



Article

# "[...] from Our Own Comfort Zone [...] to [...] All the 'Peripheries'" (EG 20). A Franciscan Keyword of Pope Francis and its Significance for Christian Worship

# Stephan Winter

Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule, Münster (Germany) and IUNCTUS, Kompetenzzentrum für Christliche Spiritualität, Münster, Hohenzollernring 60, 48145 Münster, Germany; Winter-os@kabelmail.de

Received: 16 August 2018; Accepted: 20 September 2018; Published: 25 September 2018



Abstract: In Evangelii gaudium (No. 20), Pope Francis writes: "In our day Jesus' command to 'go and make disciples' echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church's mission of evangelization [...]. Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel." Here and in other passages the Pope makes clear that he understands the Church and its mission in a very Franciscan way. Consider how St. Francis of Assisi kept company with the poor, and bear in mind texts like his "Instructions for brothers who want to go on the missions". Celebration in worship is an important element of such an evangelization: it opens a way to the experience of the One who really sends the Good News to all believers! This article argues that Francis prefers two options to promote a Franciscan worship practice in that sense: for him it is "imperative to evangelize cultures in order to inculturate the Gospel" (EG 69). Firstly, worshipping should be connected with "authentic 'popular piety" as the "starting point" of Evangelization (ibid. and EG 70), and secondly the translation of official liturgical texts should follow a threefold fidelity: to the Bible, to the Church's tradition, and to any given people's own language (cf. Motu Proprio Magnum Principium). The Pope's strategy here follows de facto ideas of St. Francis, such as when the Poverello enlivened the mystery of the Incarnation by arranging a manger in Greccio (1223). One conclusion from this is that the Church has to develop ideas "in restoring a mystical adherence to the faith in a pluralistic religious landscape" (EG 70).

Keywords: Pope Francis; evangelization; worship

### 1. Introduction

From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis made clear that he had chosen his name very consciously and that St. Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) functions as a model for his pontificate. That has been quite widely discussed in theological discourse, especially since the Pope has emphasized repeatedly that the Church's first priority is to participate in the destiny of all human beings, especially the poor. However, the theological discussion has hardly addressed what orientation to St. Francis means for the Pope's position regarding worship. I will do this in the following brief text by investigating his understanding of "popular piety" and the Pope's idea of the translation of official liturgical texts from Latin to other languages. However, as a first step I will clarify what the term "poor" might mean in this instance.

Religions 2018, 9, 290 2 of 7

### 2. Results

(a) "Option for the poor": to different dimensions of Pope Francis' key concept.

As early as in his first press conference (16 March 2013) the Pope introduced the example of Francis of Assisi, especially when it comes to an ecclesiological orientation towards an option for the poor, when he advertised "a poor church" with the following words (Francis 2013):

"Some people wanted to know why the Bishop of Rome wished to be called Francis. Some thought of Francis Xavier, Francis De Sales, and also Francis of Assisi. I will tell you the story. During the election, I was seated next to the Archbishop Emeritus of São Paolo and Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation for the Clergy, Cardinal Claudio Hummes: a good friend, a good friend! When things were looking dangerous, he encouraged me. And when the votes reached two thirds, there was the usual applause, because the Pope had been elected. And he gave me a hug and a kiss, and said: 'Don't forget the poor; And those words came to me: the poor, the poor. Then, right away, thinking of the poor, I thought of Francis of Assisi. Then I thought of all the wars, as the votes were still being counted, till the end. Francis is also the man of peace. That is how the name came into my heart: Francis of Assisi. For me, he is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation; these days we do not have a very good relationship with creation, do we? He is the man who gives us this spirit of peace, the poor man ... How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor!"

Here the Pope hints at what has been expressed more programmatically and fundamentally by the key concept of "integral ecology" in the Encyclical *Laudato Si* (Francis 2015; for interpretations of that document cf. the contributions to George 2017; Krämer and Vellguth 2017; Lienkamp 2016):

"I do not want to write this Encyclical without turning to that attractive and compelling figure, whose name I took as my guide and inspiration when I was elected Bishop of Rome. I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcast. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace."

And the following paragraph ends:

"The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled."

An integral ecology according to Pope Francis is like a frame for the right way of being human—a framing design in which concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace are bound inseparably!

