

## Editorial

### Francis and the essential challenge of resurgence

### Francisco e o desafio essencial da ressurgência

Faustino Teixeira\*

Translated by Brasil Fernandes de Barros\*\*

Pope Francis, who celebrated his 85th birthday on December 17, 2021, and he is approaching his ninth year of pontificate on March 2022, after replacing Pope Benedict XVI (Ratzinger). In all this period, he has been doing a magnificent job in the Catholic Church, with the lively purpose of renewing the institution in line with the radical project of following Jesus. The renewal steps are verified in several fields of action. He is continuing his task of reforming the Roman Curia, with a project of evangelization that is based on a deep-rooted conviction of taking the Gospel narrative to the four corners of the world.

As Cardinal Walter Kasper has rightly pointed out, Francis's revolution is signaled by tenderness and love, but also by joy (KASPER, 2015). All in close connection with the gospel, which is essentially an invitation to joy. With the maxim taken from the Gospel of John, Francis shows that there can be no sadness among those who call themselves Christians, because joy is the most beautiful horizon to be offered by the disciples of Jesus Christ to the world. In his dialogue with Eugenio Scalfari in July 2013, Francis emphasized that the agape, love for others proves to be "the only way to love God," the way to find one's way to

---

\* PhD in Theology. Professor of the Science of Religion Program at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, MG. Country of origin: Brazil. E-mail: fteixeira@uai.com.br

\*\* Ph.D. student in Religious Studies at PPGCR PUC Minas. CAPES Fellow. Country of origin: Brazil. E-mail: brasil@netinfor.com.br. ORCID:0000-0002-5285-4871

salvation and the beatitudes. There is no other possible shortcut to the loving encounter with the ever-greater Mystery (FRANCESCO; SCALFARI, 2013). This God who has no religious affiliation, who is not a “Catholic God,” is permanent revelation and is always in motion. As Teilhard de Chardin says in his *Divine Medium*, it is a God who is “eternal discovery and eternal growth.” (CHARDIN, 2010, p. 115).

When Francis visited Brazil in July 2013, in the *Basílica do Santuário Nacional de Nossa Senhora Aparecida*, he pointed out the aspects that would be fundamental in his pontificate, always illuminated with the horizon of following Jesus: to preserve the hope, to let ourselves be surprised by God and to live in joy (FRANCISCO, 2013). These were the unique attitudes that he showed as being punctual for Christians in the challenges that they would have to assume in the years to come. And that is how he remained active, from the symbolic beginning of his pontificate in Lampedusa (Italy), when, in fact, he began his eminent apostolic task. And he has chosen precisely the city that symbolizes the pain of so many emigrants who died at sea, looking for a better life horizon. In his reflection there, he sharply questioned the “well-being culture” that ends up provoking indifference regarding others, leading to an unfortunate “globalization of indifference” (THE GLOBALIZATION OF INDIFFERENCE, 2013).

In this way he carried out his pontificate, keeping always as his unique goal the option for the poorest and most excluded, for a “church which goes forth”, that breaks with the limits of the sacristy and goes towards the neglected, announcing to them a project of life and hope. Also, at the heart of his project, we find the challenge of dialogue an essential element for harmony and respect among peoples and religions. In the beautiful document on human fraternity for world peace and human coexistence, signed together with Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, in February 2019, he resumed his great conviction, that God “created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity and called them to live together as brothers.” (FRANCISCO; AL-TAYYEB, 2019).

Above all, Francis has been a great prophet of the 21st century, denouncing the inequalities and exclusion, the situations of violence that are spreading throughout the world, producing pain and division, and naming what is being

seen as “third world war fought piecemeal” (FT 25). Faced with the terrible epidemic that has been ravaging humanity for nearly two years, Francis also raised his alternative voice, and in our memories his words of light remain burning, at the end of March 2020, when he recalled that all of humanity finds itself in the same boat, with everyone “fragile and disoriented” (FRANCISCO, 2020). The pandemic has highlighted the situation of vulnerability that surrounds us all, uncovering “false and superfluous certainties around which we constructed our daily schedules.” (FT 32). In that solitary moment of Francis’ time in St. Peter’s Square, he lifted his voice high, and cried out to God for mercy, for a compassionate look at humanity, in search of the necessary courage, communal, to find new spaces of resistance and struggle, in favor of “new forms of hospitality, fraternity, and solidarity.”

