

From Latin American Problems to World Problems: Similarities in the Analysis of the Reality between the Texts of the Latin American Magisterium and the Pontifical Documents of Pope Francis

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*Catholic Social Teaching in Latin America—portrayed in the documents of the Conference of Latin American Episcopal Conferences (Río, Medellín, Puebla, Santo Domingo, and Aparecida)—seeks to provide pastoral orientations to the social problems of the subcontinent, analyzing reality from a concrete theological perspective: the perspective of the poor. This article analyzes how Latin American problems and the way to diagnose them also appear in the pontifical documents of Pope Francis, especially in *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si'*, applied to the world context. We conclude that the perspective of Latin American theology continues to be valid and relevant for the faithful throughout the world.*

Keywords: Latin American theology, poor, analysis of reality, *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Laudato Si'*, Medellín, Puebla, Aparecida

Introduction

WHEN Francis was elected pope of the Catholic Church, a great expectation was generated regarding what his perspective would be, given his Latin American origins and his closeness to—or distancing himself from—the “theology of the people” [“teología del pueblo”], a development of liberation theology in Argentine territory.¹ Both within Catholicism and other religions and sectors outside the

¹ For some scholars, Francis is close to liberation theology through the theology of the people. See Juan Carlos Scannone, “Pope Francis and the Theology of the People,” *Theological Studies* 77, no. 1 (2016): 118–35, and Rafael Luciani, *Pope Francis and the Theology of the People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 1–36. For others, however,

religious world, the way in which Francis would take on the challenges around the role of Catholicism and religion in a global geopolitical framework was carefully watched.²

Francis' Latin American origin led to distrust of his figure, especially in European and US circles. Massimo Borghesi notes:

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

he is not influenced by liberation theology. See Mario I. Aguilar, *Pope Francis: His Life and Thought* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2014), 15.

² Giuseppe Giordan, "Pope Francis: Effect between Internal Reforms of the Catholic Church and Geopolitical Choices: An Introduction," in *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 30, ed. Ralph W. Hood and Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor (Leiden, the Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2020), 251–55, at 252.

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Europe and North America, that whatever comes from Latin America is not up to Western standards.³

The criticisms were accentuated as a result of the statements of Francis, mainly *Evangelii Gaudium* [hereafter *EG*] and *Laudato Si'* [hereafter *LS*], where strong criticisms are made of the current neoliberal economic model, insofar as it does not respond to the central principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST), such as the common good, human dignity, equity, humanly dignified work, solidarity and ecological responsibility.⁴

Regardless of how these criticisms are appreciated, they agree that Bergoglio is a son of his time and of his geographical context, aspects that affect his way of *doing* theology. The place where theology is born marks the way of doing it, notes Francisco Gómez Hinojosa. The social place is the “from where” the reflection takes place, and in this same correlation, goes the theological place. Theological production is also strongly influenced by its immediate context, and its concerns are linked to its environment. For this reason, the theology of Francis is inserted even more in the life of the faithful, in their concerns, and, due to the Latin American tradition, it follows more the narrative tradition, and not so much the speculative one. It focuses on the facts, on what happens.⁵

This influence is noticeable in the way in which Francis structured his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, expressing the Latin American pastoral method⁶

³ Massimo Borghesi, *The Mind of Pope Francis: Jorge Mario Bergoglio's Intellectual Journey* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018), Introduction, Kindle.

⁴ S. Stewart Braun, “Pope Francis and Economic Democracy: Understanding Pope Francis’s Radical (yet) Practical Approach to Political Economy,” *Theological Studies* 81, no. 1 (2020): 203–24, at 204, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563920907077>.

⁵ Francisco Gómez Hinojosa, *De la teología de la liberación a la teología del papa Francisco. ¿Ruptura o continuidad?* (Madrid: PPC, 2018): 77–128.

⁶ The epistemological source of “see, judge and act” in modern thought is found if we follow Jürgen Habermas (page 16, *Pensamiento postmetafísico*) in “post-Aristotelian logic and Fregean semantics developed in the 20th century.” For him, “he problem does not lie so much in the method as in the impact of the thought: post-metaphysical thought, linguistic turn, situated character of reason and inversion of the primacy of theory over praxis—or overcoming of logocentrism”; in Jürgen Habermas, *Pensamiento postmetafísico*, trans. Manuel Jiménez Redondo (Madrid: Taurus Alfaguara, 1990), 16. This explains why many pastoral letters leave doctrines and start to see the reality (see), name the reality (judge), and transform the reality (act). Hence, the “see, judge and act” method will have a deep reception in the documents of the church of the twentieth century and in the spiritualities sustained by the review of life that will find an echo in societies such as Latin America. Leonidas Ortiz Lozada, “La importancia del método en el Concilio y en el Magisterio Episcopal Latinoamericano,” *Revista Medellín* 32, no. 126 (2006): 313–31.

made explicit in the *Medellín* and *Puebla* documents:⁷ “see, judge and act.” The encyclical begins with the “see” in chapter 1 (nos. 17–61), in which he makes a detailed examination of current environmental problems. In chapters 2 and 3, he addresses the methodological moment of “judging,” both from the Christian faith (chap. 2, nos. 62–100) and from reason (chap. 3; nos. 101–36). This chapter highlights the union of the environment with the economic, social, cultural, daily, and future aspects of humanity. Finally, the pontiff introduces the third methodological time, the “act,” which he develops in chapters 5 and 6 of the encyclical, focusing on the concept of integral ecology.⁸ Making an appeal to all the citizens of the world, he addresses especially Christians, proposing some lines of ecological spirituality based on living our relationship with the world according to the consequences of a true encounter with Christ, following the model of Francis of Assisi, who lived a relationship with creation as a dimension of the integral conversion of the person.⁹

Although the invitation to see, judge, and act is expressed as a method of CST in the work of John XXIII,¹⁰ it is in Latin American theology where it is specified as a method. Pope Francis assumes in his encyclicals the guidelines of this Latin-American theological tradition: “the characteristic situations of an entire epoch or of general circumstances of a certain time and place, which will have to be seen (interpreted) and judged (discerned) through the light of the Gospel itself, to choose and act according to God’s merciful plans.”¹¹

⁷ Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM), *Medellín*, <https://celam.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2-conferencia-general-medellin.pdf>, 1–4, and in CELAM, *Puebla*, <https://celam.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/3-conferencia-general-puebla.pdf>, 29–30.