From my point of view, this passage and similar passages speak for a particular reading of the Pope's option for "a church, which is poor and for the poor". I agree with Rafael Luciani and Félix Palazzi, who state (Luciani and Palazzi 2015):

"Various models have been proposed for interpreting the roadmap of Pope Francis. [...] All these interpretative models make use of socio-cultural paradigms and criteria of discernment that are foreign to the pope's hermeneutics of popular culture. From a Latin American perspective, it is surprising the way some analysts brand Francis as populist, socialist or

Religions 2018, 9, 290 3 of 7

demagogue without ever comprehending the universe of meanings that inspire his vision of society, of church and of God.

Although Francis, like his predecessors, makes good use of the church's social doctrine, this traditional teaching should not be confused with the broader horizon to be found in his theological-pastoral option. This option took shape in the midst of the people's movements and ecclesial communities of the 1960s, and above all as a result of the theological-pastoral debates concerning the reception of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council in the Latin American context. Francis does not practice the 'discernment focused on social morality' that is characteristic of Catholic social doctrine ('Libertatis Conscientia,' No. 72; 'Solicitudo Rei Socialis,' No. 41). Instead, he suggests interpreting and understand culture in a prophetic rather than in a doctrinaire or cultic way, and he stablishes the praxis of Jesus as the principal norm for all theological-pastoral thought and practice."

Then, Luciani/Palazzi explain the Pope's preferential option for "a poor church committed to the poor" regarding the socio-historical debate of Latin American liberation theology in its specific Argentinean reception and the important role that cardinal Bergoglio (as the Pope was called then) played in the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin American and the Caribbean, which took place in Aparecida in 2007 (Luciani and Palazzi 2015): "[...] Francis understands that pastoral ministry and theology must form a unity that makes the center of its reflection the culture of the poor. Faithful to Latin American theological method, the pope understands that praxis always comes first and that theological reflection follows as a second step. It is for this reason that his teaching style uses the method of 'see, judge and act,' placing the stress on the first moment of confronting the listener with the brute facts of the crude socio-economic reality of our world, a reality that can in no way be justified." That does not mean that spirituality would not be the focus of his pastoral approach; on the contrary. Using the words of Luciani/Palazzi once more, "[s]uch an encounter with reality will prevent us from falling into what he [Pope Francis; S. W.] calls 'abstract spiritualism' and give birth in us to a consciousness of pain. Our experience of pain has the effect of helping us 'dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it' ([Laudato Si'] No. 19)."

Indeed, like Latin American theologies of liberation, Francis understands "the option for the poor [...] primarily [as] a theological category" (compare with "The Joy of the Gospel," No. 198). For those following Jesus, the Kingdom of God is not adequately described as consisting of a private, individual relation with God. Building that Kingdom includes creating freedom, equal dignity, peace, and justice for all human beings and a good life for all creatures. However, such processes require an integral perspective of human societies as areas in which the Kingdom of God could be realized concretely. That is why the Pope "uses the word 'people' with three interrelated meanings: people-as-poor (socio-economic), people-as-nation (political) and people-as-faithful (religious) [ ... ] the people constitute the sacred place where God makes himself present" (Luciani/Palazzi). "People" has a theological status because "just as we listen to our Father, so also we listen to the faithful People of God" (Santa Cruz, Bolivia, 9 July 2015), and that one People subsists in many peoples: "The Christian substratum of certain peoples [...] is a living reality. Here we find, especially among the needlest, a moral resource which preserves the values of an authentic Christian humanism. Seeing reality with the eyes of faith, we cannot fail to acknowledge what the Holy Spirit is sowing. It would show a lack of trust in his free and unstinting activity to think that authentic Christian values are absent where great numbers of people have received baptism and express their faith and solidarity with others in a variety of ways. [ . . . ] An evangelized popular culture contains values of faith and solidarity capable of encouraging the development of a more just and believing society, and possesses a particular wisdom which ought to be gratefully acknowledged" (Evangelii Gaudium, No. 68).

# (b) Culturalist turn and popular piety

Religions 2018, 9, 290 4 of 7

That's why the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (for further interpretations of this document cf. Krämer and Vellguth 2018) demands a "culturalist turn" for academic theology and pastoral practice:

"The People of God is incarnate in the peoples of the earth, each of which has its own culture. The concept of culture is valuable for grasping the various expressions of the Christian life present in God's people. It has to do with the lifestyle of a given society, the specific way in which its members relate to one another, to other creatures and to God. Understood in this way, culture embraces the totality of a people's life. Each people in the course of its history develops its culture with legitimate autonomy. This is due to the fact that the human person, 'by nature stands completely in need of life in society' [Gaudium et spes 25] and always exists in reference to society, finding there a concrete way of relating to reality. The human person is always situated in a culture: 'nature and culture are intimately linked' [Gaudium et spes 53]. Grace supposes culture, and God's gift becomes flesh in the culture of those who receive it" (Evangelii Gaudium, No. 115).

