

THE SYNODAL POPE

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The True Story of the Theology and Politics of Pope Francis

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TAN Books
Gastonia, North Carolina

© 2022 Editions Contretemps 6 rue des Peupliers 78870 Bailly—LA FRANCE Original French Title: *François: la conquête du pouvoir*

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Cover design by David Ferris—www.davidferrisdesign.com

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ISBN: 978-1-5051-3317-2

Published in the United States by
TAN Books
PO Box 269
Gastonia, NC 28053
www.TANBooks.com

Printed in the United States of America.

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Foreword

by the publishers of the original French version

It is often said that Pope Francis is as pragmatic as he is unpredictable, because he lacks structured thought and has no true intellectual mentor—let alone a concern for liturgy. How else are we to explain his openness to the “Amazonian Rite” and his rejection of the traditional Latin Rite? How are we to understand his contradictory statements, for example, on the subject of the Abu Dhabi Document on Human Fraternity, in which he speaks of the diversity of religions as “willed by God in his wisdom,” while he privately asserts that this is merely God’s permissive will, the same that permits evil?

More questions arise: Why does Francis seem obsessed by the issues of our material world—climate, pollution, health, poverty, migration, and so on—while relegating the proclamation of the Faith to the back seat? Why is this pope prepared to take the risk of changing the doctrine of the Church by placing so-called pastoral concerns at the forefront of his speeches and actions?

This book argues that there is in fact a unifying factor, a “red thread” to follow in Francis’s thought.

Jean-Pierre Moreau, a keen observer of liberation theology, many of whose leading figures he personally met when he was a special correspondent for the *Figaro-Magazine* in the 1980s, has made a close study of the personal and intellectual itinerary of Jorge Mario Bergoglio, described by his closest supporters as professing the “theology of the people.”

Drawing on his encyclopedic knowledge of the ideological shifts that have affected so many areas of Catholicism in Latin America, the author provides insights from his own encounters and readings: the theology of the people, he shows, is a spin-off of oft-condemned “liberation theology.” Stripped of the most obviously Marxist-Leninist aspects of the latter, it places “the people of God” (and above all the poor as a “people” replacing the Communists’ “oppressed class,” but now with a messianic dimension) at the center. It promotes “the people” to the role of a “theological locus,” in other words, an eminent source of knowledge of God and His “word.”

This is why Pope Francis puts so much emphasis on the “signs of the times” and on history. These are the new tools at the service of a doctrine that is inherently evolutionary.

Jean-Pierre Moreau establishes clear links between modernism as denounced at the beginning of the twentieth century by Saint Pius X on the one hand and, on the other, Jesuit thought and its profound influence on “conciliar” innovations in particular, as well as the “praxis” of the Latin American Church. He shows the latter to have been the true testing ground for the application of Vatican II in the way those who prepared and piloted it intended.

This modernist, progressive thinking, strongly advocated by Fr. Pedro Arrupe, who became superior general of the Jesuits in 1965, was supported on a practical level by Bergoglio’s own Peronism.¹ One of the great merits of this book is that it shows, with supporting evidence, how Bergoglio drew inspiration from both the Argentine dictator’s relationship with “the people” and his military strategies and tactics. He used them to gain and retain power, to serve his own ascent within the Church.

It was Arrupe who drew up the plans for the revolution that was to give birth to the Church of tomorrow; Bergoglio, and even more so Francis, put them into practice with all the determination, skill, and know-how with which his political hero, Juan Perón, had inspired

¹ Juan Domingo Perón was an Argentine politician who served as president from 1946 to 1955. Peronism is a political movement based on his ideas and has been described as a vague blend of nationalism and laborism.

him; such is the essence of this book. But there is much more to it than this summary: it offers a wealth of facts and quotations that support these claims.

The strength of this book lies in its solid and convincing documentation (we have been able to verify the accuracy of all quotations and the reality of the facts evoked, insofar as they are in the public domain). It uncovers the guiding principles of the pope's thought and action, showing that these have hardly changed—even at the time when he was thought to be a conservative.

Jean-Pierre Moreau highlights the unbroken continuity of Pope Francis's religious and intellectual options with those of the thinkers behind the theology of the people; he provides their names and describes their thinking, disclosing the facts and Hegelian ideas that are only too often ignored by the public. These help to bring clarity to a seemingly elusive pontificate.

Portraits abound, and quotes are revealing, from Lucio Gera, the young Bergoglio's theology teacher, to Leonardo Boff, a defrocked priest, a convinced "liberationist," and today a promoter of ecologism who has been praised by Pope Francis on several occasions. Thanks to Jean-Pierre Moreau, the extent of the subversion that was at work in Argentina is here exposed—and also the way in which Cardinal Bergoglio supported and justified the action of the movement of third world priests who were responsible for its spread.

Jean-Pierre Moreau also focuses on the work and ideology of the Latin American Bishops' Conference (CELAM), where liberationists, Jesuits, and Bergoglio himself played a leading role from the early 2000s onwards.

This book sheds light on the real Bergoglio and the real influences behind him. It is anything but a catalogue of trivia about Pope Francis's governance; rather, it shows his deep-rooted coherence and true affiliations (which go back further than is generally imagined), and more importantly, it reveals the truly revolutionary nature of his leadership.

Preface

The French title of this book, *La conquête du pouvoir* (The conquest of power), did not come out of thin air. It was inspired among others by a statement from the man who serves as a reference for the current pope, the ex-Franciscan Leonardo Boff. On March 15, 2015, the Argentine daily *Clarín* published an interview of Boff, the inventor of “ecothology,” by Marcello Larraquy. The interview wound up with the following dialogue:

Two years into his pontificate, can you already say what will be the legacy of Francis?

Leonardo Boff: In my opinion, he will create a dynasty of popes from the Third World, from Asia, Africa and Latin America, who will bring new blood to antiquated European Christianity, which is old and wrinkled (*envejecida*), and practically dead (*agónica*). His legacy will be that of a Church that is no longer centralized in Rome, but an immense network of communities throughout the world, and the Pope will go from one to the other. It will not be a Church only of the West. It will be a global church.

Boff’s reply to the previous question had already hinted at the direction the pontificate would take:

There are some who fear that the process of reform will eventually dismantle the doctrinal edifice of the Church.

Leonardo Boff: There are two competing models. The doctrinal model, with the dogmas of canon law, is what has worked until now. The other, that of the people of God, is a Church accompanied by a true pastor, that has respect for the fallibility and the weakness of the human being. One of these Churches has a pastor; the other, a “doctor.” The Pope’s position is very clear. The Church must journey along with history and discover the signs of the times.

We could also have chosen to quote Cardinal Kasper, who said that the scope of current reforms is such that several pontificates will be needed to bring them to fruition. In view of what we know and see today, Kasper and Boff are two first-class experts on what is happening before our very eyes.

The Catholic Church is experiencing a cataclysm of such magnitude as has not occurred in two thousand years. In the face of an extraordinary situation, it is the duty of commentators to seek out its main cause, if any, and then, if possible, its secondary causes. Today, many are looking to the apocalypse to discern the final catastrophes that will accompany the end of the world.