⁸ Miguel Rubio, “*Laudato Si’*: Una teología de la creación en perspectiva ecológica,” *Moralia* 39 (2016): 89–117.

⁹ Eduardo García Peregrín, “*Laudato Si’*: de Francisco de Asís al papa Francisco,” *Proyección: Teología y mundo actual* 260 (2016): 41–67; Celia Deane-Drummond, “Pope Francis: Priest and Prophet in the Anthropocene,” *Environmental Humanities* 8, no. 2 (November 2016): 256–62, <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3664369>.

¹⁰ “There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: look, judge, act.” Pope John XXIII, Encyclical, *Mater et Magistra* (On Christianity and Social Progress), §236, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater.html.

¹¹ Juan Carlos Scannone, “La Ética Social del Papa Francisco: El Evangelio de la misericordia según el espíritu de discernimiento,” *Teología* 55, no. 126 (2018): 145–62, at 158 (my translation), <https://repositorio.uca.edu.ar/handle/123456789/6807>.

If theological reflection does not involve action, it is empty reflection. That is why Francis encourages people to act on the concrete problems of reality: “Today, we frequently hear of a ‘diagnostic overload’ which is not always accompanied by improved and actually applicable methods of treatment.”¹² This constant call to action reflects the theological imperative contained in Latin American pastoral documents from *Medellín* to *Aparecida*, responding to concrete problems of the people of this continent. Francis applies this way of doing theology to the context of the universal church. He realizes that some of the problems that afflict Latin America are the sufferings of people and communities around the world. After all, as Pierre Bourdieu puts it, “Nothing is more universal and universalizable than difficulties.”¹³

This tension between the local and the universal is part of catholicity and enriches the life of faith. Hence, then, for Francis there is no contradiction in making contributions from particular realities to global contexts because no one can own the truth:

There is no such thing as an isolated particular Church, one who can call herself alone, as if she presumed to be the mistress and sole interpreter of reality and of the action of the Holy Spirit. No one community has a monopoly on interpretation or inculturation. Just as, on the contrary, there is no universal Church that would turn her back, ignore or take no interest in local situations, catholicity demands, asks [*sic*] that there be a polarity between the particular and the universal, between the one and the many, between the simple and complex. To annihilate this tension would be to go against the life of the Spirit. Any attempt, any quest, to reduce communication, to break the relationship between Tradition handed down and practical reality would be to endanger the faith of the People of God. To consider either of these two instances as insignificant is to throw ourselves into a labyrinth which will not lead to life for our people. To break this communication will easily lead us to construct an ideology out of our point of view, out of our theology.¹⁴

¹² Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World), November 24, 2013, §50, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (translations my own).

¹³ Pierre Bourdieu, “The Practice of Reflexive Sociology (The Paris Workshop),” in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, eds. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc JD Wacquant (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 217–60, at 218.

¹⁴ Pope Francis, Video Message of His Holiness Pope Francis to participants in an international theological congress held at the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina, September 3, 2015, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150903_videomessaggio-teologia-buenos-aires.html.

From his journey as an Argentine pastor, Francis collects Latin American theological categories and extrapolates them to the global level, given their relevance to illuminate the realities of many communities and people throughout the world. Thus, some of these categories will be contextualized, analyzing how they are presented in Latin American episcopal documents and are “globalized” by Francis, not in an uncritical and simplistic way, but from deep reflections that were already taking place in Latin America regarding globalization since the 1990s.¹⁵

The Poor as a Theological Place¹⁶

Latin American episcopal documents identify the poor as subjects of prophetic action denouncing social injustice and proclaiming hope in the justice of the kingdom of God. These documents distinguish between poverty as an evangelical virtue and economic poverty, considered a social sin. This approach appears strongly for the first time in the *Medellín* document,¹⁷ with a self-critical perspective toward the ecclesial institution:

In the context of the poverty and even misery in which the great majority of the Latin American people live, we bishops, priests and religious have what is necessary for life and a certain security, while the poor lack what is indispensable and struggle between anguish and uncertainty. And there is no shortage of cases in which the poor feel that their bishops, or their parish priests and religious, do not really identify with them, with their

¹⁵ Cf. Rafael Luciani, “Francis and the Pastoral Geopolitics of Peoples and Their Cultures: A Structural Option for the Poor,” *Theological Studies* 81, no. 1 (2020): 181–202, at 184–86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563920906135>.

¹⁶ The pastoral approach considers the signs of the times in its first meaning as a fundamental principle of relevance and pertinence. In the second meaning, theology understands that historical reality has a sacramental dimension given God is present within it. This same presence demands recognition of the value that the *fides qua* should have for theology. The act of believing in Christ today, according to Jon Sobrino, must configure Christology. This cannot reduce the knowledge of Christ to the *fides quae* transmitted in the texts of the church. What has been valid in the field of spirituality should be accurate by analogy for the discernment of the signs of the times. Jorge Costadoat, in Jon Sobrino, *Theológica Xaveriana* 181 (2016): 38.

¹⁷ The concluding document of *Medellín* is a compilation of the final documents that each commission prepared to address the different issues agreed upon at the Second Episcopal Conference of Latin America (*Medellín*, September 1968). Thus, the text consists of sixteen chapters, one introduction, and one message to the peoples of Latin America. To facilitate citation, the name of the chapter and its corresponding number will apply to the digital edition prepared by José Luis Gómez-Martínez at <https://www.ensayistas.org/critica/liberacion/medellin/index.htm>.

problems and anguish, that they do not always support those who work with them or advocate for their fate.¹⁸

In this context, it is necessary to distinguish between evangelical poverty and material poverty, and to respond with diligence and boldness to the urgency of the times. The *Medellín* document states the following:

We must distinguish:

- a. Poverty¹⁹ as a lack of the goods of this world is, as such, an evil. The prophets denounce it as contrary to the will of the Lord and more often than not as the fruit of injustice and the sin of men.
- b. Spiritual poverty is the theme of Yahweh's poor. Spiritual poverty is the attitude of openness to God, the availability of one who expects everything from the Lord. Although he values the goods of this world, he does not adhere to them and recognizes the superior value of the goods of the Kingdom.
- c. Poverty as a commitment, which assumes, voluntarily and out of love, the condition of the needy of this world in order to bear witness to the evil that it represents and spiritual freedom from material goods. Those who make this commitment follow the example of Christ, who assumed the consequences of the sinful condition of men and that "being rich he became poor" to save us.

