

## **POPE FRANCIS: IT IS THE POLITICS!**

### **Abstract**

This article will try to establish a relationship between economy and religion based on the speech of the new Latin American Pontiff, Pope Francis, for whom the problem of global crisis should not be sought in the economy but in politics. The pontiff believes that the economy should be subordinated to the politics and not the other way around. Trying to find a solution to the global political and economic crisis involves investigating the theological causes that sustain structural poverty. Francisco, as a new prophet in times of capitalism, relying on the documents of the Latin American archbishops, denounces that the lack of work that originates this system originates a culture of death. Political theology can unmask false gods that support this system, and proclaim the importance of a poor working people who must be treated with dignity.

**Keywords:** politics, economy, poor people, culture, Pope Francis

### **Introduction**

We are witnesses of an international scene characterized by the effects of an economy that has generated structural unemployment, and has plunged a great part of the world population into poverty. At the same time, fundamentalisms that struggle for political dominion are camouflaged as religious wars; a dangerous ecological unbalance prevails as a consequence of the uncontrollable exploitation of natural resources; and migration is chosen as an alternative to political struggle. From such a scene there emerges a new pontiff who, even though he is the head of a State in the global village, attains a deterritorialized political legitimacy and maintains that the causes of poverty are political rather than economical.

As a surprise in our modern times, that pontifical word becomes an *autoric-tas* in political morality both for Christians and non-Christians, including political leaders in charge of governments. However, the academy and the press proclaim that the political sphere seems to be in a process of change, that it appears disrupted by an alleged crisis of representation, by a dubious ineffectiveness of political leaders, by the so-called populist mechanisms as a new method for institutionalizing democratic systems, that it is assailed by watchful citizens from

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dissatisfied middle strata that exert their power of control permanently but only as a negative liberty.

Even though, the new Pope keeps saying that the cause of all this is political. The Judeo-Christian tradition has always maintained that in the beginning is the word, so that it should not come as a surprise to see a Catholic priest upholding that conviction in spite of an antagonistic voice that comes from the mid-nineteenth century and states that the source of conflict is the economy and not politics. But the Pope insists that economy is the product of the word and that, in order to find a solution for the dehumanizing effects of an economical system devoid of moral restraints, we should make a political decision. And whoever decides, judges. Therefore, I wonder whether the discourse of Pope Francis might be read in terms of a political theology, or whether “pastor” may be equivalent to “*militante*”. But, if we analyzing what the authors said today in the academy about relationships between religion and politics, we can found some of them like Mirosljub Jevtic, who call it Politology of Religi6n. Francis is a pastor who seeks unity in difference; then, is he a theologian or a politician?

## 1. The theological causes of structural poverty

Francis calls himself a shepherd, neither a theologian nor a politician. According to him “To understand this reality we need to approach it with the gaze of the Good Shepherd, who seeks not to judge but to love” (EG 125). And he adds: “I am the pastor of a Church without frontiers, a Church which considers herself mother to all” (EG 210). Indeed, his latest encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, is not only addressed to Christians: “In my Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, I wrote to all the members of the Church with the aim of encouraging ongoing missionary renewal. In this Encyclical, I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home” (LS 3). In this way, “springs up the joy of the Good Shepherd who finds the lost sheep and brings it back to the flock” (EG 237). Besides, he begs for a special prayer for him, “that I may be a pastor according to the heart of Christ”<sup>2</sup> because “Christ is the Church’s Pastor, but his presence in history passes through the freedom of human beings; from their midst one is chosen to serve as his Vicar, the Successor of the Apostle Peter. Yet Christ remains the centre, not the Successor of Peter: Christ, Christ is the centre”.<sup>3</sup>

This pontiff of Latin American and Jesuit origin demands from the missionaries to be “Not men conditioned by petty fears from below, but rather Pastors en-

2 Francis, Audience with Representatives of the Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the Different Religions, Rome, March 20<sup>th</sup> 2013. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/march/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130320\\_delegati-fraterni.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/march/documents/papa-francesco_20130320_delegati-fraterni.html) (Accessed date June-2016).

