, Canon Law and Ecumenism in New Contact*, edited by Alberto Melloni and Silvia Scatena (Münster: LIT, 2005); *Chiesa e sinodalità. Coscienza, forme, processi*, edited by Riccardo Battocchio and Serena Noceti (Milan: Glossa, 2007); the special issue of *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 192/2 (2012), with articles by Piero Coda, Bradford Hinze, Bernd Jochen Hilberath, Peter Hünemann and Massimo Faggioli; and Giuseppe Ruggieri, *Chiesa sinodale* (Rome: Laterza, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> See also Massimo Faggioli, *The Liminal Papacy of Pope Francis: Moving toward Global Catholicity* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2020); Massimo Faggioli, 'From Collegiality to Synodality: Promise and Limits of Francis's "Listening Primacy"', *Irish Theological Quarterly* (forthcoming).

Peter's Square, especially in the request for the people's prayers for the new bishop of Rome. But it is an unstated synodality. The concept and the term are absent from the first important decisions announced by Francis, for example the institution of the new 'Council of Cardinals' on 13 April 2013, later described as 'a further expression of episcopal communion and assistance to the *munus petrinum* which the Episcopate across the world is able to offer'.<sup>3</sup>

The synod begins to appear in Francis's vision of his pontificate a few weeks after his election, for example in the 13 June speech to the ordinary council of the bishops' synod, where he characterized the synod in rather traditional terms, but through the personal witness of a synodal father become bishop of Rome:

The Synod of Bishops ... was without a doubt one of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council. Thanks be to God it has been possible in these almost 50 years to experience the benefits of this institution which has been permanently placed at the service of the mission and communion of the Church as an expression of collegiality. I can also bear witness to this through my personal experience, having taken part in various Synod Assemblies. Open to the grace of the Holy Spirit, the soul of the Church, let us be confident that the Synod of Bishops will experience further developments to encourage deeper dialogue and collaboration between Bishops, and between them and the Bishop of Rome.<sup>4</sup>

During this period Francis was drafting the exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (24 November 2013), in which the bishops' synod is mentioned only as a source and origin for his reflections. When addressing the need for pastoral conversion of the 'central structures of the universal Church', *Evangelii gaudium* refers to episcopal conferences, but not the bishops' synod. Synodality is mentioned only once, in reference to the Eastern Orthodox Churches:

In the dialogue with our Orthodox brothers and sisters, we Catholics have the opportunity to learn more about the meaning of episcopal collegiality and their experience of synodality. Through an exchange of gifts, the Spirit can lead us ever more fully into truth and goodness. (n. 246)

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, 'Chirograph Establishing the Council of Cardinals', 28 September 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, speech to the thirteenth ordinary council of the bishops' synod, 13 June 2013.

### ***The Magna Carta of Synodality: The Synods on Marriage and the Family (2014–2015)***

Francis announced the decision to celebrate the synods on the family and marriage on 8 October 2013. This marks the beginning of a period in which the theme of synodality appears more frequently than before and with more clear intention and detail.

In the opening speech of the 2014 synod (third extraordinary general assembly), Francis for the first time connected the bishops' synod and synodality as a motif of his pontificate: 'You will give voice in *synodality*. It is a great responsibility: to bring the realities and problems of the Churches, in order to help them to walk on that path that is the Gospel of the family.' Francis explained synodality as a condition for a new style of being Church more than a process to change ecclesiastical structures:

One general and basic condition is this: speaking honestly. Let no one say: 'I cannot say this, they will think this or this of me'. It is necessary to say with *parrhesia* all that one feels. After the last Consistory (February 2014), in which the family was discussed, a Cardinal wrote to me, saying: what a shame that several Cardinals did not have the courage to say certain things out of respect for the Pope, perhaps believing that the Pope might think something else. This is not good, this is not *synodality*, because it is necessary to say all that, in the Lord, one feels the need to say: without polite deference, without hesitation. And, at the same time, one must listen with humility and welcome, with an open heart, to what your brothers say.<sup>5</sup>



*Pope Francis and bishops at the Family Synod of 2015*

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, opening speech of the 2014 Family Synod, 6 October 2014.

The speech at the conclusion of the 2014 synod did not delve into synodality, but struck a traditional ecclesiological note, emphasizing the celebration of the synod '*cum Petro* and *sub Petro* (with Peter and under Peter), [where] the presence of the Pope is the guarantee of it all'.<sup>6</sup>

At the synod of 2015 (fourteenth ordinary general assembly) there was a much more direct engagement with synodality by Francis. In the opening speech, the Pope described the synod as,

... a journey undertaken together in the spirit of *collegiality* and *synodality*, on which participants bravely adopt *parrhesia*, pastoral zeal and doctrinal wisdom, frankness, always keeping before our eyes the good of the Church, of families and the *suprema lex*, the *salus animarum* (cf. Can. 1752).

Here Francis's emphasis on synods as something fundamentally different from secular legislative assemblies makes its first appearance:

The Synod is neither a convention, nor a 'parlour', a parliament nor senate, where people make deals and reach a consensus. The Synod is rather an *ecclesial expression*, i.e., the Church that journeys together to understand reality with the eyes of faith and with the heart of God; it is the Church that questions herself with regard to her fidelity to the *deposit of faith*, which does not represent for the Church a museum to view, nor just something to safeguard, but is a living spring from which the Church drinks, to satisfy the thirst of, and illuminate the *deposit of life*. The Synod works necessarily within the bosom of the Church and of the Holy People of God, to which we belong in the quality of shepherds—which is to say, as servants. The Synod is also a protected space in which the Church experiences the action of the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

The most important speech—the 'magna carta' of synodality—was delivered by Francis during the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of the synod by Paul VI, on 17 October 2015. Francis spoke of the synodal Church as 'a Church which listens', which realises that listening 'is more than simply hearing'. This is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the bishop of Rome: all are listening to each other and all are listening to the Holy Spirit, the 'Spirit of truth' (John 14:17), in order to know what he is 'saying to the Churches' (Revelation 2:7). Francis stated:

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, concluding speech of the 2014 Family Synod, 18 October 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis, opening speech of the 2015 Family Synod, 5 October 2015.

The Synod of Bishops is the point of convergence of this listening process conducted at every level of the Church's life. The Synod process begins by listening to the people of God, which 'shares also in Christ's prophetic office', according to a principle dear to the Church of the first millennium: 'Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari debet'. The Synod process then continues by listening to the pastors.<sup>8</sup>

Francis's speech of 17 October 2015 was receptive to the post-conciliar theological debate on synodality in its approach to three different institutional levels: the 'particular Churches' (the diocesan synod, the presbyteral council, the college of consultors, chapters of canons and the pastoral council); ecclesiastical provinces and ecclesiastical regions ('Particular Councils and, in a special way, Conferences of Bishops'); and the universal Church. Francis affirmed the bishops' synod as 'an expression of *episcopal collegiality* within an entirely synodal Church', with an emphasis on a collegiality that is not just affective: 'This level manifests the *collegialitas affectiva*, which can also become in certain circumstances "effective", joining the Bishops among themselves and with the Pope in solicitude for the People of God'.<sup>9</sup>

A most indicative part of the speech was the conclusion, where Francis explained synodality in the Church as an alternative way to govern it, compared with the governing institutions in the world of today:

Our gaze also extends to humanity as a whole. A synodal Church is like a standard lifted up among the nations (cf. Isaiah 11:12) in a world which—while calling for participation, solidarity and transparency in public administration—often consigns the fate of entire peoples to the grasp of small but powerful groups. As a Church which 'journeys together' with men and women, sharing the travails of history, let us cherish the dream that a rediscovery of the inviolable dignity of peoples and of the function of authority as service will also be able to help civil society to be built up in justice and fraternity, and thus bring about a more beautiful and humane world for coming generations.<sup>10</sup>

Speaking at the conclusion of the synod, on 24 October, Francis once again highlighted the differences between synodality in the Church and decision-making processes in the secular realm, especially for what concerns the diversity within the Church:

<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, speech for the fiftieth anniversary of the bishops' synod, 17 October 2015, quoting *Lumen gentium*, n.12.

<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis, opening speech of the 2015 Family Synod.

<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, speech for the fiftieth anniversary of the bishops' synod.

And—apart from dogmatic questions clearly defined by the Church’s Magisterium—we have also seen that what seems normal for a bishop on one continent, is considered strange and almost scandalous—almost!—for a bishop from another; what is considered a violation of a right in one society is an evident and inviolable rule in another; what for some is freedom of conscience is for others simply confusion. Cultures are in fact quite diverse, and every general principle—as I said, dogmatic questions clearly defined by the Church’s magisterium—every general principle needs to be inculturated, if it is to be respected and applied.<sup>11</sup>

A few days after the conclusion of the 2015 synod, on 10 November, Francis addressed the participants in the fifth national meeting of the Italian Church (organized and moderated by the Italian bishops’ conference) in Florence. This speech was notable for the Pope’s encouragement of a synodal process at all levels in Italy in order to deepen the message of *Evangelii gaudium*.<sup>12</sup> The encouragement to open a national synodal process has not so far been received by the Italian bishops.

### **Intermezzo: The Years 2016 to 2018**

After the peak of the emphasis on synodality in 2014 and 2015, in the years 2016 and 2017 there was no celebration of a bishops’ synod. The focus of the debate on synodality was the reception of the important post-synodal document *Amoris laetitia*, published in April 2016. But this period is an intermezzo full of other texts and moves. At the beginning of 2017 the preparation of the 2018 Synod on Youth began. On 2 March 2018 the International Theological Commission document ‘Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church’ was published.<sup>13</sup>

The most relevant intervention by Pope Francis in this interlude was the constitution *Episcopalis communio* of September 2018, on the bishops’ synod. *Episcopalis communio* replaced all previous texts—including various points of Canon Law—that in any way pertain to or regulate the working of the synod. Francis quoted all the previous popes who helped shape legislation on the synod in justifying the developments he introduced. In this new legislative text Francis also introduced and institutionalised shifts and breaks from his predecessors. For example,

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, concluding speech of the 2015 Family Synod, 24 October 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis, meeting with the representatives of the fifth national meeting of the Italian Church, Florence, 10 November 2015.

<sup>13</sup> The Italian text, dated 2 March 2018, was published on 3 May. The English translation did not appear until September.

the extensive consultation of the baptized faithful, which Francis initiated in preparation for the 2014 extraordinary assembly on the family and utilised again for the last two ordinary assemblies (2018 and 2019), became a mandatory procedure.

Francis reformed the bishops' synod by inserting it into his vision for a synodal Church, but without really changing the strictly episcopal nature of the synod created by Paul VI in 1965. One sees evidence of this in the whole apostolic constitution, though the only passage where he mentions synodality is in paragraph 6 of the introduction:

Although structurally it is essentially configured as an episcopal body, this does not mean that the Synod exists separately from the rest of the faithful. On the contrary, it is a suitable instrument to give voice to the entire People of God, specifically via the Bishops, established by God as 'authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses of the faith of the whole Church', demonstrating, from one Assembly to another, that it is an eloquent expression of synodality as a 'constitutive element of the Church'.<sup>14</sup>

One of the key novelties in *Episcopalis communio* confirms this unchanging episcopal character of the bishops' synod: should he deem it opportune, the Pope—the president of the synod—can allow an assembly's final document to be published as an official act of the magisterium (that is, as official teaching): 'If it is expressly approved by the Roman Pontiff, the Final Document participates in the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter' (art. 18.1).

The ecclesiology of synodality has *not* yet modified the fundamental structure of the bishops' synod, especially in terms of membership. There is a distance visible between the two in the 'Instruction on the Celebration of the Synod' of 1 October 2018.<sup>15</sup> The normal members of the synods are still bishops, excepting 'others appointed by the pontiff' (art. 2.5, 3.5 and 4.5). These others, including bishops and clergy, cannot exceed 15 per cent of those designated *ex officio* and *ex electione* (art. 6.6). Also the members of the ordinary council of the general secretary of the bishops' synod should be bishops (art. 10.4); the only exception might be (but the *Instruction* does not address this explicitly) if the prefect of the curia dicastery competent for the topic of the synod is not a bishop.

<sup>14</sup> *Episcopalis communio*, n. 6, quoting the speech for the fiftieth anniversary of the bishops' synod.

<sup>15</sup> General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, 'Instruction on the Celebration of the Synodal Assemblies and on the Activity of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops', 1 October 2018.

Two days after the publication of the instruction, in the opening speech of the 2018 synod (fifteenth ordinary general assembly, on ‘Young People, Faith, and Vocational Discernment’), Francis did not use the word ‘synodality’, rather he talked about the synod as ‘a moment of *sharing*’ in which everyone is to speak ‘with courage and frankness (*parrhesia*), namely to integrate *freedom, truth and charity*’. Moreover:

The Synod is an ecclesial exercise in discernment. To speak frankly and listen openly are fundamental if the Synod is to be a process of discernment. Discernment is not an advertising slogan, it is not an organizational technique, or a fad of this pontificate, but an *interior attitude rooted in an act of faith*.<sup>16</sup>

The speech at the conclusion of the synod does not contain the word ‘synodality’ either. The emphasis is on what the synod was *not*:

First: to re-emphasize once more that the Synod is not a Parliament. It is a protected space so the Holy Spirit may act. For this reason, general information is given and not particular details, names, figures of speech, with which the Holy Spirit works in us. And this was a protected space. Let us not forget this: it was the Spirit at work here. The second thing is that the purpose of the Synod is not a document, as I said at the outset. We are laden with documents. I do not know if this document will be effective outside, I do not know. But I know for certain that it must have an effect on us; it must work in us.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Synodality vs Functionalism: The Letter to the Church in Germany; the Synod for the Amazon Region (2019)***

The year 2019 represents a significant moment in the reception by the global Roman Catholic Church of Francis’s push for synodality, both at the local and universal levels. At the local level we have two important examples of synodal processes: the launch of the ‘synodal way’ in Germany at the plenary assembly of the German bishops’ conference (11–14 March 2019) and, in Australia, the first phase of the plenary council planned for 2020–2021 (postponed until 2021–2022 because of the pandemic).

Francis did not address the Australian preparations, but did directly acknowledge the German ‘synodal process’ with a letter dated 29 June 2019. He encouraged this process by inscribing it in the ecclesiology of the local and universal Church of Vatican II, but also warned against the

<sup>16</sup> Pope Francis, opening speech of the 2018 Youth Synod, 3 October 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis, concluding speech of the 2018 Youth Synod, 27 October 2018.