In this context, a poor Church:

- Denounces the unjust lack of the goods of this world and the sin that engenders it.
- Preaches and lives spiritual poverty as an attitude of spiritual childhood and openness to the Lord.
- She commits herself to material poverty. The poverty of the Church is, in fact, a constant in the history of salvation.²⁰

In this way, the church welcomes poverty as an evangelical virtue and option but rejects it when it is the fruit of injustice and structural sin. This

¹⁸ CELAM, "Pobreza de la Iglesia," *Medellín*, 3 (my translation).

¹⁹ The discernment of the sign of exclusion implies arriving at the moment of action in lucid and comprehensive orientations toward people who live and suffer different types of discrimination. See Virginia Azcuy, "La pobreza de la Iglesia y los signos de los tiempos: Medellín como recepción inacabada del Vat II," *Teología* 110 (2013): 135–36.

²⁰ CELAM, "Pobreza de la Iglesia," *Medellín*, 4–5.

is something that will be characterized in the Third Latin American Episcopal Encounter, held in Puebla in January 1979:

We therefore verify as the most devastating and humiliating scourge, the situation of inhuman poverty in which millions of Latin Americans live, expressed by infant mortality, lack of adequate housing, health problems, starvation wages, unemployment and underemployment, malnutrition, job instability, and compulsory mass migration.

By analyzing this situation more in depth, we discover that this poverty is not an accidental stage, but the product of economic, social and political situations and structures, although there are also other causes of poverty. The internal state of our countries, which in many cases finds its origin and support in mechanisms that, because they are impregnated, not with an authentic humanism, but with materialism, produce on an international level, the rich who are increasingly rich at the expense of the poor who are increasingly poor. This reality therefore requires personal conversion and profound changes in the structures that respond to the legitimate aspirations of the people towards true social justice.²¹

This situation led to the decision in the Latin American Church for a preferential option for the poor, based on the reading of the signs of the times, seeking to accentuate its exercise of evangelization “to contribute to the construction of a new, more just and fraternal society.”²² This option for the poor will be reaffirmed in Santo Domingo (October 1992), seeking human advancement through solidarity as an evangelical principle, which consists of:

Doing what Jesus Christ did, when in the synagogue he showed that he came to “evangelize” the poor (cf. Lk 4:18-19). He “being rich became poor to enrich us with his poverty” (2 Cor 8:9). He challenges us to become authentic witnesses of evangelical poverty in our lifestyle and in our ecclesial structures, just as he did. This is the foundation that commits us to an evangelical and preferential option for the poor, firm and irrevocable but not exclusive or excluding, and solemnly affirmed in the Medellín and Puebla Conferences.²³

In order to combat the dynamics of impoverishment with solidarity, Santo Domingo affirms that the situation must be interpreted with the lens of liberation-reconciliation. In Jesus, integral liberation is achieved: “liberation from sin, death and slavery, which is made of forgiveness and reconciliation.”²⁴

²¹ CELAM, *Puebla*, 33 (my translation).

²² CELAM, *Puebla*, 31.

²³ CELAM, *Santo Domingo*, <https://celam.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/conferencia-general-santo-domingo.pdf>, 67–68 (my translation).

²⁴ CELAM, *Santo Domingo*, 50.

Thus, the preferential option for the poor must be energized by solidarity, seeking reconciliation between human beings, a topic that will be expanded at the Latin American Episcopal Conference of Aparecida (May 2007) using the evangelical metaphor of the shared table:

The acute differences between rich and poor invite us to work with greater effort in being disciples who know how to share the table of life, the table of all the sons and daughters of the Father, an open table, inclusive, in which no one is left behind. Therefore, we reinforce our preferential and evangelical option for the poor.²⁵

Being a theological category ingrained in Latin American theological thought since its inception, the preferential option for the poor²⁶ has a central place in Francis' writings. Thus, to address the social dimension of evangelization, he expresses that faith in Christ made poor and close to the poor and excluded is the source from which concern for the integral development of the most abandoned of society springs (cf. *EG* §186). Therefore, the path he proposes is "to listen together with God to the cry of the poor" (*EG* §187), calling for the liberation and promotion of the poor so that they can fully integrate into society. This is a call to include them with dignity, having the attitude of

²⁵ CELAM, "Final Message," *Aparecida*, <https://celam.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/5-conferencia-general-aparecida.pdf>, 30 (my translation).

²⁶ It is not unknown that the presence of theology in Latin America, in principle, can be found from the beginning of colonization. This was based on European themes and interests, in which imperial conquest and the mission of Jesus Christ were identical. Although not with the words preferential option for the poor, but in its content, however, it is found in the thought of preachers such as Antón Montesino OP, (1475–1540), the testimony of Bartolomé de las Casas OP (1474–1566), Antonio San Miguel, Monje Jerónimo (1704–1804), and Luis Beltrán OP (1784–1827), who protested against the bad treatment inflicted on the Indigenous people. In them an option for the most fragile of society in previous times is recognized. See Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movement Theory* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 11–12. However, Monsignor Marcos McGrath, before Vatican II, pointed out that in the European and North American bibliography there was not a work written and published in Latin America in philosophy and theology. For his part, Joseph Comblin affirmed that theology on the continent was Western in nature; there was no theological production. In fact, having no history, theology would be a slavish repetition of European themes. See Jorge Costadoat, "La formación teológica en América Latina antes del Concilio," *Estudios eclesiásticos* 95, no. 373 (2020): 442. This same author presents a brief review of theology in Latin America, after the Second Vatican Council, in whose theology one can begin to recognize a production of theologians from this latitude of the world. See Jorge Costadoat, "Vigencia de la teología latinoamericana de la liberación: a cinco décadas de su origen," in *Theological Xaveriana* 71 (2021): 1–3.

God, who hears the cry of the poor, comes down to liberate them, and sends us to them. The expressions, invitations, and developments made in the *Medellín* document resonate in Francis.