3 Francis, Audience to Representatives of the Communications Media, Rome, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2013. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/march/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130316\\_rappresentanti-media.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/march/documents/papa-francesco_20130316_rappresentanti-media.html) (Accessed date June-2016).

dowed with *parrhesia*, who are able to ensure that a sacrament of unity exists".<sup>4</sup> Unity – a political category if there is one that deserves such a name – was central in Bergoglio's thought and it continues to be central in Francis. Unity is not only a political goal: for Francis it is also the goal of the Pastor as a social actor: "only together will we succeed – and this is the concluding feature of the profile of the Shepherd, in being a prophecy of the Kingdom".<sup>5</sup>

But the Argentine Pope is not only a shepherd, he is also a prophet when he denounces false shepherds: "And vanity, pastors who believe they are in a superior state to their people, detached ... let's think, prince pastors. The profiteer pastor and the prince pastor. These are the two temptations of which St Augustine speaks in his sermon, taking up the passage of Ezekiel."<sup>6</sup>

According to Francis, who introduced himself in St Peter's Square as the bishop of Rome,<sup>7</sup> a pastor is not a teacher, but a witness, "more than teachers, people seek witnesses: humble witnesses of God's mercy and tenderness; priests and religious men conformed to Christ the Good Shepherd, able to communicate Christ's charity to everyone".<sup>8</sup> With reference to bishops as pastors, he said that bishops should be social actors "close to their people, meek, patient and merciful fathers and brothers, who love poverty both as freedom for the Lord and as simplicity and austerity of life".<sup>9</sup> For Francis, the relationship between the bishop and the people is fundamental: "The Bishop has to be among his people in three ways: in front of them, pointing the way; among them, keeping them together and preventing them from being scattered; and behind them, ensuring that no one is left behind, but also, and primarily, so that the flock itself can sniff out new paths".<sup>10</sup> As the goal of the good politician is to guarantee the unity of the State, for the head of the Vatican State, "the duty of the Pope is that of guaranteeing the unity of the Church" "... Christ himself is a Shepherd and supreme doctor of all the faithful".<sup>11</sup> With respect to the political world, in his address to

4 Francis, Address To A Meeting of the Congregation for Bishops, Rome, February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/february/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140227\\_riunione-congregazione-vescovi.pdf](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/february/documents/papa-francesco_20140227_riunione-congregazione-vescovi.pdf) (Accessed date June-2016).

5 Francis, Address To The 66<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Italian Episcopal Conference, Rome, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/may/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140519\\_conferenza-episcopale-italiana.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/may/documents/papa-francesco_20140519_conferenza-episcopale-italiana.html) (Accessed date June-2016).

6 Francis, Address To Rectors and Students of the Pontifical Colleges and Residences of Rome, Rome, May 12, 2014. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/may/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140512\\_pontifici-collegi-convitti.pdf](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/may/documents/papa-francesco_20140512_pontifici-collegi-convitti.pdf) (Accessed date June-2016).

7 Cf. Caamaño, José Carlos, El obispo y los obispos de Roma, *Revista Teología*, No. 112, Buenos Aires, 2013, pp. 55-71.

8 Francis, Encuentro con las autoridades, Tirana, 21 de septiembre de 2014. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140921\\_albania-autorita.pdf](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/september/documents/papa-francesco_20140921_albania-autorita.pdf)

9 Francis, Seminar Organized by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Rome, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140920\\_vescovi-seminario-propaganda.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/september/documents/papa-francesco_20140920_vescovi-seminario-propaganda.html) (Accessed date June-2016).

10 Francis, Address to the Leadership of the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America (CELAM), July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130728\\_gmg-celam-rio.pdf](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130728_gmg-celam-rio.pdf) (Accessed date June-2016).

11 Francis, Conclusion of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Rome, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141018\\_synodo-ordinario.pdf](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141018_synodo-ordinario.pdf)

the European Parliament, the Pope says: "In addressing you today, I would like, as a pastor, to offer a message of hope and encouragement to all the citizens of Europe".<sup>12</sup> I wonder whether Francis wants politicians to act as pastors, whether he conceives the political actor in that way.