Among the most significant changes experienced by Francis in his pontificate are those related to the new consciousness of the Earth, of our planetary responsibility in a time of threatening crisis. The new ecological consciousness assumed by Francis is perhaps the decisive milestone of his pontificate. With the Covid-19 pandemic, the Earth showed its side of intrusion, of violent reaction against the human-man’s misdirection at this time of the Anthropocene. The pandemic awakened consciences to the precarious and threatening situation of our time. In his encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, on fraternity and social friendship (2020), Francis underlines that we have all “lost the taste and flavor of the truly real” (FT 33). It has brought us tribulation, uncertainty, and the awareness of limits, showing the fundamental need for a change of perspective and direction, both in our relationships, lifestyles, and the way society is organized. The human being is nakedly faced with a reality that “cries out in rebellion.” (FT 34).

In his other inaugural encyclical, *Laudato si*, on the care of the common home (2015), Francis raised his voice against the deterioration of the environment, which especially affects the “most fragile of the planet those many who carry just a few of the world. It is when Francis finds himself challenged to denounce to the entire world the great outcry of the Earth and the poor, always conjugated. He courageously speaks about the “catastrophic predictions” that are

announced for humanity if there is no immediate reaction and a decrease in the eagerness for domination and development. He underlines such predictions are not illusions, but very present threats, risking the vital path of the next generations. He points out that “The pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet’s capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes.” (LS 161).

Francis’s target is being related to the mismanagement present in this time of the Anthropocene, when the level of human intervention over reality reaches a highly dangerous and threatening degree, when pride and the omnipresence of human predatory activity reach borderline levels. We are on the edge of a true chaos arising from human “disorder”. It is the time of the “man-chased earth,” as anthropologist Anna Tsing has signaled (TSING, 2019, p. 203). We are witnessing the threatening pace of climate change, mass extinction of species, ocean acidification, freshwater pollution and contamination, violent interventions on the ecosystem, and sped up industrialization. Along with this is the exodus of huge contingents of poor and excluded people, expelled from their countries by hunger, lack of employment, and the deterioration of the environment.

Francis’ outcry is against the world’s indifference to these imminent risks. He proposes an essential awakening, aimed at recovering a lost unity, and a new and vigorous reasoning about the “meaning of our existence. He stresses that “we fed ourselves on dreams of splendor and grandeur, and ended up consuming distraction, insularity and solitude. We gorged ourselves on networking, and lost the taste of fraternity.” (FT 33).

*Laudato si* perhaps is the greatest milestone of Francis’ pontificate. It is the encyclical that has made the most progress on the central question of our time, related to the fate of the Earth. In it we find the new call for a planetary brotherhood, forged in a firm conviction of a common belonging, of a “belonging as brothers. Perhaps the most reverberating word in the encyclical is interconnectedness, the awareness that “everything is interconnected” (LS 16, 42, 117; FT 34). The human beings need to awaken to this *ubuntu* consciousness, as the Africans would say, the awareness that we are not isolated and that we need each

other. But not only from other humans, but from all living beings that inhabit the planet. There cannot be a solitary “salvation”. Everyone is imbricated and involved in the fabric of life.

