

The Global Thought of Pope Francis: A vehicle for Peace and Reconciliation

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- I - BACKGROUND





- Pope Francis (Jorge Bergoglio)
- Born December 1936, in Buenos Aires
- Became the Archbishop of Buenos Aires in 1998 and was created a cardinal in 2001
- Elected Pope in February 2013
- Foundational experiences: Argentina (nation of immigrants; poverty and popular consciousness; political troubles); the evolution of the Jesuit order from the Second Vatican Council onwards



For the Society of Jesus, the election of Francis was an unexpected turn of events. The options it had pioneered from the Second Vatican Council onward were seemingly losing traction within the Church. The relationships between the Superior General who had engineered the Society's aggiornamento, **Pedro Arrupe** (1907–1991, Superior General 1965–1983) and John Paul II had been tense.

His successor, Peter-Hans Kolvenbach (1928–2016, Superior General 1983–2008) had needed to deploy his diplomatic skills in navigating a Roman context that was not favorable to the Society. Though the relationships between Benedict XVI and the Jesuits' governing body had been cordial, Benedict's approach to theology and ecclesiology was quite different from those of many Jesuits.



- Indeed, Francis's election, given the difficulties he had had with Argentinian Jesuits, initially raised apprehensions in some Jesuit quarters. But these were quickly dissipated, and Francis has emerged as **a pope who is forcefully bringing before the whole church the kind of vision developed by Jesuit leaders and thinkers** from the 1960s till the beginning of this century, at least when it comes to global issues.

32d Jesuit General Congregation (1974-1975)

“The mission of the Society of Jesus today is **the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement.** For reconciliation with God demands the reconciliation of people with one another. In one form or another, this has always been the mission of the Society; but it gains new meaning and urgency in the light of the needs and aspirations of the men and women of our time.... Since evangelization is proclamation of that faith which is made operative in love of others, the promotion of justice is indispensable to it.”

Texts on Francis on which this Presentation is based

- *Laudato si'*, June 2015 (References to Francis of Assisi; Subtitle: "On care for our common home").
- November 2013, Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, on faith and evangelization.
- [April 2016, Apostolic exhortation, *Amoris laetitia*, on love within the family.
- Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et Misera*, November 2016.
- Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 19 March 2018.]
- Meeting with the participants in the fifth convention of the Italian Church, **Florence**, November 2015.
- Christmas exhortations to the Papal Curia.
- Motu Proprio of August 2016 *Humanum Progressionem*.
- Discourses to World Catholic Congress of Education, Congress of Christian Workers...

Challenges

- Francis speaks of «the immensity and urgency» of the **ecological challenge** the world faces. (LS n.15.) A detailed review of this challenge leads him to conclude: «Things are now reaching a breaking point» (LS n.61.)
- «Today we also have to say “thou shalt not” to an **economy of exclusion and inequality**. Such an economy kills» (EG) «Those excluded are no longer society’s underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised – they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the “exploited” but the outcast, the “**leftovers**”». (EG 53)
- Link between “the cry of the earth” and “the cry of the poor”
- Especially manifested **in the situation of refugees and migrants**; Francis has championed them, hurting the sensitivity of some local Christian churches. People responsible of the ad hoc unit in the Vatican answer directly to Francis and meet weekly with him.

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- **Interior void**, coldness, cynicism, managerial attitude, “disease of excessive planning and of functionalism” (this said to the Roman Curia....)
- **Fragmentation** of knowledge, and fragmentation of the human being (education does not nurture the link between the head, the heart and the hands)
- **Weakened sense of responsibility**, conscience and discernment
- Francis repeatedly debunks the temptation to make ourselves immune through personal excuses or empty theorizing to what directly meets our eyes: «To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a **globalization of indifference** has developed. Almost without being aware of it, **we end up being incapable of feeling compassion** at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own» (EG n.54).

Special Importance of “Laudato si”

(Underlying here only the “diagnosis” dimension of the document)

- “The Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics. But I am concerned to encourage an honest and open debate so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good.”
- “Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years,”
- “What the commandment 'Thou shall not kill' means when twenty percent of the world's population consumes resources at a rate that robs the poor nations and future generations of what they need to survive.”
- “Technology, which, linked to business interests, is presented as the only way of solving these problems, in fact proves incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things and so sometimes solves one problem only to create others.”