Besides, the fact of referring to himself as "the bishop of Rome" instead of "the Pope" is very important for the ecumenical dialogue and has been welcomed by other Christian denominations. It confirms his interest in improving Peter's ministry. Thus, Rome would be the Church which presides in charity, according to the phrase of St Ignatius of Antioch. The emphasis on the idea that the pontiff is the bishop of Rome may be a contribution to the improvement of ecumenical relationships, a goal that has always been present in Bergoglio's activities as bishop, as well as interreligious dialogue.

## 2. Francis: the new prophet in times of capitalism

Thus, in Francis, the shepherd is a prophet, and this notion comes closer to the function of the politician as a call and keeps at a distance the idea of politics as the management of private interests. In his pastoral role, Francis exerts the gift of prophecy as a denouncement of the true causes of injustice, an action replaced in the modern state by the category of negative liberty. This expression refers to the watchful attitude of citizens who –as rightly suggests Pierre Rosanvallon– denounce everything that may threaten particular principles, universalized under the label of civil rights.<sup>13</sup> However, denouncement as prophecy does not refer to the exercise of negative liberty characteristic of liberalism, as it was originally practiced by ephors and tribunes, it refers to the denouncement of causes masked behind a false conception of what is "natural". The Pope prophesies against the idea of an individual being, and in favor of a relational being.

In other words, among the prophets, negation is not the liberal right of veto but the power of negating conditions of inequality that favor dehumanization and bring wealth, recognition, and life for some people, and poverty, unheard-of-ness, and death, for others. Francis's prophecy asserts that salvation is eschatological, i.e., cosmic and for all, as he says in *Laudato Si'*: "Indeed the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love: Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world" (LS 236). It prophesies that the joy of the Gospel is possible in this world, free from a culturally constructed sorrow through the intermediation of unjust structures (EG 1-2).

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w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco\_20141018\_conclusionesinodo-dei-vescovi.html (Accessed date June-2016).

12 Francis, Address to the European Parliament, Strasbourg, November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141125\\_strasburgo-parlamento-europeo.pdf](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141125_strasburgo-parlamento-europeo.pdf) (Accessed date June-2016).

13 Cf. Rosanvallon, Pierre, *La contrademocracia. La política en la era de la desconfianza*, Buenos Aires, Manantial, 2007, pp. 22-50.

Is Francis a theologian or a pastor? Is he a prophet or a politician? If his acts are looked upon in haste, without resorting to the instruments provided by the Theology of the People –Argentine version of the Theology of Liberation–, the answer becomes entangled, and is frequently avoided. The Pope is the head of a State which has neither an army nor citizens that may contrast his promises and prophecies and, at the same time, he is the spiritual leader of millions across social and political borders. Nevertheless, as an unarmed prophet, Francis denounces or prophesies against social injustice, and summons us to exile ourselves from an individualistic culture. He denounces injustice in its different guises and he also denounces exploitation because “today we also have to say ‘thou shalt not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills.” (EG 53). He denounces consumerism because “Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a ‘throw away’ culture which is now spreading” (EG 53). “Today’s economic mechanisms promote inordinate consumption, yet it is evident that unbridled consumerism combined with inequality proves doubly damaging to the social fabric” (EG 60). He denounces the inhumanity of the capitalist system remarking: “May you reject inhuman economic models which create new forms of poverty and marginalize workers; may you reject the culture of death”.<sup>14</sup> And he also denounces discrimination inside the Catholic Church when he says: “the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care” (EG 200). Moreover, he denounces systemic discrimination in the religious sphere saying that the respect of differences does not entail “privatizing religions in an attempt to reduce them to the quiet obscurity of the individual’s conscience or to relegate them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques. This would represent, in effect, a new form of discrimination and authoritarianism” (EG 255).