© Mazur/catholicnews.org.uk

temptation of synodality turning into Gnosticism and elitism. Synodality is essentially a spiritual discernment of and in the people of God:

This ... requires in all the People of God, and especially in its shepherds, a state of vigil and conversion which allows these realities to be kept alive and active. Vigil and conversion are gifts that only the Lord can give us. It is enough for us to ask for his grace through prayer and fasting. It has always struck me how, during his life, especially in moments of great decisions, the Lord has been particularly tempted. Prayer and fasting had a special place in determining all his subsequent action (see Matthew 4:1–11). Even synodality cannot escape this logic, and must always be accompanied by the grace of conversion so that our personal and community work can represent and increasingly resemble that of the kenosis of Christ (cf. Philippians 2: 1–11).

Francis insisted on the non-functionalist and non-political features of ecclesial synodality:

Without this [spiritual] dimension, we run the risk of starting from ourselves and from the anxiety of self-justification and self-preservation that will lead us to make changes and adjustments, but halfway, which, far from solving the problems, will end up enveloping us in an endless spiral that kills and suffocates the most beautiful, liberating and promising announcement we have and which gives meaning to our existence: Jesus Christ is the Lord.<sup>18</sup>

Already a few weeks before, in May 2019, Francis had addressed a conference of the diocese of Rome in St John in Lateran and talked about 'the dictatorship of functionalism':

<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis, 'Lettera al Popolo di Dio che è in cammino in Germania', 29 June 2019, my translation.

It is a new ideological colonization that tries to convince that the Gospel is a wisdom, it is a doctrine, but it is not an announcement, it is not a kerygma. And many leave the kerygma, invent synods and counter-synods ... which in reality are not synods, are 'rearrangements'. Because? Because to be a synod—and this also applies to you [as a diocesan assembly]—the Holy Spirit is needed; and the Holy Spirit kicks the table, throws it and starts over. We ask the Lord for the grace not to fall into a functionalist diocese.<sup>19</sup>

Other signs of greater caution by Francis on synodality came from the speeches delivered in the context of the Amazon Synod of October 2019. In the opening speech, the Pope highlighted what synodality is *not*:

We have come here to contemplate, to comprehend, to serve the peoples. And we do so by taking a synodal path; we do so as a synod, not at round tables, not in conferences and further discussions: we do so as a synod, because a synod is not a parliament; it is not a parlour; it is not demonstrating who has more power in the media and who has more power on the web, in order to impose some idea or some plan. This would amount to a congregationalist Church, if we mean taking polls to find out who has the majority. Or a sensationalist Church so far off, so distant from our Blessed Mother, the Catholic Church, or as Saint Ignatius loved to say: 'our Blessed Mother the hierarchical Church'. Synod means walking together under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the primary actor of the synod. Please let us not drive him from the hall.<sup>20</sup>

In the speech at the conclusion of the synod, after reviewing in depth some aspects of the final document endorsed by the synodal fathers, Francis repeated his warning against synodality as a moment for decision concerning intra-ecclesiastical discipline:

There is always an 'elite' group of Christians which likes to interfere in this type of diagnosis, as if it were universal; in the smaller ones or in that type of resolution that is more intra-ecclesiastic discipline, I am not saying inter-ecclesial, [but] intra-ecclesiastic, and to say that this section has won over that section. No, we have all won with the diagnoses that we have made and how far we have come in the pastoral and intra-ecclesiastic issues. But one does not close oneself in on this. Thinking today about these Catholics and at times Christian 'elites', but above all Catholics who want to go to 'the small' [picture] and forget the 'big', a verse from Péguy came to mind and I went to look for it. I will try

<sup>19</sup> Pope Francis, meeting with participants in the conference of the diocese of Rome, 9 May 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Pope Francis, opening speech of the 2019 synod for the Amazon, 7 October 2019.

to translate it well. I think it can help us, when it describes these groups who want the 'small thing' and forget the 'thing' .... I am very pleased that we did not fall prey to these selective groups that, concerning the Synod, just want to see what was decided on this or that intra-ecclesiastic point and they deny the *corpus* of the Synod which consists in the diagnoses that we have carried out in the four dimensions.<sup>21</sup>

Francis's reception of the 2019 synod in the exhortation *Querida Amazonia* (2 February 2020) confirms the turn towards a more cautious interpretation of synodality as something that is not about institutional reform.

An important article on Pope Francis's concept of synod and synodality appeared on 3 September 2020 in *La Civiltà Cattolica*. Written by the editor-in-chief, Antonio Spadaro, it also published excerpts from a note by Pope Francis, with a very interesting comment on the 2019 synod and the subsequent exhortation, specifically on the issue of the ordination as priests of married *virī probati*. This is what Pope Francis wrote:

There was a discussion ... a rich discussion ... a well-founded discussion, but no discernment, which is something other than arriving at a good and justified consensus or relative majorities .... We must understand that the Synod is more than a parliament; and in this specific case the Synod could not escape this dynamic. On this issue the Synod was a rich, productive and even necessary parliament; but no more than that. For me this was decisive in the final discernment, when I thought about how to write the exhortation ....

One of the riches and originality of synodal pedagogy lies precisely in leaving aside parliamentary logic to learn to listen, in community, to what the Spirit says to the Church; for this reason I always propose to remain silent after a certain number of interventions. To walk together means to dedicate time to honest listening, capable of making us reveal and unmask (or at least to be sincere) the apparent purity of our positions and to help us discern the wheat that—until the Parousia—always grows in the midst of weeds. Those who have not understood this evangelical vision of reality expose themselves to unnecessary bitterness. Sincere and prayerful listening shows us the 'hidden agendas' called to conversion. What sense would the synodal assembly have if it were not to listen together to what the Spirit is saying to the Church? I like to think that, in a certain sense, the Synod is not finished. This *time of welcoming* the whole process that we have lived through challenges us to continue to walk together and to put this experience into practice.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Pope Francis, concluding speech of the 2019 Amazon Synod, 26 October 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Pope Francis, quoted in Antonio Spadaro, 'Francis' Government: What Is the Driving Force of His Pontificate?', *La Civiltà Cattolica* (5 September 2020), 350–364.

### ***The Ecclesiology of the People***

Francis's emphasis on synodality is one of the typical elements of his pontificate. Both in words and actions, Francis has inverted the post-conciliar tendency that, until 2013, seemed to have condemned the bishops' synod and the quest for a more synodal Church to irrelevance. But there is, in Francis's approach in the context of the bishops' synod, a particular caution and nuance that always stresses the spiritual, non-institutional dimension of the synodal moment. The emphasis is, especially since 2018, on the assumption that a synod is not the ecclesiastical version of a parliament. There is a growing concern, in Francis's words, that synodal moments can fall into the hands of ecclesial elites pushing for idiosyncratic policy or canonical changes. Synodality is for Francis part of his ecclesiology of the people and not of a comprehensive plan of institutional reform. The passage from the 2019 Synod to the exhortation *Querida Amazonia* has raised the issue of the difficulty of shaping a synodal Church where all voices in the people of God (especially women's) are heard and listened to, without such a process of institutional reform. In other words, the question is whether synodality can really become part of the Catholic Church's life through a change in style only.

The history of synodality in Francis's pontificate is far from over. But the last seven years already make it possible to look into the specific language used by the Pope in addressing the synodal issue in the Roman Catholic Church. Further investigations remain necessary into the roots of Francis's theology of synodality, and how a primacy of discernment can adequately respond to the challenges coming from the institutional disruption in many local churches.

**Massimo Faggioli** is a professor in the department of theology and religious studies at Villanova University in Philadelphia. He is a columnist for the magazines *La Croix International* and *Commonweal*. His latest book is *The Liminal Papacy of Pope Francis: Moving toward Global Catholicity* (2020). He is co-editing with Catherine Clifford *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II* (2021).

# POPE FRANCIS AND CHURCH REFORM

Gerry O'Hanlon

The centralised control from which we suffer ... was built up in less than 100 years. It could be put into reverse in less than ten.<sup>1</sup>

THIS PERHAPS PRESCIENT OBSERVATION by the late Nicholas Lash, first published in 2003 in the pontificate of John-Paul II and then republished in 2008 when Benedict XVI was Pope, may be in the course of realisation in the pontificate of Francis. Lash himself is clear that,

... questions concerning how the Gospel of the crucified and risen one is effectively to be proclaimed, in solidarity with and from the standpoint of the poor, the weak and the disadvantaged, are vastly more important than church structures. *Nevertheless, inappropriate structures frustrate appropriate evangelisation.*<sup>2</sup>

Francis takes the same approach: primacy is always given to our encounter with Jesus Christ, but for this to be facilitated and communicated there needs to be not just renewal, but church reform. While Lash, true to the impulse of Vatican II, focuses this reform on the notion of collegiality, Francis, in a more radical reading of the same council, prefers to speak of the need to move to a synodal Church. I will outline what I think is involved in this bold project of Francis and, in particular after the Amazon Synod, what progress has been made in its realisation, after more than seven of Lash's projected ten years.

## ***Encounter with Jesus Christ***

Commenting on the developing situation of the Church in Ireland, the Derry priest Neal Carlin wrote recently:

Sometimes I think we presuppose a faith and a relationship that simply is not there. Recently a man told me that he had given up

<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Lash, 'Vatican II: Of Happy Memory—and Hope?' in Nicholas Lash, *Theology for Pilgrims* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008 [2003]), 239.

<sup>2</sup> Lash, 'Vatican II', 234 (my emphasis).

the Catholic faith. I asked him what that meant. He said, 'I've stopped going to Mass'. I replied, 'and did you feel any sense of loss?' He was honest and replied, 'not really'. If, God forbid, your wife or child were to die would you feel anything? was my next question. He of course said he would be broken hearted. That is because a deep personal relationship is involved. But I told him he had not really given up the 'faith'. It seems to me he simply did not have it in the first place! It begins as an encounter with Jesus Christ, the Pope says.<sup>3</sup>

It was along these lines that Karl Rahner wrote about the need for the Christian of the future to be a mystic, in the diaspora Church when Christendom was no longer the norm, and secularisation in all its forms had taken its place. It all starts with some kind of encounter, in faith, with Jesus Christ. Remember Jesus and the rich young man: 'Jesus, looking at him, loved him' (Mark 10:21).

Pope Francis speaks eloquently in this vein—the joy of the gospel, the joy of love, rejoice and be glad—in a way that is always shot through with mercy and tenderness, the need for ongoing conversion so that this love can deepen in me. He goes so far as to say: 'the privileged place of the encounter is the caress of the mercy of Jesus Christ towards my sin'.<sup>4</sup> He prefers to stress the dynamic noun 'encounter' rather than the more abstract notion of 'relationship'.

Hans Urs von Balthasar wrote of the true, the good and the beautiful as belonging together, with beauty (glory, love) at the centre. Too often, perhaps, we see Catholicism in terms of doctrine or ethics: no, while these

**What is central  
is God's  
own self**

are important, what is central is God's own self, that encounter, all else comes from that. As Pope Benedict put it in *Deus caritas est*, in a phrase to which Francis often returns: 'Being 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' (n. 1). Benedict spoke of the passion of God for us, *eros*, linking *agape* with the erotic, after the Canticle of Canticles.

And this love is not just for me, but for us—the People of God, the Church (the *ekklesia*), as a sign for all people. It is accompanied by the gift of the Holy Spirit, love personified within the love-life of God, sent to

<sup>3</sup> Neal Carlin, 'Imaging Church and State in a Changing Environment', *The Furrow*, 71 (July–August 2020), 442–445, here 442–443.

<sup>4</sup> Massimo Borghesi, *The Mind of Pope Francis: Jorge Mario Bergoglio's Intellectual Journey* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2018), 279.

us to lead us more fully into the truth, our help in communal discernment. I note the advice of St Ignatius: ‘every good Christian is more ready to put a good interpretation on another’s statement than to condemn it as false’ (Exx 22)—the grace of freedom to listen and hear, as well as speak. Love wants to shout out, to share the good news. And so there is a certain logic flowing from encounter: Jesus loves Peter, Mary Magdalene, whomsoever—he calls them to be with him—they follow (are disciples) and they understand they have a mission, a task to announce the Good News that Jesus brings. As Pope Francis says: ‘Mission is born precisely from the divine allure, by this amazement born of encounter’.<sup>5</sup>

That Good News is contained above all in the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 25: to seek for justice and peace, to care for the poor and the earth, and to tell all that God is love, loves each of us. Francis dreams of a ‘Church which is poor and for the poor’.<sup>6</sup> And so, it has implications for our world, since the Church (the gathering of those who believe in Jesus) is called to be a ‘light of the world’ and each of us is called to play our role according to our talents.

Again, Francis is radical on this, and in a highly secular age does not propose a minimalist version of Christianity in an accommodating, apologetic mode. Instead he boldly affirms in the apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate* (2018): ‘The Lord asks everything of us, and in return he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created. He wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence.’ (n. 1) He goes on to give examples of this suited to ordinary life, of the saints ‘next door’, of a holiness which grows through small gestures.

Here is an example: a woman goes shopping, she meets a neighbour and they begin to speak, and the gossip starts. But she says in her heart: ‘No, I will not speak badly of anyone’. This is a step forward in holiness. Later, at home, one of her children wants to talk to her about his hopes and dreams, and even though she is tired, she sits down and listens with patience and love. That is another sacrifice that brings holiness. Later she experiences some anxiety, but recalling the love of the Virgin Mary, she takes her Rosary and prays with faith. Yet another path of holiness. Later still, she goes out onto the street, encounter a poor person and stops to say a kind word to him. One more step. (n. 16)

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, address to the bishops of Brazil on World Youth Day, Rio de Janeiro, 28 July 2013, quoted in Austen Ivereigh, ‘To Discern and Reform’, *The Way*, 57/4 (October 2018), 21.

<sup>6</sup> *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 198.

And so the mission has truth and ethical content, but it is not primarily doctrinal or ethical: rather, again, it is an encounter with a person, who promises salvation, liberation, fullness of life—Good News! And yet, given our context, the Church and our faith in it often does not seem like Good News: there is often an air of defeatism and demoralisation, rather than mission and joy. How can this change?

