

Pope Francis and the Theology of the People

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Abstract

The Argentine theology of the people turns to the religion of the “faithful people of God” as a key source for theological reflection. The theology of the people was developed in the church of Argentina in conversation with diverse strands of Latin American theology of liberation as well as local political circumstances and movements. The influence of the Argentine school on Pope Francis is especially evident in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*. Moreover, the theology of the people also provides an elucidating point of departure for interpreting the gestures and tonalities of Pope Francis’s ongoing call for a Church that is poor and for the poor.

Keywords

Pope Francis, popular piety, preferential option for the poor, *teología del pueblo*, theology of liberation

At the “Meeting for Friendship among Peoples of Communion and Liberation” held in Rimini, Italy in 2013, “Pepe” (José) Di Paola, an Argentine priest and shanty-town resident, referred to the pastoral practice in the slums of Buenos

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1. [The *curas villeros* are priests in Argentina who live with and serve the people in the slums on the edges of the city. These neighborhoods are akin to the *favelas* of Brazil, and the work is comparable to inner-city ministry in the United States.—Trans.]

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Aires when Pope Francisco was archbishop.¹ He acknowledged that he and his companions were “sons of the theology of the people, a movement which was disseminated by Father Gera.” Di Paola added, “In Argentina we have two very important people with whom we were formed in the theology of the people: Fathers Lucio Gera and Rafael Tello.” Thus he showed the link, at least indirectly, between the inner-city ministry of the then Cardinal Bergoglio, the pope’s current espousal of a preferential love for the poor, and the theology of the people (hereafter TP). This connection is confirmed if we remember that when Gera died in 2012 he was buried in the Cathedral of Buenos Aires in order to recognize his role as an expert at the Second Vatican Council and at the Conferences of Latin American Bishops in Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979). Moreover, when a disciple of Tello, Fr. Enrique Bianchi, published a book in 2012 about Tello, Bergoglio himself presented the book to the general public.² It was a kind of vindication of Tello since Tello had had trouble with a former archbishop, Cardinal Aramburu. This is the background to linking certain characteristics of the pastoral practice of the current pope with TP. In this article I first try to establish this very connection. I then deal with the issue of whether or not TP is embraced by Latin American liberation theology (TL). Finally, I focus on the points of convergence between the pastoral approach of Pope Francis—especially, but not only, in his exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (EG)—and elucidate some distinctive features of TP.³

The Argentine Theology of the People: Its Emergence and General Characteristics

After returning from Vatican Council II, the Argentine bishops created in 1966 the Episcopal Commission for Pastoral Practice (COEPAL) with the goal of initiating a national pastoral plan.⁴ It was made up of bishops, theologians, pastoral agents, and male and female religious. These included Gera and Tello, both of whom were diocesan priests and professors in the Faculty of Theology at the Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina in Buenos Aires; two other diocesan priests, Justino O’Farrell and Gerardo Farrell, a specialist in Catholic social teaching, and the Jesuit Fernando Boasso from the Center for Research and Social Action, as well as others. That commission was the environment in which the TP was born. The imprint of TP was already recognizable in the Declaration of the Argentine Bishops in San Miguel (1969),

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2. See Enrique C. Bianchi, *Pobres en este mundo, ricos en la fe (Sant 2,5): La fe de los pobres en América Latina según Rafael Tello* (Buenos Aires: Ágape, 2012).
 3. The first two parts of this article include material that originally appeared in Juan Carlos Scannone, “Aportaciones de la teología argentina del pueblo a la teología latinoamericana,” in *Actualidad y vigencia de la teología latinoamericana. Renovación y proyección*, ed. Sergio Torres and Carlos Ábrigo (Santiago, Chile: Universidad Cardenal Raúl Silva Henríquez, 2012) 203–25.
 4. On COEPAL, see Sebastián Politi, *Teología del pueblo: Una propuesta argentina a la teología latinoamericana 1967–1975* (Buenos Aires: Guadalupe, 1992) chap. 4; and Marcelo González, *Reflexión teológica en Argentina (1962–2010): Aportes para un mapa de sus relaciones y desafíos hacia el futuro* (Buenos Aires: Docencia, 2010) chap. 2.

especially in Document VI on Pastoral Practice for the People, a topic that applied the Medellín Conference to the church in Argentina.⁵

The Argentine political context of the times of the COEPAL included the military dictatorship of Onganía, the proscription of Peronism since 1955, the repression of the Peronist labor movement, the emergence of future guerrilla groups, and a new phenomenon: the fact that not a few intellectuals, teachers, and progressive university students supported the Peronism of that day as a popular form of resistance to the military and the social protest movement. This had not occurred during the Perón presidencies. As a result, the so-called National Professors of Sociology (*Cátedras Nacionales de Sociología*) was born at the University of Buenos Aires, with the participation of figures such as O'Farrell. He was the link between the National Professors and COEPAL because he belonged to both. This explains how both the National Professors and COEPAL, by distancing themselves from both liberalism and Marxism, found the basis for their philosophy in Latin American and Argentine history (real and written) and were enabled to employ distinctive categories such as "people," "anti-people," "peoples" in contrast to "empires," "popular culture," and "popular religiosity." The reflections of Gera and COEPAL mainly dealt with the notion of the "people of God" from Vatican II and its interrelationship with various peoples, especially the people of Argentina. It is worth noting that one of the expressions characteristic of Bergoglio is "a faithful people," a people whose faith and popular piety he values with great vigor. For COEPAL it was not only important to promote "the emergence of the laity within the church, but also the inclusion of the church in the historical course of peoples" inasmuch as they were subjects of history and culture; and, thanks to their inculturated faith, they were also both recipients and agents of evangelization.⁶ Unlike the rest of the Latin American theology of that time, they no longer rely upon the economic model of dependence. Rather they understood the situation not so much from