In accordance with his prophetic denouncement, as a pastor, Francis preaches exile, not as if running away from this world but as going forth to the world: he asks us to become involved in the world, to take on the smell of the sheep, to go out to others. Below, I quote a passage from *Evangelii Gaudium* which is, in my opinion, central for understanding the pastoral ministry of Francis in the light of Latin American theology, especially the Theology of the People and how it was practiced in Argentina together with *el pueblo-pobre-trabajador* [the working-poor-people]: “The Church which “goes forth” is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19)” (EG 24).

Going out to the world means dealing with poverty, becoming exiled in the world and not from the world; it does not imply migrating to other worlds to find the same system of oppression, but going out to our own world and struggling

14 Francis, Meeting with the Asian Youth at Seoul, August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/august/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140815\\_corea-giovani-asia.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/august/documents/papa-francesco_20140815_corea-giovani-asia.html) (Accessed date June-2016).

against the causes of poverty. In this context, there is a relevant information: in Argentina, where Bergoglio was educated and trained, unemployed workers do not migrate; they organize themselves in syndicates and fight to obtain social rights. The Pope, prophet and pastor, summons us to fight against poverty: "In this context we can understand Jesus' command to his disciples: 'You yourselves give them something to eat!' (Mk 6:37): it means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter" (EG 188). And he adds: "No one must say that they cannot be close to the poor because their own lifestyle demands more attention to other areas [...] none of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice" (EG 201) because, for Francis, "The need to resolve the structural causes of poverty cannot be delayed [...] 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" (EG 202).

### 3. Political theology function in times of market's god

To the great surprise of those who thought that theology as politics had been done away –i. e., theology used to legitimize or to question the cultural foundations of the State that engender inequality–, the Pope himself steps in now to denounce the causes of the new forms of poverty, where we may find Christ. It should be mentioned that the new forms of poverty for Francis are the homeless, the addicted, the refugees, the indigenous peoples, the elderly, the migrants: "For this reason, I exhort all countries to a generous openness which, rather than fearing the loss of local identity, will prove capable of creating new forms of cultural synthesis" (EG 110). He denounces the causes of poverty and assumes the leading role of a pastor in liberating action: "I hope there will be noise [...] I want you to make yourselves heard in your dioceses, I want the noise to go out, I want the Church to go out onto the streets, I want us to resist everything worldly [...] everything to do with clericalism, everything that might make us closed in on ourselves".<sup>15</sup> Finally, he urges us to become poor instead of trying to convert the poor, and becoming poor means becoming a people, as we shall see below in the discussion about the Theology of the People: "Yet becoming *pueblo* demands something more. It is an ongoing process in which every new generation must take part: a slow and arduous effort calling for a desire for integration and a willingness to achieve this through the growth of a peaceful and multifaceted culture of encounter" (EG 220).

15 Francis, Meeting with Young People from Argentina, Rio de Janeiro, July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130725\\_gmg-argentini-rio.pdf](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130725_gmg-argentini-rio.pdf) (Accessed date June-2016).

What did the prophets of the Old Testament try to reverse? And what did the theologians of the people try to reverse in Argentina in the sixties and seventies? An established order that determined unequal social conditions which, in turn, favored the humanization of some and the dehumanization of others. And I say “reverse” so as to distinguish between peace as the ending of a warlike conflict, from peace as the ending of an antagonism which generates inequality and, later, poverty and dehumanization. Social peace as unity –the outcome of a consensus between antagonistic interests, in the sense of an Augustan peace, which was already criticized by St Augustine<sup>16</sup>– entails a view of unity characteristic of a liberalism that seeks the end of social conflict. On the contrary, peace as the unity that results from the end of poverty, a peace achieved by denouncing the falseness of asserting particular interests as universal, that peace means recovering a lost unity. It is a transcendent unity attained through an immanent construction in history, a construction which is carried out by each people and its culture, and only then posited as transcendent, but open, contingent, dynamical: the theme on which postfoundational thought reflected, as shown by Oliver Marchart, who summarizes other authors, like Jean-Luc Nancy, Claude Lefort, Alain Badiou, and Ernesto Laclau.<sup>17</sup> Everything changes in politics according to whether we consider that the principle is unity or that it is difference. However, for Francis the principle is unity in difference. And prophecy in the sense of denouncing agonism rather than its origin –since agonism is already present in unjust systems and the prophet merely makes it visible– in this sense prophecy appears in the words of Francis thus: “The land of the southern poor is rich and mostly unpolluted, yet access to ownership of goods and resources for meeting vital needs is inhibited by a system of commercial relations and ownership which is structurally perverse” (LS 52).

