

“The work of Borghesi is a wonderful contribution to understanding the thinking and person of Pope Francis and to receiving and implementing his magisterium at a time of change in the Church and the world. It is my sincere hope that bishops, priests, seminary professors, lay theologians, and leaders will profit greatly from this text as they carry out the important work of the New Evangelization.”

—Archbishop Christophe Pierre
Apostolic Nuncio to the United States

“Massimo Borghesi has provided an indispensable resource for all who want to understand why Pope Francis thinks the way he does. Both erudite and scholarly, *The Mind of Pope Francis* reveals the intellectual and cultural formation of Jorge Mario Bergoglio, with the added benefit of recently recorded and highly reflective interviews with the subject himself. Beautifully translated, this is a vital addition to the anthology of books on this most captivating and consequential religious leader.”

—Kerry Alys Robinson
Global Ambassador, Leadership Roundtable

“Massimo Borghesi’s book is the first real intellectual biography of Jorge Mario Bergoglio and it builds a bridge between the different universes of today’s global Catholicism: different generations of Catholics; different areas of the world; different theological, philosophical, and socio-political backgrounds. This book is an invaluable contribution for the comprehension of this pontificate and potentially a game-changer for the reception of Pope Francis, especially in the English-speaking world.”

—Massimo Faggioli
Professor of Historical Theology, Villanova University

“Pope Francis’ predecessor was an internationally renowned theologian. Perhaps because of that, many have dismissed the Argentinian pope as lacking in intellectual ‘heft.’ Massimo Borghesi’s fascinating and informative study of the intellectual influences on Pope Francis has exploded that canard, demonstrating the intellectual breadth, subtlety and perspicacity of Francis’ thought. Borghesi helps us see that behind Pope Francis’ famous ‘evangelical simplicity’ lies ‘a rich and original thought process,’ one informed by such thinkers as Amelia Podetti, Alberto Methol Ferre, and Romano Guardini. Thanks to Borghesi we can better appreciate the subtle and creative mind of this ‘simple’ pope.”

—Richard Gaillardetz
Joseph Professor of Catholic Systematic Theology, Boston College

“In *The Mind of Pope Francis*, Massimo Borghesi reveals that Francis’s remarkable simplicity and openness as pope is no accident. An indispensable study of how Jorge Bergoglio became the strikingly original thinker and believer who has renewed the Church in his ministry as Pope Francis.”

—Mollie Wilson O’Reilly
Editor at Large, *Commonweal*

“Far from being just a set of ideas and influences, what Professor Borghesi’s magnificent study shows is a way of thinking, one that navigates and reconciles this world’s polarities and dialectic tensions in a compellingly original way. If ever a mind reflected the Incarnation, it is Jorge Mario Bergoglio’s; and no one is better equipped to take us on a tour of that mind than Borghesi in this masterful translation. There is no more important or illuminating book on Pope Francis. We will never see him the same way again.”

—Austen Ivereigh
Author, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the making of a radical pope*

“Any Catholic thinker, priest, or seminarian who wants to grasp the intricacies of the intellectual formation of Pope Francis has to read this book. Even the best biographies have up to now been unable to recount the true influence of Gaston Fessard, Amelia Podetti, and Alberto Methol Ferré. This book was hard to put down. The interplay of the modern dialectic and classical analogy under the rubric of Jesuit polarity is itself worthy of a small monograph. The record is now corrected. Friends and foes can learn for the first time the multiple and diverse strands of Latin American, Ignatian, and European thought that the inquisitive Bergoglio brought from the Southern Cone of his native hemisphere to the chair of St. Peter.”

—Peter Casarella
University of Notre Dame

“If Massimo Borghesi’s book, *The Mind of Pope Francis*, had been published earlier in the pontificate it could have helped prevent the surprisingly easy adoption of a superficial narrative depicting the new pope as an intellectual lightweight set on undoing much of what his predecessors had accomplished.

“Those who have tried to understand Pope Francis by acknowledging that he is Catholic, he is a Jesuit, and he is Latin American will find in Borghesi’s book a detailed description of how those three currents come together in Pope Francis, in his writings, and in his ministry. *The Mind of Pope Francis* is an important and unique contribution to the books that have been written about him.”

—Cindy Wooden
Chief of Rome Bureau, Catholic News Service

The Mind of Pope Francis

Jorge Mario Bergoglio's Intellectual Journey

by Massimo Borghesi

foreword by Guzmán Carriquiry Lecour

translated by Barry Hudock



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In memory of Alberto Methol Ferré (1929–2009)

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Foreword

by Guzmán Carriquiry Lecour

Vice President, *The Pontifical Commission for Latin America*

Since Pope Francis was elected in March of 2013, a massive number of books and articles have been published in a variety of languages. Some have been biographical, while others have recounted the pastoral work of the bishop Jorge Mario Bergoglio in Buenos Aires. There are many texts on his reform of the church or of the Roman Curia in particular, on his option for the poor, his style of communication, or his leadership in the current international context. This abundance of publications is a sign of a time full of surprises and of the widespread empathy and interest aroused by the witness and the intense activity of the Holy Father. It undoubtedly demonstrates the curiosity of a vast audience of readers, which transcends the ecclesiastical sphere and embraces people very far from the Church of Rome. Conversations about “Pope Francis” are being carried on among ordinary people as well as the elites of the world.

Among all of these, Massimo Borghesi’s *The Mind of Pope Francis: Jorge Mario Bergoglio’s Intellectual Journey* stands out. It is, in fact, a very important study that examines an essential and neglected aspect of the current pope: *the genesis and development of his thought*. In this book, the author takes an original approach with respect to all the other literature on Francis. Demonstrating an extraordinary capacity for research, the text offers a systematic analysis of the cultural background and the intellectual influences that

have contributed to forming the personality and the mind of Jorge Mario Bergoglio. It is an indispensable contribution to a better understanding of the complex personality of Pope Francis, in which his pastoral, mystical, and intellectual experiences come together.

The scarcity of resources relating to his intellectual background is due, in the first place, to Francis himself, who does not like to show off his talents and qualities in this regard and certainly would not like to be labeled an “intellectual.” Bergoglio, as we know, considers abstract intellectualisms, always at risk of being taken up in ideological currents, to be walls that close off and distract from the relationship between God and God’s people. Moreover, in every homily, catechesis, or address, he avoids theological observations that are not short, clear, and communicated in a simple way. He always prefers a “grammar of simplicity”—which is never simplistic—in his direct and authentic way of expressing himself, in order to address everyone and to reach the hearts of all those who are listening, at whatever their level of Christian development and education. So his language includes colorful expressions and images that are like “snapshots” of everyday reality. Pope Francis speaks simply because he *wants* to!

It is no coincidence that the pope describes the power of communication as a “power of proximity,” full of tenderness and compassion, proper to the pastor guided by the realism of the incarnation. Jesus, too, thanked the Father for having “hidden these things from the great and the wise” and having “revealed them to the little ones” (Matt 11:25). And Pascal, in his *Pensées*, said of Jesus, “He said great things so simply that he seems not to have thought about them, and yet so clearly that it is obvious what he thought about them. Such clarity together with such simplicity is wonderful.” For Pope Francis this is the essential method of approach to the men and women of our time, especially to those who are far from the church and do not possess a Christian formation. We must, he insists, focus on the essential, “on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. The message is simplified, while losing none of its depth and truth, and thus becomes all the more forceful and convincing” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 35). This is the “little way” of faith today. Francis’s *simplicitas* represents, as Massimo Borghesi explains, a point of arrival, and

“behind it lies a rich and original thought process.” This complexity can escape those who, accustomed to the literary, aesthetic, and theological flavor of the texts and the addresses of Pope Benedict, the greatest living theologian, are now confronted with a more “direct” language, aimed at the multitudes of common people rather than the intellectually prepared few.