### Context

The scandals around sexual and institutional abuse and how they were mishandled are obviously central to any consideration of the challenging context that the Roman Catholic Church faces. And, equally obviously, but at times forgotten, is the reality that ongoing attention to the needs and voices of victims, survivors and their immediate and wider families must remain at the forefront of the Church's response—in its safeguarding practices, but also in its theology and practice of justice. There is also the less dramatic, but inescapable and important, truth that many Catholics have not 'received' aspects of Church teaching on sexuality and gender.

© Wally Gobetz



*Limelight Marketplace, a shopping centre located in a deconsecrated church*

This is a significant obstacle to trust in the institutional Church, particularly among younger people.

However, perhaps the deepest challenge to institutional religion in our contemporary context is secularism and secularisation in their varying forms. In an address of December 2019, Pope Francis stated baldly that 'Christendom no longer exists!', noting that faith, particularly in Europe, is no longer 'an evident presupposition of social life; indeed faith is often rejected, derided, marginalized and ridiculed'. He went on to quote Benedict XVI's remarks concerning the 'progressive secularization of society, and a sort of 'eclipse of the sense of God'.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis, Christmas greetings to the Roman Curia, 21 December 2019.



With regard to secularism, the notion that ‘God is missing but not missed’ has become increasingly common among citizens of the Western world, affecting believers also.<sup>8</sup> This has led to a situation that the Canadian sociologist Charles Taylor called the ‘immanent frame’—a space for human freedom, transparency and respectful democratic inclusion that can remain neutral, it is claimed, only if reference to religion and the transcendence of God is excluded or only maintained privately.<sup>9</sup>

But the exclusion of religion from the public square is coming under increasing critique. Michael Kirwan speaks critically of a postmodern culture which is allergic to grand explanations (narratives) and so prey to fragmentation; it resists claims to even well-grounded authority and is pessimistic or cynical with regard to shared visions for our communities.<sup>10</sup> An affirmative approach to our culture’s honouring of human dignity can easily topple over into an immured autonomy, a ‘buffered’ and defended self which has little time for the common good and a deafness to transcendence. The exclusively secularist vision has difficulties with the human search for meaning, which must embrace realities such as suffering and death, not to mention our solidarity with the whole of creation.

In this vein the sociologist of religion Michele Dillon writes hopefully of what she calls the emergence of ‘postsecular Catholicism’. She argues that in many parts of the developed world there is a ‘contrite modernity’ which, while accepting secularisation as the settled reality, admits that there is a place for religion in the public square, not least in offering a corrective and alternative vision of contemporary problems.<sup>11</sup> However, Dillon notes, this needs to be a form of religion which is open to dialogue and interpretative diversity, and not simply reliant on magisterial *diktat* or fiat and a traditionalist mind-set which admits of no development of doctrine. A cultural discernment of postmodernity will want to recognise its positive aspects too, in particular if the Church is actively to engage with our culture critically and not simply in a totally accommodationist or reactionary way.

The Irish theologian Michael Conway has some interesting observations in this context. His analysis is that in contemporary culture

<sup>8</sup> Josep Vives, ‘Dios en el crepúsculo del siglo XX’, *Razón y Fe* (May 1991), 468, quoted in Michael Paul Gallagher, *What Are They Saying about Unbelief?* (Mahwah: Paulist, 1995), 5.

<sup>9</sup> See Graham Ward, ‘Christian Hope Facing Secular Fatalism’, *Doctrine and Life*, 70/4 (April 2020), 2–16, here 3; and Dermot Lane, *Theology and Ecology in Dialogue* (Dublin: Messenger, 2020), 33–35.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Kirwan, ‘Swearing, Blaspheming, Wounding, Killing, Going to Hell ... The World, as Seen and Heard by Ignatius’, *The Way*, 57/4 (October 2018), 77–89.

<sup>11</sup> Michele Dillon, *Postsecular Catholicism* (Oxford: OUP, 2018).

it has become clear that the search for faith is conducted now not so much at the level of reason and argument, but rather on the cultural wavelength of feeling, desire and imagination (hence the centrality of image), with attitudes and assumptions often unconsciously adopted and transmitted digitally through social media. The idiom of narrative, storytelling brimful of personal and communal experience, is likely to communicate more effectively than apologetics couched in abstract metaphysical propositions, however cogent (see recent political referenda). A deferential experience of authority has given way to the authority of experience. Conway notes how the demise of the institutional power of the Church is part of the decline of social hierarchies, in particular patriarchy, with long-term processes of informalisation and individualisation now embedded. Authenticity is deemed more important than formal office. What is valued today, according to Conway, is an alternative order, a new 'social imaginary', in Charles Taylor's words, which is more egalitarian, with enormous appreciation for the human person and authenticity and which embodies a 'rejection of insignificance' (de Certeau), referring to the previous silencing of marginalised voices in our culture (women, the LGBT+ community, children). Equality and freedom (especially freedom of choice) are greatly valued.

Conway argues that what is required for the Church in this new, evolving cultural matrix is less top-down, command-and-obey-style teaching and communication, and more open-space interaction nourished by the gospel and common life, facilitating an adult taking of responsibility for our lives of faith. He concludes by saying of the Catholic Church in Ireland—but one can see how this has wider application: 'I think we can say that the once powerful, monolithic institution is being slowly disempowered and what remains will need to be reshaped into a new, more culturally appropriate constellation'.<sup>12</sup>

What shape of Church might remain true to its own identity and mission and yet best respond to this context, these cultural challenges? Pope Francis is clear and sanguine:

A synodal Church is like a standard lifted up among the nations (cf. Isaiah 11:12) in a world which—while calling for participation, solidarity and transparency in public administration—often consigns the fate of entire peoples to the grasp of small but powerful groups.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Michael Conway, 'Faith-Life, Church, and Institution', *The Furrow*, 68 (September 2017), 474.

<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, speech for the fiftieth anniversary of the bishops' synod, 17 October 2015.

***Pope Francis and a Synodal Church***

In a recent book I have tried to show that Pope Francis is proposing a synodal model of Church, rooted in a faith encounter with Jesus Christ and committed to his mission, as the appropriate institutional response to our changed world.<sup>14</sup>

Francis has directed the Roman Catholic Church in an unambiguous way back to the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, with its focus on the Church as the People of God and characterized by collegiality and conciliarity. He has expanded the notion of collegiality beyond that of episcopal participation by using the term 'synodality' to highlight the role of all the baptized in their participation in the threefold 'office' of Jesus Christ as priest, prophet (teacher) and king (ruler). This 'synodal turn' has the merit of retrieving ancient Christian truths (such as collegiality itself and the 'sense of the faithful'; moreover Francis gives a privileged place here, in particular, to the voice of the poor and popular piety), as well as offering a more inclusive, participative and conversational space where individuals and communities can share their experiences and negotiate their own identities with integrity today.

This 'inverted pyramid' model of Church—a revolutionary paradigm shift (for the Catholic Church) which values decentralisation and subsidiarity, consultation and open debate, dialogue internally and with our culture, and a share for the faithful in church teaching and governance—is more attuned to the spirit of the age. It also retains, through its notion of 'communal discernment', the ability to distinguish critically between mere fads and whispers of the Spirit that are authentic. It retrieves a more ancient mode of teaching in which there is ongoing conversation between bishops, theologians and the sense of the faithful, all with their distinctive and irreplaceable roles.

Francis wants a Church that is 'entirely synodal' at all levels. This will respect the fundamental equality of all the baptized and be critical of clericalism in all its forms. The British Jesuit psychologist Brendan Callaghan has pointed out that the 'gains' for the clergy that come with a dysfunctional clericalism include special status, power and a lack of accountability—with horrific consequences for the safety of children and others, as Pope Francis himself has increasingly noted in his identification of clericalism as a root cause of the abuse of power and conscience,

<sup>14</sup> For more detail on what follows, see Gerry O'Hanlon, *The Quiet Revolution of Pope Francis* (Dublin: Messenger, 2018).

and of sexual abuse.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, Callaghan goes on to note 'gains' for the laity accompanying the acceptance of clericalism, including the avoidance of responsibility and a clearly defined role, as well as the security and 'reflected glory' that derive from dependence on another.

For bishops and priests all this will require a certain humility; listen to what Francis says in *Evangelii gaudium* about the role of bishop:

He will sometimes go before his people, pointing the way and keeping their hopes vibrant. At other times, he will simply be in their midst with his unassuming and merciful presence. At yet other times, he will have to walk after them, helping those who lag behind and—above all—allowing the flock to strike out on new paths. In his mission of fostering a dynamic, open and missionary communion, he will have to encourage and develop the means of participation proposed in the Code of Canon Law, and other forms of pastoral dialogue, out of a desire to listen to everyone and not simply to those who would tell him what he would like to hear. Yet the principal aim of these participatory processes would be not ecclesiastical organization but rather the missionary aspiration of reaching everyone.<sup>16</sup>

Bishops (and priests) are still the main leaders and teachers within the community, but they are being asked to work in a shared, listening mode.



*Pope Francis among the synod fathers at the 2018 Youth Synod*

<sup>15</sup> Brendan Callaghan, 'On Scandal and Scandals: the Psychology of Clerical Paedophilia', *Studies*, 99 (Autumn 2010), 343–356, here 351.

<sup>16</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 31.

This new model of Church will offer spaces for the sharing of faith, doubts and searchings for truth among its members, with outreach to the alienated and fellow searchers at a time of deep secularisation. It will be conscious of the mission to announce and facilitate the coming of the Kingdom of God by its socio-economic, ecological critique and its privileging of the lens of the poor. It will respect the disquiet among the Catholic faithful caused by certain neuralgic teachings, in particular on sexuality and gender, and be a catalyst for sound doctrinal development. It will offer the promise of more accountable governance, with the involvement of laity, including, of course, women, thus providing a safer space to counteract the perennial threat of abuse.

In this new model, as Michele Dillon pithily observes, ‘the cat is out of the bag’—Catholicism is returning to a tradition of respect for open debate and the ‘voice of the faithful’, present in its own patrimony, and suitable to address the post-secular culture of authenticity.<sup>17</sup> It will, in short, be a ‘field hospital’ to those who suffer and are troubled, and a more attractive icon to all of the Jesus Christ who captivated his disciples with his authority, mercy and tenderness, and his intimacy with the one he called Abba. It will dare to propose nothing less than a call to holiness for all the baptized to announce Good News to the whole world. For all this to happen, as well as a change in attitude and culture, there will also need to be appropriate institutional and structural change, so that councils and synods become a common feature of ecclesial life at all levels—parochial, diocesan, regional and universal. As Francis himself puts it: ‘It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the church in the third millennium’.<sup>18</sup>

### **Taking Stock**<sup>19</sup>

How much progress has been made in this ecclesial project of Francis?

Well, there has been considerable development along these lines, not least in the gradual creation of a more open culture of debate, discussion and discernment within the Church. This cultural shift from a centralised, monarchical Church towards a more participative one in which, as Francis says, ‘what affects all should be discussed by all’ (*quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari debet*) has been complemented by

<sup>17</sup> Dillon, *Postsecular Catholicism*, 164.

<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis, speech for the fiftieth anniversary of the bishops’ synod.

<sup>19</sup> See Gerry O’Hanlon, ‘Church Reform: Taking Stock’, *The Furrow*, 71 (June 2020), 323–332.

juridical, institutional and structural elements in order to make the change more effective and long-lasting.<sup>20</sup> One thinks of the council of cardinals, the several synods of bishops, the 2018 formal document *Episcopalis communio* (an apostolic constitution of Pope Francis with legal effect on the synod of bishops) as examples of this.

However, the 2019 Amazon Synod and the formal response of Francis in 2020 have raised questions about efficacy. In particular it quickly appeared that the Pope had not formally approved the recommendations of the synod around married priests and female deacons. After the initial hubbub had died down, it became evident that Francis had delayed a decision rather than rejecting the recommendations, and both remain on the table for ongoing discernment. Nonetheless it does seem that this episode has highlighted two issues which need clarification.

The first concerns a more precise understanding of the relationship between papal primacy and episcopal collegiality which, of course, was at the heart of an unresolved discussion at Vatican II. It would seem that the Third Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission document *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be the Church—Local, Regional, Universal* (2018) may be of considerable help here, not least in recommending that the synod of bishops be given a more deliberative role and that the authority of episcopal conferences be strengthened and more clearly articulated (nn.157–158).<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, it would seem that the commission can also help in elucidating another emerging issue in the debate around synodality after the Amazon Synod, namely the status of the *sense of the faithful* in its contribution to doctrine and governance. Again, their recommendations were to give a more mandatory and deliberative role to laity ‘even while recognising the need to preserve the executive role of bishops within dioceses and parish priests within parishes’ (n.94).

### **A Work in Progress**

The millennial paradigm shift which Francis desires has not yet been realised. But it is clear that the momentum has shifted, that, in the words of Nicholas Lash, we are ‘in reverse’ from a monarchical, centralised model of Church towards a more participative, synodal model. No doubt

<sup>20</sup> Pope Francis, speech for the fiftieth anniversary of the bishops’ synod.

<sup>21</sup> Available at [https://iarccum.org/archive/ARCIC3/2018\\_SPCK\\_ARCIC-III\\_Walking-Together-On-the-Way\\_en.pdf](https://iarccum.org/archive/ARCIC3/2018_SPCK_ARCIC-III_Walking-Together-On-the-Way_en.pdf), accessed 11 September 2020.

the ‘binding synodal process’ in Germany, the plenary council in Australia and the document ‘The Light from the Southern Cross’ (commissioned by the Australian bishops and religious in response to the report of the Royal Commission there), the synod in Liverpool and several other such events worldwide will feed into this process.<sup>22</sup> Above all it is telling that Francis has chosen the topic of synodality for the next meeting of the synod of bishops in 2022. By then the bishops and the Pope himself will have plenty of lived experience on which to draw as they reflect on the emerging issues I have discussed here, as well as others that arise.