According to Tim Ingold thought, a unique English anthropologist, human beings are wrapped in a “singular nexus of creative growth within a continuously unfolding field of relationships. Humans are but a ‘fabric of knots’ in a ‘tangle of interwoven threads’” (INGOLD, 2015, p. 120-121). The interweaving is, to be sure, the “texture of the world.” And everything is alive and in motion, for where there is life, there is motion. This Francis clearly realized in *Laudato si*, this network of interconnection, which shows that we all need each other. And he points out that this should be “recognized with affection and admiration. There are several moments in both *Laudato si* and *Fratelli tutti* where this issue is underscored with vigor. As Francis says, “everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage.” (LS 92).

Francis does not restrain from criticizing the anthropocentric claim of the human, of an anthropocentrism he recognizes as despotic, disordered, and excessive (LS 68 and 119). The pope admits that all creation is to be welcomed with respect and affection, and that this entire vital fabric cannot be excluded as superfluous. All are bearers of “characteristic rights.” Francis calls on us all, as so many mystics do, to find the Mystery in all things, for “there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face” (LS 233). Everything that surrounds us is “God’s caress” (LS 84). The human relationship with all this must be permeated with tenderness, care and welcome, and all this can be realized in the simplicity of everyday gestures, breaking with the “logic of violence” that has marked the rhythm of humans in our impoverished times. He speaks of a “culture of care” and “ecological spirituality,” two essential challenges (LS 216 and 231).

Francis can go even further, drawing noble consequences from the reflection elaborated in *Laudato si*, to bring his reflection more in tune with the significant changes that are taking place in current thinking, in the fields of philosophy, anthropology, literature, and biology. A real “ecological conversion,” as he proposes, implies a more radical unfolding of his already bold reflection. It

means, above all, breaking the still valid ties with a certain Christian anthropocentrism, which is still alive in his theoretical elaborations. We have to go beyond and reach the noble poetic gesture of John of the Cross, also remembered by Francis in *Laudato si*, and be able to sing: “My Beloved, the mountains”. This means understanding a step highlighted by the great master Dôgen of the Soto Zen tradition, who highlights the vital rhythm and movement of mountains, valleys, and rivers (DÔGEN, 2005). Everything that lives is in motion and is animated by spirit. This is true for humans, animals, vegetables, and minerals. Alive are the sun, the trees, the winds. As the vegetable thinkers show with evidence, everything that is under the earth is the object of “cosmopolitan transactions” that we are deeply unaware of when we destroy the forests and devastate the fields. In this underground city there is an “architecture of webs and filaments”. As Anna Tsing pertinently points out in her book *Living in Ruins*,

[...] fungi create these webs as they interact with tree roots, forming joint structures of fungi and roots called “mycorrhiza”. The mycorrhizal webs connect not only roots and fungi, but, through fungal filaments, trees with trees, connecting the forest into tangles. This city is a lively scene of action and interaction. (TSING, 2019, p. 43).

Francis takes an important step right at the beginning of *Laudato si*, by acknowledging that “we ourselves are earth” and that elements of the planet weave our bodies. This is an important step, but one that involves consequences that are fundamental to understanding the vital composite of the entire universe. For reasons of institutional inscription, the Pope has not yet been able to extend and radicalize this reflection, capturing the extraordinary turn that accompanies the “animal turn” and the “vegetal turn” underway, which, certainly, will be complemented by a “mineral turn”, in a Theilhardian perspective revisited and transformed.

In his valuable book, around *Vegetal thought*, the thinker Evando Nascimento takes up significant hints launched by contemporary authors from the fields of literature, botany, and philosophy, such as the Italians Emanuele Coccia and Stefano Mancuso, intending to present the novel intricacies of what he called “vegetal thought” (NASCIMENTO, 2021). Beyond the humanist tradition, such as those expressed by thinkers like Heidegger and others, Evando

opens doors and windows to understand the *humanus* in its network of connections. A humanism that, without ignoring the uniqueness of human beings, dares “to think the most unthought of and even the most unthinkable until now, our relations with other living beings” (NASCIMENTO, 2021, p. 21). It is about taking a *balzo in avanti*, a daring step beyond our “symbolic imaginary”. Today there is talk of the awakening of forestry, of the rights of forests, as there is also talk of animal rights, etc.