Along with the confusion of some who are unfamiliar with this pope’s style of communication, one must also note the diffidence of some ecclesiastical and intellectual environments toward a “Latin American,” “Argentine,” “populist” pope, considered to fall short of European cultural parameters. These critics have missed the pope’s universal embrace and his simple, evangelical appeals. They remain closed up in an old Europe, where the embers of the great fire of the fine tradition still burn, but which today generates nothing—no children (we are in the middle of demographic winter) and no new intellectual currents, movements, or political visions that open the way to a destiny of hope. They are like those “doctors of the Law” who wondered if anything good could come from Nazareth, from a “carpenter’s son.” In this case Nazareth indicates the southern end of the world. With respect to this framework, the value of Professor Borghesi’s book is to situate Bergoglio within a rich intellectual tradition that finds its roots in Argentina and its fruitfulness in close dialogue, which it knows how to conduct, with the most fruitful currents of European Catholicism. The stereotype of the “Argentine” pope certainly bears its own truth. However, as this book demonstrates, it falls short. Bergoglio is Argentinian and, at the same time, in the sources of his formation and in his reading, he is deeply European. As his polar dialectic indicates, particularly in the intellectual connections with Romano Guardini, he himself is a “bridge” between two continents. Hence the usefulness of this book by Massimo Borghesi, which offers a picture of extraordinary richness, showing the different cultural and intellectual strands that intertwined in the personality of the future pope and that constitute the illuminating substratum of his magisterium and of his pastoral action.

The reader will thus have the opportunity to understand the true genesis of the thought of Jorge Mario Bergoglio, which until now has remained concealed from his various interpreters. It is a dialectic, “polar” conception of reality that the young student of

philosophy and theology of the Colegio San Miguel developed thanks to the renewal of the Ignatian vision carried out by his professor, Miguel Ángel Fiorito, and by the interpretations of the Spiritual Exercises offered by Jesuit intellectuals like Gaston Fessard and Karl-Heinz Crumbach. Here is rooted his discovery of Jesuit mysticism and his appreciation for the figure of Peter Faber, through Michel de Certeau. The dialectical vision proved invaluable when Bergoglio, as a young provincial of the Argentine Jesuits in the fiery 1970s, developed a synthetic vision of the Society of Jesus, of the church, and of society, in order diligently to avoid the contradictions embraced by the followers of the military dictatorship and pro-Marxist revolutionaries. It is the same dialectical vision that led him to encounter Amelia Podetti, the most perceptive Argentine philosopher of the 1970s, and Alberto Methol Ferré, the most important Latin-American Catholic intellectual of the second half of the twentieth century. Bergoglio's thought, as Borghesi clearly shows, owes much to a tradition of Jesuit thought. It is a tradition that, starting from Johann Adam Möhler, understands the church as *coincidentia oppositorum*, a vision that we find in the work of Erich Przywara, Henri de Lubac, and Gaston Fessard. This orientation explains why Bergoglio chose the "polar opposition" of Romano Guardini as the subject of his doctoral thesis in 1986.

In this way, Borghesi traces a thread in the thought of Bergoglio the presence of which has been missed by many scholars. This also explains, to a large extent, the accusations of those who, hostile to the direction of his pontificate, have not hesitated to accuse Francis of inadequate theological or philosophical expertise. The merit of Borghesi's volume is to locate Bergoglio's intellectual vision within the historical, ecclesial, and political context of Argentina in the 1970s and '80s. We can thus understand his particular position on "Peronism" and his critique of political theology from an exquisitely Augustinian horizon. It also illuminates his sympathy for the "theology of the people," the current of liberation theology developed by the Rio de la Plata school, in which the preferential option for the poor, embraced in the 1979 Puebla document of the Latin American church, united with a firm opposition to Marxism. This school—which included Lucio Gera, Rafael Tello, Justino O'Farrell, Juan Carlos Scannone, and Carlos Galli as protagonists—left its

mark in the Puebla and Aparecida (2007) documents. It also prompted the rediscovery of popular religiosity, a theme very dear to Bergoglio, who is not therefore less attentive to the important place of the “encounter” to Christian witness within the secular horizon of the great metropolises. We also see in his more recent thought the development of the category of beauty and its unity with the good and the true. It is a development that owes much to his reading of the great theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Pope Francis has emphasized “open” discussion, with the wind at its stern, open to the ever greater, always elusive Mystery. For this reason, it is fitting that Massimo Borghesi’s volume certainly does not pretend to close the discussion so much as open the way to further investigation concerning the intellectual biography of Jorge Mario Bergoglio/Pope Francis. The two large, recently published volumes of Lucio Gera’s pastoral and theological writings, for example, offer new material from a key source for further investigation. The thought of Lucio Gera, the father and teacher of a generation of Argentine priests who was buried in the Buenos Aires cathedral at the behest of Archbishop Bergoglio, was profoundly echoed in the most recent General Conferences of the Latin American episcopate. And in any complete account of the intellectual background of Bergoglio—who was professor of philosophy, theology, and literature—his literary passion deserves a place. He succeeded in better understanding the reality of his people by moving from the native, gauchesque poetry like the *Martín Fierro* to the metaphysical, but very different, contemporaries such as Jorge Luis Borges and Leopoldo Marechal. He read Alessandro Manzoni’s *I promessi sposi* several times, with all its implications of popular religiosity, and he loved Dostoevsky’s reading of the intertwining of the human soul between sin, guilt, punishment, forgiveness, and redemption. He also appreciated the paradoxes of Chesterton, and it is not by chance that he described the mystery of the incarnation in the thought of the fathers of the church as “paradox of paradoxes.” He was a reader of León Bloy, this irascible, “politically incorrect” convert, who would have enjoyed seeing himself mentioned in the first homily by Pope Francis: “Anyone who does not pray to the Lord, prays to the devil.” Bloy was important for the conversion of Charles Péguy, whose pages the pope loves to peruse

in the short time his busy schedule of commitments allows him to pick up one of the books in the pile that accumulates on his desk at the Domus Sanctae Marthae. Francis even quoted Bernanos's *Diary of a Country Priest* in an address to priests during the Jubilee Year of Mercy. Familiarity with such work does not constitute a minor aspect of anyone's intellectual biography. As Hans Urs von Balthasar wrote, referring to the great French literature of the first half of the twentieth century, "It could be that among the great Catholic writers there was a greater, more original intellectual life, expansive and able to flourish in the fresh air, than among our modern theologians, short of breath and content with little" (*Bernanos: An Ecclesial Existence* [1956]).

If intellectual formation and priestly and pastoral experience are related, in the biography of Jorge Mario Bergoglio they are both marked by the mystical experience and prayerful discernment that accompanies his days. In the company of the saints—von Balthasar will always say—there is a "theological existence," inasmuch as their life displays, in an existential form, a living doctrine, given by the Holy Spirit for the good of the whole church. Every pastoral action and every theological reflection begins "on their knees," as Pope Francis has often repeated. His intellectual biography, then, is undoubtedly inseparable from the ways along which Providence has led him toward his evangelical radicalism, in encounter with the Lord, for the good of the whole church in the current historical moment.