The discourse of this Latin American Pope, critical of the established order, is perceived as a novelty by those who ignore the Judeo-Christian tradition – especially the discourse of prophets in the Old Testament about the servitude of the Jewish people– and also ignore the Evangelical principles introduced in the New Testament. However, the novelty in the discourse of Francis does not lie in the message itself but in its manner, its method, as will be seen later. Seeing the critical discourse of Francis as a novelty in the tradition of the Catholic Church also implies ignoring the history of the Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries with regard to political matters. Already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, much earlier than the Church of Rome, and considering the democratic and liberal republican model was a guarantee for human dignity in the age of capitalism, the Catholic Church of the United States was the first critical voice that predicted the catastrophic consequences of an economical liberalism that knew no ethical bounds and

16 Cf. St Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XII and Book XIX, chapter 15 and ff.

17 Cf. Marchart, Oliver, *El pensamiento político posfundacional*, Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2009, pp. 87-200. [English edition: *Post-foundational Political Thought*, Edinburgh University Press, 2007.]

ranked the economy higher than politics. However, it supported a political liberalism morally limited by a participative democracy. A reading of the episcopal magisterium in that country during the 19<sup>th</sup> century is enough to confirm that position.<sup>18</sup> This means that the Catholic Church –even that of Francis– defends the republican form of government as long as it is democratic but it asserts that it is contingent nonetheless.<sup>19</sup> In the first place, these considerations dispel any suspicion that the Pope might be communist; in the second place, they refute the idea that the discourse of Francis is a novelty among Catholics. Quite the opposite: the discourse of the current pontiff is another way of prophesying against false deities who enslave people and, therefore, dehumanize them.

#### 4. Poor-worker-people: the big product in Modern Times

Nevertheless, the prophetic word of Pope Francis, supporting as it does the *pueblo-pobre-trabajador* [the working-poor-people] in an echo of a Theology of the People, divides into two the public opinion, drawing a line that introduces the moment of politics inside the theological discourse. This sovereign manner of the people's Pope inscribes him in the same line of his predecessor, Benedict XVI, and defines him as an antagonist of the old enemies of Catholicism, that is, liberal modernity and its system of accumulating wealth without moral limits. At the same time, expressing this third position, the Pope becomes attuned in part to the good policies of democratic and popular governments in Latin America, even though he also criticizes their mistakes, for instance, corrupt decisions made by some actors in these new styles of representation. Because of this third position, he is also accused of playing the populist tune without noticing that his discourse is evangelical and not necessarily Peronist (the name given to populism in Argentina). Although Adam Smith himself criticized the indolence and conceit of the wealthy, although the *Communist Manifesto* stated that even the Pope had entered into a holy alliance with the enemies of the people, more than a century later, the Roman pontiff –faithful to the Gospel and to the traditions of the universal Church, and particularly the Latin American and Argentine Church– upholds the poor and working people, denouncing an immoral economic system. A sovereign word of such characteristics charts a course; for a liberalism deprived of ethical restrictions it is a scandal; for a secular Marxism, it is craziness, but it is a fresh impetus for a missionary pastoral practice.

In 2015, the Pope traveled the whole length of the American continent and explored its democracies, from the more liberal to the more popular. In his condition of head of a State who wields a moral authority beyond geopolitical borders, he becomes a threat when he says in his last encyclical that not only the

18 Cf. Nolan, Hugh J. (ed.) *Pastoral Letters of the United States Catholic Bishops*, Washington, United States Catholic Bishops, 1984, vol. I: 1792-1940; Cuda, Emilce, *Democracia y catolicismo en Estados Unidos*, Buenos Aires, Ágape, 2010.