Such a culturalist turn implies two complementary impulses in the Church's life: first, to become inculturated into a specific people the Christian believers belong to, and thus, secondly, not to become completely absorbed by a single nation, social group, family etc., avoiding the influence of ideologies of whatever kind. It has probably not been perceived so far that the ritual-symbolic part of the Church's life has a paradigmatic role as much for analyzing as for shaping the life of the faithful. Regarding this point, Pope Francis declared: "The faithful people know how to express their faith with their own language. They manifest their deepest sentiments of pain, doubt, joy, failure, and gratitude through diverse devotional forms, through processions, candles, flowers, and hymns which are transformed into a beautiful expression of their confidence in the Lord and their love for his Mother, who is also our Mother" (Quito, 8 July 2015). Here one finds the reason for which *Evangelii Gaudium* expressly mentions the evangelizing power of popular piety: it is an essential part of a culture as "a dynamic reality which a people constantly recreates":

"122. [ . . . ] each generation passes on a whole series of ways of approaching different existential situations to the next generation, which must in turn reformulate it as it confronts its own challenges. [ . . . ] Each portion of the people of God, by translating the gift of God into its own life and in accordance with its own genius, bears witness to the faith it has received and enriches it with new and eloquent expressions. One can say that, a people continuously evangelizes itself". Herein lies the importance of popular piety, a true expression of the spontaneous missionary activity of the people of God. This is an ongoing and developing process, of which the Holy Spirit is the principal agent." "123. Popular piety enables us to see how the faith, once received, becomes embodied in a culture and is constantly passed on. Once looked down upon, popular piety came to be appreciated once more in the decades following the Council. In the Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI gave a decisive impulse in this area. There he stated that popular piety 'manifests a thirst for God which opp. only the poor and the simple can know' and that 'it makes people capable of generosity and sacrifice even to the point of heroism, when it is a question of bearing witness to belief.""

# (c) Popular piety and the official language of liturgy

With the *Aparecida Document* Francis refers to popular piety as "popular spirituality" or "the people's mysticism" (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, No. 124): "It is truly 'a spirituality incarnated in the culture of the lowly'. Nor is it devoid of content; rather it discovers and expresses that content more by way of symbols than by discursive reasoning, and in the act of faith greater accent is placed on *credere in Deum* than on *credere Deum*." On the other hand, the official liturgy of the Roman Catholic church has a very important anti-ideological force: liturgy is a living expression of God's People that exists in many peoples. At the same time, it is higher and broader than any concrete nation on earth

Religions **2018**, 9, 290 5 of 7

(cf. Haunerland 2011; Haunerland 2014; Winter 2017). But following the "imperative to evangelize cultures in order to inculturate the Gospel" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 69) means shaping a ritual-symbolic practice. Therefore, it follows when Pope Francis emphasizes in his *Motu Proprio Magnum Principium* (Francis 2017), what John Baldovin writes (Baldovin 2017): "The translation of official liturgical texts should follow a threefold fidelity: that to the bible, to the church's tradition and to the own language of a given people." (cf. Haunerland 2017; Bieringer and Meckel 2018). Only those texts following this principle are able to move faithful human beings to celebrate liturgy with their hearts firmly anchored in the very center in which the inseparable connection of the love of God and the love of neighbor is located (cf. the—partly English, partly German written—contributions to Stuflesser and Stephan 2009; Kranemann et al. 2006). How Benedict XVI. stating in *Deus Caritas Est*, No. 18 (Pope Benedict XVI 2005):

"If I have no contact whatsoever with God in my life, then I cannot see in the other anything more than the other, and I am incapable of seeing in him the image of God. But if in my life I fail completely to heed others, solely out of a desire to be 'devout' and to perform my 'religious duties', then my relationship with God will also grow arid. It becomes merely 'proper', but loveless. Only my readiness to encounter my neighbour and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well. Only if I serve my neighbour can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me. The saints—consider the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta—constantly renewed their capacity for love of neighbour from their encounter with the Eucharistic Lord, and conversely this encounter acquired its realism and depth in their service to others. Love of God and love of neighbour are thus inseparable, they form a single commandment. But both live from the love of God who has loved us first. No longer is it a question, then, of a 'commandment' imposed from without and calling for the impossible, but rather of a freely-bestowed experience of love from within, a love which by its very nature must then be shared with others. Love grows through love. Love is 'divine' because it comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a 'we' which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is 'all in all' (1 Cor 15:28)."