The Latin American pastoral call of complementing liberation with solidarity is also present in the *Santo Domingo* document.²⁷ Francis points out that the church has recognized the need to listen to the cry of the poor, but says that it comes from the liberating work of grace in each one and that it is not just a mission of some. Thus, the church is guided by the gospel of mercy and by love for the human being, “she hears the cry for justice and wants to respond to it with all her might” (*EG* §188). (It is noteworthy that the phrase “cry for justice” in *EG* §188 comes from Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Libertatis Nuntius* [6 August 1984], XI, 1. In turn, that document is citing *Puebla*, 87.) Using this framework, we understand the request of Jesus to his disciples:

“You yourselves give them something to eat!” (Mk 6:37): it means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter. The word “solidarity” is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community, and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few.²⁸

Thus, as in *EG* §§7 and 57, solidarity should be lived as the decision to give back to the poor what is due to them (cf. *EG* §189). The text insists on listening to the cry of entire peoples, of the poorest, because peace is based on respect not only for human rights, but also for the rights of peoples (cf. *EG* §190). Here the call is for shepherds who have to listen to the cry of the poor (cf. *EG* §191), and only when that cry is heard, it becomes flesh, when one feels in one’s gut the pain of others. Hence, the recurring theme at the biblical level is that of mercy (Matt 5, 7; James 2, 12-13; Dan 4, 24; Tob 12, 9; Eccl 3, 30; 1 Pet 4, 8) (cf. *EG* §193). One must study the Bible in order to be faithful to the way that Jesus taught us, in contact with reality. Because the message is so clear, direct, and eloquent, then no ecclesial hermeneutics has the right to

²⁷ It must be taken into account that solidarity is a category that had been developed in the corpus of CST from the notions proposed by Pope John XXIII in *Mater et Magistra*, and expanded by John Paul II in several of his writings; ccf. Meghan J. Clark, “Pope Francis and the Christological Dimensions of Solidarity in Catholic Social Teaching,” *Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (2019): 102-22, at 103-04, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563918819818>.

²⁸ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §188.

relativize it or to obscure or weaken its exhortative meaning, but rather an obligation to help us assume it with meaning and fervor.

Thus, interest in study of the Bible is not only academic or doctrinal. The conceptual apparatuses are to favor contact with the reality that it tries to explain and not to distance us from it. Those who defend orthodoxy passively are accomplices of political regimes that practice injustice. Moreover, the Pauline criterion for communal life, which is relevant today, is recalled: “not to forget the poor” (Gal 2, 10) and not to allow oneself to be devoured by the individualistic lifestyle of the pagans (cf. *EG* §195). The poor are so important to God that he himself became poor (2 Cor 8, 9) (cf. *EG* §197).

In *EG* the category “poor,” or “the poor,” is related to commitment, which does not consist exclusively of actions or programs of promotion and assistance. There is a difference between the option for the poor and any attempt to use the poor in the service of personal or political interests. All must be concerned with the poor and with social justice (cf. *EG* §201). The economy and income distribution, the need to solve the structural causes of poverty, are a way to heal society (cf. *EG* §202). Reliance upon welfare programs should not be perpetual but rather temporary. Here Francis names the causes of poverty: the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation, which are causes of inequality and the world’s problems. This had already been declared, with the nuances of the time, by the *Puebla* document, which extended a similar invitation to be challenged by the poor, for the promotion of social justice.

The tradition of Latin American pastoral thought is not present only in *EG*. It is also explicit in *LS* with a novelty. The earth “is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor.”²⁹ This indicates the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet. Because everything is connected, the document criticizes the new forms of power and economy that derive from technology (cf. *LS* §16). Pollution, garbage, and the throwaway culture affect everyone, but especially the poorest, causing countless diseases and deaths (cf. *LS* §25). It is these same poor who suffer the most from the effects of climate change, a global problem with serious environmental, social, and economic dimensions (*LS* §48).

If in Medellín and Puebla, it was said that the majority of the inhabitants of Latin America were poor and excluded, Francis now brings that reality to the world level, affirming that the majority of the world are in fact marginalized. Therefore, the true ecological approach is a social approach, which must

²⁹ Pope Francis, Encyclical, *Laudato Si’* (On Care for Our Common Home), May 24, §2, 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

integrate justice into discussions about the environment, to listen to both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor (cf. *LS* §49). This issue had been worked on by then-Cardinal Bergoglio, president of the final drafting commission of the *Aparecida* document. The document invited the church to:

Deepen pastoral presence in the weakest populations and those most threatened by predatory development, and support them in their efforts to attain equitable distribution of land, water, and urban spaces, [and] pursue an alternative development model, one that is comprehensive and communal, based on an ethics that includes responsibility for an authentic natural and human ecology, which is based on the gospel of justice, solidarity, and the universal destination of goods, and that overcomes its utilitarian and individualistic thrust, which fails to subject economic and technological powers to ethical criteria.³⁰

In *LS* the theme of mercy raised in *EG* is brought up again, and it is contextualized to include nature. Francis points out the inconsistency between concern about animal trafficking and indifference to human trafficking, neglecting the poor. He recalls that 20 percent of the world's population consumes resources to such an extent that it robs the poor (cf. *LS* §95). Dehumanizing misery is in contrast to wasteful and consumerist overdevelopment (cf. *LS* §109). The level of specialization of technology prevents finding ways to solve complex problems, especially those of the environment and the poor (cf. *LS* §110). The culture of relativism leads to treating the other as an object. Here he takes up *EG* §204, in which everything is left to market forces (cf. *LS* §123). In *LS* §128, Francis addresses work as a necessity, part of the meaning of life and human fulfillment. For this reason, helping the poor with money must be only a temporary solution. The great objective would be to allow them to have a decent life through work. The preferential option for the poor, according to *EG* §123, is a principle of the common good (cf. *LS* §158). Nations should focus on the eradication of poverty, contributing to social development, and analyzing scandalous consumption (cf. *LS* §172), as well as addressing the reduction of pollution and the development of poor countries and regions (cf. *LS* §175). This priority should be a requirement of faith to the extent that most of the planet's inhabitants declare themselves believers, and it should provoke religions to enter into a dialogue between them oriented to the care of nature, to the defense of the poor, and to the construction of networks of respect and fraternity (cf. *LS* §210).

Just as *Aparecida* concludes with a eucharistic invitation through the metaphor of the shared table, Francis takes the same reference, adding the

³⁰ CELAM, *Aparecida*, 242.

dimension of rest, because rest becomes a lens that allows us to once again recognize the rights of others. Consequently, the day of rest, whose center is the Eucharist, sheds its light on the entire week and motivates us to incorporate the care of nature and the poor (cf. *LS* §54).