Introduction

On the evening of February 28, 2013, a white helicopter lifted off from Vatican City and flew over the city of Rome, accompanied by the sound of church bells throughout the capital. It bore Benedict XVI, who had just become the first pope of the modern era to resign from his ministry. The greatest theologian of our time had inherited a difficult legacy, that of John Paul II and a church marked by problems and scandals that had twisted and stained its image in the eyes of the world. His determination to resolve and repair them had proven insufficient in the face of his failing strength.

In Benedict's place came the Argentine Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, "from the other side of the world." Ratzinger's mild sweetness was replaced by Francis's impetuous sweetness, with his simple and direct way of expressing himself and of touching people's hearts. It was a witness that was persuasive enough to change—in the arc of just a few years after his March 13, 2013, inauguration—the face of the church, whose heavy legacy was no longer such an indictment against itself. The global success of the figure of Francis has not drowned out, as in the years of John Paul II, the progressive voice of churches. It supports the humble faith of the peoples, of the simple, of those who are invisible on the stage of history.

Yet this encounter between the papacy and popular reality has not received the applause and appreciation of everyone. As Agostino Giovagnoli writes:

[Francis's] popularity, however, does not extend everywhere and in all environments and, above all, the novelty it brings is not always accepted and understood. This is the case for most European leaders

and, in particular, for the intellectuals and scholars of the old continent. In Europe, in fact, the world of culture seems, at the very least, uncertain about him. There have been few visits by Pope Francis to great cultural institutions, and meetings with academics have been rare. He does not offer scholarly lectures like those Benedict XVI presented at the University of Regensburg or the Collège des Bernardins in Paris. And there have been few opportunities in which he has talked explicitly about works of culture, scientific research, or intellectual problems. But all of this is not enough to explain the distance between Francis and the world of European culture.¹

Actually, Giovagnoli observes, it is not true that Francis is uninterested in culture, and in European culture in particular. “From his writings, in fact, emerges a more complex and elaborate body of thought than might at first seem apparent. Contrary to what is sometimes thought, the more one studies his documents, his addresses, or his homilies, the more one sees that Francis knows the world of intellectuals and has a solid set of beliefs on the role of culture in contemporary society.”² This complexity of Bergoglio’s thought has not yet received, with a few exceptions, the attention it deserves.³ On the contrary, critics, would-be theologians who deduce the pope’s vision from newspaper articles, abound.

Two objections are repeated with disarming monotony. First, Francis is a populist, an Argentine “Peronist” who lacks the ability to understand the subtle distinctions of liberal, modern Europe. Second, Bergoglio lacks the theological and philosophical preparation to handle the Petrine office. The two criticisms blend in the presumption, expressed all over Europe and North America, that whatever comes from Latin America is not up to Western standards. This point of view is expressed well, for example, by Angelo Panebianco:

1. Agostino Giovagnoli, “Francesco sfida gli intellettuali,” *Avvenire*, November 3, 2015, <https://www.avvenire.it/agora/pagine/intellettuali->

2. *Ibid.*

3. Cf. Victor Manuel Fernández with Paolo Rodari, *The Francis Project: Where He Wants to Take the Church*, trans. Sean O’Neill (New York: Paulist Press, 2016); Alberto Cozzi, Roberto Repole, and Giannino Piana, *Papa Francesco: Quale teologia?* (Assisi: Cittadella Editrice, 2016).

It is inevitable—since each of us are children of our own histories—that this pope, like all those who preceded him, will carry with him, along with his faith and his reading of the Gospel, also the experiences, ideas, and feelings that make up the tradition of his land. These traditions do not necessarily coincide with ours. It is plausible that in a country of mature capitalism, which Italy, despite everything, certainly is, there will be many, even among Catholics, who will disagree with Bergoglio on the topics of labor and profit or who do not believe that contemporary wars are the result of greedy capitalists pursuing their wealth. And it is also plausible that many will realize that the pope's economic views derive from a certain interpretation of the Scriptures but also, perhaps, from a strong anticapitalist tradition rooted in his country of origin. In Italy, we have excellent scholars of Latin America in general and of Argentina and its history in particular. Perhaps they should begin to explore the cultural ties between this pope and that tradition.⁴

Francis's limitation is his origin, his being Argentine; Panebianco is far from alone in this judgment. He echoes, in a less moderate tone, Loris Zanatta, according to whom Bergoglio is “the child of a Catholicism suffused with visceral antiliberalism, erected, through Peronism, to guide the Catholic crusade against Protestant liberalism, the *ethos* of which is understood to be a colonial shadow on Catholic identity of Latin America.”⁵ We hear the same criticism from the liberal philosopher Marcello Pera, known for the book he coauthored in 2004 with Joseph Ratzinger, in which he called for a new “civil religion” and, in the context of the war in Iraq, the

4. Angelo Panebianco, “L'equilibrio che cerca la Chiesa,” *Corriere della Sera*, August 21, 2015.

5. Loris Zanatta, “Un papa peronista?,” *il Mulino* 2 (2016), 240. Zanatta's article gave rise to a critical discussion with the Vatican affairs journalist Riccardo Cristiano: Riccardo Cristiano, “‘Bergoglio peronista’: per *il Mulino* è un peccato l'empatia umana,” *Reset*, June 22, 2016; Loris Zanatta, “Le mie critiche a Bergoglio e ai guasti del peronismo,” *Reset*, June 27, 2016; Riccardo Cristiano, “Così l'empatia di Francesco ha riportato la Chiesa nella storia,” *Reset*, June 29, 2016. Cristiano is the author of *Bergoglio, sfida globale: Il Papa delle periferie tra famiglia, giustizia sociale e modernità* (Rome: Castelvecchi, 2015).

return of Europe to a warlike spirit rather than pacifism.⁶ According to Pera, “Both John Paul II and Benedict XVI gave their missions a strong Western grounding. They steadfastly addressed their message to Europe and there was an obvious Western perspective, with our continent seen as the cradle of Western values. Francis, on the other hand, has a purely South American view.”⁷ Francis’s approach to the subject of immigration, says Pera, makes clear that he “detests the West, aspires to destroy it, and does everything to achieve this. . . . The pope displays every South American prejudice toward North America, toward the market, liberties, capitalism.”⁸ According to Pera, “His vision is South American, one of Peronist justice that has nothing to do with the Western tradition of political liberties and its Christian matrix.”⁹

Panebianco, Zanatta, and Pera each express, in imperious tones, the distance with which the secular, *liberal* world views Bergoglio. The Westernist, capitalist, liberalist ideology sees in the Argentine pope a skepticism about the singular way of thinking that has dominated the era of globalization. The pontiff is an adversary and must be treated as such.

To these critics one can add the Catholic conservatives of theocon orientation, similar in mentality to so much of United States Catholicism. They reinforce the opposition between the West and South America that is typical of the liberal, secular right.¹⁰ The simplifica-

6. Joseph Ratzinger–Pope Benedict XVI and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*, trans. Michael F. Moore (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

7. “Il Papa sta secolarizzando la chiesa,” interview with Marcello Pera, *Il Foglio*, November 22, 2016.