To summarize and reiterate: One important way of supporting the pastoral approach that Pope Francis wants to realize is to bring the celebration of the official liturgy in close contact with elements of popular piety.

# (d) Pope Francis and St. Francis—one last thought about their relationship

My last point following this observation: Even more clearly than he has done so far, Pope Francis could refer for that strategy concerning inculturation of the liturgy to St. Francis of Assisi. It was the Poverello who enlivened the mystery of the Incarnation—celebrated in the official texts of the Roman liturgy in a relatively sober style—by setting up a manger in Greccio (1223) (for the following passage cf. (Wahle 2018)). According to legend, he did it for a Christmas Mass in the local forest, and so he connected liturgy and popular piety in a congenial way. Thomas of Celano (about 1190–1260), to whom we owe the first biography of St. Francis, writes that Francis intended to lead the celebrating community towards an intimate, sustainable acquisition of the mystery of the Incarnation by a realistic and affective performance (Thomas von Celano, Vita prima S. Francisci I 30; cf. for further details an interpretations of that important text Wagner 2009; Wahle 2015, pp. 231–34): for this, he set up a manger, integrating a living ox and donkey, lit candles, and burned torches, encouraged a procession, the singing of popular songs and hymns, chanted the gospel, and held a sermon with scenic elements, etc.

It is obvious that such a performance can only work if it is composed for the concrete situation of the worship it is placed in and if it fits the expectations, different ways of understanding, etc., of the congregation. Therefore, the context does not have to be a eucharistic one in every case. Nativity plays detached from codified liturgy are common. Furthermore, that is why we have such a large variety of mangers and similar installations around the world. In my opinion, the spiritual idea is the same in all those cases: it aims at moving the individual *and* the whole community in order to become more and

Religions 2018, 9, 290 6 of 7

more poor—that is, open to the grace of God. Here lies the deepest reason for the idea of a liturgia semper reformanda: permanent reform is necessary, because only in this way "the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church" (*Sacrosacntum Concilium*, No. 2). Whoever internalizes the Pope's Franciscan spiritual approach can therefore act as a ritual-symbolic reformer in the described sense of the word. That means, for example, being creative in connecting the tradition of Roman Catholic (official) liturgy with the rich treasures of popular piety (which of course does not mean "anything goes"!) (for details cf. Kranemann 2014; Winter 2009). A passive, anxious attitude would be completely out of place here:

"In our day Jesus' command to 'go and make disciples' echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church's mission of evangelization [...]. Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel" (Evangelii Gaudium, No. 20).

**Acknowledgments:** Great thanks to Andrew Tullock for help with the linguistic revision of that article! **Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### References

- Baldovin, John. 2017. A liturgical expert explains Pope Francis' Change to Mass translation rules. *America. The Jesuit Review*. September 9. Available online: https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/09/09/liturgical-expert-explains-pope-francis-change-mass-translation-rules (accessed on 2 August 2018).
- Pope Benedict XVI. 2005. Encyclical letter Deus Caritas Est of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI. To the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women religious and all the Lay faithful on Christian Love. Available online: http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\_ben-xvi\_enc\_20051225\_deus-caritas-est.html (accessed on 2 August 2018).
- Bieringer, Andreas, and Thomas Meckel. 2018. Wer hat das letzte Wort? Das Motu Proprio "Magnum Principium". Herder Korrespondenz 72: 31–34.
- Francis, Pope. 2013. Audience to Representatives of the Communications Media. Address of the Holy Father Pope Francis. Città del Vaticano: Paul VI Audience Hall, March 16, Available online: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/march/documents/papa-francesco\_20130316\_rappresentanti-media.html (accessed on 2 August 2018).
- Francis, Pope. 2015. Encyclical letter Laudato Si' of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our common Home. Available online: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\_20150524\_enciclica-laudato-si.html (accessed on 2 August 2018).
- Francis, Pope. 2017. Apostolic letter issued "Motu Proprio" of the Supreme Pontiff Francis "Magnum Principium" by which Can. 838 of the Code of Canon Law is modified. Available online: https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu\_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio\_20170903\_magnum-principium.html (accessed on 24 September 2018).
- George, Wolfgang, ed. 2017. Laudato Si'. Wissenschaftler antworten auf die Enzyklika von Papst Franziskus. Mit einem Geleitwort von Weizäcker, Ernst Ulrich von. Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag, ISBN 978-3-8379-2642-2.
- Haunerland, Winfried. 2011. Gottesdienst zwischen kirchlichem Anspruch und individueller Spiritualität. Perspektiven liturgischer Erneuerung. In *Objektive Feier und subjektiver Glaube? Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Liturgie und Spiritualität*. StPaLi 32. Edited by Stefan Böntert. Regensburg: Pustet, pp. 171–86, ISBN 9783791723730.
- Haunerland, Winfried. 2014. Gottesdienst in katholischer Weite—Perspektiven der Vielfalt in der Einheit. In *Eucharistischer Kongress, Köln 2013. Katechesen—Predigten—Vorträge*. Edited by Alexander Saberschinsky. Köln: Erzbistum Köln, pp. 248–53. First published as 2013. Pastoralblatt 65: 359–64.
- Haunerland, Winfried. 2017. Eine doppelte Korrektur. Zum Motu proprio *Magnum principium* von Papst Franziskus. *Gottesdienst* 51: 169–71.
- Krämer, Klaus, and Klaus Vellguth, eds. 2017. *Schöpfung. Miteinander leben im gemeinsamen Haus*. ThEW 11. Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, ISBN 978-3-451-37837-9.