- II - OBJECTIVES



Mission Statement

- Pope Francis' marching order is probably best summarized in the discourse he pronounced in front of the Italian bishops gathered in Florence in 2015:
- «**Wherever you may be, build neither walls nor borders but village squares and field hospitals**».

Field hospitals are built because of a sense of urgency; they need to be organized on the spot and in any location; they take care of anyone who needs to be healed regardless of who s/he is and they do so without much preliminary planning.

Village squares correspond to any space that makes people meaningfully meet together, exchange opinions in a mutually transformative way, and share resources.

At the same time, field hospitals are sometimes experienced as (provisional) village squares and deliberations taking place in village squares make field hospitals possible.

- *This for achieving four transversal objectives:*

Objective 1 - Promoting Integral Human Development

- True development must be directed to «**all men and the whole man**». (*Integrative and integral*)
- Integral development means first *sustainable development*. At the same time, development is sustainable only as long as it is grounded on justice: «*We have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*» (LS 49)

Objective 1 (continued)

- Sustainability is not attained from above. It arises from the fact of putting poor and marginal people into center stage [*integrative*]:
- «An appreciation of the immense dignity of the poor [...] is in fact an ethical imperative essential for effectively attaining the common good».
- Such appreciation entails listening to the marginalized, speaking for them, and embracing the wisdom « which God wishes to share with us through them». (EG 198)

Objective 2 - Fostering a New Humanism

- In *Laudato Si'* as well as in the Florence exhortation, Francis indicates that humility, gratuitousness, and joy are the core attitudes on which relies such spirituality.
- Such spiritual path opens up to four directions:
- a) The tackling of present-day challenges requires from us to nurture **human depth**: «Even the best mechanisms can break down when there are no worthy goals and values, or a genuine and profound humanism to serve as the basis of a noble and generous society».

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- b) Our world needs **spiritual persons who are socially conscious** and active, and **social actors who are spiritually grounded**: «More than in ideas or concepts as such, I am interested in how such a spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world.»
- c) The merging of global concern and spiritual depth is what characterizes New Humanism and, in reaction to the current «fragmentation of knowledge», leads one to **crisscross various fields of knowledge** in the service of an integral and integrative vision.
- d) Finally, New Humanism fosters a **culture of discernment**. Rather than offering ready-made instructions, Humanism, as understood by Francis, animates the heart's inner desire, encourages people to dream more and dare further, triggers imagination, and educates the individual and collective subject to craft specific expressions of the vision and principles that give meaning to our life. ***Conscience cannot but operate «amid the concrete complexity of one's limits», and discernment is thus about «growing in the midst of limits».*** ,

Objective 3 - Educating Heads, Hearts and Hands

- The discourse to the World Congress on Education stresses that educating the youth means to teach them how to think, how to «feel» in the right way, and also to accompany the youth in the actions they undertake. One must «**think**» what one feels and accomplishes, «**feel**» what one thinks and does, and «**do**» what one thinks and feels. **Inclusiveness** means both working on these three dimensions and making each and everyone benefit from such an approach.

Objective 4 - Resolute Priority Given to the Peripheries of Society

- Francis insists on work as a way to restore social integration and human dignity, calling for a new «**humanism of work**», a notion detailed as follows: «Work should be the setting for this rich personal growth, where many aspects of life enter into play: creativity, planning for the future, developing our talents, living out our values, relating to others, giving glory to God».



Francis' overall vision can thus be summarized as follows:

- (a) Education is to be seen as integral and integrative
- (b) the preferential option for the poor first applies to the ones who are radically excluded and marginalized
- (c) giving everyone a positive right to work (while humanizing the concept of work) is the road through which to link educational change with the priority to be given to the excluded;
- (d) and these principles must direct the assessment and reassignment of an organization's material and human resources.