It needs to be said, as well, as one of the sympathetic critics of Pope Francis has pointed out, that ‘... the pope has a problem with an episcopate unable to “carry” synodality, especially in their relationship with local churches’.<sup>23</sup> In other words, this has to be a work of the whole Church—faithful, priests and bishops—as well as a work of the Pope, if the inspiration of the Spirit is to be implemented. It has to be carried out in the face of the apathy of many and the downright (and sometimes well organized and well financed) opposition of some.<sup>24</sup>

A supremely pastoral Pope such as Francis will surely take learnings too from this turbulent time of COVID-19 and its implications for the shape of the Church. A synodal Church must also be a ‘Church which is poor and for the poor’, and we are called to ‘go down into the underground, and pass from the hyper-virtual, fleshless world to the suffering flesh of the poor’.<sup>25</sup>

**Gerry O’Hanlon SJ** is a Jesuit priest, theologian and former Provincial of the Irish Province. He has written extensively on church reform and the role of the Church in the public square. His latest book is *The Quiet Revolution of Pope Francis* (2019, revised edition).

<sup>22</sup> See Richard Gaillardetz’s commentary on and text of this May 2020 document, which is a detailed attempt to translate the rhetoric and vision of synodality into institutional nuts-and-bolts reality, under the rubric of governance, at <https://johnmenadue.com/richard-r-gaillardetz-may-the-global-church-discover-light-from-the-southern-cross-review-and-analysis-of-potentially-groundbreaking-document-on-church-governance/>, accessed 11 September 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Massimo Faggioli, ‘The Limits of a Pontificate: Part Two’, *La Croix International* (15 April 2020).

<sup>24</sup> Austen Ivereigh, *Wounded Shepherd: Pope Francis and His Struggle with the Catholic Church* (New York: Henry Holt, 2019), chapters 5 and 9; John O’Brien, ‘The Empire Strikes Back’, *Doctrine and Life*, 70 (April 2020), 18–30.

<sup>25</sup> Pope Francis, interview with Austen Ivereigh, *The Tablet* (11 April 2020), 6–8, here 7.

# CHRIST IS ALIVE

## Preparing the Future

*Dushan Croos*

*Everything written during the pandemic lockdown risks being superseded soon afterwards. Nevertheless, in response to that crisis, Pope Francis has created a COVID-19 commission to 'Prepare the Future', which reveals that, since his election, the Pope has been using the 'See, Judge, Act' method to recognise the reality of the world into which the Church is sent, interpreting how the Church needs to renew its mission, and choosing the paths on which Christ invites all humanity to discover the Risen Christ.<sup>1</sup> We can now begin to see how the 2018 Synod on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment is one step on that road, which prepares the future of the Church and so may offer insights that endure through the change of perspective brought by the pandemic.*

**I**N OCTOBER 2016, Pope Francis announced that the next synod would be on 'Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment':

... to accompany the young on their existential journey to maturity so that, through a process of discernment, they discover their plan for life and realise it with joy, opening up to the encounter with God and with human beings, and actively participating in the edification of the Church and of society.<sup>2</sup>

The synod process is the means by which the Pope wants to listen to where the Holy Spirit is leading, so as to explore the question that he asked young people in Krakow during the 2016 World Youth Days: *Can we change things?*

### **An Overview of the Synodal Process**

Pope Francis wrote a letter to young people on 13 January 2017:

<sup>1</sup> For more on the Covid-19 commission, see Christopher Lamb, 'Vatican Pushing for Rethink of Financial System Post-Covid', *The Tablet* (19 June 2020).

<sup>2</sup> 'Synod 2018: Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment, 06.10.2016', at <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2016/10/06/161006b.html>.



A better world can be built also as a result of your efforts, your desire to change and your generosity. Do not be afraid to listen to the Spirit who proposes bold choices; do not delay when your conscience asks you to take risks in following the Master. The Church also wishes to listen to your voice, your sensitivities and your faith; even your doubts and your criticism. Make your voice heard ....<sup>3</sup>

The letter invited its readers to look forward, towards the land that the Lord will show the Church, as the Lord invited Abraham. It accompanied the preparatory document of the synod, which, Pope Francis wrote, 'I am also entrusting to you as your "compass" on this synodal journey'.<sup>4</sup>

Outlined and presented in the introduction to the synod working document (*Instrumentum laboris*), the meetings, consultations and sources leading up to the synod were characterized by a desire to discuss and gather information, since bishops and the Roman Curia are ever more aware that they do not instinctively know everything about this question.<sup>5</sup> The preparatory document included a questionnaire for the bishops, as with the 2014 and 2015 Family Synods, but this time the questions were phrased in less ecclesiastical language and it was complemented by a multilingual online questionnaire aimed at young people themselves, which was translated by several bishops' conferences, eliciting replies from more than a hundred thousand respondents from all over the world (though these were not evenly distributed).<sup>6</sup> (The results are available in Italian and English on the synod website.) A further innovation was the pre-synodal meeting in Rome, from 19 to 24 March 2018—ending on Palm Sunday, when its final document was delivered to the Holy Father.<sup>7</sup> About three hundred young people from five continents participated, as well as fifteen thousand more through social media.

The synod itself met in Rome from 3 to 28 October 2018: young people were present at the discussions and, for the first time, non-ordained male (but not female) religious were allowed to vote. The synod concluded

<sup>3</sup> 'Letter of Pope Francis to Young People: Letter on the Occasion of the Presentation of the Preparatory Document of the Synod of Bishops' (13 January 2017).

<sup>4</sup> 'Letter of Pope Francis to Young People'; and see 'Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment: Preparatory Document', at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20170113\\_documento-preparatorio-xv\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20170113_documento-preparatorio-xv_en.html).

<sup>5</sup> See 'Instrumentum laboris', at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20180508\\_instrumentum-xvassemblea-giovani\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20180508_instrumentum-xvassemblea-giovani_en.html).

<sup>6</sup> 'Book: The World of New Generations according to the Online Questionnaire', at <http://www.synod.va/content/synod2018/en/news/book--the-world-of-new-generations-according-to-the-online-quest.html>.

<sup>7</sup> 'Final Document from the Pre-Synodal Meeting', at <http://www.synod.va/content/synod2018/en/news/final-document-from-the-pre-synodal-meeting.html>: this is not to be confused with the final document of the synod itself.



© Mazur/catholicnews.org.uk

*Participants at the pre-synodal meeting for the Synod on Youth*

by publishing a final document more substantial than either the lists of propositions from previous synods or the report of the 2015 Synod on the Family.<sup>8</sup> The next year, on the Solemnity of the Annunciation, 25 March 2019, the Pope's post-synodal apostolic exhortation to young people and to the entire people of God, *Christus vivit*, was published. It is part of a mosaic that begins with the 2007 Aparecida document from the fifth meeting of the Latin American Bishop's Conference (drafted by the then archbishop of Buenos Aires), as well as *Evangelii gaudium*, *Laudato si'*, *Amoris laetitia* and the other documents of this papacy.

### ***Recognising, Interpreting and Choosing: The Preparatory Document***

The January 2017 preparatory document and the letter of Pope Francis to young people opened the consultation for the synod, inviting a process of discernment using the 'See, Judge, Act' method that originated with Joseph Cardijn and the Young Christian Workers movement at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> The method has been developed by this pope under the rubric of *recognising*, *interpreting* and *choosing*, and it underpins the vocational discernment process, 'by which a person makes

<sup>8</sup> See 'Synodus episcoporum Bulletin' (27 October 2012) at [http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino\\_25\\_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02\\_inglese/b33\\_02.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02_inglese/b33_02.html), and 'The Final Report of the Synod of Bishops to the Holy Father, Pope Francis' (24 October 2015), at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20151026\\_relazione-finale-xiv-assembly\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20151026_relazione-finale-xiv-assembly_en.html).

<sup>9</sup> See 'The Method of See, Judge, Act, Review', at <https://www.ycw.ie/resources/see-judge-act-resources-2/>, accessed 22 August 2020.

fundamental choices, in dialogue with the Lord and listening to the voice of the Spirit, starting with the choice of one's state in life' (2.2). This process is, of course, much broader and richer than considering vocations to priesthood and religious life alone. It involves the exercise of conscience, 'an inviolable place where a promising invitation is present' (2.1):

... 'recognising' concerns how life's happenings, the people one meets, and the words one hears or reads affect the interior life .... It also requires capturing the 'flavour' that remains, that is, the consonance or dissonance between what is experienced and what is in the depths of the heart.

... 'interpreting', [is] to understand what the Spirit is calling the person to do through what the Spirit stirs up in each one .... The work of interpretation is carried out in an internal dialogue with the Lord, fully engaging a person's abilities. The assistance of an experienced person in listening to the Spirit, however, is a valuable support that the Church offers, a support which it would be unwise to disregard.

[Choosing] is an exercise of authentic human freedom and personal responsibility, which, of course, is always connected to a concrete situation and therefore limited. Other desires and emotions will arise in this stage; 'recognising' and 'interpreting' them will allow the possibility of seeing whether the decision is good or whether it is advisable to re-evaluate it. Consequently, 'going out' is important, even with the fear of making a mistake, which, as previously seen, can be crippling. (2.2)

### **Young People and the Entire People of God: *Christus vivit***

*Christus vivit* opens with the reminder that not only is Christ alive, but 'he wants you to be alive' (n.1) and 'to grow in holiness' (n.3). The three central chapters are specifically for the young, while the whole document is addressed 'to young people and to the entire People of God', rather than the usual form, 'to the bishops, clergy, consecrated persons and the lay faithful' that begins *Evangelii gaudium* and the exhortations of previous popes.

The exhortation should be read alongside the final document of the synod, which it sometimes summarises or quotes, and also with the other documents of this papacy. In it the Pope's words 'echo the myriad voices of believers the world over who made their opinions known to the Synod'. Perhaps surprisingly, as well as addressing 'young people and ... the entire people of God', the Pope acknowledges that 'young people who are not believers, yet wished to share their thoughts, also raised issues that led me to ask new questions' (n.4). *Christus vivit* draws out threads from the

earlier stages of the synodal process, the pre-synodal meeting of young people and, particularly, the bishops' final document, giving some of the intuitions the force of speaking directly from lived experience.

*Forming Protagonists of Change*

Developing the opening paragraphs of the exhortation, the Pope outlines 'three great truths' (n.111): 'God loves you' (n.112) and cares more about 'reconciling than forbidding ... the future than the past' (n.116); 'Christ saves you' (n.118), forgiving us 'time and time again ... bearing us on his shoulders' (n.119); and 'Christ is alive' (n.124), which allows us to 'stop complaining, and look to the future' (n.127). He invites young people to make choices for the 'common good' (n.170) and for 'living the present to the full' (n.147), to be 'protagonists of change' (n.174) and 'courageous missionaries' (n.175). He also urges them to maintain a relationship with older people: 'so that we can benefit from their experience' (n.188). 'The old dream dreams', he writes, 'and the young see visions .... If young people sink roots in those dreams, they can peer into the future' (nn.192–193; Joel 3:1). The roots of all our lives are in Christ, as the words of St Oscar Romero attest,

Christianity is not a collection of truths to be believed, rules to be followed, or prohibitions. Seen that way, it puts us off. Christianity is a person who loved me immensely, who demands and claims my love. Christianity is Christ. (n.156)<sup>10</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI expressed the same idea in his first encyclical: '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' (n.129).<sup>11</sup>

Pope Francis addresses his hopes for the common good and the invitation to be protagonists of change first of all to young people (who in 2015 represented half the world's population, though the median age varies across the world and is rising), then to those who accompany them and to other members of the Church.<sup>12</sup> This reflects his call in *Evangelii gaudium* for an outwardly directed or missionary Church. Francis clearly sees young people as the heart of the Church's mission and its agents.

<sup>10</sup> Quoting Oscar Romero, 'La Iglesia escatológica', in *Su pensamiento*, volumes 1 and 2 (San Salvador: Publicaciones Pastorales del Arzobispado, 2000), 312.

<sup>11</sup> *Deus caritas est*, n.1.

<sup>12</sup> See *Our World in Data*, <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/median-age>, accessed 22 August 2020.



*Pope Francis meeting young people during the synod*

This is not to disregard older members, but to reorder our focus to accompanying, facilitating and assisting others, especially the young, in developing their mission for the Church. His approach might not be surprising from such an experienced Ignatian spiritual director, but it does contrast with the age profile of many of our parishes and groups as well as of our clergy and religious. It underlines his invitation in *Evangelii gaudium*: 'A missionary heart ... 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' (n.45). Mission is not for one's own benefit but for nurturing the life of the other.

The pre-synodal meeting document highlighted the need for the Church to offer better support to families for forming young people in the faith, especially where freedom of expression is restricted. Young people themselves at the meeting asked for help particularly in living their digital lives, which risk becoming inhuman, distorting sexuality through pornography and creating 'a delusional parallel reality that ignores human dignity'.<sup>13</sup> In *Christus vivit*, the Holy Father quotes an entire section of the document asking the Church for accompaniment by mentors (not only priests and consecrated religious) who seek holiness for themselves and for those they accompany, starting from the truth of the flaws of their own humanity and walking alongside young people to help them become 'active participants on the journey', respecting the freedom of young people's discernment to 'nurture the seeds of faith' in them

<sup>13</sup> 'Final Document from the Pre-Synodal Meeting', nn. 1, 4; *Christus vivit*, nn. 80, 90.

(n.246).<sup>14</sup> Further, it asks for programmatic formation of young leaders and the development of female role models within the Church (n.245).

### *Institutional Recognition*

The final document of the synod highlighted the bishops' awareness, before and during their meetings, of the need for more listening in the Church, admitting that 'all too often, there is a tendency to provide pre-packaged answers and ready-made solutions, without allowing their young people's questions to emerge and facing the challenges they pose'. Remembering that we should be listening more than speaking is not enough, for true listening requires not only 'rethinking and renewing' ministry and 'reviewing its priorities', but also training in listening, hearing and accompanying more perceptively as well as 'institutional recognition as a form of ecclesial service'.<sup>15</sup>

The Pope and the bishops appreciated the diversity of 'young people's worlds'—not overlooking contexts of exclusion and marginalisation—as an aspect of the universality of the Church, which must courageously side with the excluded and discarded.<sup>16</sup> The Church needed to see the world also from a non-Western perspective, to avoid a 'cultural colonization that severs young people from the cultural and religious roots'.<sup>17</sup> The choice of migrants as a typical image of our time and of young people's lives may surprise Western readers, until we remember that the synod gathered bishops and the views of young people from all over the world, from both sending and receiving countries, and that the young Catholic community will be particularly marked by this experience.

Some migrants are fleeing persecution, but others want to study or seek better work and life chances. Whether they are migrating temporarily or permanently, because of suffering and poverty or looking for prosperity and employment, the Church is challenged to help them recognise Christ's call wherever they find themselves. Even if they have freely chosen to live in another country, and more if it has been forced on them, they experience dislocation and loneliness that are difficult to accompany.