19 Cf. Cuda, Emilce, *La democracia en el magisterio pontificio*, Buenos Aires Ágape, 2011, first part.

Kingdom of Heaven but the world itself belongs to the poor. Without apologizing, he denounces that the cause of inequity is an economic system devoid of ethical limits and supported by a cultural hegemony. Hence, certain sectors of the Northern right accuse him of Marxism; the relegated European left applauds him; and other sectors in Latin America call him a populist. To all that I reply in neoPlatonic terms: he is neither; he is all that and none of that.

The prophetic discourse of Pope Francis should not astonish because, from the synoptic gospels to the *Aparecida Document*, the preferential option of Christ's Church is for the poor of a people. Therefore, although the pontiff's discourse includes now current political and economic categories, it continues to be Christian and Catholic. Besides, although it is a pastoral and prophetic discourse, it is nonetheless theological, mainly because it does not refer only to the effects of injustice but also to its causes, grounding his criticism on the Trinitarian model and the Incarnation dogma. There are many who wonder why the Pope does not take up the old debate about the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son instead of paying attention to economic theology (an expression that refers to God's discourse about His creation and his collaborators in the historical path towards eschatology) and instead of urging us to take on the smell of the sheep. But he does. The whole of his pastoral and prophetic discourse refers to the main principles of dogmatic theology on which he bases his criticism and his proposal. Always, the goal is man as the likeness of God, and the poor man in so far as he is dehumanized.

Among those who criticize, many are ready to accept the role of religion as an institution that provides "some order" in the social sphere, but they seem to ignore –sometimes conscientiously– the specificity of theology as a criticism of the political foundations underlying culture. The idea that money is a fetish which, as an empty signifier, tends to take up the place of the ineffable Absolute, and that merchants are *gens non sancta* was written in the Gospel before than in *The Capital*, and was also present in patristic and monastic philosophy centuries before the Theology of the People or Peronist populism. This Pope continues the preferential option for the poor established by Latin American bishops, a true option for the people, *el pueblo*, that respects the aspirations of each particular culture, even its democratic choices.

Thinking that pastoral action is prophetic does not amount to anything other than putting theology to read the text of history as a space where God addresses man, where he gives signs which, in the theological categories are called "the signs of the times". Reading the signs of the times is theologizing, rather than "playing religion". It means seeing theology as an historical, cultural practice. A theologian who reads the signs of the times and later denounces the causes of injustice and proclaims the good life for men is a prophet and a pastor. Reading the signs of the times means applying theological discernment to the secular present (Mt 16, 3; Lk 12, 56; GS 4.a). It implies a theological prophetic interpre-

tation, as Carlos María Galli explains to us: “history is man’s time; and man is the subject of history”<sup>20</sup>, signs manifest themselves in different languages and reach all the peoples, even though they emerge in a particular one. According to this author, “it is there that history’s sacramentality arises: through his historical action, man expresses himself significantly and acts efficiently in and for the world”.<sup>21</sup> Demands for justice are signs of the times, and the prophet reads them as a text and denounces its causes. For this reason, “unlike apocalyptic preaching, prophecy highlights the continuity between the historical present and the eschatological future”.<sup>22</sup> According to Galli, we might say that a prophetic theology interprets the signs of history from the eschatological standpoint, which is none other than salvation, man’s liberation, wished by man from his liberty and by God from his gratitude.