The Second Vatican Council encouraged the faithful to discover and read the signs of the times. These mysterious signs are purported to contain the explanation of the world as they unfold, allowing those who are attentive to them to catch a glimpse of the future of the Church and of our societies. On a more prosaic level, we have chosen to observe the signs of the past, which can also shed light on the present gloom.

We belong to a generation that read Jean Madiran’s *L’hérésie du XXe siècle* (The Heresy of the 20th Century). We have observed the global spread of Marxism-Leninism and its dialectics even to the heart of Catholic movements and associations. Under the pretense of justice, this social revolution accompanied the guerrilla wars of the Third World as well as the struggles against colonialism organized by the USSR or Mao’s China.

We had accepted the idea that liberation theology in Latin America was one of the driving forces behind these bloody conflicts. The best historians described this in detail. But the fall of the Soviet Union did not slow down this tragic process, insofar as the same revolution has continued to this day under different names.

This is a fact that compels us to consider that liberation theology was not merely an expression of class struggle but that it was also something else. It is, in reality, a sort of fulfillment of modernism, which has been rampant in the Catholic Church for a very long time. Liberation theology masqueraded in Argentina as the “theology of the people.” It shed its Bolshevik garb and donned the trappings of modernism through the thinking Lamennais and Yves Congar, Maurice Blondel, Karl Rahner, and Jean-Luc Marion. One of the people behind this “extraordinary transformation” was Fr. Juan Carlos Scannone, an Argentinean Jesuit and one of Jorge Bergoglio’s professors during his novitiate. Scannone once said that it is “the *theology of the people* that inspires the actions of Pope Francis.” This is surprising, because as a rule, an elected pope abides by Catholic theology, regardless of his preferred school of thought.

The only French-language book on the subject is Juan Carlos Scannone’s *La théologie du peuple: racines théologiques du pape François*, published by the Jesuits of Belgium (it was issued in English in 2021 under the title *Theology of the People: The Pastoral and Theological Roots of Pope Francis*). This work has not been subjected to any serious criticism. The reader therefore has no way of forming an objective opinion about it.

This allegedly Latin American theology has a European and conciliar pedigree. All the Latin American theorists of liberation theology and theology of the people attended universities in France, Germany, and Belgium, not to mention the Jesuit University in Madrid. This multifaceted version of modernism might never have moved beyond the stage of being an intellectual and theological exercise. But with Father Arrupe, the general of the Society of Jesus, it ceased to be a mere subject of dissertation, instead becoming the ideological mask for radical change in the Catholic Church. It was Arrupe who appointed the

youngest provincial in the history of the Society to head the powerful province of Argentina: Fr. Jorge Bergoglio.

From 1943 to 1955 and from 1972 to 1974, General Juan Domingo Perón ruled over Argentina. His impact on the course of the events under our consideration has been confined to anecdotes provided by cursory research. The truth, however, is altogether different.

Many other issues have failed to attract the attention of commentators, and yet . . .

In his first apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis laid out four principles that have shaped all his speeches since his election. Where do these four principles, which are presented as the essential principles for reform of society and of the Church, actually come from?

The answer appears to have slipped even Pope Francis's mind.

No one seems to have been able to find the origin of these four principles in Catholic literature or theology. But they actually do have a source that is never quoted.

One of the young Jesuit Bergoglio's theology professors, Lucio Gera, was a revolutionary priest who was among the most active in the Movement of Priests for the Third World. He was buried in the cathedral of Buenos Aires by order of Cardinal Bergoglio. Why?

Similarly, the story of the famous sickle and hammer sculpture associated with the crucifix that Pope Francis received as a gift in Bolivia has not been properly investigated.

As a rule, those who report on these subjects fail to carry out proper research. And many who claim to have studied the matter leave out anything that would undermine their hagiographic approach.

This book does not presume to answer every possible question. Its documentary, evidence-based method simply aims to point out a few interesting clues to understanding how the youngest provincial in the history of the Jesuits became "Francis the First."

Hopefully, they will be useful in helping to understand the crisis that the Church is going through. Behind the most extraordinary propaganda apparatus ever seen in the Vatican, organizing the constant

praise of Francis the First, a radical, systematic, and organized “law of silence” is in force.

It has been operating in Argentina since the 1970s. Its purpose is to conceal the true origins of an unprecedented ascent to power and to circulate far-fetched anecdotes or cleverly crafted deceptions.

Francis the First is someone who disturbs, disrupts, and initiates processes. The hagiography he has inspired exceeds anything seen or heard in the past. Even Pope John Paul II, at the height of his popularity, never received such acclaim. One of the most recent books to have contradicted this chorus of praise is *The Dictator Pope*. It lifts a corner of the veil on the true Francis, yet it does not fundamentally change the way the whole world perceives the Francis phenomenon. The new Dicastery for Communication and the 2018 Wim Wenders film on Francis commissioned by the pope himself have reinforced this stranglehold on the media.

The endless list of laudatory adjectives praising his unfailing popularity is echoed by networks whose universal reach is unparalleled in history. For example, Zenit.org, issued in ten languages, publishes four to six photos of the pope every day. Nunciatures all over the world now subscribe to the Jesuit magazine *Civiltà Cattolica*. This publication, founded in 1850, has become the semi-official newspaper of the Vatican, under the leadership of Father Spadaro, a close friend of the pontiff. It now has a French and even a Korean edition.

The main books that have appeared, including the one published in Italy in 2020, *Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Una biografia intellettuale - Dialettica e mistica*, share similar structures, being based on an interview with the pope. The latter leads the writer in a given direction, and the writer thus limits himself to writing only along those lines. It is difficult to imagine the fate of anyone who would dare to make even a minor objection. The same is true of the first book to be published on “Francisco” in Latin America, which, by the way, was presented as the work of the bishop of Rome, *Conversaciones con Hernán Reyes Alcaide*.

Typical of this kind of work is French author Dominique Wolton's *Politique et société* (*The Path to Change: Thoughts on Politics and Society*). The author was granted twelve interviews with the pope, each lasting two hours. An article by Caroline Pigozzi, a famous Vatican expert who writes for *Paris-Match*, was headlined by a statement by Dominique Wolton himself: "The Pope's unrestricted confession." Who would dare argue with the pope's confession?

Most books draw heavily on *The Great Reformer* by Austen Ivereigh, one of Pope Francis's champions who is also his authoritative biographer. Oddly enough, the French title of the translation was shortened to *Le Réformateur*, "The Reformer," even though the English author gives the strong impression that Pope Francis will surpass Luther. From the very first page of the English edition, the reader is told what to expect: "Well written, full of information; this is the best biography of Pope Francis to date."

In our eyes, the only reliable work to date is *The Political Pope* by George Neumayr, published in 2017. It is full of significant anecdotes, yet it fails to provide the key that connects Father Arrupe to Francis. It also ignores General Perón, Lucio Gera, and Juan Carlos Scannone. The liberal and progressive left do not suffice to account for what really was afoot.

The greatest difficulty has been to gather meaningful documentation among an abundance of sources that never run dry, covering fifty-five years. We have searched for the events and texts related to the formidable current that brought the provincial Bergoglio to the chair of Peter. His election owes nothing to chance.