8. “Bergoglio vuole fare politica, il Vangelo non c’entra nulla,” interview with Marcello Pera, *Il Mattino*, July 9, 2017.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Cf. Sandro Magister, “Da Perón a Bergoglio: Col popolo contro la globalizzazione,” August 12, 2015, <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1351113.html>; Magister, “Quando Bergoglio era peronista: E lo è ancora,” August 26, 2015, <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1351119.html>; Magister, “‘Il popolo, categoria mistica’: La visione politica del papa sudamericano,” April 20, 2016, <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1351278.html>. In 2013, Magister’s approach was very different: “Bergoglio, rivoluzionario a modo suo,” May 16, 2013, <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1350519.html>.

tions of terms—populism, Peronism—that ignores their historical contexts, in fact, follows a logic of delegitimization, a refusal to tolerate any criticism of the dominant model of globalization. What is surprising among these critics is the absence of any documentation or support of their assertions, as if the present Pontiff lacks any cultural background or ecclesial experience worthy of exploration.¹¹

Massimo Franco aptly writes that “when Bergoglio is depicted as a kind of South American Don Camillo, an obfuscation takes place; the former Archbishop of Buenos Aires cannot be described with European or, worse, Italian categories. But he is not a country curate like Giovanni Guareschi’s fictional character, but an urban priest, indeed, of a megacity. And his simple language comes from a profound knowledge of the territory and its inhabitants, and from a long reflection upon—even at a lexical, in-the-field level—his priestly identity.”¹² Bergoglio’s language, in other words, is “simple” because he *wants* it to be simple. It is simplicity that is rooted in long reflection and in evangelical simplicity, not in any limitation of expression. Behind it lies a rich and original thought process, derived from the Jesuit school and nourished not only by Argentine teachers but also, and above all, by European ones. When young Bergoglio was a student of philosophy and theology at Colegio

11. Andrea Riccardi correctly observes, “When one studies the thought and personality of Francis, the simplifying myths of a populist or sentimental pope disappear. It is captured by studying his background and his thought. Jorge Mario Bergoglio has developed, over the years, an articulate reflection on the crucial issues of the life of the church and its location in contemporary society. He followed with particular attention the changes of the last two decades with the undeniable affirmation of globalization and its consequences on economic and social life. He has given great consideration to the place and the mission of the church today in a transformed, pluralist world, marked by huge cities. He did this by having as his point of reference the Second Vatican Council and the postconciliar years, those of Paul VI and John Paul II. The “laboratory” of this reflection of Pope Francis was Argentina, with its difficulties and contradictions, connected as it was—if only from a religious point of view—to Latin America” (Andrea Riccardi, *La sorpresa di papa Francesco: Crisi e futuro della Chiesa* [Milan: Mondadori, 2013], viii–ix).

12. Massimo Franco, *Imperi paralleli: Vaticano e Stati Uniti: due secoli di alleanza e conflitto* (Milan: Mondadori–Corriere della Sera, 2015), 262. Cf. Franco, *Il Vaticano secondo Francesco* (Milan: Mondadori, 2015).

Máximo in San Miguel, his standard references were the Jesuit intellectuals of the French sphere: Henri de Lubac, Gaston Fessard, Michel de Certeau. Some were representatives of the Lyon school. These are his teachers. They are “European” teachers. They are the same teachers who guided, in part, the thinking of the person who would become both his friend and intellectual point of reference, the Uruguayan Alberto Methol Ferré, the most brilliant Latin American Catholic intellectual in the second half of the twentieth century, editor of *Vispera* and *Nexo*, journals that Bergoglio read assiduously.

European and Argentine teachers: a complex mix that demands to be investigated by anyone who cares to move beyond the simplifications that find fertile ground in ignorance of facts. As Rodrigo Guerra López observes:

The absence of study in Europe of Latin American philosophers and theologians is widespread. I sometimes get the impression that some European (and North American) academics consider Latin American thinking a kind of inferior or secondary exercise, as opposed to the real work being carried out in countries like Germany, France, and even Italy. This would be nothing more than an anecdotal observation if it were not, in my opinion, such an important factor in understanding what is happening with regard to Francis. . . . When John Paul II was elected pope, a special effort was necessary to understand his teaching in the context of his intellectual and pastoral background. For many, it was necessary to study the history of Christians in Poland and the various philosophical traditions at the roots of Wojtyła’s thinking, and to master his arduous philosophy in order to understand in depth the true meaning and scope of, for example, his *Redemptor Hominis*, *Laborem Excercens*, or what would eventually be known as the “theology of the body.” Scholars like Rocco Buttiglione, Maxim Serretti, Tadeusz Styczen, Angelo Scola, and others did incredible work of exploration and explanation that continues to bear fruit today. In my opinion, a similar effort must be made in the case of Jorge Mario Bergoglio, SJ. How many misunderstandings might be avoided if we were to get a better understanding of our pope’s intellectual and pastoral biography! In the major academic institutions dedicated to the dissemination and deeper understanding of the pontifical magisterium, professors and students have scarcely begun to undertake a serious and systematic

study of the writings of Jorge Bergoglio and his most beloved authors, such as Lucio Gera, Juan Carlos Scannone, or Alberto Methol Ferré, not to mention a profound study of the theology of the people or the magisterium of the Latin American episcopate.¹³

Guerra López's demand is entirely justified. English and Italian readers can turn to, among other works, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, an excellent biography of Bergoglio by Austen Ivereigh, who reconstructs with precision the formation, intellectual and otherwise, of the future pope.¹⁴ It is an essential text for understanding Bergoglio's "political" positions, so often misunderstood by his critics. As Ivereigh writes:

Francis's radicalism is not to be confused with a progressive teaching or ideology. It is radical because it is missionary, and mystical. Francis is instinctively and viscerally opposed to "parties" in the Church: he roots the papacy in the traditional Catholicism of God's holy faithful people, above all the poor. He will not compromise on the hot-button issues that divide the Church from the secular West—a gap liberals would like to close by modernizing doctrine. Yet he is also, just as obviously, not a pope for the Catholic right: he will not use the

13. Rodrigo Guerra López, "Aprender los unos de los otros," August 18, 2016, <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1351355.html>. On Argentine philosophy, cf. Diego F. Pró, *Historia del pensamiento filosófico argentino* (Mendoza: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, Instituto de Filosofía, 1973); Alberto Caturelli, *Historia de la filosofía en la Argentina 1600–2000* (Buenos Aires: Ciudad Argentina–Universidad del Salvador, 2001). On Argentine theology, cf. Carlos María Galli, "Investigando la teología en nuestra Argentina," *Teología* 110 (2013), 163–188.

14. Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (New York: Henry Holt, 2014). For a bibliography of biographies of Jorge Mario Bergoglio, cf. Walter Kasper, *Papst Franziskus—Revolution der Zärtlichkeit und der Liebe. Theologische Wurzeln und pastorale Perspektiven* (Stuttgart: Kardinal Walter Kasper Stiftung, 2015). The bibliography appears on pp. 14–15, n. 12, of the Italian edition, *Papa Francesco: La rivoluzione della tenerezza e dell'amore* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2015). An essential biographical synthesis is provided in Alberto Melloni, "Papa Francesco," in Alberto Melloni, ed., *Il conclave di Papa Francesco* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2013), 63–95.

papacy to fight political and cultural battles he believes should be fought at the diocesan level, but to attract and teach; nor does he feel the need endlessly to repeat what is already well known, but wants to stress what has been obscured—God’s loving-kindness and forgiving mercy. And where Catholic conservatives would like him to speak more about morality than social issues, Francis is happy to do quite the opposite, to rescue Catholicism as a “seamless garment.”¹⁵

Ivereigh’s judgment is important in part because it helps us overcome the misconception about a supposed opposition between Francis and Benedict XVI that is promoted especially by conservatives. In fact, the reality is a difference in style and emphases, not in content. Theologian Massimo Faggioli comments:

If the long Wojtyła-Ratzinger pontificate was characterized by the teaching of the Church on moral and social issues, with a strong emphasis on “anthropology” linked to the idea of “natural law,” Pope Francis appears to be motivated by a more historical and cultural vision, in line with the Latin American theology he comes from, and by a more spiritual than theological vision for the ministry of the Roman pontificate. The pontificate of Benedict XVI, “the theologian pope” (in the sense of academic theologian), may be an exception in the history of modern Catholicism.