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5. Although COEPAL ceased to exist in early 1973, several of its members continued to meet as a theological reflection group under Gera's leadership. He served as an expert on Medellín and Puebla, was a member of the Theological-Pastoral Team of the Episcopal Conference of Latin America (CELAM), and later participated in the International Theological Commission. His theology is more oral than written, although it also includes important writings and transcriptions made from many of his recorded oral presentations. Later, I myself participated in these meetings, together with Gera, Farrell, Boasso, and Joaquín Sucunza, the current vicar general of the archdiocese of Buenos Aires, and Alberto Methol Ferré from Uruguay. A selection of Gera's works can be found in Virginia R. Azcuay, Carlos Maria Galli, and Marcelo González, eds., *Escritos teológicos y pastorales de Lucio Gera I: Del preconcilio a la Conferencia de Puebla (1956–1981)* (Buenos Aires: Ágape/Faculty of Theology: UCA, 2006) and *De la Conferencia de Puebla a nuestros días*, vol. 2 (Buenos Aires: Ágape, 2007). Tello's unedited works are also being published, e.g., *La nueva evangelización: Escritos teológico-pastorales I* (Buenos Aires, Ágape, 2008) and *Pueblo y cultura* (Buenos Aires: Patria Grande, 2011).
 6. See C. M. Galli, "Epílogo," in *Escritos teológico-pastorales de Lucio Gera*, vol. 1, *Del preconcilio a la Conferencia de Puebla (1956–1981)*, ed. Virginia R. Azcuay, Carlos Galli, and Marcelo González (Buenos Aires: Agape, 2006) 867–924, at 879 n. 4.

the standpoint of economic domination, but predominantly from the standpoint of political domination (imperialism), which includes the economic dimension, framing both dimensions in terms of the integral liberation from sin, including from sin in its structural dimensions.

The People and the Option for the Poor

The category “people” is ambiguous, not for its vacuity but for its wealth of meaning. On the one hand, it can designate the entire people as a nation; on the other hand, it can designate the lower classes and popular social sectors that comprise a nation. COEPAL understood the term primarily in the first sense, starting from the plural unity of a common culture, rooted in a common history, and projected forward toward a shared common good. The historical dimension is fundamental to this conception of “people,” which also implies on the part of pastors and politicians a careful discernment of the “signs of the times” in the life of the people that for believers are also pointers to the providential will of God. In Latin America, the poor are those who, at least in practice, retain the very culture of their people as a structuring principle for everyday life and common life.⁷ Likewise, they hold on to the historical memory of the people and ensure that the interests of the people coincide with a common historical project of justice and peace, given that they may live in an oppressive situation of structural injustice and institutionalized violence. Therefore, in Latin America, at least *de facto*, the option for the poor coincides with the option for culture. This is probably also the case *de jure*, because the poor are those most likely to reveal the common culture of their people.⁸

According to Boasso, COEPAL had favored the issue of culture because he had taken it from the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes* (GS) 53. However, the wording of the Puebla Document (DP) 386, one of whose principal drafters was Gera, shows how GS was read from a Latin American perspective. In DP the words “in a people” were inserted.⁹ These words are not found

7. See *Documento de Puebla*, III Conference General del Episcopado Latinoamericano [DP] 414, http://www.celam.org/doc_conferencias/Documento_Conclusivo_Puebla.pdf. (All URLs referenced herein were accessed October 4, 2015.)

8. [Here the author calls to mind Juan Pueblo, a fictional character of the popular imagination whose grassroots image is well known to Latin Americans. A similar phrase in English might be “John Doe.”—Trans.] On the relationship between people and the poor according to COEPAL, see F. Boasso, *¿Qué es la pastoral popular?* (Buenos Aires: Patria Grande, 1974).

9. DP 386 reads, “Con la palabra ‘cultura’ se indica el modo particular como, *en un pueblo*, los hombres cultivan su relación con la naturaleza, entre sí mismos y con Dios (GS 53.2) de modo que puedan llegar a ‘un nivel verdadera y plenamente humano’ (GS 53.1). Es ‘el estilo de vida común’ (GS 53.3) que caracteriza a los diversos pueblos; por ello se habla de ‘pluralidad de culturas’ (GS 53.3)” (emphasis added).

in the actual texts of paragraphs 1 and 2 of *GS* 53. Thus, the more humanistic interpretation of culture in the first two sections was displaced by what the Council later related with its “historical and social aspect” and termed its “sociological and ethnological sense,” phrases that *GS* first introduces in 53.3. As a result, Puebla reinterprets *GS* 53.1 and 53.2 through the lens of 53.3, and in that way changes the perspectival angle for understanding culture.¹⁰

TP does not ignore the pressing social conflicts in Latin America, although its understanding of “people” privileges unity over conflict, a priority later repeatedly affirmed by Bergoglio. Though TP does not take class struggle as a “decisive hermeneutical principle for understanding society and history,”¹¹ it concedes a historic place to conflict—even class conflict—conceiving of it on the basis of the prior unity of the people. Thus institutional and structural injustice is understood as a betrayal of this unity by one part of the whole and thus becomes a force opposed to the people (*antipueblo*).