The synod could not avoid speaking of abuse in all its forms (the abuse of power, the abuse of conscience, sexual and financial abuse),

<sup>14</sup> Compare 'Final Document from the Pre-Synodal Meeting', n. 10.

<sup>15</sup> 'Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment: Final Document', 27 October 2018, nn.8, 9; *Christus vivit*, nn. 65, 244.

<sup>16</sup> 'Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment: Final Document', nn. 10, 12; *Christus vivit*, n. 69.

<sup>17</sup> 'Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment: Final Document', n. 14; *Christus vivit*, n. 185.

since more historic cases of sexual abuse came to light during the year when the synod took place, though such a complex problem needs to be addressed in a forum of its own, rather than as one issue among others. The bishops did, however, describe a perspective which leads to different types of abuse in ministry: treating it as ‘a *power* to be exercised, rather than a free and generous *service* to be offered. It makes us think that we belong to a group that has all the answers and no longer needs to listen or has anything to learn’.<sup>18</sup> The Pope expanded and deepens in his exhortation the paragraphs on abuse from the synod final document.

### *A Life Fully Lived*

Throughout his exhortation, the Holy Father offered pen-portraits of saints and those on the path to canonization who illustrate aspects of young Christian life or ministry to young people. He cited Ven. Carlos Acutis, an Italian teenager who ‘knew how to use the new communications technology to transmit the Gospel, to communicate values and beauty’ (n.105), with the warning, ‘Carlo said, “everyone is born as an original, but many people end up dying as photocopies”. Don’t let that happen to you!’ (n.106) Instead the Pope invited young people to follow the advice of Pedro Arrupe: to fall in love with God, stay in love and let that decide everything.<sup>19</sup> As an example of how to live the gospel, he offered the words of St Alberto Hurtado:

Being an apostle does not mean wearing a lapel pin; it is not about speaking about the truth but living it, embodying it, being transformed in Christ. Being an apostle does not mean carrying a torch in hand, possessing the light, but being that light .... The Gospel, more than a lesson, is an example. A message that becomes a life fully lived ....

If the helmsman of a ship becomes careless, he is fired straight away for not taking his sacred responsibility seriously. As for our lives, are we fully aware of the course they are taking? What course is your life taking? If it is necessary to give this more thought, I would beg each one of you to give it the highest consideration, because to get it right is tantamount to success; to err is quite simply to fail.<sup>20</sup>

The Church and young people are both invited to trust in the ability of the latter to make good choices with the prompting of the Holy Spirit,

<sup>18</sup> ‘Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment: Final Document’, n. 30; *Christus vivit*, n.98.

<sup>19</sup> *Christus vivit*, n.132; the prayer Pope Francis quotes is attributed to Pedro Arrupe, see James Martin, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 219.

<sup>20</sup> *Christus vivit*, nn. 175, 257; see Alberto Hurtado, ‘Ustedes son la luz del mundo’ and ‘El rumbo de la vida’, in *Un fuego que enciende otros fuegos* (Santiago de Chile: Pontifica U. de Chile, 2004), 66, 33.

and to support them in so doing: ‘we are called to invest in their fearlessness and to train them to take up their responsibilities, in the sure knowledge that error, failure and crisis are experiences that can strengthen their humanity’.<sup>21</sup> Of course, this requires the formation of conscience, recognising God’s work in our daily lives and growing in the virtue of prudence.<sup>22</sup> Here Francis returns to the keynote of the synod: recognising, interpreting and choosing as Jesus did, as he walked with the disciples on the road to Emmaus (n.237).

*A Path of Freedom*

Hearing the call of Jesus our Friend, or recognising our personal vocation (n.287), is not restricted to—but does include—the possibility of religious life or priesthood.

A vocation, while a gift, will undoubtedly also be demanding. God’s gifts are interactive; to enjoy them we have to be ready to take risks. Yet the demands they make are not an obligation imposed from without, but an incentive to let that gift grow and develop, and then become a gift for others. When the Lord awakens a vocation, he thinks not only of what you already are, but of what you will one day be, in his company and in that of others. (n.289)

In this long document it is chapter nine, on discernment, that is key to how the Pope and synod invite other members of the Church to walk with young people. As an experienced spiritual director, the Pope is well placed to outline key features of the discernment process and show that it is not sufficient simply to pray about a question in the hope of a clear response validated by a religious person. Accompanying the discernment of that question requires sensitivity, and the three sensitivities he sketches are invaluable in understanding how to accompany young people on the journey.

The *first kind of sensitivity* is directed to the *individual* .... The other person must sense that I am listening unconditionally, without being offended or shocked, tired or bored. We see an example of this kind of listening in the Lord; he walks alongside the disciples on the way to Emmaus, even though they are going in the wrong direction (cf. Luke 24:13–35) .... Attentive and selfless listening is a sign of our respect for others, whatever their ideas or their choices in life. (n.292)

<sup>21</sup> *Christus vivit*, n. 233; ‘Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment: Final Document’, n. 70.

<sup>22</sup> *Christus vivit*, n. 282; ‘Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment: Final Document’, n. 108.



The *second kind of sensitivity* is marked by *discernment*. It tries to grasp exactly where grace or temptation is present ... what is it that the other person is trying to tell me, what they want me to realize is happening in their lives .... This kind of listening seeks to discern the salutary promptings of the good Spirit who proposes to us the Lord's truth, but also the traps laid by the evil spirit—his empty works and promises. It takes courage, warmth and tact to help others distinguish the truth from illusions or excuses. (n.293)

The *third kind of sensitivity* is the ability to *perceive what is driving* the other person. This calls for a deeper kind of listening, one able to discern the direction in which that person truly wants to move .... the real issue is what they would like to be. This may demand that they look not to their own superficial wishes and desires, but rather to what is most pleasing to the Lord, to his plans for their life .... Jesus knows and appreciates this ultimate intention of the heart. (n.294)

In the end, good discernment is a path of freedom that brings to full fruit what is unique in each person, something so personal that only God knows it. Others cannot fully understand or predict from the outside how it will develop .... (n.295)

At a certain moment we ourselves have to disappear in order to let the other person follow the path he or she has discovered. We have to vanish as the Lord did from the sight of his disciples in Emmaus, leaving them alone with burning hearts and an irresistible desire to set out immediately (cf. Luke 24:31–33). (n.296)

### ***Keep Running the Race***

The documents of Pope Francis may be seen as turning points for the Church's understanding and teaching in the light of experience and tradition, perhaps under the influence of St Ignatius' vision of Christ carrying his cross at La Storta (a name meaning 'the bend in the road') on his way to Rome. This clarified for Ignatius how he and the other companions of Jesus would serve the Risen Christ from Rome and all over the world.

The work of the synod moved into a higher gear with the publication of its exhortation: after *recognising* and *interpreting*, now was the time for *choosing* or *acting*. The synod showed that the bishops have responsibility for interpreting and guiding, but the next stage of the journey must be taken up by others. Three examples, among many others, of how that is happening in Britain are Synod Fruits, Million Minutes and Jesuit Young Adult Ministries.

Synod Fruits describe themselves as 'a group of young people excited about what the final document and subsequent apostolic exhortation

from the Pope had to say, as well as inspired by the role young people had in the whole process', and provide a range of resources to help us understand the synod and gather its fruits in our communities.<sup>23</sup> Million Minutes 'enables youth action and advocacy activities that give voice and support to young people (aged up to 25) to transform their lives and their world', supporting initiatives by young people and resourcing those who accompany them.<sup>24</sup> Jesuit Young Adult Ministries (in which the present writer serves) works with people aged 18 to 35, particularly those in employment, whose pastoral care is less organized than that of young adults at school or university.<sup>25</sup> Starting from a young-adult Mass at the Farm Street Jesuit Church, the project has developed by discerning the path on which the Lord is calling us, by meeting young adults and responding to the questions and needs they express. This has resulted so far in Catholic Social Teaching days (in person and, more recently, online); a small residential community; weekend retreats (again, more recently online); and group reflection on the Pope's invitation to the 2020 Economy of Francesco meeting, among many other activities.<sup>26</sup> It is connected with the London Jesuit Centre which launches at the end of 2020.

The Pope concluded *Christus vivit* with an invitation to young people:

Keep running, 'attracted by the face of Christ, whom we love so much, whom we adore in the Holy Eucharist and acknowledge in the flesh of our suffering brothers and sisters. May the Holy Spirit urge you on as you run this race. The Church needs your momentum, your intuitions, your faith. We need them! And when you arrive where we have not yet reached, have the patience to wait for us.'<sup>27</sup>

This is an open ending, because what is most interesting about the synod and *Christus vivit* is what is going to happen next ....

**Dushan Croos SJ** has worked in school and university chaplaincy and is now part of the recently formed Jesuit Young Adult Ministry team based in London and online.

<sup>23</sup> *Synod Fruits*, at [www.synodfruits.org.uk/get-involved/](http://www.synodfruits.org.uk/get-involved/), accessed 2 September 2020.

<sup>24</sup> *Million Minutes*, at <https://millionminutes.org/about>, accessed 2 September 2020.

<sup>25</sup> See [www.facebook.com/jesuityam/](https://www.facebook.com/jesuityam/) and <https://www.pathwaystogod.org/centres/mount-street-jesuit-centre/young-adult-ministries>, accessed 2 September 2020.

<sup>26</sup> See 'Custody of Creation', *The Economy of Francesco*, at <https://francescoeconomy.org/custody-of-creation/>, accessed 2 September 2020. This congress has been planned by Pope Francis 'to discuss the role currently played by the world of economics and finance, to which must be added ... an in-depth look at the climate issue'.

<sup>27</sup> *Christus vivit*, n. 299; Pope Francis, prayer vigil with young Italians, 11 August 2018.

# THE GEOGRAPHY OF POPE FRANCIS

*Pierre de Charentenay*

*The various journeys undertaken by Pope Francis, along with his choice of cardinals, indicate his priorities. Leaving to one side major centres, especially those in Europe, they tend to the 'peripheries'. The Pope's attitude to Europe seems ambivalent. However, his commitment points to the internationalisation of the Church and enables the Roman centre to open out to the world.*

POPE FRANCIS OFTEN EXPRESSES his interest in the 'peripheries', both social and geographic. He would like the Church to look at the world from a different point of view from that of the centre, Rome or Europe. Such a change of perspective allows for new discoveries, authorises the adoption of new points of view, changes priorities so that the gaze falls first of all upon the poorest in humanity. In the centre are to be found wealth, heritage, the great traditions that fashion a way of seeing the world and of interpreting the gospel. But looking from a distant perspective, preoccupations change and focus on what is essential.

In the course of his pontificate, which will soon have completed seven years, Francis has had the chance to put his preference for the peripheries into practice. There are two areas in particular which seem worth studying: the journeys he has made worldwide and his nomination of cardinals.

## ***Obvious Reasons for the Journeys of Pope Francis***

We begin by looking at a list of the Pope's journeys. In the course of 32 apostolic journeys (not counting visits made within Italy) he has travelled to the most far-flung corners of the world, from Chile to the Philippines and Japan, from Latvia to Panama. He has visited Muslim countries, the United Arab Emirates and Morocco. He has penetrated to the heart of Africa, Uganda and the Central African Republic. In his home continent, South America, he has made several visits to Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, Paraguay, Cuba, Mexico, Colombia, Chile and Peru. But he has visited Europe only for very special occasions: for the centenary of the apparitions

at Fátima; for the fifty years of the European Union in Strasbourg; and to what may be called the peripheries of Europe: Albania, Bosnia, Poland, Sweden, Ireland, Bulgaria and, in June 2019, Romania. He has never visited Britain, Germany, France, Belgium or Spain, what may be called the heart of historic Europe, the Europe of Charlemagne, Philip II and the French Revolution. So, by the beginning of 2020 the Pope had visited nearly fifty different countries, more already than Benedict XVI in about eight years. Such a number permits us to read a message in its geographical spread. Four orientations seem to have governed the Pope's choice of countries to visit.

First, there is his concern for the poorest countries. He had made this plain to Mgr Jacques Gaillot, whom he had met in the Vatican early in September 2015: in the words of the bishop of Partenia, 'the Pope gave me to understand that he is interested in small countries which are in difficulties'.<sup>2</sup> And so Pope Francis has visited the Central African Republic, Myanmar, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Uganda, Mozambique and, in September 2019, Madagascar. Wherever he went, he brought his support and friendship to people in difficulty.

A second category includes countries where the Pope has been able to engage in interreligious dialogue: Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates. On several occasions he has met Ahmed Mohamed Al-Tayeb, Grand Imam of al-Azhar (Cairo). His interest in ecumenical dialogue has extended to several meetings with Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople, who frequently accompanies him at special events.

A third category would cover countries which, despite a menacing context of instability, are in the process of reconstructing peace: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Palestine. He has made two journeys to the Caucasus, to Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. These destinations also allowed encounters with other religions.

The final category is of journeys undertaken for anniversaries or important international meetings. The Pope has been welcomed for World Youth Days in Brazil in 2013, Krakow in 2016 and Panama in 2019. The Sixth Asian Youth Day saw the Pope in South Korea in 2014. The fifth centenary of the Reformation drew him to Sweden in 2016. The centenary of the birth of the Baltic States sent him to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in September 2018. In November 2014, the fiftieth anniversary of the European institutions brought him to Strasbourg. These visits are strictly

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Gaillot, blog, at [https://www.partenia.org/francais/rencontre\\_fr.htm](https://www.partenia.org/francais/rencontre_fr.htm), accessed 16 September 2020.

timed, not extending beyond the anniversary being celebrated, to the extent that he did not enter Strasbourg Cathedral, even though it was celebrating its first millennium and was only a few hundred metres from the European institutions.

France remains on his agenda since 2015. Multiple invitations have been made to him during these five years but he has not accepted any of them, claiming that none of them was a priority. Clearly the question needs to be raised as to why his journeys seem to have avoided Europe. A quick look at the journeys of his predecessor will reveal much about what is distinctive in Pope Francis.