We have deliberately made little use of studies that concentrated only on the Marxization of the Latin American Church. Great historians such as Ricardo de la Cierva focused on these approaches, whereas from our point of view, this Marxization is only one of the temporary components of a far older and more profound destabilization and transformation of the Catholic Church. The theory of history and Marxist dialectics have never been decisive elements in the birthing of the new Church. They were destabilizing factors. It must be said, to be precise, that philosophical and theological modernism

as well as liberation theology stem from the same ancient and modern sources, from Heraclitus to Teilhard de Chardin, by way of Hegel and Maurice Blondel.

I wrote this essay so that others may continue on the path of this research on Francis's accession to the throne of Saint Peter, which is widely acknowledged to be absolutely unique in over two thousand years of Christianity. The Argentines should be the first to embark on this task.

Writing about the Society of Jesus and its "refounder," Fr. Pedro Arrupe, was also a daunting task. But this challenge proved even more hazardous insofar as the aim of this work was to understand the thoughts and actions of the first Jesuit pope in the history of the Church. The height of the challenge was reached when the case for the beatification of the general of the Jesuits—whom we consider to be the main inspirer of the great reform of the Church—was opened in Rome.

According to one of his official biographers, Fr. Gianni La Bella, SJ, Father Arrupe "was one of the greatest actors of post-conciliar Catholicism." We have certainly taken a great risk in reading this statement in its most obvious sense.

We are well aware of the immense turmoil and confusion that reign in the Catholic Church because of Francis: his secret agreement with the government of Communist China is only one of its features.

The election of Francis the First is the result of a full-scale electoral campaign aimed at seizing the power of the keys of Saint Peter: it included the setting up of an ideological corpus, a manifold communication system, agents in crucial positions, and unlimited funding. His election has made it possible to discover a hidden past and to understand what is happening today before our eyes. We were perhaps too quick to forget that all the cardinals who elected him could not have ignored the fact that he had been the candidate of the "Sankt-Gallen Mafia" in 2005, against Cardinal Ratzinger.

The heresiarchs of old imposed themselves thanks to the support of princes who saw in them the means to consolidate their own power.

Henry VIII subjugated the Church in order to satisfy his own compulsions. Luther succeeded in finding those German princes who similarly were seeking both to get their hands on the wealth of the Church and to satisfy their passions. Without complicit princes, there would have been no major spread of heresy.

Today, the battlefield has been reversed on the basis of a very different objective. Luther proclaimed: “*Los von Rom*,” which can be translated as “Anything rather than Rome.” Those who contributed to the establishment of Francis do not want a new Church in competition with the Church of Rome. They want a new mode of being for the Church of Rome herself.

The reasoned timeline presented in this book constitutes the incomplete history of what happened to the largest Catholic continent in the world, Latin America. Every event, every actor, every piece of writing, and every word wove the meshes of a net that has finally ensnared the Catholic Church in its entirety, leading to an agony that has been all too protracted.

Jorge Mario Bergoglio is a fascinating character. Once stripped of his gangue of praise and his spectacular humility, we see him as the central character of an adventure that appears to be carrying him forward, while in truth, he is its main actor. His appetite for power, his suspicious nature, and his art of communication place him on a par with the greatest leaders who have set out to conquer the world. Both an adulator of the people and a tyrannical ruler, he has taken over the oldest institution in the world, the Catholic Church, to the point of making some of the faithful wonder about the continuance of the divine assistance that accompanied the Church for two millennia.

In order to make our case, we have been compelled to present numerous texts because this story is generally unknown.

We must confess that Francis’s accession to power was a blessing for us because, without him, we would never have known about the real, the only revolution that has been taking place in Latin America since the 1960s. We would never have known about the true situation of the Catholic Church today.

Introduction

At the start of it all, the Vatican Council

It would be of great interest to explore the twists and turns of the theology, philosophy, and general lines of thought of those who promoted the election of Pope Francis. Such an endeavor would, in our opinion, be very useful to a universal history of the Catholic Church in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. However, the main factor in the unprecedented disruption we are witnessing has been the remarkable organization that linked Europe to Latin American hotbeds for the development of the ideology of the Second Vatican Council. From the moment it was announced, the council has been an inexhaustible catalyst for all things modernist that have flourished since the 1930s. In Germany, France, Belgium, Spain, and Italy, where all the major Latin American figures of the conciliar revolution were educated, a communications network of unusual intensity was set up. The only examples that can convey any idea of such a mechanism are those related to the preparation of the French Revolution of 1789 and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. In his book *The Second Vatican Council —An Unwritten Story*, Prof. Roberto de Mattei observed: “For information about the numerous para-conciliar groups, it is indispensable to consult the research of Salvador Gómez y Catalina, *Grupos ‘extra aulam’ en el Concilio Vaticano y su influencia* (three books in nine volumes, for a total of 2,585 pages!).”²

² Mattei, *Vatican II, une histoire à écrire*, n. 79, p. 378.

The advent of this revolution—and its timeline offers irrefutable proof of this—owes nothing to ideological developments borrowed from Marxism-Leninism or from class struggle. What prevailed among the conscious part of the progressive bishops and the myriad of experts assisting them was a unanimous determination to change the Church. All the reforms they undertook had this sole purpose. Ultimately, liturgical reform was based only on the intent of breaking with the sacramental tradition of the Church.

The traditional Offertory included this prayer: “O God, Who in creating man didst exalt his nature very wonderfully and yet more wonderfully didst establish it anew.” It offers an admirable proclamation of the divine origin of our dignity and of its restoration! The intensity of these words expressing the *Gesta Dei* during the Holy Sacrifice carries an incredible force that surpasses all discourse. It was purely and simply suppressed in the “new Mass,” at a time when we are awash with speeches on man-centered human dignity from the United Nations.

The source of this great upheaval is to be found especially in *Gaudium et Spes*. Drafted by experts in the field of revolution, it contained the very essence of modernist ideology, which would go on to be endlessly explored. It was later complemented by the encyclicals *Populorum Progressio*, *Ecclesiam Suam*, and *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, among others.

The initial work that nourished the thinking of the Council Fathers was that of a French worker priest, Paul Gauthier: *Christ, the Church and the Poor*. These words were copied and transformed because all revolutions need a slogan that strikes the imagination.

From Marx to Hélder Câmara

In 1848, Marx and Engels made their famous appeal at the end of their manifesto: “Proletarians of the world, unite.”

The Second Vatican Council made an appeal that was every bit as powerful and decisive as that of *Das Kapital*. It had been so well prepared, so methodically organized, and spread by such a powerful

network of strong supporters within the council and beyond that it continues to roam the world today. It has been echoed countless times by all the actors who appear in this book, including Francis in his *Letter to Priests* of August 4, 2019. It was a cry voiced by Leonardo Boff and updated by him in 1995 in *Ecology and Poverty: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*.

At the Vatican Council, The Church of the Poor, a group led by the Brazilian bishop Dom Hélder Câmara and the Chilean bishop Manuel Larraín, teamed up with the famous Bologna Working Group. They were all driven by the desire to transform the institutional Church, presented as arrogant and over-rich.

Fr. Paul Gauthier was a member of this group. It was he who circulated a firebrand pamphlet to all the Council Fathers calling for a definitive reform of the Church.