Development under an Economy of Death

Between the conferences of Medellín and Aparecida, passing through Puebla and Santo Domingo, the notions of development, common good, option for the poor, and the people of God are developed—not in a linear sense, but polyhedral.³¹ The set of these notions supports a *style* or way of living, thinking, feeling, and acting in the world, which Francis assumes. He proposes a personal, community, and social conversion in the dimensions of thinking, feeling, and acting, which in turn, lead to socioeconomic, cultural, and ecological transformation.³²

The first two notions (development and the common good) became a concern and a source of ethical inspiration after World War II and are part of ecclesial heritage since Vatican II. Those that follow (the option for the poor and the people of God) can be identified as Latin American heritage and as an expression of the various theological currents of the continent. In this sense, it is important to take them as narratives (what is told, its why and for what) that imagine and construct invitations and interpellations for a lifestyle that saves the planet and improves social conditions.³³

The modern notion of development took root in the last years of World War II and acquired discursive legitimacy with the inaugural speech of US President Harry Truman, in 1949.³⁴ This inaugural notion generated very

³¹ The image of the polyhedron is taken from *EG* §236: “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.”

³² The theological concept of “style” as a key to reading *Laudato si’* is defined by Jiménez as one of joy, confidence, and freedom: “It is not a style of escape from the world or of avoidance of problems. Nor is it a style of longing for past times.... The particular style of Francis seeks to be rooted in the Gospel and invites conversion and reorientation towards the future.” Luis Orlando Jiménez, “El concepto teológico de “estilo” como clave de lectura de *Laudato si’* y *Gaudete et exsultate*: una manera de encontrar a Dios en la acción transformadora del mundo,” *Theologica Xaveriana* 70 (2020): 1–28, at 10, <https://doi.org/10.11144/javeriana.tx70.ctecl>.

³³ Jiménez, “El concepto teológico de “estilo” como clave de lectura de *Laudato si’* y *Gaudete et exsultate*,” 11.

³⁴ Sachs states the following about this: “Truman’s imperative to develop meant that societies of the Third World were no longer seen as diverse and incomparable possibilities of

diverse variants throughout the following decades.³⁵ Ecclesial discourse in general, and the magisterium in particular, does not ignore these influences. The latent concern for the development of peoples in the only pastoral constitution of Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), and the encyclical of Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (1967, [hereafter *PP*]), immediately influenced the reflections of the assembled Latin American magisterium in Medellín (1968).³⁶ What *Medellín* says, although it is marked by the narrative and correlate of development/underdevelopment, departs from modernizing approaches and recognizes (while criticizing, adapting, or limiting) contributions from dependency approaches.³⁷

human living arrangements but were rather placed on a single ‘progressive’ track, judged more or less advanced according to the criteria of the Western industrial nations.” Wolfgang Sachs, *Planet Dialectics: Explorations in Environment and Development*, (London: Zed Books, 1999), 4.

³⁵ The modernization or neoclassical approach, strongly influenced between 1945 and 1965, deepens the horizon exposed by Truman. The failure to fulfill the promises of modernizing development, in addition to the deep political and social deterioration, is the perfect context for the emergence of the dependency approach (between 1965 and 1980). This approach emphasizes the social and political variables of underdevelopment. Halfway between these two approaches, environmentalist approaches emerge that will offer the concept of sustainable development (1970–1990) and human-scale development approaches (1975–1980). These are confronted by neo-modernizing approaches (from the 1980s and their neoliberal recycling until our decade), which, in their political and economic influence in the first decades of the twenty-first century, is opposed to new approaches around human development (1990–2000) and sustainable development (2000–2010). See Esthela Gutiérrez Garza, “De las teorías del desarrollo al desarrollo sustentable: Historia de la constitución de un enfoque multidisciplinario,” *Ingenierías* 11, no. 39 (June 2008): 21–35, <https://es.calameo.com/eya-academy/read/00350627055073855f05d>.

³⁶ In fact, *PP* acts as the great founding story of all the Latin American episcopal conferences from Medellín onward. See Carlos Cerda Dueñas and Salvador Leetoy, “El desarrollo es el nuevo nombre de la paz: contexto, secuencia y vigencia de la encíclica *Populorum progressio*,” *Claves del pensamiento* 12, no. 24 (December 2018): 1–33, at 1–8, https://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1870-879X2018000200001.

³⁷ Faced with a developmentalism (modernization approach) that causes inequity and injustice, Pope Paul VI calls for “a concrete action, in favor of the integral development of man and the solidarity development of humanity” (*PP* §5). Development “is not reduced to simple economic growth.” Its authenticity lies in “promoting the whole man and all men” (*PP* §14) and, in this sense, “it is the passage, for each and everyone, from less humane living conditions to more humane conditions” (*PP* §20), “specifying that moral deficiencies and oppressive structures are also taken into account, as well as recognition of the dignity of each person, cooperation in the common good, recognition of the supreme values and of God and the faith (*PP* §21).” Pope Paul VI, Encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of

The *Medellín* document states the importance of reading the signs of the time in the middle of a complex social, economic, and political context. Thus, it shows, in a prophetic way, an objection of the totalitarian government and institutionalized violence, which generates deep injustices and underdevelopment marked “by massive phenomena of marginality, alienation and poverty”³⁸ and is conditioned “in the last instance, due to structures of economic, political and cultural dependency with respect to the industrialized metropolises.”³⁹ In this context, the importance of development is undertaken from a critique of modernization paradigms, which reduce it to a quantitative and utilitarian issue:

Developers deal preferentially with the means of production, which, according to them, should be modified accordingly in quality and quantity.... They maintain that marginalized people must be integrated into society, as producer and consumer. They place more emphasis on economic progress than on social promotion of the people.⁴⁰

The notion of development that it seeks to build, in accordance with the conciliar teachings, is one that is “capable of freeing our men from the cultural, social, economic and political servitudes that oppose our development.”⁴¹ Moreover, this is underpinned in the supernatural dimension that conditions the fullness of a Christian life. It is about *integral development*, which reflects peace, the product of justice, and the creation of a new order: “The passage from less humane conditions to more humane conditions is the new name for peace.”⁴²

This comprehensive development approach goes beyond the economic realm and is framed in the social and cultural realms, aspiring to make the person the subject of their own development, allowing an authentic human community to come into being. This “takes place in time and is subject to a movement that constantly implies change of structures, transformation of attitudes, conversion of hearts.”⁴³

Eleven years after *Medellín*, *Puebla* reiterates the general note of authoritarian governance and institutionalized violence, although *Puebla* must be understood in its context. This includes a new developmentalism promulgated by the Trilateral Commission, the emergence and consolidation of National Security doctrines with the consequent increase in the repressive character of the

Peoples), March 26, 1967, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/es/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html (my translation).