- III - THE METHODOLOGY OF CHANGE





- **1 - Initiating Processes of Growth and Transformation**

The spiritual and practical primacy to be given to «**time**» constitutes one of the favorite topics of this Pope: «Giving priority to time means being concerned about **initiating processes** rather than possessing spaces». This means that actors must be first and foremost *initiators who proceed in such a way as to ensure they do not control and possess what they start but rather **initiate natural growth processes that will be progressively transformed and enriched by all people involved.***



- **2 - Interconnectedness of All Realities**

Taking conscience of the way everything is **intrinsically connected to the whole** (or, said otherwise, **seeing realities as nets of relations rather than substances** of their own) means that we raise our awareness of the possible consequences of all things we start: «It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected. Time and space are not independent of one another, and **not even atoms or subatomic particles can be considered in isolation**».

(Note: this is a very Asian vision)

- « (An) **organic vision** leads one to experience the whole of reality and one's place in it. Plurality does not become a threat, because it is part of one's very self. ... Harmony is an approach in which the human is understood and viewed from the perspective of the various bonds that bind it with the whole of creation in cosmic solidarity» (F. WILFRED, *Margins: Site of Asian Theologies, Delhi, 2008, pp.126-128.*
- (And there is also a text by Mencius that speaks well of the unity of the personal and collective dimension within the spiritual quest:
- 孟子曰：“万物皆备于我矣，反身而诚，乐莫大焉。强恕而行，求仁莫近焉。” 《孟子·尽心上》)



- **3 - Dialogue, Discernment and Prioritization of Frontier Zones**

Francis speaks of «**the exodus necessary for every authentic dialogue**».

Similarly, a kind of «**inner exodus**» is needed for entering into *fearless discernment*: «Discernment, then, is an authentic process of leaving ourselves behind in order to approach the mystery of God, who helps us to carry out the mission to which he has called us, for the good of our brothers and sisters».

Dialogue and discernment prove to be truly **transformative when one listens with peculiar intensity to the ones at the frontiers**, the ones usually excluded from dialogical spaces and procedures.

The triad «**dialogue, discernment, frontier**» sketches a methodological approach seen as an unbreakable whole.



- **4 - Centering on Metropolises as Hubs of Creativity**

Due to his own life trajectory, Francis seems to be particularly sensitive to **the transforming power of global metropolises**, underlining the scope and impact of urban creativity and stressing that «**social problems must be addressed by community networks**».

Community renewal testifies to the growth of humankind as an organic whole and manifests itself more distinctly in places where the need for integral salvation is acutely experienced. As global cities are agents of change throughout the world, producing ripples far away from home, creative actions initiated in such places trigger processes of natural growth of special intensity.

- IV – ASSESSING TOGETHER (OUR) WAYS OF PROCEEDING: RECAP





- The discourse of Florence states that reliance on management tools often lead organizations and their leader to become «**controlling, harsh and [act in a] normative manner, norms [giving them] the security of feeling superior, of having a precise bearing**».
- Speaking to the Roman Curia, he also points out «**the disease of excessive planning and of functionalism**». Opposite to the tendency to privilege abstraction and structures, there must be a stream of life constantly driving, sustaining and assessing structures. Life can be continued only if primacy is given to the humane: «**A healthy body is one that can recover, accept, reinforce, care for and sanctify its members**».



The necessity to transition from the present-day international landscape towards a true global community taking in charge its destiny is a point on which Francis shows to be particularly insistent:

- «Interdependence obliges us to think of **one world with a common plan**. Yet the same ingenuity which has brought about enormous technological progress has so far proved incapable of finding effective ways of dealing with grave environmental and social problems worldwide». (LS 164)
- «**Spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world**, [this through] an impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity». (LS 151)

12 Tools in Our Toolbox

- 1) Healing and meeting (field hospitals, village squares)
- 2) Centrality of the poor
- 3) A culture of sobriety and inclusiveness
- 4) Integral human development
- 5) Interconnectedness
- 6) New Humanism
- 7) Integral and integrative education
- 8) Work as a strategic setting for human dignity



- 9) Fostering natural processes of growth
- 10) Mutually transformative dialogues
- 11) Desire, imagination, discernment
- 12) One world, one common plan

When it is recaptured as a whole, Francis' vision strikes the observer as being **radical**, **systemic** and **open-ended**, all at the same time.