### 5. Latin America’s politics: sign of the times

Is Francis the sign of the times nowadays? In my opinion, the election of a Pope like Francis is a sign of the times, not only because he is the first Latin American and the first Jesuit Pope, but also because he is the prophet of the people, *el pueblo*, in these times of scientific, political, and cultural crisis. I do not speak of economic crisis because Francis thinks it is a consequence and not a cause. With these words I want to highlight that, when the crisis becomes apparent in politics as a crisis of representation, in science as a crisis of truth, and in culture as a crisis of meaning, the Catholic Church (which also suffered that crisis, even to the point that the former pontiff decided to resign) is the first historical institution that seems to have read in time these signs of the times. It has read them by electing a new pontiff able to see the crisis, to judge it according to categories that do not obey to hegemonic agendas –that only denounce effects or results–, and capable of becoming a pastor and prophet who is respected by Catholics and also by citizens from other States. Today, Francis represents a deterritorialized *auctoritas*, a “decisive” voice. The global political and economic situation that started in 2007, dubbed as a crisis by economists and political scientists, is not only a crisis but a “sign of the times” which refers us to a “new paradigm”. Such is the interpretation of an Argentine theologian and philosopher who was a teacher of the Pope and remains close to him, the Jesuit Juan Carlos Scannone.<sup>23</sup>

In my opinion, Latin America theological pastoral practice is reconstructed as an *a posteriori* judgment of reality, where praxis and theory converge but are not mixed. Thus the conclusion of the practical syllogism is a decision towards ac-

20 Galli, Carlos María, “La interpretación teológica de los signos de los tiempos”, en: Ferrara, Ricardo y Galli, Carlos (eds.), *El tiempo y la historia*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones Paulinas, 2001, p. 220.

21 *Ibidem*, p. 221.

22 *Ibidem*, p. 225.

23 Cf. Scannone, Juan Carlos, “Interpretación reflexiva de la actual realidad histórica: semillas del futuro”, en: Grupo Farrell, *El surgimiento de un nuevo paradigma*, Buenos Aires, CICCUS, 2015, pp. 23-46.

tion in terms of those who suffer the most. In other words, the theological pastoral has the immediate goal of generating changes in the effective reality tending to a good life. Thus, a theological pastoral would result from understanding ethics, not as transcendental principles established *a priori*, but as transcendental principles constructed *a posteriori* by the people itself in the drama of its history and, therefore, contingent in the course of each people's culture.

However, the voice of the Latin American prophet arrived at Rome is heard speaking from Peter's chair. What does it speak about? Is it a theological or a pastoral discourse? Is it Christian or political? Marxist or populist? Questions of this kind arise in many different places, from the academy and the media. For example, the American radio pundit Rush Limbaugh says Pope Francis is Marxist and the Catholic Church is hypocritical because it criticizes the capitalism that funds her. In the course of a lecture given in Buenos Aires, the famous Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo speaks of the "Papinter" as a new socialist international,<sup>24</sup> and another author is driven to write –almost ironically– in a newspaper column that... "The Pope is Christian!"<sup>25</sup> According to Víctor Manuel Fernández, an Argentine theologian close to the Pope, "The Theology of the People differs both from the Marxist analysis and from liberal views. That's why none of them like it very much: they consider it is *populist*".<sup>26</sup> He also says the thought of Francis cannot be called "progressive" either because "sheer progressivism runs the risk of losing its roots and withering".<sup>27</sup> The people's theologian does not walk before the people. According to Fernández, the theologian of the people walks after the people: "To walk after them means letting the people guide him, 'allowing the flock itself to strike out on new paths'" (EG 31).<sup>28</sup>

Understandably, the idea of a pastoral theology is not clearly grasped in other cultural contexts, and lesser still the idea of a theological pastoral. Seeing pastoral action as theological, i.e., not only as the action of the Church on the world in order to relieve the problems that distress men or in order to indoctrinate, but also as a method to know truth and thus undermine the foundations of the culture of death, is something new. Unexpected in the magisterium of a Church that was born anew after the Second Vatican Council and its reverberations in the American continent, embodied in the teachings of theologians such as Bernard Lonergan, in Canada, and Lucio Gera, in Argentina. Speaking about theology as the practice of pastoral or political conversion, Lonergan says: "Basically the issue is a transition from the abstract logic of classicism to the concreteness of method. On the former view, what is basic is proof. On the latter view, what is basic is conversion".

24 Cf. Vattimo, Gianni, lectura given at the "Foro internacional para la emancipación y la igualdad", Buenos Aires, March 12, 2015.