The shift of emphasis with Bergoglio, from the theological to the spiritual papacy, has some unknowns for the future structure of Catholicism. But presenting an alternative to Ratzinger does not make Bergoglio a progressive or a liberal (just as Ratzinger was not a reactionary). Bergoglio is a “social Catholic” with a subtle and complex vision of “modernity.”¹⁶

This “social” Catholicism, in vogue in the postconciliar years and then forgotten in the age of globalization, conflicts with a certain Catholic approach that is committed to the value of unborn life but not to other social values. That approach criticizes what it considered to be Francis’s theological progressivism (which does not really exist), starting from its distrust of a pope it sees as overly critical

15. Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, 386.

16. Massimo Faggioli, *Pope Francis: Tradition in Transition* (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), 77–78.

of the values of the market. In fact, the pope's criticism is of a society that excludes, takes away opportunities for work, creates new divisions, and does not want to allow a political party for Catholics or face the opposition of the church. As Massimo Franco writes:

Francis is the man of reconciliation in South America's divisive and at times tragic stories. The global equivalent of the reforms he has undertaken within the Vatican, which have met with both controversy and opposition, is the destruction and removal of all the ideological debris and waste left behind after the Cold War. In Latin America, this means tearing down the last "Berlin Wall," that is, the "Havana Wall," as well as other, less visible walls, hidden in the secret archives and in the collective memory of those peoples. It means consigning to the past the civil wars fought in the name of Marxism and capitalism, with the Catholic Church and its bishops in the role of victim, and sometimes of accomplice. Many were shocked by the gift offered to Francis by Bolivian President Evo Morales: a crucifix with the sickle and hammer, crafted by Father Lu s Espinal, who was killed in the 1980s for his work defending the poor and democracy. Failing to notice Francis's perplexed expression at the moment, some wanted to see in the gift an embrace by Francis of an already dead liberation theology of the most Marxist form. In reality, with that gesture, Morales was acknowledging in the pope a kind of leadership never before attributed to the Church, and he was doing so with a gesture of subordination and submission that would have been unthinkable a decade ago.¹⁷

Franco notes that "Francis has destroyed the revolutionary myths of Communism by offering his powerful support to popular movements and giving them a different expression: peaceful, inclusive, but no less critical of what he has called the 'technocratic paradigm' to which he has called for resistance."¹⁸ This is the same paradigm criticized by Romano Guardini, whose work is dear to Bergoglio, and by Augusto Del Noce, an author of reference for Methol Ferr . It is a model that excludes people who are "useless," who are "refuse," the unproductive, the unemployed, the poor, the elderly, those born inferior and those not yet born, the gravely ill, the weak in

17. Franco, *Imperi paralleli*, 263.

18. *Ibid.*, 264.

general. The way out is a way of reconciliation, between the weak and the protected, which creates concord and therefore social and political peace. *Bergoglio's entire system of thought is one of reconciliation*—not an irenic, optimistic, naively progressivist thinking, but rather a dramatic thinking, marked by a tension, that, having matured during the course of his Ignatian studies in the 1960s, finds its first formulation in the 1970s, in the tragic context of an Argentina divided between a right-wing military and left-wing revolutionaries. It is a contrast that marks both the church and the Society of Jesus. From here grows his idea of a “polar,” “antinomian” dialectic that constitutes the golden thread of Bergoglio’s thought, his original, conceptual core.

Bergoglio fought for a synthesis of the oppositions that lacerated the historical reality—not a “meet in the middle” synthesis, nor a mere “centrist” solution, but a theoretical/practical/religious attempt to propose an antinomian unity, an agonistic solution achieved by way of the contrast. It is, therefore, a dialectical view in which reconciliation is not entrusted, as in Hegel, to philosophical speculation, but to the Mystery that acts in history. The model was constructed by Gaston Fessard, in his foundational work *La dialectique des “Exercices spirituels” de saint Ignace de Loyola*, first published in 1956. Subsequently, while living in Germany in 1986, Bergoglio had the opportunity to compare this perspective with the system of polar opposition elaborated by Romano Guardini in his 1925 book *Der Gegensatz: Versuche zu einer Philosophie des Lebendig-Konkreten*. From that point, Guardini, whose philosophical thought was the subject of Bergoglio’s doctoral work, became a key author of reference for Bergoglio, one who accompanied him in his efforts to think through social and ecclesial antinomies and their solutions. Bergoglio’s thought, which in many respects is similar to that of Method Ferré, is structured as *a symphony of opposites*. It is a philosophy that is situated firmly in the flow of Catholic tradition, understood as a *coincidentia oppositorum*, as expressed in the work of Johann Adam Möhler, Erich Przywara, Romano Guardini, and Henri de Lubac. Bergoglio said while still a cardinal:

“Harmony,” I said. This is the right word. In the church harmony is created by the Holy Spirit. One of the first fathers of the church wrote

that the Holy Spirit “*ipse harmonia est.*” The Spirit is harmony itself. He alone is author of, at the same time, plurality and unity. Only the Spirit can inspire diversity, plurality, and multiplicity, and at the same time create unity. Because when we try to create diversity, we end up creating schisms, and when we want to achieve unity, we make uniformity, homogeneity.¹⁹

He has repeated the same perspective as pope:

In other words, the same Spirit creates *diversity and unity*, and in this way forms a new, diverse and unified people: the *universal Church*. First, in a way both creative and unexpected, he generates diversity, for in every age he causes new and varied charisms to blossom. Then he brings about unity: he joins together, gathers and restores harmony: “By his presence and his activity, the Spirit draws into unity spirits that are distinct and separate among themselves” (Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, XI, 11). He does so in a way that effects true union, according to God’s will, a union that is not uniformity, but *unity in difference*.

For this to happen, we need to avoid *two* recurrent *temptations*. The first temptation seeks *diversity without unity*. This happens when we want to separate, when we take sides and form parties, when we adopt rigid and airtight positions, when we become locked into our own ideas and ways of doing things, perhaps even thinking that we are better than others, or always in the right, when we become so-called “guardians of the truth.” When this happens, we choose the part over the whole, belonging to this or that group before belonging to the Church. We become avid supporters for one side, rather than brothers and sisters in the one Spirit. We become Christians of the “right” or the “left,” before being on the side of Jesus, unbending guardians of the past or the avant-garde of the future before being humble and grateful children of the Church. The result is diversity without unity. The opposite temptation is that of seeking *unity without diversity*. Here, unity becomes uniformity, where everyone has to do everything together and in the same way, always thinking alike. Unity ends up being homogeneity and no longer freedom. But, as

19. Gianni Valente, *Francesco, un papa dalla fine del mondo* (Milan: EMI, 2013), 35.

Saint Paul says, “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor 3:17).²⁰

In this complex relationship between unity and diversity lies the nucleus of Bergoglio’s “Catholic” thought. Here, its three polar pairs (fullness/limit, idea/reality, globalization/localization) take shape with four principles: time is superior to space; unity is superior to conflict; realities are superior to ideas; the whole is superior to the part. On this foundation rests his classical doctrine of the unity of the transcendentals of Being (beautiful/good/true) in close contact with the theological reflection of Hans Urs von Balthasar. It is fundamental doctrine because it represents the key to the relationship between Mercy and Truth in the contemporary world. If, as Balthasar affirms, *only love is credible*, then the cosmological-theological way of the medievals and the anthropological way of the moderns must, in this era of relativism and nihilism, give way to Mercy as the “manifestation” of Truth.²¹ It is the evangelical way, the *kerygmatic* path that is at the center of this pontificate, along which Christianity can return, today, to the dynamic of its own beginning. But it is a point strongly rejected by the conservatives, who insist, with the modernists, on holding Mercy and Truth in opposition.