The substantial challenge for Francis and for the entire Catholic church today is to move beyond anthropocentrism, to grasp life in this “planetary continuous flux.” It is a new and essential field to broaden the vision of dialogue to involve inter-being and living with. As Evando says,

[...] the most isolated human, animal, or plant life coexists with species and things that are, at the same time, alien, and neighboring, depending on them for survival. The absolute solitude doesn't exist, because solidarity, natural and cultural, is a minimum law of existence, unavoidable for those who or what live. (NASCIMENTO, 2021, p. 34).

Despite all the dark horizon that threatens us, it is possible to believe in paths of survival, of weaving of new solidarities, of finding gaps of light in this cloudy world. This is what Anna Tsing names as “resurgence,” involving the work “of many organisms that, negotiating across differences, forge assemblies of multi-species abilities” (2019, p. 226), as Anna Tsing has shown. Pope Francis has this immeasurable challenge before him, to weave strings, to recompose the idea of dialogue into this broader, more airy vision, beyond the closed circuits of traditional institutions. To see beyond is to understand that the human is not the world's navel, but that it is part of being. To understand that he is not the only interesting being that exists, but that he is inserted in a vital and provocative field. It is possible and necessary to cultivate a new reverence for the whole and find ways to “postpone the end of the world.”

## REFERÊNCIAS

“A globalização da indiferença nos tirou a capacidade chorar”. O discurso de Francisco em Lampedusa. **Revista IHU On Line**. São Leopoldo, 09/07/2013. Disponível em: <https://www.ihu.unisinos.br/noticias/521786-qdao-onde-estas-caim-onde-esta-o-teu-irmao-o-discurso-de-francisco-em-lampedusa>. Acesso em: 16/12/2021.

CHARDIN, Teilhard. **O meio divino**. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2010.

DÔGEN, Maître. **Shôbôgenzô**. Le vrai loi, trésor de l'oeil. Tome 1. Paris: Sully, 2005.

FRANCESCO, Papa; SCALFARI, Eugenio. **Dialogo tra credenti e non credenti**. Torino: Einaudi/La Repubblica, 2013.

FRANCISCO, Papa. **Palavras do papa Francisco no Brasil**. São Paulo: Paulinas, 2013.

FRANCISCO, Papa. **Evangelii Gaudium**. A alegria do evangelho. Sobre o anúncio do evangelho no mundo atual. São Paulo: Paulus/Loyola, 2013.

FRANCISCO, Papa. **Laudato Si**. Sobre o cuidado da casa comum. São Paulo: Paulinas, 2015.

FRANCISCO, Papa; AL-TAYYEB, Imame Ahmad. **Documento sobre a fraternidade humana em prol da paz mundial e da convivência comum**. Abu Dabhi, 2019. Disponível em: [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pt/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190204\\_documento-fratellanza-umana.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pt/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html). Acesso em 16/12/2021.

FRANCISCO, Papa. **Fratelli Tutti**. Sobre a fraternidade e a amizade social. São Paulo: Paulus, 2020.

FRANCISCO, Papa. **Momento extraordinário de oração em tempo de pandemia**. Cidade do Vaticano, 27/03/2020. Disponível em: [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pt/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200327\\_omelia-epidemia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pt/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200327_omelia-epidemia.html). Acesso em: 16/12/2021.

KASPER, Walter. **Papa Francesco**. La rivoluzione della tenerezza e dell'amore. Brescia: Queriniana, 2015.

INGOLD, Tin. **Estar vivo**. Ensaios sobre movimento, conhecimento e descrição. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2015.

NASCIMENTO, Evando. **O pensamento vegetal**. A literatura e as plantas. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2021.

TSING, Anna. **Viver nas ruínas**. Paisagens multiespécies no Antropoceno. Brasília: IEB Mil Folhas, 2019.