The Religion of the People

What has been said up to this point has consequences for how we think about popular religiosity. On the one hand, following Paul Tillich, we can consider religion (or, respectively, a negative attitude toward religious matters) as the core of the culture of a people, and on the other hand, we can think of it, along with Pope Paul VI, as the piety of “the simple and poor.”¹² But here again the contrast is only apparent if we consider that the simple and poor, at least *de facto* in Latin America and probably also *de jure*, are the ones who best preserve a common culture, its values and symbols, even religious ones because they alone have their human dignity and common culture without the privileges of power, possession, and knowledge. I speak of those values and symbols that by their own accord tend to be shared by everyone and that could be in our countries the seed in the nonpoor of a conversion to the poor, bringing about one’s own liberation and indeed the liberation of all. Therefore, the

10. At a meeting of the teachers of the Faculties of Philosophy and Theology of the Universidad del Salvador (Área San Miguel) that took place immediately after Puebla, I asked Gera whether the drafters had realized that they had made a hermeneutical shift, and he answered no. In other words, it was a spontaneous, unreflective act, probably due to the new hermeneutical place in Latin America from which the text was interpreted—a change in the point of view that was not perceived as such by the bishops, since they held no objection, and that is preserved in Francis’s exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*.

11. See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), “Instruction on Certain Aspects of the ‘Theology of Liberation,’” *Libertatis nuntius* (1984) 10.2; cf. 9.2. See http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html.

12. Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi* 48. See http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html. [This document was the pope’s apostolic exhortation following the 1974 Synod of Bishops, devoted to “Evangelization in the Modern World.” It was the third synod held after Vatican II.—Ed.]

religion of the people, if the gospel is authentically proclaimed, is far from being an opiate, for it has potential not only for evangelizing but also for liberation, as the reading of the Bible by the people has demonstrated in actual practice. Hence Puebla is considered an authentic continuation of Medellín, even though the former takes new contributions on both the evangelization of culture and popular piety from *Evangelii nuntiandi*. It is evident that the Bishops' Synod of 1974 had dealt with these themes under the influence of the TP, thanks to Latin American bishops and specifically Bishop Eduardo (later Cardinal) Pironio.¹³ Paul VI then gathered together these contributions in his postsynodal *Evangelii nuntiandi*, which, in turn, was applied by Puebla (1979) to Latin America and then enriched with new contributions, such as what Gera wrote in "Evangelization of Culture" and the Chilean Joaquín Allende contributed regarding "popular religiosity."¹⁴ This is how a kind of multiplier effect (*una espiral virtuosa*) was generated in the exchanges between Latin America and Rome. It began in Argentina and then was taken to Rome by the Synod. There Paul VI deepened it, before it was taken up in Puebla and further enriched at Aparecida (2007). Now it returns to Rome with Pope Francis, who has helped it flourish, to the enrichment of the universal church.

One important development is found in the relevance that Puebla—in line with TP—accords to "popular wisdom" in the two sections of the document cited above (DP 413 and 448). Puebla connects the religion of the people with sapiential knowledge, that is, a form of wisdom that does not replace scientific knowledge, but rather situates it existentially, complements it, and confirms it. TP considers sapiential knowledge to be crucial in mediating the faith of the people and an inculturated theology.¹⁵ Pope Francis recognizes its importance when he talks about connatural knowledge, following not only Thomas Aquinas but also DP and Gera.

Later, Aparecida was able to discern within Latin American popular piety moments of genuine spirituality and the mysticism of the people.¹⁶ Jorge Seibold, one of the pastoral theologians of TP, had already foreshadowed this development when he introduced the category of "mysticism of the people."¹⁷ As we will see, in *Evangelii gaudium*, Francis refers to it twice. Taking it seriously today is a new challenge both within and outside Latin America.

13. [Cardinal Pironio (1920–1998) was from Argentina. He served as secretary general of CELAM during Medellín and later as its president. He was then assigned to the Roman Curia and served as prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and president of the Pontifical Council for the Laity. John Paul II requested him as a confessor.—Trans.]

14. Allende refers in a laudatory fashion to what he calls the "Argentine school of popular pastoral theology" in "Diez tesis sobre religiosidad popular," *Religiosidad popular* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1976) 119.

15. About this mediation, see my book *Evangelización, cultura, y teología*, 2nd ed. (1990; Buenos Aires: Docencia, 2012).

16. Aparecida Document (DA) 258–65, esp. 262, <http://www.celam.org/aparecida/Ingles.pdf>.

17. See Jorge R. Seibold, *La mística popular* (México City: Buena Prensa, 2006).

One Current in Liberation Theology?

In 1982 I was able to distinguish four currents within Latin American liberation theology (TL).¹⁸ One of these was TP. Juan Luis Segundo had coined the term “theology of the people” in order to mount his criticism of it, but Sebastián Politi also adopted it for the sake of defending it. Gustavo Gutiérrez characterizes it as “a current with its own characteristics (*rasgos propios*) within TL”; and Roberto Oliveros, recognizing it as an aspect of this, pejoratively labels it “populist theology.”¹⁹ Later, this classification into four currents was accepted by theologians of liberation like João Batista Libânio and by its critics, such as Methol Ferré and Antonio Quarracino, when he presented *Libertatis nuntius*, the instruction of the CDF regarding liberation theology.²⁰ In connection with the general themes highlighted in the first part of this article, one can enumerate the characteristics of the methodology of TP: (1) use of historical-cultural analysis (*el análisis histórico-cultural*), privileging it over structural social analysis (*el análisis socio-cultural*) without discarding the latter; (2) employment of more synthetic and hermeneutical sciences such as history, culture, and religion (as complements to more analytical and structural sciences) as a form of mediation to get to know reality and to transform it; (3) rooting of such scientific mediations in a sapiential knowledge and discernment for the sake of the “affective connaturality that love gives” (*EG* 125), which, in turn, confirms their scientific character; and (4) taking a critical distance from the Marxist method of social analysis and its categories of understanding and practical strategies.²¹