This Frenchman, who had been “exiled” to the Holy Land and was a worker-priest in Palestine, was considered by Leonardo Boff to be the father of liberation theology. In *L'Église et la subversion* (The Church and Subversion),³ Guillaume Maury described this character's subversive activities in detail, but he was not aware of Gauthier's links with the Bologna Group. Paul Gauthier would later abandon the priesthood and marry.

The first meeting of the Working Group took place at the Belgian College on October 26, 1962, in the presence of the bishop of Tournai, Charles-Marie Himmer. Twelve bishops, including Cardinal Gerlier and Cardinal Lercaro, archbishop of Bologna, there resolved to intervene in the council aula. It was Lercaro who, on December 6, 1962, lit the fuse that would never be extinguished.

What did the cardinal say? That the mystery of Christ in the Church is more than ever “the mystery of Christ in the poor.” Following the words of John XXIII, the Church is “the Church of all men, but above all the Church of the poor.” The cardinal expressed surprise at the complete absence of this aspect from the schemas of the Council, although it was “the essential and

³ Maury, *L'Église et la subversion, le CCFD*, pp. 28–29.

primary element of the mystery of Christ, who lived it out himself throughout his earthly life.” For this reason, he urged that the Council should establish “as the very center and soul of its doctrinal and legislative work the mystery of Christ in the poor and the evangelization of the poor.”⁴

Father Rouquette, SJ, would later underscore: “This address by the Cardinal of Bologna was the boldest and most reforming of all those heard during the first session; perhaps it will open up a new path.”⁵

Poor people of all countries, unite with the Church that liberates!

From that moment onwards, the “poor” lost their “evangelical” status and became the “ideological poor,” the equivalent of the proletariat. On the poor, a new Church, faithful at last to its founder, could be built. A female Argentinian theologian, a friend of the pope, went so far as to speak of “recategorization.”

In September 1964, Cardinal Lercaro developed this new conception of the Church together with eleven bishops. Their agenda would receive its first concrete expression with the Pact of the Catacombs, which some forty bishops signed on November 16, 1965.

The Church of Latin America had become the Church of the poor; from then on, not a single meeting or encounter would fail to mention this call to battle. On May 25, 2019, the cardinal of Buenos Aires, Archbishop Mario Aurelio Poli, forcefully reiterated the “preferential option for the poor” by quoting Bishop Enrique Angelelli, who preached under the flag of the “Montoneros,” a Peronist Argentine political-military organization of the 1970s.

In this context, the agents fighting the “structures of sin” are the religious institutes that are engaged in social ministry or in the struggle for social justice. Among these, the Jesuits were by far the most active and best organized. They asserted themselves by piloting political and

⁴ Sauvage, CIRTP, Acte 10, 4 June 2013.

⁵ *Etudes*, February 1963.

social choices, thereby becoming a “parallel temporal magisterium.” In the name of faith and of the poor, they supplanted “the laity.” Being a spiritual power—because of their religious status—they governed through proxy associations and groups of influence. They shaped the decisions of the temporal powers by designating the enemy of the poor.

This is visible today in the Vatican’s policy regarding immigration, the death penalty, ecology, or “coexistence.” The pope told a Mexican television station on May 28, 2019, that Trump’s wall between the United States and Mexico is like the Berlin Wall. He also slammed the walls around Ceuta and Melilla but never mentioned the one built by Israel in Palestine. In Romania, he canonized martyred bishops without ever using the word *communism*. Was he trying not to offend the Chinese communists?

Not so long ago, religion was dismissed as a private matter; nowadays, it associates with globalist powers and has its throne in the political arena. Ours is a time of confusion, where totalitarian powers refuse to distinguish between the temporal and the spiritual. The combination of the sickle and hammer with the crucifix, or the politicization of the “Way of the Cross of Solentiname” by the revolutionary poet Ernesto Cardenal in Nicaragua, are just a few examples of this major disruption.

However, this overview would be out of step with reality if we were to ignore the ecological turn taken by the pontificate. Two years after the election of Francis, the Church entered into the “ecological” era. Leonardo Boff revealed in an interview given on March 17, 2015, that Pope Francis had asked him for his writings to help prepare *Laudato si’*; Boff sent him two sets of documents. He specified that as early as the 1980s, he had launched the idea that the earth was the “*Great Poor*” and that he had been the first to speak of the “*ecothology*” of liberation.

The Amazonian Indians are the latest “poor” in the process that began at the council. It is a process that cannot be measured in ordinary electoral time frames. This is a long-term project.

Vatican expert Sandro Magister was the first, on December 9, 2015, before the Amazon synod was even announced, to predict that

after the issue of remarried divorcees at the family synods, that of marriage for priests would be brought to the fore. He made the connection with Amazonia, where some are calling for this in the name of promoting an indigenous clergy.

All this is forcing us to consider the full meaning of Leonardo Boff's pronouncement about Francis: "*He has made liberation theology the good of the Church and has caused it to spread.*"⁶

⁶ IREM, January 2, 2017.

CHAPTER 1

The Second Vatican Council and Its Repercussions in Latin America

No one can truly grasp the work and thinking of Pope Francis without a brief mention, at least, of the ecclesial context in which he has functioned since the close of the Second Vatican Council. The major upheavals that took place in Latin America as a result of recommendations made by leading figures of the council have been decisive in this regard. We have moved from one religion to another without having, even today, genuinely explored the ways and means of this process. Some of the effects are well-known, but the principle has never been affirmed as such. We feel it is essential to give a synthetic analysis of the impact of the council in Latin America, and especially in Argentina.

The council marked the beginning of a major crisis in the Latin American continent, and it remains difficult today to imagine what its final outcome will be.

Literature on this subject is overabundant and includes thousands of articles and books. We will summarize it here with a few quick expressions and recurring judgments that demonstrate the existence of an unflinching consensus. Those who failed to subscribe to the general enthusiasm in Latin America, France, and Europe were totally sidelined and played only a minor role in the course of events.

In his apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Pope John Paul II called the council “the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century”: “there we find a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning.”

Latin American analysts think exactly that—but they do not have the same compass.

Ricardo Miguel Mauti, an Argentine, wrote in *Vatican Council II: event and theology*:

The names of Chenu, Congar and de Lubac are *characteristic* of the dramatic tension that existed in the various paths of Catholic theology from the 1930s onward. They were all *involved* in the *groups* in favor of ecclesial renewal that were preparing Vatican II, but at the time they were *under suspicion* and had to face being misunderstood, slandered and silenced. The *summons* of Pope John XXIII turned them into experts, which not only led to their personal *rehabilitation* but also to the acknowledgement of the *Catholic* character of their theology. Their *Diaries* are a living testimony of their *passion* and love for the Church; with assertive realism, they proved that the Council was a true *spring-time of the Spirit*, who at every moment assisted the assembly of the Fathers and the theologians’ work. But they also show the *historical* character of the faith, revealing the *human dimension* of the assembly, which is by no means negligible, through which the Spirit fulfills his work of renewal.⁷

The same author quoted the Argentinian priest and “expert” Jorge Mejía as telling the same Father Congar: “The position of many [bishops] is that the Holy Father prepared the Council, that the texts are the best that could be hoped for, and that we should say: Amen. Many believe in a simplistic ecclesiology: the Pope has studied things and teaches what needs to be said; all we have to do is follow. For them the Council has no precise objective.”