As is clear, a careful analysis of the roots and the development of the thought of Jorge Mario Bergoglio reveals for the European scholar a vision of extraordinary wealth. It is nourished by various sources, linked to each other by a profound logic. As Diego Fares writes:

The reference to Guardini, with his phenomenological capacity to “see” the “living figures” in which the parts contribute to the function of the whole, and the whole to the function of the parts, seems

20. Pope Francis, “Homily on the Solemnity of Pentecost,” June 4, 2017: https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170604_omelia-pentecoste.html.

21. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, trans. David C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004); orig. *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1963).

to give consistency to what Pope Francis tells us. . . . Remember too Erich Przywara, with his thinking on God as the one who is always greater and the Spirit as the one who puts everything in motion and creates harmony in diversity; and Hans Urs von Balthasar, with his ordering of the transcendentals, which places the Beautiful and the Good (always dramatic) before Logic; with his way of opening every finite, philosophical truth to Christ (to push all truths towards Christ) and his art of clarifying transposition (which brings unity in multiplicity; which translates the one Word into many, always with a look of creative and merciful love).²²

We stand before a vision made up of cultural exchanges between Europe and Latin America, an interweaving of ideas from which emerges with strength the Catholic *communio*. Bergoglio is, in his apparent simplicity, a complex figure. He himself is, in his personality, a *complexio oppositorum*. This man, who is criticized as a pontiff for being too concerned about worldly matters, is a “mystic.” The depths of his thought and of his very soul are nourished by the *Exercises* of St. Ignatius, by the mystical thread within the Society of Jesus, which so insistently unites contemplation with action. As Fr. Antonio Spadaro has written: “The key to understanding his thought and his action can be sought and found in the Ignatian spiritual tradition. His Latin American experience is incorporated into this spirituality and must be read in its light if one is to avoid interpreting Francis by falling into stereotypes. His own episcopal ministry, his style of acting and thinking are shaped by the Ignatian *vision*, by the antinomian tension to be always and everywhere *contemplativus in actione*.”²³ Peter Faber—the companion of Ignatius, the tireless traveler in a Europe divided by wars of religion, the sweet and gentle proclaimer of the Gospel and of the peace of Christ—is his model. A “mystical” thinker is an open thinker, who

22. Diego Fares, *Papa Francesco è come un bambù: Alle radici della cultura dell'incontro* (Milan: Ancora–La Civiltà Cattolica, 2014), 37 (cf. also, on the same page, n. 38).

23. Antonio Spadaro, introduction to Jorge Mario Bergoglio–Pope Francis, *Nel cuore di ogni padre: Alle radici della mia spiritualità* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2016), x. Orig., *Meditaciones para religiosos* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Diego de Torres, 1982).

does not close the spirals. As Francis has said, “The mystical dimension of discernment never defines its edges and does not complete the thought. The Jesuit must be a person whose thought is incomplete, in the sense of open-ended thinking.”²⁴ For this reason, Bergoglio’s antinomian dialectic is, unlike Hegel’s, an “open” dialectic, because its syntheses are always temporary, so they must always be sustained and restored, and because reconciliation is the work of God, not primarily of humans. This explains his criticism of a “self-referential” church, closed in on its own “immanence,” marked by the double temptation of Pelagianism and gnosticism. The Christian is “decentered”; the point of balance between opposites is outside of herself.



This book represents a first attempt to outline the thought of Jorge Mario Bergoglio. It benefits from four audio recordings of exceptional importance that the Holy Father very graciously sent me in response to a list of questions that I had sent to him. These recordings are dated January 3 and January 29, 2017, and two of March 13, 2017 (the latter date being the fourth anniversary of his pontificate). Much of their content is reflected in the text of this book and is cited each time. The recordings were accompanied by two communications by the pontiff’s secretary, on February 7 and March 12, 2017, bearing two texts useful to our work. The pope, with his answers, emphasized the essential points of his formation that would have been otherwise difficult to understand. He clarified, in particular, the genesis of his thinking in the 1960s, starting with his reading of interpretations of the *Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola.

24. Pope Francis with Antonio Spadaro, *My Door Is Always Open: A Conversation on Faith, Hope, and the Church in a Time of Change*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 24. An earlier translation of this interview, prepared by a group of translators, was published as Antonio Spadaro, “A Big Heart Open to God: An Interview with Pope Francis,” *America* 209, no. 8 (September 30, 2013), available at <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>. The quotations of the interview in this book will come from *My Door Is Always Open*.

These interpretations centered on the dialectic tension between grace and freedom that lies at the heart of the Ignatian perspective. From here a line of thought took shape that then led him to the encounter with Romano Guardini's polar dialectic. Among the many new insights that emerged from the pope's audio recordings that deserve to be noted are the decisive influence exercised upon him by Gaston Fessard and by the "theology of *as if*," the importance of the French Jesuit journal *Christus*, the mine of ideas and readings, the acknowledgment of debts in his thinking to Amelia Podetti and Alberto Methol Ferré, the direction of his doctoral thesis on Guardini, the importance of von Balthasar's essay on Irenaeus for his anti-gnostic sense, and so on. For all these clarifications and for the time that he has given me, I can only be deeply grateful to the Holy Father, to whom I express my profound thanks.

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Church and Modernity

4

Methol Ferré and the Catholic Risorgimento in Latin America

Vatican II as the Overcoming of the Reformation and the Enlightenment

We have already considered the importance of Alberto Methol Ferré for Bergoglio. The journals he led—*Nexo*, *Vispera*, and then *Nexo* again—profoundly influenced Catholic intellectuals throughout Latin America. In their pages, Methol developed his vision of an “ecclesial geopolitics” dominated by the church and Latin America,¹ as two poles in tension, united and distinct at the same time. As he wrote in 1975, he wished to provide “a reflection that runs between two poles, Latin America and the church, in order to define the current ‘configurations’ that both have taken. It is a compelling problem, because we are Latin Americans engaged in the church and Christians engaged in Latin America. But one pole cannot intersect with the other pole and its conflicts without bringing its own along with it. We are engaged in the conflicts of the two poles, the ecclesial and the secular, which interpenetrate. We cannot

1. On “ecclesial geopolitics,” see Alberto Methol Ferré, “Prologo per Europei,” foreword to Methol Ferré, *Il risorgimento cattolico latinoamericano*, trans. P. Di Pauli and C. Perfetti (Bologna: CSEO, 1983), 12.

be engaged in one without also being engaged in the other.”² It is impossible to separate the poles, he said, because both have the same starting point: the people. He wrote:

[The church is] a universal people “within” peoples. It is a universal people, because it is the people of God, living in the midst of every nation, encountering all manner of opposition, until the final day of history. Without a home of its own, it is the most fragile of peoples and also the strongest, because it resides in the power of the love of Christ, of God. The mystery of the church is founded on the omnipotence of the crucified God who assumed our weakness in order to redeem us, without a homeland of its own on the earth, but residing within peoples and states, submissive to them, sharing their vicissitudes and traditions, and yet with a consistent, ecclesial tradition of its own, because the church is itself a people. The church assumes the traditions of the peoples that make it up and nourishes itself with them, but at the same time it develops a tradition of its own, different from that of all the peoples of the world, and penetrates them from “outside” to constitute itself “inside” and change the ecclesial “outside” to the “inside” of the people of the world.³

In this inside-outside-inside dialectic, the relationships between the church and the world are played out, taking three different forms: secularization, reaction, and inculturation. Exploring these three positions in order to identify the most fitting mode for an encounter of faith with Latin American modernity is the guiding aim of Methol Ferré’s work from the 1970s through the 1990s.