³⁸ CELAM, “Movimientos de laicos,” *Medellín*, 2.

³⁹ CELAM, “Movimientos de laicos,” *Medellín*, 2.

⁴⁰ CELAM, “Pastoral de élites,” *Medellín*, 7.

⁴¹ CELAM, “Educación,” *Medellín*, 7.

⁴² CELAM, “Catequesis,” *Medellín*, 8.

⁴³ CELAM, “La paz,” *Medellín*, 14.

States, the crisis of the models proposed by ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), a tributary of the dependency approaches, and the emergence of certain socialist alternatives.⁴⁴

In its “Message to the Peoples of Latin America,” *Puebla* outlines the reality of Latin American (under) development. This reality is a condition of being a satellite both economically and politically as well as ideologically in the midst of a growing arms race. In this sense, the issue of integral development is seen as a different path, and in contrast to other paths of development that by putting “man at the service of the economy” are classified as “forms of idolatry”: the capitalist and the collectivist.⁴⁵ The term “idolatry” is new in use with respect to *Medellín*. *Puebla* defines idolatry as “the values erected in idols or those values that, without being so, a culture assumes as absolute.”⁴⁶ Therefore, one of the pastoral tasks consists of liberating people from those types of idolatry that, in terms of *Medellín*, referred to systems that violate human dignity but, in *Puebla*, are specified as idolatry of wealth and political idolatry,⁴⁷ a divinization and totalitarian use of political and economic power converted into forms of institutionalized injustice. Along with these idolatries, ecological issues begin to be articulated. Not only is the inhuman social cost of development technocracies recognized, but also the serious deterioration of the human relationship with the environment.⁴⁸

Development is, therefore, something more than a reference to the material forces of production. It is a dynamism that must go hand in hand with liberation in order to generate an evangelizing force that allows human advancement. Development refers to human promotion, an idea that will be expanded in the *Santo Domingo* document.

Indeed, in *Santo Domingo*, development as human promotion argues with contemporary proposals for sustainable development, which in their claim to “combine economic growth with ecological limits” still carry the danger of privileging minorities. Therefore, development proposals have to be subordinated to ethical criteria⁴⁹ because “an ecological ethic implies the

⁴⁴ To delve into this context, see Enrique Dussel, *De Medellín a Puebla. Una década de sangre y esperanza (1968-1979)* (Buenos Aires: Docencia, 2017).

⁴⁵ CELAM, *Puebla*, 88 (my translation).

⁴⁶ CELAM, *Puebla*, 76.

⁴⁷ Among other liberation theologians, the critical theological approach to the issue of idolatry and capitalism as religion can be broadened. Allan Da Silva Coelho, *Capitalismo como religião: Uma crítica a seus fundamentos mítico-teológicos* (São Paulo: Universidade Metodista de São Paulo, 2014).

⁴⁸ CELAM, *Puebla*, 35 and 88.

⁴⁹ To expand on what is related to the debate on how development is not only a technical and socioeconomic issue but also an ethical matter, consult Ildefonso

abandonment of a utilitarian and individualistic morality. It postulates the acceptance of the principle of the universal destiny of the goods of the creation and promotion of justice and solidarity as indispensable values⁵⁰ and insists that one must overcome “the mentality and the praxis of development induced from outside, in favor of self-development so that these peoples are the architects of their own destiny.”⁵¹ This will generate a culture of solidarity as opposed to individualism and the predominant culture of death.⁵²

Santo Domingo dedicates an entire chapter exclusively to human promotion, establishing that it is a privileged dimension of the new evangelization that must respond to the signs of the times marked by the violation of human rights, the deterioration of the environment, the inequitable distribution of land, impoverishment and solidarity, as well as social problems associated with work, mobility, democratic order, economic order, and integration.⁵³ In sum, it could be stated that in the *Puebla* document, the Conference of Latin American Bishops (hereafter CELAM) adopted *Medellín*'s inspiring concern about an authentic human development, referring to it as human promotion. *Santo Domingo*, in turn, built it upon the previous bishop's assemblies.⁵⁴ However, the notion of integral development takes center stage in the *Aparecida* conference (2007).

Aparecida highlights, once again, the importance of capturing a notion of development that must have an equitable character on a quantitative basis, a cumulative process of goods and services at the service of the populations. Although, this basis is insufficient—even being focused on the common good—for the achievement of human happiness, due to that “profound law of reality: life only develops fully in fraternal and just communion.”⁵⁵ Given this, development in *Aparecida* must be comprehensive and solidary on the

Camacho, “Desarrollo: perspectiva ética y cristiana,” *Revista de Fomento Social* 76, no. 2 (2021): 439–73.

⁵⁰ CELAM, *Santo Domingo*, 64.

⁵¹ CELAM, *Santo Domingo*, 89.

⁵² On this formulation and its insufficiency as an antimodernist critique, see José de Jesús Legorreta, *Modernidad, secularización e Iglesia en América Latina. Los obispos latinoamericanos y el cambio cultural* (Mexico: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2013): 54–56.

⁵³ See CELAM, *Santo Domingo*, 62–77.

⁵⁴ Not without tensions and lines of disagreement, which they acknowledge, especially in relation to the notion of human promotion. See Víctor Codina and Jon Sobrino, *Santo Domingo 92. Testimonial chronicle and contextual analysis* (Bilbao: Sal Terrae, 1992): 19–39; Germán Neira Fernández, “Human Advancement: A Privileged Dimension of the New Evangelization,” *Theologica Xaveriana* 105 (1993): 49–65, <https://revistas.javeriana.edu.co/index.php/teoxaveriana/article/view/21865>.

⁵⁵ CELAM, *Aparecida*, 194.

one hand, and sustainable and respectful, on the other.⁵⁶ Only in this way is a dignified life possible that does not make work precarious and preserves nature, and affirms the universal destiny of goods from their regulated use according to principles of distributive justice and intergenerational solidarity.