25 Cf. Willis, Garry, "The Pope is Christian!", The New York Review of Books, 2015. [www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblo/2015/mar/29/pope-francis-against-rome/](http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblo/2015/mar/29/pope-francis-against-rome/). (Accessed date June-2016).

26 Fernández, Víctor Manuel, *El programa del papa Francisco*, Buenos Aires, San Pablo, 2014, p. 76.

27 *Ibidem*, p. 38.

28 *Ibidem*, p. 83.

### Theology as political practice against dirty economy

Such a pastoral practice is the Church itself as the mystical body of Christ acting throughout history from its beginnings, especially if we consider the patristic teaching not only as the theological and philosophical development of the dogma underlying the foundations of Western culture, but also as an alternative to the Roman Empire and its political oppression of other peoples, like the Jewish and the Greek. Quoting an 1882 paper by Franz Overbeck entitled "On the Beginnings of Patristic Literature", Philipp Vielhauer comments that patristic literature is "a Greco-Roman literature in keeping with the Christian faith and interests [...] and Christianity succeeded in transforming it into a literature that was viable only in connection with already existing worldly literature".<sup>29</sup> This use of Roman culture in order to denounce injustice and achieve the conversion of men and structures may be already seen in Justin, the Martyr, who addressed his discourse to the emperor Antoninus Pius and the Roman Senate in favor of the Dogma.

Jesus, the Christ, in the words of Walter Kasper, is God's Son for millions of Christians around the world and.<sup>30</sup> Hence, repeating it time and again for a reader who is not well versed in the Christian dogma may help us see which is the legitimate connection between the principle of faith that God is incarnate in the man Jesus as the Second Person of Trinity and the relevance of a theological pastoral carried on by Pope Francis and the theologians of the people, in-the-world. Such a Christological view of the world, says Kasper, "understands Being not as an essence, but as a reality, that is to say, as an acting Being"<sup>31</sup> and thus Christianity is introduced into history by replacing the Greek notion of essence by the notion of person. For Kasper –a required reference when discussing the discourse of Pope Francis–, Jesus the Christ is the achievement of the living dialectics, where death is the negation of human dignity, and resurrection is the final negation of death and indignity. In other words: "But love means that in the midst of division there is at the same time reconciliation and union. Thus the death of God means at the same time the removal of alienation, the death of death, the negation of negation, the reality of reconciliation". Later on, he adds: "the death of God has therefore a double meaning: it has a meaning for God; it shows God as a living God, as love. But it has a meaning also for death and for man; it shows that negation is in God himself and that the human is thus assumed into the divine idea. In God there is scope for man, his suffering and death; God is not the oppression of man, but freedom of love for man".<sup>32</sup>

29 Vielhauer, Phillip, *Historia de la literatura cristiana primitiva*, Salamanca, Sigueme, 1991, p. 17.

30 Kasper, Walter, *Jesús, el Cristo*, Madrid, Sal Terrae, 2013, p. 200.

31 *Ibidem*, p. 202.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 207. [The English translation was taken from Kasper, Walter, *Jesus the Christ*, London: Continuum, 2011, p. 170.]

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## **Емилче Чуда**

### **ПАПА ФРАЊА: ТО ЈЕ ПОЛИТИКА!**

#### **Сажетак**

Овај чланак жели да успостави вези између економије и религије засновану на говору папе Фрање, по којем проблем светске кризе не треба да се реши економски, већ политички. Папа верује да економија треба да буде подређена политици, а не обрнуто. Покушај да се нађе решење за глобалну политичку и економску кризу укључује истраживање теолошких узрока који подржавају структурално сиромаштво. Фрања, као нови проповедник у времену капитализма, ослањајући се на документа латиноамеричких бискупа, сматра да недостатак посла у овом систему има корене у култури смрти. Политичка теологија може да разоткрије лажне богове који подржавају овај систем, и да објави важност третирања сиромашних радника са достојанством.

**Кључне речи:** политика, економија, сиромашни, култура, папа Фрања

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