The two instructions of 1984 and 1986 by the CDF on liberation theology helped prevent extreme positions. For his part, John Paul II, in his message of April 9, 1986, to the bishops of Brazil, gave ecclesial recognition to TL not only as “timely, but also [as] useful and necessary,” and as “a new stage” in the theological and social thought of the church, provided that it remains in continuity with it.²² Subsequently,

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18. I refer to my article “La teología de la liberación: Características, corrientes, etapas,” *Stromata* 48 (1982) 3–40, in *Problemi e prospettive di teologia dogmatica*, ed. Karl Neufeld (Brescia: Queriniana, 1983). In the text of the same paragraph I allude to: Juan Luis Segundo, *Liberación de la teología* (Buenos Aires: Lohlé, 1974) 264; Politi, *Teología del pueblo*; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *La fuerza histórica de los pobres* (Lima: CEP, 1988) 372; and Roberto Oliveros, *Liberación y teología: Génesis de una reflexión (1966–1977)* (Lima: CEP, 1977).
 19. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *La fuerza histórica* 372; Roberto Oliveros, *Liberación y teología* 338.
 20. I refer to João Batista Libânio, *Teologia da libertação: Roteiro didático para um estudo* (São Paulo: Loyola) 258; A. Methol Ferré, “De Rio de Janeiro a Puebla: 25 anni di storia,” *Incontri* 4 (1982) 4; and A. Quarracino, “Presentación de *Libertatis Nuntius*,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, Spanish edition, 819 (September 9, 1984) 567.
 21. See my contribution: “Situación de la problemática del método teológico en América Latina (con especial énfasis en la teología de la liberación después de las dos Instrucciones),” in *El método teológico en América Latina* (Bogotá: CELAM, 1994) 19–51.
 22. See “Carta do Papa João Paulo II aos Bispos da Conferência Episcopal dos Bispos do Brasil.” April 9, 1986, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pt/letters/1986/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_19860409_conf-episcopale-brasile.html.

two meetings were held at El Escorial, Spain, in 1972 and 1992, on liberation theology in Latin America. The second of these meetings tested the possibility of cross-fertilization between the main aspect of TL and that of the Argentine school.²³ Some years later, in September 1996, the leadership of CELAM, with the participation of the authorities of the CDF (including then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone), convened a meeting in Schönstatt, Germany, of a group of theologians and Latin American experts to think about “the future of theology in Latin America.” The participants were asked to develop four themes: TL, the social doctrine of the church, communitarianism, and the theology of culture.²⁴ The first of these was entrusted to Gustavo Gutiérrez and the fourth to Gera’s disciple Carlos Galli, with the request to present the theology of his teacher. In other words, an important role was recognized for the theological future of Latin America in both the main stream of TL and the Argentine version.²⁵ After Gutiérrez’s brilliant presentation, Ratzinger explicitly praised him for his Christocentrism and sense of the gratuitousness of grace.

In November of that same year, the Dutch-language section of the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Louvain convened another meeting to discuss the issue of a possible paradigm shift in TL, “from a socio-economic paradigm to a cultural one.”²⁶ In Schönstatt I asked Gutiérrez for his opinion, and he told me that that the issue of culture had been present from the beginning, and that there had not been a change in paradigm, but only in emphasis. That was the response of the majority of the meeting’s participants. The pressing social and economic concerns of liberation had not only persisted; they had intensified, and were amplified and deepened by the consideration of culture.

23. My own presentation was based on the point of view of TP. See “Teología y política: El actual desafío planteado al lenguaje teológico latinoamericano de liberación,” in Instituto Fe y Secularidad, *Fe cristiana y cambio social en América Latina. Encuentro de El Escorial, 1972* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1973) 247–81. In the same context the participants at the El Escorial, Spain meetings paid particular attention to the problems of culture, of the new social-cultural imaginary, and of the wisdom of the people, as indicated in the papers read by theologians such as Pedro Trigo, Diego Irarrázaval, Antonio González, Victor Codina, et al. See their contributions in *Cambio social y pensamiento cristiano en América Latina*, ed. Joseph Comblin, José Ignacio González Faus, and Jon Sobrino (Madrid: Trotta, 1993).

24. I also participated in the meeting and asked the organizers why these themes had been chosen. The answer was because they were considered the most important for Latin American theology of the third millennium.

25. See Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Una teología de la liberación en el contexto del Tercer Milenio,” in *El futuro de la reflexión teológica en América Latina*, ed. Luciano Mendes de Almeida (Bogotá: CELAM, 1996) 97–165; and C.M. Galli, “La teología latinoamericana de la cultura en las vísperas del Tercer Milenio” *ibid.* 245–362. I was given the topic: “El comunitarismo como alternativa viable” *ibid.* 195–241.

26. See Georg De Schrijver, ed., *Liberation Theologies on Shifting Grounds: A Clash of Socio-Economic and Cultural Paradigms* (Leuven: Leuven University and Peeters, 1998).

The Pastoral Focus of Pope Francis and TP

Ever since he stepped onto the balcony of St. Peter's after his election, Pope Francis has made symbolic gestures, given interviews, spoken as head of the church, and published a "roadmap" of his pontificate, the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, which in many ways is redolent of the Argentine TP. Thus arises the question about the convergences of his pastoral perspective with such theology. In this third part I consider, among these convergences, first, Francis's understanding of God's faithful people. I then examine his understanding of the peoples of the earth in their relation to the people of God, and in their own historical and cultural construction as peoples. Third, I address the pastoral and theological evaluation of popular piety and, finally, its relationship with the poor.