But was this council truly one of blind trust?

⁷ Mauti, “El Concilio Vaticano II: acontecimiento y teología”; italics in the original text.

Virginia Raquel Azcuy—also from Argentina, and in our opinion one of the best specialists on our theme—similarly quoted Father Congar in an article written in 2013 for the *Revista Teología*: “*La recepción del Concilio Vaticano II en el Pueblo de Dios*” (The Reception of the Second Vatican Council in the People of God). She there refers to an article published by Congar in 1972 in *Concilium*: “Reception as an Ecclesiological Reality,” of which he was to publish a more complete version in the *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* soon afterward: “According to Congar reception involves something very different from what the scholastics understood as obedience . . . ; reception implies a distinctive contribution of consent and of incidental judgment, thus expressing the life of a body that brings its original spiritual resources into play.”

Angel Anton, also quoted by Virginia Azcuy, saw the council as “an indirect stimulus for creating a new consciousness and praxis of reception, starting with the re-reception of previous councils.” Anton propounded an ecclesiological notion of reception which would include both “the deposit of faith and also the sense of faith of the entire body of the faithful.”

Virginia Azcuy provides a similar assessment of Cardinal Walter Kasper’s opinion: “Kasper’s orientation could be summarized as follows: the reception of Vatican II requires consent to its true content—letter and spirit—so that it can be put into practice in the Church; reception is also an interpretation that calls us to learning in order to understand, to conversion in order to put into practice, and to witness in order to proclaim.”

Similarly, the Venezuelan Bishops’ Conference stated in 2008: “It should be made clear that the Council was the inspiring and enlightening principle of the Medellín Conference.” In the eyes of the Latin American bishops, all things need to be interpreted in the light of the Second Vatican Council in order to bring about a profound renewal, and this necessarily involves a greater presence to the world and also a conversation with the world in the light of the Gospel, the council, and the papal magisterium. In Latin America, the Church scrutinizes and interprets *the signs of the times*.

The council prompted widespread enthusiasm that continues to this day. In Peru, José Manuel Rodríguez wrote in 2013, “In our opinion, the Second Vatican Council brought forward three main lines of action that have been adopted in a particularly forceful way in Latin America: *aggiornamento*, the promotion of the laity and dialogue with people of good will, which are considered necessary for the proclamation of the Good News.”

The impulse given by the council was classified by Leonardo Boff, from Brazil, in several categories. These are summarized below:

“First of all, all the CELAM Conferences, from Medellín (1968) to Aparecida (2007), adopted the preferential option for the poor. This option has become the trademark of the Latin American Church and of Liberation Theology.”

It is the council that gave concrete expression to the Church as the People of God. “Vatican II placed this category ahead of that of the Hierarchy. For the Latin American Church, ‘People of God’ is not a metaphor.”

The council opened itself to human rights—that is, the right to life (*which has nothing to do with pro-life*), to work, to health, and to education.

The council welcomed ecumenism among the Christian churches. “All the Churches together committed themselves to the liberation of the oppressed. It is an ecumenism based on the mission.”

Lastly, it established “dialogue with the other religions, in which it recognized the presence of the Spirit who arrived before the missionaries; they are to be respected with their particular values.”

It is safe to say that the reception of the council was a triumph in all the Latin American nations. All anticipated that it would bring about the realization of their deepest aspirations, in accordance with their personal choices regarding mission, ecclesiology, and/or politics.

There lies the source. Alongside the vast majority of bishops, clerics, and lay people who were willing to adhere to everything in a spirit of fidelity to the Church, other bishops, clerics, and lay people had taken hold of the council before it had even begun.

The council: a catalyst for modernism and progressivism

The council was not the cause of the great upheaval in the Church. It simply enabled the organization and expansion of all the heterodox currents with which the Church was already teeming. The history of Catholicism in Europe and South America abundantly proves this. The initial moments of the council, with their rejection of the schemas prepared under the authority of the Curia, together with the unprecedented act of Cardinal Alfrink cutting off Cardinal Ottaviani's microphone while the latter was defending the use of Latin in the liturgy, announced *urbi et orbi* that the source of power in the Church was no longer where it had been until then.

Admittedly, the older power would still exist, but it would dwindle, get blocked, and pass into other hands. The reform of the Curia by Pope Francis is but the most recent development of those memorable days at the beginning of the council.

The Latin American Church has been nourished by European modernism and progressivism. All of its leaders studied in the most revolutionary "Catholic" faculties in Europe: Paris, Lyon, Louvain, Frankfurt, Madrid, Tübingen, and so on.

Thus, the Colombian priest Camillo Torres, who died leading the guerrilla in his country, had studied in Louvain under Canon François Houtart, who would later present himself on the internet as a "*Marxist Canon*." This was the same priest who taught the Cubans and then communist Vietnam how to manipulate the Catholic religion in order to serve the worldwide Marxist revolution.

That story has yet to be told.

From the moment Pope John XXIII announced his decision to convene the council, three figures who would become the initial and most important agitators of the revolution in the Latin American Church made their appearance: Hélder Câmara, Ivan Illich, and the aforementioned François Houtart.

The name of Dom Hélder Câmara is widely known. On May 3, 2015, Archbishop Saburido of Olinda-Recife proclaimed the opening

of the diocesan phase of investigation of his heroic virtues. The decisive step toward his beatification was recently made public.

At this point, it seems important to recall that Dom Hélder Câmara violently opposed Pope Paul VI on *Humanae Vitae* and that he was in favor of a second religious marriage following a divorce.

After having been seduced in his youth by Nazism, he became an active agent of the radical transformation of the Catholic Church. On October 14, 1952, Hélder Câmara was appointed auxiliary bishop of Rio de Janeiro. He remained in that position until 1964.

In 1952, he was also behind the creation of the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB), of which he would remain secretary for twelve years, until 1964. In 1955, he also participated in the creation of the General Conference of Latin American Bishops (later known as CELAM) under the presidency of a Chilean, Bishop Larraín, and was the representative of the Brazilian episcopate at CELAM until 1992.

Pope John XXIII announced the opening of an ecumenical council on January 25, 1959.

At that time, Dom Hélder Câmara was already in touch with Ivan Illich and François Houtart, who had worked together from 1958 to 1962 to organize and produce a forty-three-volume study on the history and sociology of Catholicism in Latin America. This monumental opus was to serve as a work of reference for all future liberation theology studies and for all subsequent research. It truly became the matrix for all later developments.

François Houtart once admitted that Dom Hélder Câmara was not an intellectual but a remarkable maneuverer with a considerable degree of arrogance and seduction. It was his idea to write a summary of the forty volumes of the history of Catholicism in Latin America. It was immediately implemented, and the summary was distributed to all the bishops at the council in 1963.

An abridged version of the book by the French priest Paul Gauthier, *Christ, the Church and the Poor*, which is a model for all liberation theology, was also distributed at the council.

1961

The strategy of intervention at the council had made it necessary to hold a meeting between the main agents who would transform the Assembly of Bishops into a “destruction and reconstruction” machine. It took place in Rio de Janeiro, with the presence of Ivan Illich, François Houtart, Father Poblete, SJ, Bishop Larraín, and Dom Hélder Câmara.

