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## THE WORD OF THE GUEST EDITOR

### **“Francis from Buenos Aires to Rome: Southern winds on the politology of religion”**

A Latin American occupies the chair of St. Peter for the first time, and he brings with him to Rome the political, popular and symbolic voice proper to a continent which has been silenced, but not muted. Consequently, the Latin American question is imposed as a topic of debate on the academia that specialises in politics and religion. But this question, situated, ought to go beyond the mere Church-State relationship from which it is analysed in Europe. Understanding the new continent means grasping a cultural blend whose core of meaning is manifested as a “vital synthesis” – vital rather than theoretical-, the fruit of the articulation between: aboriginal *ethos*, rationalistic enlightenment and Marxist *intelligentsia*. Still, its culture has not been completely alienated to the point of fully identifying itself with any of these. That is why it resists. But neither has it been emancipated on significant levels. That is why it perishes. Ambiguity and symbol are, respectively, the hermeneutical keys for a political-religious interpretation of a people who is defined by its resistance for life and its experience of death as martyrdom. Consequently, the region has generated situated forms of democracy. These political forms, far from the essential characteristics of the European nationalisms from which they are intended to be analysed –that is, from totalitarian, systematic, criminal and impoverishing- rather encourage in their style the unity in the diversity of different forms of emancipation and agency of power, prioritising work as a way of accomplishing human dignity, as opposed to armed struggle<sup>1</sup>. Concurrently, for the first time a Chief of State of Latin American origin is a global authority in the field of moral politics, –given the citizenship transversality of Catholicism. Considering that in almost two years into office the Argentinean Pope has not been questioned by the press, and that his gestures have an effect on speeches by other heads of state – even in countries where Catholicism is a minority- then the Latin American political-religious question becomes relevant to the politology of religion.

As Miroljub Jevtic explains<sup>2</sup>, the relationship between politics and religion may be predictated in many ways. Religion may be studied as an instrument of politics as by Alexis de Tocqueville, or as its foundation as by Eusebius of Cesarea or Carl Schmitt. But to study religion from “the political” as a cultural

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1 Juan Carlos Scanonne, *Nuevo punto de partida de la filosofía latinoamericana*, Buenos Aires, Guadalupe, 1990.

2 Miroljub Jevtic, “Political science and religión”, *Politics and Religion*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2007.

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practice which exposes hegemonic discourses and liberates from structural social injustice and not from “politics” in its Church-State relationship,<sup>3</sup> is a Latin American originality from the 1960s, paying more attention to the legitimising cultural practices of a people in particular than to the legal models of European political science<sup>4</sup>. Understanding religion as a prophetic practice, i.e., as a denunciation of social injustice and political corruption which Francis seems to practise it as Chief of State –and not as indoctrination or spiritualistic intimacy– finds its origins in popular historical-political contexts. It thus becomes relevant to dedicate an issue of *Política y Religión* to Latin America, where the relationship between politics and religion does not occur only in a moralising sense, but also in a liberating and reconciling one. There, the poor people –and not the class struggle– is the starting point of all hermeneutics, despite the strong secularising processes that have pierced the continent from right and left.

The Latin American question originated this academic call in which researchers from different countries, disciplines and creeds participate. All of them colleagues and friends with great prestige and local and international recognition. However, it is not an easy task to bring the specialised voices from one continent to another without having the cultural paradigms of the recipient countries determine possibly mistaken interpretations. Since a definition of its central categories would exceed the scope of this introduction, I will only state that a defining characteristic in Latin American intellectuals is their historical commitment. Therefore their practice is theoretical-practical. That is why many specialists in Latin American politics and religion whether Catholic, Protestant or Jewish place their historical responsibility on the demystification of those foundations of the State which, although possible, are admitted as necessary and evident, as a guarantee of social injustice which enables exploitation and its consequent dehumanisation. Denaturalising inequality, and poverty as its necessary consequence, is a political-religious mission for certain committed intellectuals from the end of the world –as Francis referred to his region on the day he was elected Pope. In those southern latitudes, religion becomes mission and/or militancy. Religion is critical and it transforms structures, rather than collaborating in maintaining the dominant *status quo*. This causes an inversion in the understanding of the constituent principles of the modern liberal State. Thus, the notion of equality as tolerance towards the Other is displaced by the notion of recognition as responsibility toward the Other, a displacement that is enabled in the South by a valorisation of the absolutely Other rooted in popular symbolic culture. Finally, for a better understanding of the question it is also necessary to mention that, contrary to what happens in secularised liberal contexts where religion is relegated to the private sphere and its only function is to collaborate with the State, in Latin American peoples religion is public. In the southern part of the

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3 Oliver Marchart, *El pensamiento político posfundacional*, Buenos aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2009.

4 Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Muffe, *La razón populista*, Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005.

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world religion demands an efficacious political commitment with the oppressed, resting on a religious basis which goes beyond the deistic theory of equality by creation on which the liberal Constitutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were based. Thus, a situated religion becomes public and fights for justice, not as an annihilation of differences but as a conversion to unity in the distinction.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, liberation is not understood as individual considering it a consequence of personal virtues –which is typical of religious practice in extremely secularised contexts- but as collective, considering it the result of social and political virtues. Religion in Latin America goes beyond intimacy and becomes political criticism and action for the poor.

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5 Víctor Manuel Fernández, *Conversión pastoral y nuevas estructuras. ¿Lo tomamos en serio?* Buenos aires, Ágape, 2010.

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