The Faithful People

Pope Francis's request that the people bless him almost immediately after appearing in public was striking. Those of us who knew his theological appreciation for the "faithful people of God" were not surprised since this implies at the same time a specific way of conceiving the church as well as recognizing the "sense of faith" of the people and the laity's role in it. Hence we can grasp his preference for the term "faithful people" that is also repeated in *EG* (e.g., 95, 96) and that he explicitly recognizes as "a mystery rooted in the Trinity, but that has its historical concreteness in a pilgrim and evangelizing people, and that transcends all necessary institutional expression" (*EG* 101).²⁷ It is this people in its entirety that announces the gospel. God "has chosen," he says, "to call us together as a people and not as isolated beings . . . he draws us closer, taking into account the complex web of interpersonal relationships that are presupposed in the life of a human community" (*EG* 113).

In these texts we hear echoes of Scripture and of Vatican II, but also of the TP, especially with regard to peoples, their cultures, and their history:

The People of God is incarnate in the peoples of the earth, each of which has its own culture . . . It has to do with the lifestyle of a given society, the specific way in which its members relate to one another, to other creatures and to God . . . Grace presupposes culture, and God's gift becomes flesh in the culture of those who receive it.²⁸

27. See also *EG* 95. Bergoglio himself credits to his theological studies his admiration for the claim that "the faithful people is infallible 'in credendo'—in believing." He formulated it like this by his own memory: "Whenever you want to know what the Church believes, go to the Magisterium," "but when you want to know how the Church believes, go to the faithful people." Jorge Mario Bergoglio, *Meditaciones para religiosos*, ed. Diego de Torres (Buenos Aires: San Miguel, 1982) 46. See also *EG* 124.

28. *EG* 115. The 1993 doctoral thesis of Carlos María Galli, which was directed by Gera and sadly is still not published in its totality, bears the title, "El Pueblo de Dios y los pueblos del mundo: Catolicidad, encarnación e intercambio en la eclesiología actual." One of its

I would add that, following the TP, Pope Francis adopts *DP*'s rereading of the first two paragraphs of *GS* 53, from the perspective of the third.²⁹ Therefore, when he speaks of God's people, Francis refers to its "multiform face" (*EG* 116) and a "multiform harmony" (*EG* 117) due to the diversity of cultures that enrich it. Likewise, when he speaks of peoples, he analogously employs the image of the polyhedron to mark the plural unity of irreducible differences within the heart of this unity. Furthermore, in line with the TP, he emphasizes a traditional doctrine, when he recognizes that

God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith—*sensus fidei*—which helps them to discern what is truly of God. The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively, even when they lack the wherewithal to give them precise expression.

Moreover, "the flock itself has its own sense of smell to find new paths" of evangelization (*EG* 31).

The Four "Bergoglian" Priorities in Building and Leading the People

Following the emphases of the TP and enriching them, the Argentine bishops, including Cardinal Bergoglio, adopted the proposition of the Argentine Commission for Justice and Peace to create a path "from residents to citizens." This path illuminates what Francis, with an even deeper mode of reflection, writes in *EG* 220 about the people-nation:

People in every nation enhance the social dimension of their lives by acting as committed and responsible citizens, not as a mob swayed by the powers that be . . . Yet becoming a *people* 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 *cultura del encuentro* ("culture of encounter").³⁰

chapters was published as "La encarnación del Pueblo de Dios en la Iglesia y en la eclesiología latinoamericanas," *Sedoc* 125 (1994) 50–60.

29. When Bergoglio was rector of the Faculties of San Miguel, he organized the first conference on evangelization of culture and inculturation of the gospel ever to take place in Latin America (1985). He organized it with the presence of theologians of South and North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. In his own opening plenary he spoke about the inculturation, citing Pedro Arrupe, who was a pioneer in the use of this neologism. See Jorge Mario Bergoglio, "Discurso inaugural," in *Congreso Internacional de Teología*, "Evangelización de la cultura e inculturación del Evangelio," *Stromata* 61 (1985) 161–65; the allusion to the intervention of Pedro Arrupe at the Synod of 1974 appears on 164.

30. [Emphasis added.—Trans.]

Note his typical expression: *cultura de encuentro*.³¹ Already when he was the provincial of the Jesuits, Bergoglio stated and later, as archbishop of Buenos Aires, explained in more detail how certain priorities of governance might guide us together toward the common good:³² (1) the priority of time over space; (2) the priority of unity over conflict; (3) the priority of reality over the idea; and (4) the superiority of the whole over the parts (being more than the mere sum of the parts). According to legend, these priorities are taken from a letter of Juan Manuel de Rosas, governor of Buenos Aires, to Facundo Quiroga, governor of La Rioja in Argentina, that concerns the organization of Argentina as a nation and that was written from the estate of Figueroa in San Antonio de Areco on December 20, 1834.³³ Rosas may not have named each priority explicitly, but he implicitly accounts for each of them. Later, as pope, Francis introduced the two last priorities in the encyclical *Lumen fidei* (55, 57). Finally he developed and articulated them in *EG* 217–37, presenting them as a contribution emanating from Christian social thought “for the sake of the building up of a people”—in the first instance, of the peoples of the world, but also of the People of God.