For him, the theology of secularization—which was in vogue in the 1970s, thanks to the work of scholars like Gogarten, Bonhoeffer, Robinson, and Cox—found its starting point in the supremacy of the modern world. “Optimistically speaking, the modern world appears as a monolith. It is the ‘illuminated’ version of the modern world. Taking up the themes of the Enlightenment, it shares the same criticisms of the church that the Enlightenment offered. There can be nothing ‘beyond,’ nothing ‘supernatural’: the task of Chris-

2. Methol Ferré, “La Chiesa, popolo fra i popoli,” in *Il risorgimento cattolico latinoamericano*, 139.

3. *Ibid.*, 146–147.

tians is only to build the secular world, without distinguishing themselves from the secular world.”⁴ According to this stance,

there is no place in the world for anything that is specifically Christian, because it would be “objectification,” “Christianity,” and so forth. Religious contaminations of the faith. Whatever is visibly Christian is impure; only the profane may be visible. An obsession with “purity” that marks the return of the sectarian spirit in the church. For the secularizers, a Christian people could only be a “people of angels in an earthly world.” The process of spiritualization reaches its ultimate limit: only faith remains, naked, pure love as a Kantian transcendental, without a church, without objective content. Here appears an irreconcilable contradiction between secularization and the People of God, the visible, historical subject incarnate in history, in this or that concrete setting. The logic of secularizers is to make the visibility of the church, of the People of God, disappear.⁵

For Methol Ferré, this position, with its uncritical acceptance of the “Enlightenment” version of modernity, is simply a mirror image of its antithesis: the reactionary position that opposes everything modern, conceived, again, in Enlightenment terms. Set against one another’s conclusions, progressives and reactionaries share the same vision of modernity. The reactionary and progressive positions are reciprocally subordinate; they share the same flawed model of modernity.

The theologies of secularization are an inversion of the approach to the modern world that had previously been dominant in the church. This approach was largely derived from the “romantic political theology” (De Bonald, Donoso Cortés, Haller, for example) of the early nineteenth century that saw the Enlightenment as an enemy and that rejected modernity as a whole, based on a mythical and idealized memory of the Middle Ages. It was a reaction of the old, rural world against the emerging bourgeoisie. Forever mourning the passing of the Middle Ages, modernity can only be viewed as a pure deviation. Modernity’s antimodern stance, in this view, can only be understood as anti-Christian.

4. *Ibid.*, 154.

5. *Ibid.*

This is a grave misunderstanding! There are no archetypes, no Christian eras that should be seen as a “model.” There is only Christ. But the simplification of the “antimodern” survived in the church until the Second Vatican Council. Then the theology of secularization carried out a reverse, compensatory simplification: all modernity is good and all of medieval Christianity bad. Christianity is anti-Christian contamination; secularizing modernity is Christian maturity.⁶

In this way two positions, because of the one-sidedness of each, collide, giving rise to an antithetical dialectic that divides the church from within. Drawing on the work of Jacques Maritain, Methol could not accept the medievalist ideology—the “return to the Middle Ages”—driven by the neoscholastic movement of the early twentieth century, which was, thanks to the influence of Spain, widespread in Latin American Catholic circles.⁷ Nor, however, could he share the optimism of the new, postconciliar theologies. He saw the theology of secularization of the 1970s as a reaction to a frozen, closed church, unable to confront the modern world constructively. What was needed was a “critical” approach, able to distinguish between the positive and the negative aspects of modernity. *It is here that we find the originality of Methol’s dialectical Thomism, compared to the scholastic Thomism that was being taught at the Catholic universities of Latin America.* The latter is the heir of the “‘defensive’ era of the Catholic Church that, in general, lasted until the Second Vatican Council. One cannot resist without adapting oneself to some degree. To resist is like a desperate self-defense; it leads to withdrawal into oneself, into a fortress. Resisting means an inability to generate models, and only to survive in the face of existing models determined by others. To resist means to become dependent, because the fight takes place on terrain chosen by others, imposed by others. The Catholic Church of the eighteenth century up to today can therefore clearly be recognized as a ‘dependent society.’”⁸ This is

6. *Ibid.*, 155.

7. Cf. Alberto Methol Ferré, “Maritain: un tomista avventuriero e mal tradotto,” *Incontri* 8, November–December 1982, 43–48.

8. Methol Ferré, “La Chiesa latinoamericana nella dinamica mondiale” (1973), in Methol Ferré, *Il risorgimento cattolico latinoamericano*, 131.

confirmed by its strenuous resistance and its inability to do anything other than resist, by the way it sets its eyes more on the past than the future, because those who resist look to the ages to which they are oriented. This is the origin of the Catholic “medievalism” that emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But by grasping onto the memory of an era that possessed the dynamism to generate decisive models for itself, and “copying” this era, the church made itself incapable of generating models for its own time. One cannot respond adequately to current situations by nostalgically recalling answers that were effective in other situations and at other times. Indeed, this approach is precisely the best way to make oneself unable to respond effectively to one’s own times, and it is precisely the opposite of what medieval Catholics did to generate models. In times of defeat, memory is certainly a support. But the truest and most effective support is the hope and audacity of the project rather than the repetition of what has been and of what, having already been, can never be again.⁹

The approach of the traditionalists is really a surrender to the opposition while standing in opposition to it. Methol wrote, “The reinterpretation of the origin of modernity by the Enlightenment imposed its model. The traditionalist, defensive, dependent integralist accepted the assumptions of the Enlightenment, and in doing so it made the modern age, begun by Descartes, the enemy, seeing it as pure decadence. . . . The integralist is a Catholic who has been conquered by the Enlightenment, who surrenders; the modernist is the same, but is open about it. One freezes, the other dissolves.”¹⁰

Methol effectively grasps the *forma mentis* of both conservative and progressive Catholicism. The failure of both is their failure to rise to a true dialectical thought, capable of integrating opposition: “The church, lacking the energy to offer an opposition that assimilates and overcomes, limited itself simply to ‘opposing.’ Its main goal was to oppose in the trenches, to repel the opponent. And

9. Ibid., 131–132.

10. Methol Ferré, “Il risorgimento cattolico latinoamericano” (1981), in Methol Ferré, *Il risorgimento cattolico latinoamericano*, 260. On the traditionalist Catholic position that moves “in the shadow of De Bonald,” see “Sviluppi della sociologia latinoamericana,” *Vispera* 37 (April 1975).

undoubtedly the church carried out a full-blown rejection. If all I do is fight, I am limited to the field of the dominant models; it is precisely these that ultimately condition me.”¹¹ The dialectic in the life of the church oscillates between two forms of dependence: “The risk of resistance is sclerotization, stiffening, and degeneration; the risk of adaptation to another is simply being absorbed by the other. This is what is happening to us today, at various levels. There is so much ‘serving’ others, without reference to the church or to Christ. These two interdependent moments end either in integralism or in secularization. Both are paths of death, if one does not manage to transcend them by assuming and taking into oneself the other and generating new cultural models.”¹²

This assumption/transcendence requires a way of thinking that is critical and dialectical at the same time, an ability to free the core of truth from the ideologies in which it is inscribed.