Illich became Cardinal Suenens’s theologian at the council, and Houtart was one of the main redactors of *Gaudium et Spes*.

Illich and Houtart, joined by Lucio Gera from Argentina and Alex Morelli, OP, would later publish *Del subdesarrollo a la liberación* (From Underdevelopment to Liberation) in Madrid in 1974 under the banner of the Catholic Popular Propaganda association.

Ivan Illich’s and François Houtart’s writings foreshadowed all present-day demands. Illich would abandon the priesthood, and Houtart’s last years were marred by an accusation of child abuse.

1964

In March, at the request of Ivan Illich, a meeting was held in Petropolis, Brazil, about fifty kilometers from Rio de Janeiro. Gustavo Gutiérrez, Juan Luis Segundo, Lucio Gera, and Enrique Dussel, among others, took part in this meeting. It was at this point that the theology of liberation began to flood the Latin American continent. The Second Vatican Council was in full swing.

According to the historian Enrique Dussel, Segundo spoke about “the theological problems in Latin America”; Gera addressed the “sapiential and not only rational character of ‘*what should be done*’ from the point of view of theology” and the need for theologians to be committed to the aspirations of the people; Gutiérrez analyzed the function of theology in connection with the majority masses, the intellectual elites, and the conservative oligarchy.

According to Dussel, this was a foundational meeting. Pope Francis’s theology professor, Juan Carlos Scannone, agreed: “That is where it all began.”

From that point, the speakers split up the workload. Segundo Galilea and Luis Maldonado stopped over in Havana from July 14 to 16, 1965. Juan Luis Segundo and Casiano Floristan were in Bogotá from July 9 to 14 of the same year. Ivan Illich went to Cuernavaca in Mexico, where he was soon joined by Segundo Galilea, from July 4 to August 14.

Similar meetings mushroomed throughout the continent for years and led to the creation of training, distribution, and consultation networks that still exist today under different names.

Their mission was and is straightforward: to revolutionize society and the Church.

1965

On November 16, on the sidelines of the council and less than a month before its conclusion, the Pact of the Catacombs was signed under the impetus of Dom Hélder Câmara (see the full text at the end of this book): it constitutes a full-scale catalogue of the “duties” of the Church’s hierarchy toward the poor. It not only propounded a new lifestyle for the hierarchy but above all a new way of governing the Church. This will be discussed in more detail in the course of this work. Five hundred bishops are said to have signed it over the years.

1967

This was the year in which Dom Hélder Câmara launched a new appeal, the Message of the Bishops of the Third World, a rallying call to work for the Revolution in the Church and in society. The appeal called on the French Revolution of 1789 as a model for a beneficial revolution. It was signed by seventeen bishops.

The declaration reached Argentina in French. It was translated into Spanish locally and led to the creation of the most important movement of revolutionary priests on the continent, the *Movimiento de Sacerdotes para el Tercer Mundo* (MSTM, Movement of Priests for the Third World). The MSTM spread everywhere under different names and through numerous meetings, books, and pamphlets, so

much so that in 1968, it was the MSTM and its affiliated bishops that controlled the CELAM Assembly in Medellin. Lucio Gera became a member in 1968. As will be shown later, the movement was to become the spearhead of the revolution of the clergy in Argentina and throughout the continent.

1968

In Chimbote, Peru, a month before the great assembly of CELAM with Pope Paul VI, a meeting of subversive priests was organized under the auspices the priestly association ONIS (National Office for Social Information) led by Father Garatea. Sixty percent of the clergy present were Jesuits and foreign priests. The keynote presenter of ONIS was Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Peruvian priest who was not yet a Dominican (this was the same Gutiérrez who had participated in the 1964 meeting organized by Ivan Illich). During his conference, he shifted “from the language of development to that of liberation,” which would crystallize all the revolutions on the continent.

He later recounted how he was “asked to speak at a national meeting of pastoral workers held in Chimbote in July 1968 on a topic that was then in vogue, the theology of development.” “In preparing the conference, I came to the conclusion that rather than development theology, we should speak of liberation theology, that is, theology of salvation in Christ with all its historical consequences for today,” he explained.

Gutiérrez became the darling of the ensuing CELAM Assembly in 1968 and was also official advisor to the Peruvian bishops. The publication of his book, *Teología de la Liberación*, in 1971, would establish him as the father of liberation theology.

1970

In a meeting in Buga, CELAM and the Departments of Education and University Pastoral Care of Colombia drew up a plan for the reform of the continent’s universities in order to align them with the conciliar orientations. The Church, according to this plan, should not be absent

from the great movement that was rocking the Latin American countries, and she needed to assert a strong spirit of integral and Christian humanism. The entire world of higher education switched over to progressivism, often choosing its most radical revolutionary form. The action of the Hispanic-American Student Council in Argentina tried in vain to alter the course of this tidal wave. Chile emerged as a pioneer of this kind of student revolution.

1976

In August, at the Foyer of the Holy Cross in Riobamba, Ecuador, under the leadership of Bishop Leonidas Proaño, some fifty people—bishops, clerics, and lay people—gathered to lay the foundations of a protest movement against authoritarian governments.

The Ecuadorian police had been following the affair since its inception and well knew the participants, all of whom were notorious activists. They stepped in and imprisoned them all; they were released the next day.

Among the “prisoners” were two archbishops and fifteen bishops, including a Venezuelan, three Americans, three Chileans, two Brazilians, three Mexicans, a Spaniard and a Paraguayan, and Bishop Sastre from Argentina.

Joseph Comblin, Dom Hélder Câmara’s Belgian theologian, was among the priests.

As to the lay faithful, the presence of Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, an agitator who would go on to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1980 after having developed the “Justice and Peace Service” throughout the continent, deserves a special mention. He was elected Man of the Day in the French communist daily *L’Humanité* on March 7, 2018.

On August 31, 1976, the Ecuadorian bishops signed the document known as the Evangelical Pact of Ecuador, or Riobamba Pact, under the leadership of the Pastoral Council of the Church of Ecuador. It condemned the minister behind this “imprisonment” and reaffirmed the bishops’ commitment to the Ecuadorian people, demanding freedom of worship, religion, and assembly.

Meanwhile, Dom Hélder Câmara . . .

Dom Hélder Câmara left Rio de Janeiro in 1969, having been named archbishop of Olinda and Recife.

The following year was that of his famous European tour—especially in France, where since that day the progressive press has never ceased to sing his praises and weave crowns to his glory. Among his followers in France were Mgr. Riobé, bishop of Orleans, and José de Broucker, director of ICI (*Informations catholiques internationales*).

The entire official Catholic press offered its unwavering support to the Brazilian prelate for many years, from the now defunct *Informations Catholiques Internationales* to diocesan bulletins and the diocesan committees of the CCFD (Catholic Committees against hunger and for development). His works have been translated into French.