Time Is Greater Than Space

EG begins by asserting the priority of time over space. In fact this means that starting “processes that build up a people” in history is more important than occupying positions (*espacios*) of power and/or possession (of, e.g., land or wealth) (*EG* 223, 224). The spiritual sense of the proper time for the right decision, whether it be existential, interpersonal, pastoral, social, or political, is part of the Ignatian charism and is closely connected with the discernment of spirits. In his theology Gera recognizes its importance for prophets, pastors, and politicians, and Methol-Ferré is known for his geopolitical analysis and his Christian interpretation of the current signs of the times and of the Latin American Church as a mature source of ecclesial reflection. For his part, Bergoglio, as a Jesuit, shares the charism of discernment and most likely knew about the theoretical contributions of these thinkers. He does not ignore the question of space

31. [In Spanish *encuentro* usually signifies an actual face-to-face meeting of persons, even though *encuentro* can be translated as either “meeting” or “encounter.” In English, by contrast, we tend to speak of a “meeting” and a “personal encounter” as if they were gatherings of individuals with very distinct characters.—Trans.]

32. At Provincial Congregation 14 of the Jesuit Province of Argentina on February 18, 1974, Bergoglio spoke as provincial of three of these criteria without explicitly referencing the superiority of the reality over the idea. See *Meditaciones para religiosos* 49–50. The presentation and development of all four are offered in his lecture as archbishop of Buenos Aires at the 13th Annual Archdiocesan Meeting of Social Teaching and Pastoral Ministry (2010): “Hacia un Bicentenario de justicia y solidaridad, 2010–2016: Nosotros como ciudadanos, nosotros como pueblo,” especially in section 4, www.arzbaires.org.ar/inicio/homilias/homilias2010.htm#XIV_Jornada_Arquidiocesana_de_Pastoral_Social). The entire document illustrates his conception of *pueblo*.

33. See Enrique Barba, *Correspondencia entre Rosas, Quiroga y López* (Buenos Aires: Hyspamérica, 1984) 94.

but looks at it rather from a temporal perspective. He crowns his considerations by saying, “Time governs spaces, illumines them, and makes them links in a constantly expanding chain, with no possibility of return.”³⁴

Priority of Unity over Conflict

TP considered plural unity and conflict from the side of unity but also recognized the reality of the “anti-people” of conflict and of the struggle for justice. On this point the pope is not only influenced by TP but also gives it a more profound, more evangelical, and more theological meaning. He states that we cannot ignore conflicts; nor can we get caught up in them or make them the key to progress. On the contrary, it is a matter of a “willingness to face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process. ‘Blessed are the peacemakers!’ (Matt 5:9)” (EG 227). This peace is not the peace of the cemeteries, but of the “communion of the differences,” that is, “a life setting where conflicts, tensions, and oppositions can achieve a diversified and life-giving unity” (EG 228), “a cultural covenant resulting in ‘a reconciled diversity’” (EG 230). “This is not to opt for a kind of syncretism, or for the absorption of one into the other, but rather for a resolution that takes place on a higher plane and conserves what is valid and useful on both sides” (EG 228). The ultimate foundation of the *cultura del encuentro* that he fosters is not to remain blind to the reality of conflict.³⁵

Realities More Important Than Ideas

There is also a double-sided tension between reality and ideas (see EG 231), because the latter is a function of the former without being separated from it. Otherwise there would exist a danger of manipulating reality. “Formal nominalism has to give way to harmonious objectivity” (EG 232), writes Francis. According to him, this “principle has to do with the incarnation of the word and its being put into practice.” He adds, “Not to put the word into practice, not to make it reality, is to build on sand, to remain in the realm of pure ideas and to end up in a lifeless and unfruitful self-centeredness and Gnosticism” (EG 233). Unlike the previous two Bergoglian principles, I do not see an immediate connection between this priority and TP, except perhaps for the criticism that it levels against ideologies, those of both Marxist and liberal inspiration, and in its search for hermeneutical categories from the Latin American historical reality, especially of the poor.

34. EG 223.

35. Bergoglio had wanted to do his doctoral thesis on Romano Guardini, made inquiries into Guardini’s archives, and was devoted to his understanding of the dialectical dynamism of opposites (not in the Hegelian or Marxist sense) in order to apply this understanding to praxis and to history, since the unity that binds them together is fully given in Christ (EG 229). See Romano Guardini, *Der Gegensatz: Versuche zu einer Philosophie des lebendig Konkreten* (Mainz: Mathias Grünewald, 1955).

Superiority of the Whole over the Parts

Francis connects the principle of the priority of wholes over parts with the tension between globalization and localization (EG 234). Regarding this tension, it converges with the historical and cultural roots of TP, situated socially and hermeneutically in Latin America and Argentina. Due to its emphasis on the incarnation of the gospel, it also converges with the transcultural aspect of the gospel, inculturating it in popular Catholicism.³⁶

At this point Bergoglio moves toward a higher synthesis that does not erase the tensions, but understands them, makes them fruitful, and opens them up to the future. “Here our model is not the sphere, which is no greater than its parts, where every point is equidistant from the centre, and there are no differences between them. Instead, it is the polyhedron, which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness.” And almost immediately, he adds, “It is the convergence of peoples who, within the universal order, maintain their own individuality; it is the sum total of persons within a society which pursues the common good, which truly has a place for everyone” (EG 236). Without using the word, the pope points to *interculturality*.

Previously Pope Francis had offered the trinitarian foundation of this principle: When properly understood, cultural diversity is not a threat to Church unity. The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, transforms our hearts and enables us to enter into the perfect communion of the blessed Trinity, where all things find their unity. He builds up the communion and harmony of the people of God. The same Spirit is that harmony, just as he is the bond of love between the Father and the Son. It is he who brings forth a rich variety of gifts, while at the same time creating a unity which is never uniformity but a multifaceted and inviting harmony (EG 117). The attraction of the beautiful is another characteristic of Francis’s approach, which in this respect is not unlike that of Method Ferré.