To assume and orient a real historical process obviously requires the *conditio sine qua non* of knowing the other, of deeply penetrating the logic of current models, of entering them in order actually to overcome them, in order to respond to reality in a true manner. If I am simply a resister, if I say, “Hegel and Marx are atheists,” and this is enough for me and I lock myself in, this is not a journey. Theologians of the last century were clearly aware of the atheism of Hegel and Marx and denounced them. But it was not enough. It was necessary to penetrate deeply into their motivations, to discover the new problems that they generated. And this was not done. And so today a couple of generations of Catholics are trying in vain to assimilate and understand Hegel and Marx. It will happen that many will die of indigestion, because it is not possible to “consume” Hegel and Marx with impunity, and the task of “overcoming” them is difficult.¹³

According to Methol,

In order to transcend something, I have to incorporate it in some way within myself, by which I mean the church. This is what the

11. Methol Ferré, “La Chiesa latinoamericana nella dinamica mondiale,” 132.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., 133.

Christians did with Hellenic-Roman culture. This happened in the Middle Ages, when “Averroism” was the strongest intellectual energy and Thomas Aquinas creatively absorbed it. One only overcomes what is digested well, because the other is always a very heavy food and eating it greedily risks an ulcer. It is not a matter of “devouring” it in order to destroy it, but to save it, according to that singular dialectic of death and resurrection in which we are immersed.¹⁴

This dialectic, Methol said, was actualized in the life of the church with the Second Vatican Council. In his interview with Alver Metalli, Methol commented:

With the Council the church transcends both the Protestant Reformation and secular Enlightenment. It overcomes them, by taking into itself what is best in both of them. We can also say this: it creates a new Reformation and a new Enlightenment. The Reformation and the Enlightenment were at the time the two big, unresolved issues, on which the accounts had never really been closed. With the Council, they both finally recede into the past. They lose substance and their reason for being and realize the best of themselves in the Catholic intimacy of the church. The church, assimilating them, repeals them as adversaries and takes within itself their constructive power.¹⁵

14. Ibid. “No, nobody needs an enemy. But a mission—the church essentially *is* mission—can be dynamic when it is able to understand the enemy; more precisely, when it acquires the understanding of the ‘best’ of the enemy it faces. . . . In this sense the enemy is ‘outside,’ but it is also ‘within.’ One can see in the enemy a friend who must be redeemed and saved. We need to make the enemy a friend, to find the friend that is in the enemy, knowing that the enemy is already part of us anyway. . . . The originality of Christ is not only love of neighbor, but peculiarly love of one’s enemy. The friend-enemy dialectic in Christian terms cannot be resolved by annihilating the enemy, but by recovering the enemy as a friend. In the worldly order, this is not so; the enemy is liquidated. Either the State eliminates the enemy or it is eliminated by the enemy. In the church things are radically different, and when the church has failed to behave as if they are—as in certain moments of the Inquisition and even more so in the religious wars—history has rightly reproached her” (Alberto Methol Ferré and Alver Metalli, *Il Papa e il filosofo* [Siena: Cantagalli, 2014], 54–56).

15. Ibid., 95.

Assimilation is a form of a dialectical overcoming that separates the truth from error:

In order to respond to the challenges it faced—in order to “update”—the church had to assume into itself the whole of modernity, against which it had spent the entire period of the dissolution of medieval and baroque Christianity defending itself. The fundamental traits of modernity were called Protestant Reformation and secular Enlightenment. The church had given answers to both, but these answers had been limited and somewhat insufficient, in the sense that they had refuted and rejected the unacceptable elements of the Reformation and the Enlightenment, but they had not sufficiently distinguished their truth from their error. An error is powerful precisely because of the truth that it contains; it can therefore be effectively confronted only by understanding the central truth that it bears. . . . In my opinion the Second Vatican Council overcomes modernity for the first time by understanding what was right about the Reformation and what was right about the Enlightenment.¹⁶

In the case of the Reformation, this truth concerns “the affirmation of the People of God and of the laity as a priestly people. In a sense, the Reformation was a great protest of the laity against clericalism.”¹⁷ In the case of the Enlightenment, the truth consists in the fact that “the Council, contrary to the claims of the figures of the late Enlightenment, shows that faith does not disavow the autonomy of the secular, and that it brings new reasons for human development. Heaven fertilizes the Earth, wisely pushes it toward its integral development, elevates it, purifies it. The Council affirms the autonomy of knowledge of nature and history.”¹⁸ This twofold overcoming of the Enlightenment and the Reformation not only reconciles the church with the authentic core of what is modern but also places it in a “postmodern” horizon.

The Second Vatican Council, for the first time, establishes the church in true postmodernity. The postmodernity of which people often

16. *Ibid.*, 95–96.

17. *Ibid.*, 96.

18. *Ibid.*, 99. Similar considerations in Methol Ferré, “Evangelizzazione e cultura” (1980), in *Il risorgimento cattolico latinoamericano*, 195–196.

speak is not really that; it is mere decomposition of modernity, not a *post*-modernity. We are the only postmodernity because we have assumed the best of modernity. We have also discarded traditionalism, though not of course tradition. We do not have to defend ourselves against everything. The pope can ask for forgiveness from Luther in peace, absolutely in peace. One only asks for forgiveness when one is really at peace. This points to the worldwide significance of the Second Vatican Council, with its two wings, *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*, in its two transcendences, in the new epoch that the church places at the level of historical actuality, at the moment that the secular religions have entered in agony the collapse of the secular myth embodied by the USSR: messianic atheism.¹⁹

From Medellín to Puebla: The Latin American Catholic *Risorgimento*

The approach outlined here, in which we see Catholicism close its accounts with modernity, constitutes, for the church of Latin America, a *new beginning*, a historic opportunity: “Twenty or thirty years ago,” Methol wrote in his 1981 essay “Il risorgimento cattolico latinoamericano,”

no one would have dared to foresee the current dynamics of the church in Latin America. . . . But now everything has changed, almost suddenly. What no one could have thought to be feasible, or even possible, is happening: what was thought to be a residue of the past appears as a tendency projecting toward the future. What was static, reactionary, or simply resigned now rises, dynamic and creative, in the heart of the Latin American peoples. The first signs of this emerged with Medellín and then became clear with Puebla. In fact, we need to take a closer look, to try to understand and trace the lines of this historic surprise: the Latin American Catholic rebirth.²⁰

19. Methol Ferré, “Grandes orientaciones pastorales de Pablo VI para América Latina,” in *Pablo VI y América Latina: Jornadas de estudio (Buenos Aires 10–11 ottobre 2000)* (Rome: Istituto Paolo VI–Studium, 2002), 28.

20. Alberto Methol Ferré, *Il risorgimento cattolico latinoamericano*, trans. P. Di Pauli and C. Perfetti (Bologna: CSEO-Incontri, 1983), 208.

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