Ultimately, *Aparecida* offers the notion of development as the matrix of a dynamic peace, under the tutelage—again—of *PP*, seeking:

An alternative, comprehensive and solidary development model, based on an ethic that includes responsibility for an authentic natural and human ecology, which is based on the gospel of justice, solidarity and the universal destiny of goods, and which goes beyond utilitarian and individualistic logic, which does not subject economic and technological powers to ethical criteria.⁵⁷

In these words lies the convention developed by CST, concerning the centrality of the subject.⁵⁸ Internal development, or true development, tries to overcome and oppose an insufficient development, which comes to be classified as predatory if it is restricted to mere economic development,⁵⁹ that is nothing more than a mere process of accumulation of goods and services that takes precedence over the preservation of nature (with consequent damage to biodiversity, the depletion of water reserves and other natural resources, air pollution, and climate change). An insufficient notion of development also overrides the justifiable concerns of national, regional, and local economic actors.⁶⁰

All these discussions around the notion of development are framed within the ecclesial concern for the common good, developed by CST since Vatican II, and whose discussion prompted, in particular, the primary concern of the subsequent papacy of Pope Paul VI.⁶¹ Thus, the common good as the “principle to which every aspect of social life must refer to find fullness of

⁵⁶ CELAM, *Aparecida*, 241.

⁵⁷ CELAM, *Aparecida*, 241.

⁵⁸ For Hinkelammert, at the center of the preconciliar doctrine is the person; at the center of postconciliar doctrine is the subject. In the postconciliar doctrine, the subject “is projected onto the external world to transform it through his work in function of the satisfaction of his needs [establishing a necessary] existential solidarity among men, given the dignity of each one of the subjects as the subject of work. and the consumption of a product produced in a land that belongs to everyone.” Franz Hinkelammert, “From Social Doctrine to Social Doctrine?,” *Steps* 9 (1987): 1–9, at 5.

⁵⁹ See Ildelfonso Camacho, “Desarrollo: perspectiva ética y cristiana,” *Revista de Fomento Social* 76, no. 2 (2021): 439–73.

⁶⁰ CELAM, *Aparecida*, 16.

⁶¹ See Antonio Argandoña, *The Common Good* (Barcelona: IESE Business School, 2011), 2.

meaning⁶² is manifested as the ultimate horizon of various roles and functions that human beings, especially believers, must assume.⁶³

Thus, the concepts of development and the common good are united in the Latin American theological tradition. Development, with all the nuances that it has throughout ecclesial documents, is part of the broad universe of concrete ways of building human dignity. It represents for Latin American magisterium, on one hand, an opportunity to differentiate themselves from social and political managers; but on the other, to point out a route that can be integrated toward more authentic ways of promoting the common good. Beyond the nuances and aspects of discussion just outlined, the truth is that the notion is part of a movement to contemplate reality and the world's problems, seeking to leave a positive mark on it,⁶⁴ which will have an impact on the pontificate of Francis.

Francis understands the common good from the implications of economic development indicated previously. That is why he is emphatic that the prevailing economic system does not point to the common good, but to particular interests that threaten life: "Just as the commandment 'do not kill' sets a clear limit to ensure the value of human life, today we have to say, 'no' to an economy of exclusion and inequality. That economy kills."⁶⁵

Such concern for the common good on the part of Francis is in line with the legacy of *PP* and other writings of his predecessors, who at the time also made harsh criticism of market systems that have attacked the common good. Francis has done so more emphatically, however, which has earned him criticism from certain religious sectors.⁶⁶

Francis' concern is not gratuitous: it is the experience of Pastor Bergoglio, immersed in the bustle of the economic situation and the models of competition that have been imposed in Latin America and with considerable vigor in

⁶² Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (US Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), 164.

⁶³ To reconstruct the theoretical debate around the role that religion plays within a social system and the analysis of the documents of the social thought of the church on the process of globalization, development, the environment and ecology, see Juan Cruz Esquivel and Fortunato Mallimaci, "Religión, medioambiente y desarrollo sustentable: la integralidad en la cosmología católica," *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 60 (2017): 72–86, <https://dx.doi.org/10.7440/res60.2017.06>.

⁶⁴ See Jiménez, "El concepto teológico de "estilo" como clave de lectura de *Laudato si' y Gaudete et exsultate*," 21.

⁶⁵ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §53.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Andrew M. Yuengert, "Pope Francis, His Predecessors, and the Market," *The Independent Review* 21, no. 3 (2017): 347–60, at 347–49, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26314740>.

Argentina. From the forging of his immediate reality, Francis glimpses in the current market model a system that undermines the common good and produces new forms of exclusion, which “assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world.”⁶⁷ Social and economic analyses show that these claims are increasingly distant from reality, as confirmed by a heart-breaking description:

How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality. Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape.⁶⁸

In *EG*, Francis also wants to present a broader vision to understand this matter of the common good, an issue that implies responding to all those who are left out of this good: the poor, the excluded and marginalized, the ecological, and so many more.⁶⁹ Francis insists that an “economy of exclusion” prevails in the world we live in.⁷⁰ In an economy of exclusion, there are many who do not fit into the logic of the common good. In other words, it is a culture where people are considered as consumer goods, commodities that are later discarded.⁷¹ It is the logic of an economy based on competitiveness, efficiency, and consumerism; a culture of false well-being that has nothing to do with the common good:

The culture of well-being anesthetizes us and we lose our cool if the market offers something that we have not yet bought, while all those lives cut short due to lack of possibilities seem to us a mere spectacle that in no way alters us.⁷²

⁶⁷ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §54.

⁶⁸ Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §53.

⁶⁹ Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*.

⁷⁰ Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*.

⁷¹ One of the first debates on the subject of idolatry in which the human being appears as a commodity and the market as a god can be found in the text of Hugo Assmann. *La idolatría del Mercado*, Colección Economía-teología (San José: Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones, January 1, 1997).

⁷² Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §54.

Along the same lines, the pope presents the disastrous effects of that economy from a determined and altruistic action toward the poorest.⁷³ He issues a call to action for the integral development of all, of the poor, the excluded, and the exploited from a true integral development.⁷⁴ For Francis, then, the common good is not a simple device or a tool to propose solutions⁷⁵ to the market economy. It is much more: it is a word that has the force of denunciation.⁷⁶

This prophetic perspective that encourages action is precisely and without a doubt the perspective and horizon of Pope Francis throughout his ministry, which is reflected in these two leading documents: *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si'*. Both have a common concern: the commitment to historical reality, with each moment and each context, to respond to the victims of injustice that have occurred in the human history of all times, and for that they must appeal to the biblical God who is not a “God of the dead, but of the living,” as Jesus recalls, when citing the faith tradition of Israel (Matt 22:32). Indeed, Francis states that he is “convinced that from an openness to transcendence a new political and economic mentality could be formed that would help to overcome the absolute dichotomy between the economy and the social common good.”⁷⁷

For the Christian, the fight against sin is framed by hope because divine grace abounds over sin. It is not gratuitous that Pope Francis speaks of the common good by linking it to the social peace in his document *Evangelii Gaudium*.⁷⁸ And this peace includes thinking about the land that we will leave to our children who must also participate in that common good; that is, an economy oriented toward the preservation of life or an economy for life,⁷⁹ but also, from the construction of the common good, as a challenge for an exclusive society.⁸⁰

Thus, as in the previous point, Francis makes use of many of the hermeneutical expressions and horizons of Latin American ecclesial documents, thus showing that he appeals to their theological roots, but expanding their

⁷³ See Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, §158.