When Leonardo Boff published *La fe en la periferia del mundo* (Faith in the periphery of the world) in 1985, he concluded his book with a poem to the Blessed Virgin: *Show Yourself to be a Liberating Mother* and the following poem by Dom Hélder Câmara to the Virgin of Liberation:

Your thoughts were for all,
 But you made a clear choice for the poor
 As later did your Son.
 What is there in You, in Your words, in Your voice?
 In Your Magnificat You proclaim the overthrow of the mighty
 and the exaltation of the lowly, the satisfying of the hungry,
 and the sending away of the rich.
 What is it about you that no one dares call you subversive
 Or look at you with suspicion?⁸

Dom Hélder Câmara was awarded thirty-two honorary doctorates, from the Universities of Louvain, Paris, Chicago, Amsterdam, Uppsala, and many others. He received twenty-four prizes, including the Martin Luther King prize.

His country, Brazil, is undoubtedly the first country where liberation theology was openly set out.

⁸ Boff, *La Fe en la periferia del mundo*, p. 237.

Those who have experienced its manifestations in Brazil know that all the propaganda of the dioceses and organized movements was under the sign of the “Povo de Deus” (People of God). In 1975, the main theme of the first meeting of the base communities in Espirito Santo was: *A Church born of the people by the Holy Spirit*. Such a church claims to be directly guided by the Holy Spirit, without passing through the “juridical church,” and the people in question are especially those who are poor and victims of cultural and economic oppression. At the time, it was customary to speak of a “new Church that is born in the midst of the people, mainly through the base communities.”

In a Christian continent such as Latin America, the social, political, religious, and economic revolution cannot be carried out with the proletariat—a word unknown to the masses—but needs to be implemented in the name of the “people of God.” The leaders of the Revolution are bishops, religious, and committed laymen. Since the higher clergy is assumed to be in league with the oppressors, the Church itself must also be changed.

Social, economic, and political life hardly changed with this Revolution. The Church, on the other hand, was caught up in a turmoil that continues to this day.

The word *people* became the rallying cry of all the oppressed. *Pueblo* or *Povo*: these are words everyone understands. In Argentina, the word *Pueblo* has a greater historical load than in other countries. For this “new” theology, all men, whomsoever they may be, are creatures, and therefore “sons of God,” and they therefore belong to the People of God. This is what makes the birth of a more “universal” Church that is open to a new ecumenism possible.

For Cardinal Bergoglio, the preferential option for the poor did not consist in assisting them, which would be humiliating. It was about treating them as thinking people, with their own projects, including expressing their faith in their own way. They are considered to be active subjects, who are creative according to their own culture, and not objects of discussion, reflection, or pastoral action.

His friend, Archbishop Victor Manuel Fernandez, would later point out that “*the archbishop always insisted that parish priests be*

merciful and not defend rigid morality or strict ecclesial practices, and that they not complicate people's lives with complex norms authoritatively handed down from above."

Cardinal Bergoglio embraced the positive appreciation of the popular faith, understood as a free and mysterious action of the Spirit. He talked with one and all and spent a lot of time conversing with non-Catholics. The aim of this pastoral principle was not to convert but to apply the principle of encounter. "Contribution to the common good implies being in conflict, suffering from it, resolving it and transforming it into a higher stage for a new process," he would say.

One category, however, is not included in these encounters: "*the self-referential*" with a "*closed identity*" who belong to the juridical Church—that is, the Church received from the apostles.

Pope Francis is opening up paths today that have already been opened. In 1976, the theme of the Brazilian base communities was: "*The Church, a people on its way*"; the following year, "*The Church, a liberated people*"; in 1981, "*The Church, an oppressed people organizing its own liberation.*"

Yves Congar, author of *True and False Reform in the Church*, and Karl Rahner (*Structural Change in the Church*) have long been committed to this change in the Church. The Dominicans of Salamanca have republished *Por una Iglesia Pobre y Servirodra* (For a Poor and Servant Church) by Father Congar in 2014.

And it goes on. A Congress of Liberation Theologians took place from October 7–11 in 2012, bringing together 733 participants, 533 of them from South America; they included fifteen Catholic bishops, all from Brazil but two—one Chilean and one Mexican—and three Anglican bishops. Among the bishops was Xavier de Maupeou, French bishop emeritus of Viana, Brazil. All these wonderful people were advised by Gustavo Gutiérrez; Leonardo Boff gave a brilliant conference on the theme: *Liberation theology and ecological concern*. Things have moved on from the revolutionary alphabetization of Paulo Freire in the 1960s to ecological alphabetization. But the objective is still the same. And it is the current program of Pope Francis.

The reception of the council in Argentina

Two main authors have best synthesized this liberationist impregnation: the above-mentioned Victor Manuel Fernandez and Rafael Luciani.

The former is an intimate of Cardinal Bergoglio, especially since the meeting of CELAM in Aparecida in 2007. He followed him to Rome before becoming one of the first archbishops to be appointed by the Argentinian pope in 2013. Archbishop Fernandez wrote the most controversial passages of *Amoris Laetitia*. Since then, he has received the office of rector of the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina, which he left only to become archbishop of La Plata in June 2018 (and Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2023). He has summarized the pope's thought and action in several articles, as well as in a small book of interviews: *The Francis Project*. He had previously published an erotic book on the art of kissing.

The Venezuelan layman Rafael Luciani, a professor of theology at Boston College and other Jesuit universities, has written numerous articles and studies, including *Pope Francis and the theology of the people*. He is also a member of the theological commission of the Synod of Bishops.

Bishop Fernandez has provided an outstanding study in an article entitled "Pinceladas sobre el pensamiento pastoral del cardenal Bergoglio" (Sketches of Cardinal Bergoglio's pastoral thought) published in *La Revista Católica* in June 2013.

This article outlines the "perspectives" that were already held by Cardinal Bergoglio. Archbishop Fernandez explains: "The image he prefers when referring to the Church is that of People of God. The word 'people' is one he likes to use, because it values the people as a collective subject, which should be at the center of the Church's concerns, and the concerns of all authority."

Rafael Luciani, on the other hand, claims that Pope Francis wants to free the Church from Charlemagne's desire to create a "Christian cultural totalitarianism."⁹

⁹ In Luciani, *El papa Francisco y la teología del pueblo*.

Rafael Luciani, in order to show that we have entered a new era, quotes the profession of faith of the Jesuit Cardinal Robert Bellarmine in the face of the Protestants: “The one and true Church is the community of men brought together by the profession of the same Christian faith and conjoined in the communion of the same sacraments, under the government of the legitimate pastors and especially the one vicar of Christ on earth, the Roman pontiff.”

It is this Church that the pope criticizes “as a *self-referential and self-centered* Church,” of which Luciani specifies that it understood itself “on the basis of the visible elements that expressed its genetic and structural unity (profession of faith, sacraments, legitimate pastors).”

He continues:

By reason of this it sustained its own credibility and proposed itself as the means by which believers could live out their faith (*medio de realización de la vida de la fe*). Grace was an unmerited and undeserved reality that could only be received by believing what the Church teaches, and by acting and the way it acts. Under this arrangement, believers are only objects, addressees who participate in ritual and go to church, but are not the agents of their own process of humanization nor do they have anything of their own to contribute as active subjects.