### ***The Journeys of Benedict XVI***

During the seven years and ten months of his pontificate the predecessor of Pope Francis made 25 journeys outside Italy. He visited 28 countries. In six years, Pope Francis has gone on 32 journeys and visited 48 countries. The pace of the current Pope, then, is notably more rapid than that of his predecessor. But that is not the only difference. If one looks at the places visited by Benedict XVI, quite a different panorama emerges from that of Pope Francis. Sixteen of the 25 journeys made by the emeritus Pope were to Europe (three to Germany and two to Spain). He went only twice to Latin America (Brazil and Mexico–Cuba), once to North America (the USA), twice to Africa (Cameroon–Angola and Benin) and once to Oceania (Australia for the World Youth Day in July 2008).

As a European pope, who had chosen the name of one of the patrons of Europe, Benedict XVI travelled over all the major countries of his own continent, and seemed somewhat distrustful of initiatives stemming from Latin America or Asia. He grappled with themes linked to the Enlightenment, the relationship between faith and reason, notably in dialogue with his contemporary and compatriot the philosopher Jürgen Habermas. He knew France and its cultural heritage very well. He spoke French with ease and was acquainted with the theologians of that country, with whom he had often been in dialogue. Likewise, he closely followed the workings of the German Church, since, as archbishop of Munich, he had previously been one of its eminent members.

On becoming Pope, Benedict XVI opened himself to the universality of the Church, with which he was well acquainted thanks to his previous position as Prefect of the Congregation for the Faith. But he did so as a European visiting the peripheries: World Youth Days hardly transported him to the developing world, since they took place first in

Cologne (2005), then in Australia (2008) and finally in Spain (2011). The journeys undertaken by Pope Francis point to a very different geography from those of his predecessor: there is an inverse proportion between journeys to Europe and to the rest of the world—11 to 21 in the case of Francis, 16 to 9 for Benedict.

### ***The Nomination of Cardinals***

A second criterion for appreciating the geography of Pope Francis can be found in the spread of his choice of cardinals across the world, which differs considerably from that of Benedict XVI.

The first thing to notice concerns the number of cardinals in the curia. Benedict XVI appointed 33, while his successor has chosen only 10. The centre of the Church has lost many cardinal's hats. A number of curial posts, traditionally filled by cardinals, have not received the red hat. In all, Benedict XVI nominated 77 cardinals; Pope Francis, up to the present day, has nominated 64.<sup>3</sup> Given the large number of cardinal's hats allocated to the curia by the emeritus Pope, the distribution between the centre and the periphery is again in inverse proportion with Pope Francis. Whereas Benedict XVI nominated 44 cardinals in 28 different countries, Pope Francis has already appointed 54 cardinals in 41 countries. The most remarkable changes are to be seen by examining more closely which episcopal sees have been elevated to cardinal rank: there are three countries in Oceania—New Zealand, Tonga and Papua New Guinea—all now headed by a cardinal. This is the case also with islands such as Cape Verde and Mauritius, along with the Central African Republic, Mali, Myanmar, Lesotho, Malaysia, Laos and El Salvador.

Pope Francis is also an expert in confounding predictions and expectations by leaving to one side cities accustomed to having resident cardinals and sending the cardinal's hats instead to archbishoprics located in unexpected places, such as Agrigento, Ancona and L'Aquila in Italy, while Venice and Turin, along with Toledo and Seville in Spain, no longer have cardinals. In Haiti, the cardinal's hat landed not in Port-au-Prince but in Les Cayes, a small town which barely had an episcopate.

Noticeable in these nominations is a mixture of geopolitical policy and personal appreciation. Agrigento, for example, is a small Sicilian

<sup>3</sup> By the beginning of 2020 this had increased to 88: see Andrea Gagliarducci, '2020, All Pope Francis' Men', *Catholic News Agency* (8 January 2020), at <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/column/2020-all-pope-francis-men-4105>, accessed 17 September 2020.

city of some 60,000 inhabitants, which hardly counts for anything next to the large metropolises, but its bishop has been very actively engaged in welcoming refugees from the Mediterranean. The cardinal's hat is clearly intended to attract attention to such a fundamental policy. The same holds for the young archbishop of Bangui, Mgr Dieudonné Nzapalainga, born in 1967, who for years has been working wholeheartedly to promote peace in his tormented country. Pope Francis does not seem tied to a tradition that dictated the systematic promotion to cardinal's dignity of bishops linked to certain episcopal sees. He seeks rather to further policies which he promotes on behalf of peace, refugees and the peripheries in general.

### ***Far from the Heart of Europe***

The papacy under Pope Francis is opting for cultural, geographic and geopolitical policies very different from those of his predecessor. Being an Argentinian, this Pope hails from the developing world and takes a distant view of Europe, even if his family does come from there. Moreover, he looks at it from a very particular context, that of Argentina under Juan Perón, a nationalist and Catholic country. His country is enormous, sparsely populated (16 inhabitants per square kilometre), modern in many ways, open to the future, even though it has been undermined from within by the dictatorship of Jorge Rafael Videla (1976–1981) and the corruption of Carlos Menem.<sup>4</sup>

Against this background of huge open spaces full of hope, Europe appears to the Pope as a weary 'grandmother', as he said in his speech to the



*Countries visited (shaded) and cardinals nominated (hats) by Pope Francis*

<sup>4</sup> Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, president 2007–2015, was also indicted for corruption in May 2019.

European Parliament on 25 November 2014; he repeated this diagnosis at the conferral of the Charlemagne Prize on 6 May 2016. Insufficient attention has been paid to these words, first in Strasbourg and then in Rome, which suggest a schematic and rather negative appraisal of Europe today. They are worth repeating, having been pronounced on two official occasions:

In addressing the European Parliament, I used the image of Europe as a grandmother. I noted that there is a growing impression that Europe is weary, aging, no longer fertile and vital, that the great ideals that inspired Europe seem to have lost their appeal. There is an impression that Europe is declining, that it has lost its ability to be innovative and creative, and that it is more concerned with preserving and dominating spaces than with generating processes of inclusion and change. There is an impression that Europe is tending to become increasingly 'entrenched', rather than open to initiating new social processes capable of engaging all individuals and groups in the search for new and productive solutions to current problems. Europe, rather than protecting spaces, is called to be a mother who generates processes [compare *Evangelii gaudium*, n.223].

What has happened to you, the Europe of humanism, the champion of human rights, democracy and freedom? What has happened to you, Europe, the home of poets, philosophers, artists, musicians, and men and women of letters? What has happened to you, Europe, the mother of peoples and nations, the mother of great men and women who upheld, and even sacrificed their lives for, the dignity of their brothers and sisters?<sup>5</sup>

However, in this same speech, he lays down the challenge of 'updating' the idea of Europe, a Europe capable of giving birth to a new humanism based on three capacities: the capacity to integrate, the capacity to dialogue, and the capacity to generate. He ends with the dream of a Europe that will provide help to families, to the young, to migrants, and that will defend the rights of each individual.

His speech about Europe is in the end ambivalent: very critical on the one hand, but exhortatory on the other, almost desperate that Europe should be able to pick up once more the torch it has carried in the past. Peering through his Argentinian spectacles, he wonders what has happened to this continent. He says almost nothing about the political structure of the European Union, which has guaranteed peace and promoted the development of the 28 members of the organization during nearly 70 years.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, address at the conferral of the Charlemagne Prize, 6 May 2016; and see Pope Francis, address to the European Parliament, 25 November 2014.



### ***A Different Sociological View***

Accustomed as he was to the poor areas of Buenos Aires, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio never felt at ease in the rich suburbs. He always rejected 'worldly' invitations, and never met Roman Catholics belonging to the Argentinian business elite. Thus the rich and powerful who make up the context of Europe and the USA belong to a world he has never frequented.

But neither does he care for the middle class: those who having been poor became rich and often, in the process, abandoned the faith, preoccupied exclusively with their own improvement and having no thought for the common good. This class is accused of having broken up the coherence of a nation. Individualism counts for more there than community.<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis has a very negative view of such transformation: as he said in his address to the Council of Europe:

Together with this, we encounter certain rather selfish lifestyles, marked by an opulence which is no longer sustainable and frequently indifferent to the world around us, and especially to the poorest of the poor .... To tend to those in need takes strength and tenderness, effort and generosity in the midst of a functionalistic and privatized mindset which inexorably leads to a 'throwaway culture'.<sup>7</sup>

Democracy is mutating and becoming an ensemble of autonomous individuals, which is far from the masses or homogeneous humanity. One will recall how Pius XII, in his famous 1944 Christmas speech, had already spoken of the 'mass of people' in very negative terms because he wanted to promote the notion of a modern liberal democracy where what holds the citizens together is the law. Pope Francis keeps to the tradition that sees the 'people' as the foundation of a nation, which is centred on a culture.

Thus the problem raised by the Pope brings together, all at the same time, economy, culture and religion, and he seeks to find out what the contradictions are. When he granted a long interview to Dominique Wolton, a part of which dealt with Europe, the Pope brought up the question of immigrants in Europe as typical of this closing in, this fear. In the words quoted by Wolton, 'The Christian who closes his door to refugees or to those who need help, is a hypocrite'. Europe is obviously torn apart by this question.

<sup>6</sup> On this point, compare the arguments developed at length in a previous article: Pierre de Charentenay, 'Le "Peuple" de la "théologie du peuple"', *Études*, 4242 (October 2017), 75–86.

<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis, message to the executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, 12 January 2018.

I accepted the Charlemagne Prize for the good of Europe, because I think Europe is now in crisis. The unity of Europe is in crisis. One thing I have mentioned, and greatly insisted upon, is dialogue. It is necessary for our children to learn, beginning from their primary school years, to dialogue [*dia-lo-guer*].

And, a little later, he adds, 'We have lost the culture of listening'.<sup>8</sup>

Behind these remarks emerges what seems to be for Pope Francis the best model for society in general: this is the image of a polyhedron, to which he returns frequently. The multiple facets of this geometric figure are moulded into one, forming a unity within its plural diversity.<sup>9</sup> In a society of this sort, different persons can live together without distrust or disputes. Everyone in this way has a particular knowledge to contribute to the community. If there are disputes, everything should be done to resolve them and to restore unity to society, especially by cultivating a culture of meeting one another, the aim being to restore unity.

But Europe is troubled by all sorts of demons, especially the financial one. 'There is a problem in Europe. Europe is not free. Europe's economy is not one that is productive of the soil, a concrete economy. It has lost its "concreteness". It is a liquid economy: [based on] finance.'<sup>10</sup> In other words, it has been absorbed into an economic and financial globalisation where distinctive culture and nation are lost.

### ***Another Religious View***

However, in addition, Pope Francis also has a negative opinion of those secularised societies that seem to have distanced themselves from the faith:

The process of secularization tends to reduce the faith and the Church to the sphere of the private and personal. Furthermore, by completely rejecting the transcendent, it has produced a growing deterioration of ethics, a weakening of the sense of personal and collective sin, and a steady increase in relativism. These have led to a general sense of disorientation, especially in the periods of adolescence and young adulthood which are so vulnerable to change.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, interview with Dominique Wolton, in *Pape François. Politique et société* (Paris: L'Observatoire, 2017), 126–167, here 126, 129–130. For emphasis he splits up the French word *dialoguer* into syllables.

<sup>9</sup> Compare 'Rencontre', an article written by Mgr Victor Manuel Fernandez, the best interpreter of the Pope's way of thinking, in the collected work *Pape François. Lexique* (Paris: Cerf, 2018), 317 following.

<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, interview with Dominique Wolton, 140.

<sup>11</sup> *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 64.

This diagnosis is certainly realistic, but at the same time it provides the chance for a personal and responsible affirmation of one's faith. Does the Pope believe that it is possible to live as a Christian in an economic world full of attractions and fascination armed simply with traditions and popular devotions, which require neither reflection nor discernment? When today's young people commit themselves to the priesthood or religious life, it is after a long maturing process, a series of very deliberate renouncements regarding a world they know, with which they are familiar.

Pope Francis is an Argentinian, coming from the developing world. He is not aware of the considerable interior effort made by Christians in European countries who have had to face up to secularisation. This is the continent in which movements such as those of Taizé, the houses of l'Arche for people with learning disabilities, the Sant'Egidio community, and all the new movements since the 1970s have appeared. That is where the great monasteries were born, that forged a rigorous evangelical life over the long term. This is where, as he acknowledges himself, the great European initiatives have taken shape, those processes and projects that have been spiritually active. The European Union itself, however open to criticism, is the only attempt ever made in the history of the world at a political federation which brings together as partners nations that have been enemies for centuries. Other attempts of this sort, notably in Latin and Central America, such as the Union of South American Nations, set up in 2008, are no more than embryos of federation.

These remarks do not belittle in the least what Pope Francis has contributed to dust off the Church, to shake up its administration and renew its language, to demand the truth about sexual abuse, to denounce clericalism, to rediscover its foundations in the gospel and its commitment to the most poor. Pope Francis has achieved an enormous amount in a few years, but he himself comes from a certain culture and has personal alignments like all his predecessors. John Paul II was viscerally Polish and anti-Communist, which did not dispose him to understand Latin America. Benedict XVI had the turn of mind of a European intellectual, which was little help to him in the theological debates with the developing world.

For several years now Pope Francis has a standing invitation to visit France. He has said that, if he came, it would be via Marseilles, where no contemporary pope has ever stopped.<sup>12</sup> Given the collapse of buildings in

<sup>12</sup> The last time a pope visited Marseilles was back in 1533, for the wedding of a niece of Clement VII with a nephew of Francis I. On that occasion the Pope travelled from Saint-Victor to Saint-Ferréol by

the rue d'Aubage and the revelation of scandalous neglect by the city council, it would be possible for Pope Francis to visit that city, symbolic of the periphery in the Europe that he denounces, which remains a laboratory for interreligious dialogue and social dynamism. Lourdes, a leading Marian shrine of world importance, is also a place he still has to visit. John Paul II went there twice, in 1983 and 2004. And Benedict XVI came in 2008 to celebrate the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the apparitions.

For many years the Church had Italian popes because the great Roman families had a hold on the Vatican. Later, other Italian popes had very different social origins, such as the simple Roncalli family. Paul VI began the internationalisation of the Roman Curia and of the college of cardinals, as he wanted to break up a clique which had begun to show its weakness and no longer corresponded to the worldwide expansion taking place. Finally, someone who hailed from another European country, Poland, became Pope and took the name of John Paul II. The international dynamic continued to develop and led to the election of a pope who came 'from the ends of the earth', Pope Francis.<sup>13</sup> However, that dynamic has still to work its way down into the inner cogs of the Church's central administration: a still greater openness to the peripheries and an internationalisation of members of the curia, such as the Vatican's financial section, now in the hands of non-Italians. The geography of Pope Francis has opened the centre to the peripheries with a vigour that is quite Latin American.