⁷⁴ See Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §203–04.

⁷⁵ Eugenio Yáñez, “La Doctrina Social de la Iglesia frente al actual modelo de desarrollo económico en la sociedad de América Latina” (Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez Chile), <https://fdocuments.es/document/la-doctrina-social-de-la-iglesia-frente-al-actual-modelo-de-desarrollo-economico-en-la-sociedad-de-america-latina.html?page=1>.

⁷⁶ See Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §218.

⁷⁷ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §205.

⁷⁸ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §217–37.

⁷⁹ Franz Hinkelammert and Henry Mora, *Towards an Economy for Life* (San José: DEL, 2013), 355–82.

⁸⁰ Santiago Sierra, *Bien común: desafío para una sociedad excluyente* (Bogotá: PUJ, 2020), 241–75.

horizons and meanings of the categories of analysis, judgment, and invitation to action typical of Latin America. With the pastoral tools of analysis, he criticizes the notions of development impregnated with an economy for death, making use of the expressions reflected in Latin America, but broadens the perspective and the heritage of his discourse with the categories of CST, such as the common good.

Conclusion

After the approximation made to the ideas proposed by Pope Francis, emanating from his writings, it can be affirmed that, in his teachings, features of Latin American thought and epistemology appear, typical of the social scientific work of the South American continent. Similarly, it was found that there is a particular emphasis on the incidence of the theology of the people in the theological development and pastoral work of Bergoglio. This has caused criticisms, both inside and outside the church and from religious, social, and political leaders and groups, among others. However, is this a limitation in the pastoral exercise of Francis? Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff is blunt in this regard and points out that “Many have wondered if the current Pope Francis, as he comes from Latin America, is a follower of the liberation theology. This question is irrelevant. The essential thing is not to be of the theology of liberation but the liberation of the oppressed; of the poor and of those who suffer injustice.”⁸¹

In this way, there is a difference between Francis and his predecessors, who had been recognized for their high theological and philosophical erudition, since Boff states that Francis is a pastor who freely lives based on the principles emanated from the gospel. This is how Francis proposes to the church the challenge of “taking the first step”⁸² as a way to show the leadership of an institution that seeks to tune in with the globalized world. This also aims to defend the values of respect for human dignity and promote more dignified and humane conditions for the excluded ones. In this sense, Francis’ theology is a theology of the people, contextual, applied, a pastoral reflection that belongs to a particular theological tradition and enriches both CST and pastoral praxis.

Although this theology is a contextual one marked by its time and social location, the export of the theology of the people to Rome and hence to

⁸¹ Leonardo Boff, “El papa Francisco y la teología de la liberación,” *Servicios Koinonia*, April 28, 2013, <https://www.servicioskoinonia.org/boff/articulo.php?num=559>.

⁸² See Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §24.

the universal Church by Francis, is rooted in the fact that contextual theology, despite its limitations of time and space, has a cross-cultural relevance. This makes it possible for local Churches to share with others or with the universal Church God's manifold gifts, which the presence of the Gospel in their cultures makes possible.⁸³

This characteristic of Francis' theological and pastoral reflection, from Latin America to the catholicity of the church, is not reductionism because this pope is a pastor, faithful to the tradition and the contents of CST. This has been reflected in the direction given to the final document of the conclusions of the V Conference of the Latin American Episcopate meeting in Aparecida, 2007. In this document, Bergoglio traces the continuity of social thought of the Latin American church as a proposal that will continue in his papal magisterium, placing his marked accent on the option for the poor and the description of the concrete, marginalized faces of men and women in the existential peripheries.

The questioning of the advanced thoughts on church reformation proposed by Pope Francis has generated strong criticism, especially from ultra-conservative Catholics. For instance, we could remember, during an interview granted to the journalist Andrea Torielli on December 15, 2013, when he asked him about the criticisms made of his "Marxist" thought, the pope replied: "The Marxist ideology is wrong. But I have met many Marxists in my life who are good people, so I don't feel offended... There is nothing in the Exhortation that cannot be found in the social Doctrine of the Church."⁸⁴ For this reason, the contributions of the church's social teaching validate not only the social thought of Francis, but also strengthen the spirit of the ecclesial tradition of topics and problems typical of the social reflection of the church in the last 130 years, placing as a guarantee of its action and social teaching the solidity of the post-John XXIII method in *Mater et Magistra* (1961):

There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to

⁸³ Peter Onyekwelu Okafor, "Editorial: Pope Francis: Apostle of Contextual Theology," *Ministerium: A Journal of Contextual Theology* 5 (2019) 1–8, at 7–8, <https://ezenwaohaetor.org/journals/index.php/Ministerium/article/view/869/866>.

⁸⁴ Andrea Torielli, "Never Be Afraid of Tenderness," *La Stampa*, December 15, 2013, last modified July 16, 2019, <https://www.lastampa.it/vatican-insider/en/2013/12/15/news/never-be-afraid-of-tenderness-1.35947042>.

implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: look, judge, act.⁸⁵

Proposing the centrality of the topic of the poor, as a theological place and as a Latin American method of doing theology, is part of a line of inquiry in the theology of Pope Francis. Thus, the preferential option for the poor espoused by Latin American theology is not a small thing for Francis, for under his leadership, the church incorporates this option into its work and pastoral commitment. The chronological resource of the Latin American Episcopal Assemblies, taken into account in this article, is not only a transversal search of this topic in the ecclesiology of the southern hemisphere, but today it is a contribution to the Catholicity of the church and the challenge to contemporary theology.

In closing, this article not only highlights the incidence of the SDC (Social Doctrine of the Church) in Pope Bergoglio's thought, but also outlines the traits that the pope will leave as a legacy to the SDC; topics that can lead an investigation, such as the one revealed by the research group responsible for this document.

⁸⁵ Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* §236.