For many Christians this is still the model for encountering God: through the mediation of an ecclesial culture, as opposed to the living out of a gospel life based on a relationship with the person of Jesus, and not on structures or disciplinary reforms. There needs to be a return to Christianity in which personal encounter with the Jesus of the Gospels is the axis around which Christian life evolves. Such an understanding would replace the prevailing clerical mindset with one that is more horizontal and familial. Francis understands that to attain this objective the Church must undergo a paradigm shift by which it ceases being self-referential, self-centered, or functionalized: by no longer reflecting its own light, but rather the light of Christ. And for this to happen, in order to decentralize, it must go to the peripheries, leave the center and the safe space and go to

those whom the world rejects, to those whom many consider should be discarded.

The better to convince the reader of the theological orientation of his remarks, Luciani then extensively quotes from the Jesuit Karl Rahner, who was also an expert at the council.

Rafael Luciani provides further insights collected in a long article he published in 2016 in the journal *Perspectiva Teología* under the title “The theological-pastoral option of Pope Francis.”¹⁰

“As a former professor of pastoral theology, the Pope realizes that precedence must be given to praxis, and then, as a second step, to theological reflection,” he wrote:

This vision—which is true to the impetus given by the Second Vatican Council—stems from a theology of historical redemption according to which the condition for salvation is found not in the fact of being Christian but in that of being human, because the Christian praxis is quintessentially that of *nearness* [italics in the text]. In it, “we rediscover the essence of Christianity, the way in which all men are saved, be they Christians or non-Christians”. This is all about a mystical fraternity that requires our ethical connection with reality and contact with the people, “with the homes and lives of the people” so that theology, and hence the life of the Church, will not lead to “depersonalization” (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 75).

According to Luciani, “this initial and necessary contact with reality is also set out in *Laudato si'*”: “Theological or philosophical reflections on the situation of humanity and of the world can come across as a repetitive and abstract message, if they are not presented anew following a confrontation with the present context, in what is new for the history of humanity.”¹¹

The said “present context” serves as an inspiration for Pope Francis “for his theological-pastoral option that is deeply influenced by some

¹⁰ Rafael Luciani, “The theological-pastoral option of Pope Francis,” *Perspectiva Teología*, pp. 81–115.

¹¹ Luciani, pp. 81–115.

of the main categories of liberation theology and its methods. For the Pope, theological thought, pastoral praxis, the life of faith as well as the mission and the identity of the ecclesial institution cannot be conceived as isolated fragments: faith and socio-political life, academics and pastoral insertion, form pairs that cannot be considered separately without provoking a dysfunctional relationship between the thinking subject and the reality of the poor to whom they are morally obliged.¹²

It is difficult to understand these new categories which form the basis of the pope's thinking. The people, as such, embody Gospel values. This new paradigm is so integral to the discourse of the pope's followers that they actually copy each other. Thus, Luciani quotes Fernandez: "*We can observe in the poor a number of profoundly Christian values: a spontaneous attention to the other, an ability to devote time to others, to come to their aid without measuring time or sacrifice, while the well-to-do, who have a more organized life, hardly offer their time, attention, or self-denial to others in a spontaneous, obliging, and disinterested way.*"¹³

"The socio-economic reality of the greater part of humanity . . . , in Francis' eyes, is a social locus that decisively determines the theological 'what to do,' and is therefore a mode that allows one to understand reality as *theo*-logical, that is, as a primordial *locus theologicus*, a place where the presence of God is revealed and which expresses the historical-theological dimension of reality in the light of *Gaudium et Spes* (11)."¹⁴

We apologize for this convoluted language, but while it is abstruse for those are not familiar with liberation theology, it is illuminating for those who recognize the major inversion that it brings about.

For liberation theologies, the expression "*theological locus*" has a radically different meaning from the one received in the Catholic Church.

For the Catholic Church, theological *loci* are essentially the sources of the Catholic faith and the truths that flow from it, as listed by the

¹² Luciani, pp. 81–115.

¹³ Luciani, pp. 81–115.

¹⁴ Luciani, p. 90.

Church's Magisterium: Tradition, the Magisterium, and Sacred Scripture, and the subsequent definitions. The *sensus fidelium*, the faith expressed by the faithful, cannot be anything other than the faith of the Church.

For liberation theology, by contrast, it is the place or *locus* where the word of God is elaborated. The poverty of the People of God makes them a new chosen people who receive directly from God the knowledge and interpretation of "the signs of the times," by way of the socio-economic reality. Salvation history thus becomes one with the history of humanity.

This "*historicization*" of theology was outlined and refuted by Cardinal Siri in *Gethsemane: The Origins and Rise of the Intellectual Revolution in the Church*.

If there is an initial unifying element among the various liberation theologies, this is the one. It has been used in various ways by all the tenors of the Latin American continent.

Their unchallenged leader is Jon Sobrino. In two books, *The True Church and the Poor* and *Jesus in Latin America*, he developed a new theology that would earn him a severe rebuke from Cardinal Ratzinger. An irate Sobrino fumed: "Ratzinger doesn't understand a thing," and appealed to the superior general of the Jesuits for support.

It is interesting at this point to note that Jon Sobrino's defense was led by Victor Manuel Fernandez and then by Jorge Costadoat, a Jesuit who was later banned from teaching at the Pontifical University of Santiago, Chile, for having called for the abolition of *Humanae Vitae*.

Jorge Costadoat defended Jon Sobrino in these terms: "In the Church of the poor, in a certain way, we have a new knowledge of Christ. This Church practices a following (*seguimiento*) of Christ from which it draws a deeper knowledge of Christ himself, a knowledge which in the end, has a decisive value. Praxis, in liberation theology, takes precedence over orthodoxy. . . . Praxis is the principle and the end. . . . Thence derives the full force of the precedence attributed by liberation theology to orthopraxis over orthodoxy."

This peculiar theologian wrote a study in 2015 entitled *¿Hacia un nuevo concepto de revelación? La historia como "lugar teológico" en la*

Teología de la liberación (Towards a new concept of revelation? History as a “theological locus” in liberation theology).

François Houtart offered the same analysis in 2006 in *L'état actuel de la théologie de la libération en Amérique Latine* (The present state of liberation theology in Latin America):

In theology, this is a reversal of the logic of the usual approach. Traditionally, theology is deductive, that is to say, it starts from the divine revelation contained in the sacred texts, and then draws all the logical and practical implications at the level of reality. On the contrary, liberation theology follows an inductive approach, which leads it to construct a specifically religious thought starting from reality and social practice. Such an intellectual journey inevitably introduces an element of relativity into the theological discourse. It does not reduce the latter to the epistemological status of the human sciences, but is constructed using the latter as a starting point, thus implying that the quest for religious meaning can change its orientation depending on varying situations and the way in which they are analyzed. The discourse is therefore no longer dogmatic, but proceeds from an empirical necessity.

In the same article, the Marxist Canon from Belgium does not bother with subtleties: “Liberation theology takes as its starting point the situation of the oppressed. This is what we call a ‘*theological locus*,’ that is, the perspective from which the discourse about God is constructed.”

All these changes that are taking place in the Catholic Church today appear to be borrowed from Hegelian Marxism. But what is modernism if not the “historicization” of all faith, all dogma, all morality and all discipline? For a long time, this ideological proximity led people to believe that it was all historical and dialectical materialism. Now that the Soviet Union has fallen, we can see that this is not the case.

It is not Marx and Lenin who have won, but the modernists.