Popular Piety

One distinctive feature of TP is its theological and pastoral revalorization of the religion of the people inasmuch as TP came to recognize a *mística popular* (spirituality of

36. COEPAL did not take globalization into account explicitly when it was still just emerging. Later it was considered by COEPAL’s successors, such as Method Ferré, Gerardo Farrell, and the interdisciplinary investigations of the Grupo de Pensamiento Social de la Iglesia (“Group on Social Thought of the Church”). See Gerard Farrell et al., *Argentina: alternativas frente a la globalización* (Buenos Aires: San Pablo, 1999); see also Alberto Method Ferré and Alver Metalli, *El papa y el filósofo* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2013). The Group on Social Thought and the Church took Farrell’s name after his death. Farrell had been a member and secretary of the COEPAL, although because of his age he is considered as belonging to the second generation of TP and was a founding member of Grupo de Pensamiento Social de la Iglesia.

the people).³⁷ *EG* refers to it twice. For example, Pope Francis exemplifies the superiority of the whole over the parts, stating that “The genius of each people welcomes in its own way the entire Gospel and embodies it in expressions of prayer, fraternity, justice, struggle, and celebration” (*EG* 237; see also *EG* 124). *Mística popular* also converges with the TP, when, for example, *EG* connects popular piety with other issues crucial to both, such as the inculturation of the gospel (*EG* 68, 69, 70), “the most needy” (*EG* 68), and “the advancement of society” (*EG* 70). Both clearly distinguish popular piety from “Christianity made up of devotions reflecting an individual and sentimental faith life” (*EG* 70), without negating the need for a “purification and maturation” of that religiosity, for which “popular piety is precisely the best starting point” (*EG* 69), as the exhortation itself explains.

When *EG* refers to “new relationships brought by Jesus Christ” (see *EG* 87), it spontaneously connects this with popular religiosity, recognizing that

genuine forms of popular religiosity are incarnate, since they are born of the incarnation of Christian faith in popular culture. For this reason they entail a personal relationship, not with vague spiritual energies or powers, but with God, with Christ, with Mary, with the saints. These devotions are fleshly; they have a face. They are capable of fostering relationships and not just enabling escapism. (*EG* 90)

One of the pope’s richest and most profound insights on the religion of the people was communicated in Rio de Janeiro before the meeting of CELAM, when he presented it as an expression of the laity’s creativity, healthy autonomy, and freedom, in the context of his critique of the temptation of clericalism in the church. He recognized the religion of the people as a manifestation of “being Catholic as a people,” a result of one’s community and the adult character of their faith. Similarly and in the same breath, he recommended defining institutions that developed organically in Latin America, such as Bible circles and base ecclesial communities.³⁸

A striking example of convergence with the TP is offered by *EG* when, quoting *DP* 450 (and *DA* 264), Pope Francis concludes that, by way of popular piety, “people are constantly evangelizing themselves” if we are talking about “peoples among whom the Gospel has been inculturated” (*EG* 122; see also 68). For each of these peoples is

the creator of its own culture and the protagonist of its own history. Culture is a dynamic reality which a people constantly recreates; each generation passes on a whole series of ways of approaching different existential situations to the next generation, which must in turn reformulate it as it confronts its own challenges . . . In their process of transmitting their culture they also transmit the faith in ever new forms; hence the importance of understanding

37. On the mysticism of the people, see *DA* 262.

38. See Francis’s allocution to CELAM, July 28, 2013, in Víctor M. Fernández et al., *De la misión continental (Aparecida, 2007) a la misión universal (JMJ—Río 2013 y Evangelii gaudium): Anunciando la revolución e la ternura* (Buenos Aires: Docencia, 2013) 287.

evangelization as inculturation. Each portion of the people of God, by translating the gift of God into its own life and in accordance with its own genius, bears witness to the faith it has received and enriches it with new and eloquent expressions. (EG 122)

Note that *EG* does not talk about a merely external cultural transmission, but a living collective testimony. For that reason Francis adds, “This is a reality in continuous development, where the Holy Spirit is the principal agent” (EG 122).

Pope Francis returns a second time to speak of *mística popular* as “a spirituality inculturated in the culture of the lowly” (EG 124), and says that although the *mística popular* “in the act of faith . . . stresses more *credere in Deum* (believing in God) than *credere Deum* (believing God)” — a formulation reminiscent of certain expressions of Tello — “it is not empty of content, but is discovered and expressed more through a symbolic mode than through the use of instrumental reason.” A fortiori, “it brings with itself the grace of being a missionary, of coming out of oneself, and setting out on pilgrimage” (EG 124).

A little later, almost retracing the steps of Gera and *DP*, Pope Francis teaches in *EG* that “only from the affective connaturality born of love can we appreciate the theological life present in the piety of Christian peoples, especially among their poor” (EG 125). Moreover, the exhortation ends with a treatment of popular religiosity, accepting, with *TP*, its relevance not only pastorally but in a strictly theological sense. In fact, he concludes, “Expressions of popular piety . . . for those who are capable of reading them, are a *locus theologicus* which demands our attention, especially at a time when we are looking to the new evangelization” (EG 126).

The Spirit blows when and where it wills. I think that today, whereas in the secularized zones of the North “God is conspicuous by God’s absence,”³⁹ we of the South humbly offer the testimony and sense of piety “of the poor and simple” and its *mística popular* as one contribution to the new evangelization (EG 126). But the Pope is not naive and does not ignore the fact “that in recent decades there has been a breakdown in the way Catholics pass down the Christian faith to the young” (EG 122). He had already warned of this as archbishop of Buenos Aires. Then he does not only sound out its causes (EG 70); he also wagers on inner-city ministry (EG 71–75), since “God lives in the city” (DA 514), even though God’s presence still has to be “found, uncovered” (EG 71). This process of discovery applies not in the least to “non-citizens,” “half citizens,” and “urban remnants” (EG 74). In other words, it applies to the poor and excluded and their “fight to survive,” which “contains within it a profound understanding of life which often includes a deep religious sense” (EG 72).