Religions **2018**, 9, 290 7 of 7

Krämer, Klaus, and Klaus Vellguth, eds. 2018. *Evangelii gaudium—Stimmen der Weltkirche*. ThEW 7. Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, ISBN 978-3-451-33380-4.

- Kranemann, Benedikt. 2014. Ein liturgischer Katechumenat? Neue Chancen für Riten und Rituale. In *Liturgia—Die Feier des Glaubens zwischen Mysterium und Inkulturation*. Katholische Kirche im Dialog 2. Edited by Martin Kirschner and Joachim Schmiedl. Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, pp. 160–75.
- Kranemann, Benedikt, Thomas Sternberg, and Walter Zahner, eds. 2006. *Die diakonale Dimension der Liturgie*. QD Bd. 218. Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, ISBN 978-3-451-02218-0.
- Lienkamp, Andreas. 2016. Die Sorge für unser gemeinsames Haus! Herausforderungen der bahnbrechenden Enzyklika Laudato si' von Papst Franziskus. Linzer Beiträge zu Wirtschaft—Ethik—Gesellschaft 8. Linz: Katholische Privatuniversität, July 16, Available online: http://www.wiege-linz.at/band8 (accessed on 2 August 2018).
- Luciani, Rafael, and Félix Palazzi. 2015. Pope Francis' 'Option for the Poor' Means Living and Thinking with the People. *America. The Jesuit Review*. November 13. Available online: https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/peoples-church (accessed on 2 August 2018).
- Stuflesser, Martin, and Winter Stephan, eds. 2009. "Ahme nach, was du vollziehst . . . ". Positionsbestimmungen zum Verhältnis von Liturgie und Ethik. StPaLi 22. Regensburg: Pustet, ISBN 978-3-7917-2184-2.
- Wagner, Fritz. 2009. Die Krippenfeier des Franz von Assisi. In *Essays zur zisterziensischen Literatur*. Mariawalder MA-Stud. 3. Aachen: Bernardus-Verlag, pp. 223–32. ISBN 3-8107-9284-5.
- Wahle, Stephan. 2015. Das Fest der Menschwerdung. Weihnachten in Glaube, Kultur und Gesellschaft. Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, ISBN 9783451348006.
- Wahle, Stephan. 2018. Krippe–Christbaum–Lechterkerke. Die Christmette als sinnliches Erlebnis. *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 68. forthcoming.
- Winter, Stephan. 2009. Logos vor Ethos?! Mystagogie als diakonisches Projekt. In "Ahme nach, was du vollziehst ....". Positionsbestimmungen zum Verhältnis von Liturgie und Ethik. StPaLi 22. Edited by Stuflesser Martin and Winter Stephan. Regensburg: Pustet, pp. 169–214, ISBN 978-3-7917-2184-2.
- Winter, Stephan. 2017. "… seid nicht gleichförmig… " (Röm 12,2). Das Widerständige der Liturgie als Quelle christlicher Spiritualität. In: LJ 67 (2017). 139–159.



© 2018 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).