*Pierre de Charentenay SJ* is a former president of the Centre Sèvres, the Paris institute of higher education of the Society of Jesus, and was the editor in chief of the monthly French Jesuit journal *Études* from 2004 to 2012. He is the author of nine books and over five hundred essays in journals and newspapers. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1965 and received his PhD in political science from the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques in Paris in 1980.

*translated by Joseph A. Munitiz SJ*

ship, then moved on in a palanquin from Saint-Ferréol to Marseilles' cathedral of La Major, where the wedding took place.

<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, 'First Greeting of the Holy Father Pope Francis', 13 March 2013.

# ANOTHER WORLD IS NECESSARY

## Proposals from Ignacio Ellacuría and Pope Francis for a New Global Civilisation

*Martin Maier*

**W**E ARE LIVING not only in an epoch of change but in a change of epoch. Forty years ago, Ignacio Ellacuría had a prophetic presentiment of this change. He analyzed with clarity the crisis in the current global system, which he characterized as a civilisation of capital wealth. With great creativity he put forward another model, which he called a civilisation of poverty. Pope Francis, from the very beginning of his pontificate, has shown his concern with the future of our planet and with a more just global order. In his encyclical *Laudato si'* he insists on the intrinsic connection between the social and ecological challenges that face the world: he invites us to listen both to the cry of the poor and to the cry of the earth.

Our aim here is to bring together the vision of Ellacuría for a new global order and the proposals of Pope Francis. Our starting point is the crisis in today's civilisation due to the growing inequality between rich and poor, and to the deterioration of the environment. Both Ellacuría and Pope Francis are crying out for a deep change. Ellacuría is asking that 'history be put into reverse' and advance instead into 'a civilisation of poverty'. For Pope Francis what is needed is 'a real cultural revolution' directed towards 'an integral ecology'. We propose to analyze the economic, ethical and spiritual bases of this change, concluding with a reflection on utopia and hope.

### ***The Crisis in Today's Civilisation***

While they avoid fatalism, Ignacio Ellacuría and Pope Francis are both greatly preoccupied by the crises affecting humanity and the future of the planet. Ellacuría tends to emphasize the injustice and the inequality between rich and poor, but he is well aware of the threat to nature. He points out that the world is 'seriously ill'. He sees the need 'to put



*Ignacio Ellacuría*

history into reverse, to subvert it, and direct it in a new direction'.<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis states that we are living through an unprecedented socio-environmental crisis. Although the poor are those who have contributed least to the exploitation of natural resources and to the danger of global warming, they are the ones who suffer most from the consequences. Moreover, he denounces the culture of waste, the idolatry of money, the technocratic paradigm and the ideology of the free market.

Ignacio Ellacuría and Pope Francis are at one in their criticism of the capitalist system, which is built on the need to accumulate, the reckless exploitation of natural resources and unlimited consumerism. These deepen the gulf between rich and poor, and cannot be sustained. They are destroying the vital foundations of future generations; they idolize capital and sacrifice human beings. They are creating a dynamism of collective suicide and self-destruction. Ellacuría anticipated the analysis of capitalism in the twenty-first century made by the French economist Thomas Piketty.<sup>2</sup> For Ellacuría, the civilisation of capital wealth,

... proposes in the final instance the private accumulation of the greatest wealth possible on behalf of individuals, groups, multinationals, states or groups of states, as the fundamental base of development; and the possessive accumulation, whether individual or by family, of the greatest wealth possible as the fundamental base of personal security, and the possibility of an ever greater consumption as the base of individual happiness.<sup>3</sup>

According to the calculations of Oxfam, the eight most wealthy individuals living in the world today dispose of a fortune equivalent

<sup>1</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, 'El desafío de las mayorías pobres', *Estudios Centroamericanos*, 493–494 (1989), 1078. English translation as 'The Challenge of the Poor Majority', in *Towards a Society That Serves Its People: The Intellectual Contribution of El Salvador's Murdered Jesuits*, edited by John J. Hassett and Hugh Lacey (Washington, DC: Georgetown U, 1991), 171–176.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, Ma: Belknap, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, 'Utopía y profetismo desde América Latina. Un ensayo concreto de soteriología histórica', in *Escritos teológicos* (San Salvador: UCA, 2000), volume 2, 273.

to 50 per cent of what is possessed by all the poor in the world.<sup>4</sup> In consequence,

... the dominant civilisation in our world ... is constructed basically on the need to accumulate; it is generally thought and believed that only by accumulating wealth is it possible to ensure personal security, the possibility of avoiding domination by others and gaining dominion over the rest, the final chance to gain power, esteem, pleasure, and even the capacity to develop culturally.<sup>5</sup>

Already, forty years ago, Ellacuría was aware of the link between capitalism and the exploitation and destruction of nature; he denounced 'what is a real dictatorship of private capital'.<sup>6</sup> Even worse is that cultural dimension of a civilisation of wealth by which it is pregnant with,

... ideologies—theological, economic, political and cultural—that prevent us from seeing the crude reality of a situation ... which has allowed us to see as 'natural' and even as willed by God that a few should possess all and that the many should possess hardly anything, because of certain mechanisms, some subtle and others crude, that allow domination and exploitation.<sup>7</sup>

In a very similar way Pope Francis clearly condemns the present world economic and social system as unjust from its very roots. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* he affirms, in provocative denunciation: 'Such an economy kills' (n. 53). And, in a more analytical style,

As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world's problems or, for that matter, to any problems. Inequality is the root of social ills. (n. 202)

Moreover, he pinpoints new forms of poverty and vulnerability: 'I think of the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly who are increasingly isolated and abandoned, and many others' (n. 210). He insists:

<sup>4</sup> See 'Just 8 Men Own Same Wealth as Half the World', Oxfam International, at <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/just-8-men-own-same-wealth-half-world>, accessed 11 September 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, 'La construcción de un futuro distinto para la humanidad', in *Escritos teológicos*, volume 1, 351.

<sup>6</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, 'A sus órdenes, mi capital', in *Veinte años de historia en El Salvador (1969–1989)* (San Salvador: UCA, 1991), 654.

<sup>7</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, 'Misión actual de la Compañía de Jesús', in *Escritos teológicos*, volume 4, 247.

We must never forget that the planet belongs to all mankind and is meant for all mankind; the mere fact that some people are born in places with fewer resources or less development does not justify the fact that they are living with less dignity (n.190).

In his message for the World Day of Peace in 2014 he warns that, ‘The succession of economic crises should lead to a timely rethinking of our models of economic development and to a change in lifestyles’.<sup>8</sup>

He develops and deepens this theme in his encyclical *Laudato si’*, published in 2015. This is not an ecological encyclical, but rather a social one, following in the tradition of great social encyclicals that began with *Rerum novarum* (1891). It bears the subtitle, ‘On Care for Our Common Home’. Our common home is our world. This is something marvellous, but it is being threatened by climate change and the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources. Our duty is to care for it and we must save it. We have this responsibility with regard to future generations. We have only the one home, and that is the home of the whole of humanity. Because of this, the ecological question is a question of justice.

In his address to participants at the World Congress of the International Association of Penal Law in November 2019, Pope Francis denounced the idolatry of the market and the ‘macro-delinquency of corporations’:

Today, some economic sectors exercise more power than the States themselves (cf. *Laudato si’*, n.196): a reality that is even more evident in times of globalization of speculative capital. The principle of profit maximization, isolated from all other considerations, leads to a model of exclusion—automatic, no?—that violently inflicts on those who suffer its social and economic costs in the present, while condemning future generations to pay for its environmental costs.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Sketches of an Alternative Economic Model***

Neither Ignacio Ellacuría nor Pope Francis restricts himself to a critical analysis of the current system; both sketch out an alternative economic model to capitalism. The principles of the Church’s social teaching provide the guidelines for such a model. At the centre have to be found the dignity of the human person, solidarity, the preferential option

<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, ‘Fraternity, the Foundation and Pathway to Peace’, message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis, address to participants at the World Congress of the International Association of Penal Law, 15 November 2019.



for the poor and protection of the environment. Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, the founder of the Young Christian Workers movement, formulated it with a striking comparison: 'the young worker, whether male or female, is worth more than all the gold in the world'.<sup>10</sup>

In the last decades the split between rich and poor has become ever wider, both at the national and the international level. This unjust distribution of financial means has a profound ethical dimension. Thus, Ellacuría insisted on the ethical scandal of wealth-abundance in the face of poverty-misery. If poverty-misery exists then wealth-abundance is immoral, an ethical scandal; it affronts not only the dignity of the poor, but also that of the rich. Stressing this line of thought, in 2018 the German philosopher Christian Neuhäuser published his book on wealth as a moral problem, in which he argues that the extreme poverty of large sectors of the world population needs to be justified morally by Western societies, because the rich countries are maintaining a global system which causes a foreseen but preventable harm to the inhabitants of poor countries.<sup>11</sup> Frugality and a more austere level of life represent not only an ethical challenge, but a question of survival for humanity. Hence one may speak of 'a civilisation of shared sobriety'.<sup>12</sup> This is not about giving up things with reluctance, but rather the discovery that voluntarily limiting oneself can enrich and bring happiness.

For Pope Francis as well, the inequality of North and South raises an ethical challenge:

Inequity affects not only individuals but entire countries; it compels us to consider an ethics of international relations. A true 'ecological debt' exists, particularly between the global north and south, connected to commercial imbalances with effects on the environment, and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time.<sup>13</sup>

He also questions if the sort of world we want to leave to future generations is in relationship to our own dignity (see *Laudato si'*, n. 160).

Those who denounce injustices and want to change existing systems inevitably provoke polemic and persecution. That happened with the

<sup>10</sup> See <http://cardijn.org/en/press-releases/14-a-young-worker-is-worth-more-than-all-the-gold-in-the-world>, accessed 12 September 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Christian Neuhäuser, *Reichtum als moralisches Problem* (Stuttgart: Suhrkamp, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Martin Maier, 'La civilización de la pobreza y los desafíos globales de hoy', *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología*, 91 (2014), 41 following.

<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, n. 51.

prophets of the Old Testament and it happened also with Jesus. So it is not surprising that both Ellacuría and Pope Francis have been accused of being Marxists and communists. This was a theme in the visit of the then Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, to El Salvador in 1989, a few months before the assassination of the six Jesuits and their two female workers. When Fr Kolvenbach said to the Jesuits, with a touch of irony, 'Apparently you are all Marxists and communists!', Ignacio Ellacuría replied with a smile, 'Do you think we would lay down our lives for Marx and his theories? We are companions of Jesus and He is the mystery of our lives.'<sup>14</sup> On a more academic level, Ellacuría wrote an important article on theology of liberation and Marxism.<sup>15</sup>

Something similar happened to Pope Francis. In his address to participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements, on 28 October 2014 in Rome, while defending the right to *land, housing and work*, he said, 'if I talk about this, some say that the Pope is communist'. His reply was that those who accused him 'do not understand that love for the poor is at the centre of the Gospel. Land, housing and work, what you struggle for, are sacred rights. To make this claim is nothing unusual; it is the social teaching of the Church.'<sup>16</sup>

### ***Towards a Civilisation of Poverty and an Integral Ecology***

#### ***A change in the direction of history***

The French writer Albert Camus said in his speech on receiving the Nobel Prize in 1957: 'Each generation doubtless feels called upon to reform the world. Mine knows that it will not reform it, but its task is perhaps even greater. It consists in preventing the world from destroying itself.'<sup>17</sup> Today this challenge is greater still. A single transformation of the world economic order is not enough. There is a need for a change of mentality and a change in the direction of history towards a new civilisation. Ignacio Ellacuría called it a 'civilisation of poverty', and Pope Francis speaks of 'integral ecology'.

Ellacuría developed the concept of a civilisation of poverty in various articles. By 'civilisation' he means a global order of human

<sup>14</sup> Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, 'The Gospel's Reality', *Company Magazine*, 17 (Fall 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, 'Teología de la liberación y marxismo', in *Escritos teológicos*, volume 1, 46.

<sup>16</sup> Pope Francis, address to participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements, 28 October 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Albert Camus, 'Banquet Speech', at <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1957/camus/speech/>, accessed 12 September 2020.

cohabitation. He gives various meanings to the term 'poverty', as did the Latin American bishops at their meeting in Medellín (1968), and the theology of liberation. Fundamentally, it has three meanings. The first takes poverty in a negative sense as the absence or privation of what is needed to live with dignity: this misery-poverty has to be eradicated. In a second sense, poverty is something positive: the spiritual openness to God and an evangelical counsel of perfection. The third meaning is also positive: it is poverty that gives solidarity with the poor and is a share in the struggle for justice.

Ellacuría describes the civilisation of poverty as follows:

At a deeper level it is not simply the creation of a new world economic order, in which the relations of interchange are more just, but a new civilisation, built no longer upon pillars of hegemony and domination, on accumulation and difference, on consumerism and a falsified well-being, but rather upon pillars that are more human and more Christian.<sup>18</sup>

He goes on to explain more fully what this civilisation of poverty is,

... in which poverty will no longer be the privation of what is necessary and fundamental, owing to the historic action of certain groups or social classes, of certain nations or groups of nations, but rather a universal state of affairs in which are guaranteed the satisfaction of fundamental necessities, the freedom of personal choices, and a context of personal and communitarian creativity which would allow the apparition of new forms of life and culture, new relationships with nature, with others, with oneself and with God.<sup>19</sup>

In his final great article, 'Utopía y profetismo', from 1989, Ellacuría returned to his vision of a civilisation of poverty. Here he shows how the eschatological utopia of a new earth is related to a new economic order, a new social order, a new political order and a new cultural order.<sup>20</sup> In this text, he underlines the dialectical dimension of the antithesis between poverty and wealth:

The civilisation of poverty is so-called in contrast with the civilisation of wealth and not because it seeks universal pauperisation as an ideal of life .... What has to be emphasized here is the dialectical

<sup>18</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, 'El reino de Dios y el paro en el tercer mundo', *Escritos teológicos*, volume 2, 300.

<sup>19</sup> Ellacuría, 'Reino de Dios y el paro en el tercer mundo', 303 and following.