39. I refer to convergent expressions of European phenomenologists of religion such as Bernhard Welte and Jean-Luc Marion; see Welte, *Das Licht des Nichts: Von der Möglichkeit neuer religiösen Erfahrung* (Düsseldorf, Patmos, 1980) 54ff.; and Marion, “Métaphysique et phénoménologie: Une relève pour la théologie,” *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 94 (1993) 189–206, esp. 203.

The Preferential Option for the Poor

I have emphasized the close connection between the preferential option for the poor and popular piety as it is lived in Latin America, especially in the poor sectors. Although the whole church, including popes, has made that option, it is unmistakably clear that TL in all its currents, including the Argentine one, is defined by making this option its starting point and prime locus of interpretation.

The new pope, from the very choice of his name, made manifest his accentuation of the preferential love of the poor, marginalized, excluded, unemployed, sick, disabled, “rejected,” as well as the so-called “urban remnants.” Some have even claimed that his first visits outside Rome, to Lampedusa and Cerdeña, and his meeting there with the refugees and migrants and with the unemployed, function symbolically as authentic encyclicals.

Francis not only states that “solidarity is a spontaneous reaction by those who recognize that the social function of property and the universal destination of goods are realities which come before private property” (EG 189) in accordance with Catholic doctrine; he also adds, “For the Church, the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one” (EG 198). Hence he again expresses what he had said on other occasions: “This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them” (EG 198).

But neither does Francis tire of seeing the other side of the same coin. Hence he criticizes “an economy [that] kills” (EG 53), the “fetishism of money” (EG 55), and a “socioeconomic system . . . unjust at its root” (EG 59) due to “ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and [of] financial speculation” (EG 56; see also 202). He claims that “God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person, but also the social relations existing between men” (EG 178), so that Christians have to fight without violence but with historical efficacy, for “the inclusion of the poor in society” (EG 185) and against “an economy of exclusion and inequality” (EG 53) and “evil crystallized in unjust social structures” (EG 59).

I do not intend to develop here Francis’s thought on the poor because it is too obvious and well known; but, in this context, I must at least mention it as an essential point of convergence between his teaching, the church’s social teaching, and TP. In all three cases we are not dealing with a mere theory, but its incarnation in existential and social practices (including structural ones) that make real the “incarnation of the Gospel” and the “revolution of tenderness” (EG 88).

By Way of Conclusion

Although he did not know Latin America personally, Karl Rahner had a keen sense for what makes theology current. Thus he was aware of two important contributions from the church and from theologians in Latin America to the universal church and to all theology: a theology that liberates and the religion of the people. Accordingly he

compiled and edited a book on each of these subjects.⁴⁰ In fact, the two books define TP and, in my opinion, breathe in the fresh air from the South that broke into the church, thanks to the pope who came “from the end of the earth.”⁴¹

Since reality is superior to the idea, I think that, apart from the new ideas that Francis has brought to the papacy, about which I have written here, the reality of his person and personal charism contributes something even more important, namely, a radical transformation of the spiritual mettle (*el temple de ánimo*) within the church and also outside it.

I agree with Paul Ricoeur that history, including that of the Church and its relationship in the last year with the world, can be interpreted as a text.⁴² From this standpoint, not only what is said but also the pragmatic force of how something is said belong to the meaning of a text. In other words, we must also attend to the existential attitude and spiritual mettle, to the affective tone and the lived experience (*vivencia*) that accompanies the text. From that we can elicit objective indexes in the style of the text, in the repetition of words, and so forth. As a result, the time of the pontificate of Francis taken as a text and the text of *EG* itself seem to reflect a new spiritual mettle in the church, both in the interventions of the pope and in the creative response of the faithful people. Such spiritual mettle is made manifest in the textual, lived, and performative (*gestual*) repetition of guiding themes such as “the joy of the Gospel,” “a revolution of tenderness,” “*cultura de encuentro*,” and other distinctive phrases. These guiding themes are opposed to attitudes of ennui (*acedia*), disenchantment, and individualistic isolation; and, above all, they witness to and make evident the joy of evangelizing and of being missionary disciples, joyful self-giving, the preferential love for the poor, the mercy of Jesus, hope for the kingdom and “for the possibility of another world.” I am not talking about separate tonalities, but rather about a harmonic configuration of “a whole series of ways” (*EG* 122) that show and spread the joy of the gospel.

40. See Karl Rahner et al., eds., *Befreiende Theologie: Der Beitrag Lateinamerikas zur Theologie der Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1977), and *Volksreligion—Religion des Volkes* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1979). Rahner himself wrote the prologue to the first work and the introduction, “Einleitende Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Theologie und Volksreligion” (9–16), to the second.

41. Pope Francis thus referred to himself when he spoke from the balcony of the papal apartments on the day of his election. Thomas J. Craughwell plays off these words in his book, *Pope Francis: The Pope from the End of the Earth*, foreword Cardinal Seán O’Malley (Charlotte, NC: Saint Benedict, 2013).

42. See Paul Ricoeur, “Le modèle du texte: L’action sensée considérée comme un texte” and “Expliquer et comprendre. Sur quelques connexions remarquables entre la théorie du texte, la théorie de l’action et la théorie de l’histoire,” in Ricoeur, *Du texte à l’action: Essais d’herméneutique II* (Paris: Seuil, 1986) 183–211, 161–82.

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