<sup>20</sup> Ellacuría, 'Utopía y profetismo', 271.

relationship wealth-poverty and not poverty as such. In a world which is sinfully shaped by the dynamism of capital-wealth the need is to set in motion a different dynamism which can overcome it in a way that brings salvation.<sup>21</sup>

The civilisation that is dominant in our world is built upon the need to accumulate, grow and possess ever more. The civilisation of poverty means an active denial overcoming that model, which is in the end destructive of both lives and the environment.

However, Ellacuría's picture is not simply in black and white: he acknowledges that not everything in the world order is negative. The civilisation of wealth, with its social and technological advances, has also brought many benefits. But these are only for a minority, and in the final count the evils outnumber them.<sup>22</sup> The Pope acknowledges that technology has improved the quality of life of human beings, and moreover that it is capable of producing things of beauty. Thus he mentions 'the beauty of an aircraft or a skyscraper'. But he opposes what he calls the technocratic paradigm which, 'undifferentiated and one-dimensional', extends its colonial dominion over minds, behaviour and culture.<sup>23</sup>

### ***The Argument from What Is Universalisable***

For both Ellacuría and Pope Francis, an essential parameter by which to outline a new world social order is the argument from what is universalisable, rooted in Kant's categorical imperative. Among various formulations of the categorical imperative, Ellacuría cites the following: 'Work in such a way that the principle you have opted for may always serve as a universal principle of law'.<sup>24</sup> From this he draws the conclusion, 'any civilisation that is not historically universalisable is not human'.<sup>25</sup> A global project is only acceptable if it provides for all the inhabitants of the planet the same rights to consume from, and impose on, the environment.

The solutions offered by the wealthy countries to the global crisis cannot be true solutions because they are not universalisable. It is simply impossible for the poor countries of the South to come anywhere near the level of life of the rich countries of the North. The natural

<sup>21</sup> Ellacuría, 'Utopía y profetismo', 274.

<sup>22</sup> Ellacuría, 'Utopía y profetismo', 273.

<sup>23</sup> *Laudato si'*, nn.103, 106, 122.

<sup>24</sup> Ellacuría, 'Utopía y profetismo', 249.

<sup>25</sup> Ellacuría, 'Construcción de un futuro distinto', 349.



© Stephen Codrington

*Slums and skyscrapers in Hong Kong*

resources needed for that do not exist, nor does the planet have the capacity for the residues. To attempt to do so would lead to a global ecological collapse. To establish a world order, the only model that can be adopted for such a project must be universalisable. Ellacuría was calling out for a world civilisation of poverty for the same reason.

However, Ellacuría does not mean by *universalisable* the same thing as ‘imposed uniformity’.

The principle of universalisation is certainly not a principle of imposed uniformity, and certainly not one that is imposed by a powerful centre on an amorphous and subordinated periphery, which is usually the way of universalisation pretended by those who want to impose that model of life which for the moment is more favourable to them.<sup>26</sup>

Likewise, Pope Francis warns against a cultural and ideological colonialism which deprives peoples of their own cultural traditions.

The argument from universalisability is also central to the encyclical *Laudato si’*. For the Pope it is false to blame the growth in population rather than the extreme and selective consumerism practised by some:

It is an attempt to legitimize the present model of distribution, where a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalised, since the planet could not even contain the waste products of such consumption. (n.50)

<sup>26</sup> Ellacuría, ‘Utopía y profetismo’, 253 and following.

At the centre of a new civilisation there must be solidarity and the universal destiny of goods:

Solidarity is a spontaneous reaction by those who recognise that the social function of property and the universal destination of goods are realities which come before private property. The private ownership of goods is justified by the need to protect and increase them, so that they can better serve the common good; for this reason, solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them.<sup>27</sup>

Closely linked to the principle of universalisability is the principle of the common destiny of goods. One of the major advances in the encyclical *Laudato si'* is that it considers the atmosphere, forests and oceans as common global goods (nn.93–95). Already Thomas Aquinas had defended the goods of the earth as a creation of God belonging to all human beings. Ellacuría expressed this as follows:

The great goods of nature (the air, seas and beaches, mountains and forests, rivers and lakes, and in general all of nature's resources for production, use and enjoyment) do not need to be taken over as private property by any individual person, group or nation, and in fact they are the great means of communication and cohabitation.<sup>28</sup>

His justification for this was 'the gratuity of nature, which is offered equally to all and which all can enjoy'.<sup>29</sup>

If all the natural goods that have been 'created' are for the service of the common good of humanity, the institution of private property over natural resources can be justified only in so far as this is of greater service for the common good, rather than the common property of natural resources. Private property, therefore, is subject to social responsibility. There are consequences for the use of fossil energy, which contaminates the atmosphere with the carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) that causes global warming. The determination of rights to the use of the atmosphere serves the common good if it can be shown that in that way a dangerous climatic change can be avoided. Thus, the devaluation of property rights to coal, petrol and gas can be justified in the light of the social responsibility that goes with private property. In line with Catholic social teaching, the universal destiny of common goods and

<sup>27</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 189.

<sup>28</sup> Ellacuría, 'Utopía y profetismo', 277.

<sup>29</sup> Ellacuría, 'Construcción de un futur distinto', 352.

the social responsibility that goes with private property, must be of service, in the first place, to the poor.

### **A New Spirituality**

A new model of civilisation presupposes a new spirituality, in the wide sense of a new way of thinking, a new culture and a new way of life. Ignacio Ellacuría and Pope Francis also coincide in this cultural and spiritual perspective. Scientific discoveries and technical projects are not enough in themselves to generate fundamental changes. Revolutions start in the mind, in a different way of thinking. A fundamental change is needed in conscience and in values, related to a new way of understanding quality of life and the environment, and the integration of ecological factors into the notion of well-being and progress. From the poor it is possible to learn that a more austere level of living does not imply a lessening of happiness. The acquisition of interior simplicity must go hand in hand with greater interior happiness. 'It is better to live well than to own much', was the motto chosen for the fasting campaign launched by the ecclesiastical development agency Misereor in Germany a few years ago.<sup>30</sup>

Ellacuría lays much stress, both in his theology and in his concept of spirituality, on history and on historicisation. Spirituality means for Ellacuría the appropriate historicisation of what is most true and vital in the gospel. The meeting with God has to pass through history: 'The meeting with God in the realisation of history is the essential problem in theology, pastoral work and the spirituality that are needed today in Latin America'. Such a meeting takes place 'in the historic actions of human people'. This implies, moreover, a link between spirituality and praxis. Ellacuría justifies the subordination of orthodoxy to orthopraxis thanks to the principle, which is Ignatian but in the long run evangelical, that love should show itself in deeds more than in words.<sup>31</sup>

Behind all this is the short formula of Ignatian spirituality, *contemplativus in actione*. For Ellacuría contemplation and the meeting with God take place in action that is personal and historical.<sup>32</sup> But the action in question is not just of any sort, it is action for justice. Bearing in mind the

<sup>30</sup> See <https://www.misereor.org/>, accessed 3 October 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, 'Lectura latinoamericana de los Ejercicios Espirituales de san Ignacio', *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología*, 23 (1991), 113, 120, 144.

<sup>32</sup> Compare Ignacio Ellacuría, *Conversión de la Iglesia al Reino de Dios. Para anunciarlo y realizarlo en la historia* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1984), 232.

fundamental option of the Society of Jesus in favour of faith and justice, undertaken by General Congregation 32 in 1975, for Ellacuría the true Ignatian contemplative today is the '*contemplativus in actione iustitiae*'.<sup>33</sup> Thus, 'a contemplation ... in action on behalf of justice would be the Christian way of approaching God and of bringing God to others'.<sup>34</sup>

For Pope Francis, as well, a strategy of change 'calls for rethinking processes in their entirety, for it is not enough to include a few superficial ecological considerations while failing to question the logic which underlies present-day culture'. Technical and partial answers are insufficient as foundation for an ecological culture.

There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm. Otherwise, even the best ecological initiatives can find themselves caught up in the same globalized logic. To seek only a technical remedy to each environmental problem which comes up is to separate what is in reality interconnected and to mask the true and deepest problems of the global system.<sup>35</sup>

An idea which runs through the whole of the encyclical is that everything is intimately related, and that the problems of today's world require an integral perspective which takes into account all factors. In a similar way, forty years ago, Ignacio Ellacuría was pointing out the need 'to see others not as part of oneself, but rather to see oneself in union and communion with others'; and also for 'a common enjoyment of common goods' and 'a new relationship with nature' which will allow 'its enjoyment with veneration and not mistreated, despised and exploited'.<sup>36</sup>

### **Utopia and Hope**

Both Ellacuría and Pope Francis believe in the possibility of change and of a way out of today's crises. They are advocates of hope. Ellacuría defends the utopia of a new humanity and a new world. Pope Francis, in *Laudato si'*, insists that human beings still have the possibility of intervening positively in the course of history.

<sup>33</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, 'Pedro Arrupe, renovador de la vida religiosa', *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología*, 22 (1991), 9.

<sup>34</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, 'Fe y justicia', in *Fe, justicia y opción por los oprimidos*, edited by Ignacio Ellacuría and others (Bilbao: Mensajero, 1980), 71.

<sup>35</sup> *Laudato si'*, n. 111.

<sup>36</sup> Ellacuría, 'Utopía y profetismo', 276, 270.



It is not by chance that the final great article by Ellacuría, which is something like his last will and testament, has the title 'Utopía y profetismo desde América Latina'. Ellacuría himself has suffered the lot of the prophets: he was calumniated, persecuted and assassinated. None of the prophets saw the fulfilment of their prophecies while they were alive. In a certain sense one can say that all the prophets failed. However, as was said by the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, 'Success is not one of the names of God'. The writer and former Czech president Václav Havel put it in these words: 'Hope is not the conviction that everything will turn out fine, but the assurance that what we are doing has meaning, without worrying about the result'.<sup>37</sup>

The prophets denounced injustices, but they also proclaimed hope in a new world. The motivation for change and conversion has to be positive, the belief that we do not lose but win. In *Laudato si'* Pope Francis recalls the ancient teaching, found in many different religious traditions and also in the Bible, that 'less is more'. In one of the key saying in the Gospel Jesus asks, 'For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?' (Mark 8:36). There is a sobriety that is happy and liberating and,

... a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack. This implies avoiding the dynamic of dominion and the mere accumulation of pleasures. (n.222)

In a similar way, for Ellacuría a civilisation of wealth confuses 'being happy with being entertained, it favours and promotes a consumerist production based on supposed needs introduced by means of the market'; it empowers attitudes that are 'actively consumerist' and 'passively receptive'.<sup>38</sup>

The Pope says, in one of the finest passages of *Laudato si'*:

Such sobriety, when lived freely and consciously, is liberating. It is not a lesser life or one lived with less intensity. On the contrary, it is a way of living life to the full. In reality, those who enjoy more

<sup>37</sup> Martin Buber, quoted in Eugene Kogon and Karl Thieme, 'Martin Buber', *Frankfurter Hefte*, 6/1 (1951), 195; Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvězda* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 181.

<sup>38</sup> Ellacuría, 'Utopía y profetismo', 287.

and live better each moment are those who have given up dipping here and there, always on the look-out for what they do not have. They experience what it means to appreciate each person and each thing, learning familiarity with the simplest things and how to enjoy them. So they are able to shed unsatisfied needs, reducing their obsessiveness and weariness. Even living on little, they can live a lot, above all when they cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, in service, in developing their gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature, in prayer. Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer. (n.223)

It is obvious that the poor are much closer to this concept of life than those who live in abundance. That is why Ellacuría insists that the poor are the primary subjects of the changes that are needed. That is also why Pope Francis keeps on repeating that changes come from the periphery and that the future of humanity lies in the hands of the people. In this search for a new model of civilisation, the Church and—from an ecumenical point of view—all the Churches and non-Christian religious communities, have a very important role to play. A Church that is poor and for the poor, such as Pope Francis wants, can be, and has the duty to be, the promoter of a civilisation of poverty.

With regard to the possibility of bringing into existence a new world civilisation, that will be more just and sustainable, Ignacio Ellacuría wrote by way of testament and vision:

Thus it is that the new humanity will be defined in part by its active protest and permanent struggle, which seek to overcome the dominant structural injustice, seen to be an evil and a sin as it keeps the vast majority of the population in inhuman conditions of life. The negative element is this situation itself, which by its very negativity launches a resort to escape from it; but the positive element is the dynamic to overcome, in which the Spirit gives strength in many ways, the most supreme of all being the willingness to lay down one's life for others, whether it by daily indefatigable self-offering or by the sacrifice of a death, violently inflicted.<sup>39</sup>

If the World Social Forums gather under the slogan, *Another world is possible*, today threatened by global warming, the loss of biodiversity and the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources, it is necessary to

<sup>39</sup> Ellacuría, 'Utopía y profetismo', 268 following.

proclaim, *Another world is necessary!* The civilisation of poverty and ecological conversion are no longer an option but an imperative. Every process of change begins with a call and an examination of conscience. It needs inspiration and vision. Ignacio Ellacuría and Pope Francis are among those inspirers and visionaries, of whose importance the German philosopher Georg Simmel (1858–1918) noted: ‘Things in the world never turned out in the way that prophets and leaders thought and desired, but without prophets and leaders they would never have turned out at all’.<sup>40</sup>

**Martin Maier SJ** joined the Jesuits in 1979 and studied philosophy, theology and music in Munich, Paris, Innsbruck and San Salvador. From 1993 to 1994 he coordinated the humanitarian relief action of the German and Austrian Jesuits in Bosnia and Croatia. He has been managing editor of the review *Stimmen der Zeit*, and rector of the Berchmanskolleg in Munich. Since 2014 he has been Secretary for European Affairs at the Jesuit European Social Centre in Brussels.

*translated by Joseph A. Munitiz SJ*

<sup>40</sup> Georg Simmel, *Fragmente und Aufsätze: aus dem Nachlass und Veröffentlichungen der letzten Jahre* (Munich: Drei Masken, 1923), 46.

Spiritual companions connect here.



Seek and Find Guide

Conferences

Workshops

Webinars

Author Readings

Seminars

Open Houses

Presence Journal

Digital Magazines

Newsletters

Videos

Forums

Plug in to [sdiworld.org](http://sdiworld.org)



Spiritual Directors International