

Phenomenology of Religious Experience II: Perspectives in Theology

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Bergoglio among the Phenomenologists: Encounter, Otherness, and Church in *Evangelii gaudium* and *Amoris laetitia*

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Abstract: Because Jorge Bergoglio's (Pope Francis's) pontifical texts depart from his predecessor's Thomistic vocabulary, critics claim his works deploy an "improvisational" style. Closer analysis reveals, however, that Francis deploys the terminology of French phenomenology after the "theological turn." In fact, *Evangelii gaudium* and *Amoris laetitia* frame the event of interpersonal encounter using three concepts drawn from Emmanuel Lévinas's and Jean-Luc Marion's philosophical projects: the gaze, the face, and the other. Without ruling out a direct textual influence, I argue that Bergoglio's theology of encounter highlights recent phenomenology's implications for Catholic moral theology and ecclesiology. Faith is born of an encounter with the merciful gaze of a specific other – Jesus Christ. The Church, as the community that bears witness to this gaze, is thus called to eniconize this same gaze for "the least of these" (Matt 25:40). Not obviating the need for moral precepts, the encounter with the particular other becomes the condition of their possibility; moral norms only cohere within the context of the pastoral "face-to-face." The main ecclesiological consequence of the "pastoral turn" Bergoglio initiates is thus a "kerygmatic hermeneutic" of the Church: the community of believers turns outward to encounter the other in mercy, evangelizing by example and charity.

Keywords: accompaniment, ecclesiology, face, Pope Francis, kerygma, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, moral theology, pastoral theology, theological turn

"A pastor, not a theologian," goes the clichéd description of Pope Francis. Although where the stress is placed in that fragment is usually a surefire way to judge its speaker's broad position on the sliding scale of ecclesial politics, this quip produces an immediate misinterpretation of both the pontiff's work and the relationship between ministry and theology around which that work revolves. While of course admitting that, in terms of institutional academic experience, Jorge Bergoglio must necessarily pale in comparison to his predecessor, debatably Rome's controlling theological figure from 1981 until his abdication, this admission need not immediately push us into the arms of Francis's most vocal inquisitors. Here R.R. Reno presents an archetypical assessment when he critiques Francis for "ad-lib, improv theologizing," conceding that Bergoglio's "vocation perhaps requires" some "latitude" in the same breath that he asserts that "flexibility, permission, and provisionality" have no room in serious theological discourse.¹ The contradiction is obvious: the vocation of the pastor requires flexibility, but this flexibility is refused any systematic theological basis. The pastor's concrete decision, always tied to the particularity of a situation, thus "floats free," so to speak, from the complex of conceptual determinations that comprise theology proper: a discourse of improvisation that resurrects, as it were, the doctrine of non-overlapping magisteria within ecclesial life.

¹ Reno, "Francis's Improv Theology."

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The ensuing convenience of being able to suppress or ignore “pastoral” comments is bought at the high price, however, of *structurally* (and not just rhetorically) distancing theology from the circumstances of lay believers, to say nothing of the concrete occupation of most clergy. Putting aside the fact that the totally crystallized Neo-Scholasticism emerging in the mid-19th century had already achieved the latter in practice, the shadow of that period of Catholic theology continues to haunt attempts to catalogue Bergoglio’s philosophical possibilities. Who is ultimately to blame for the “pastoral turn”? According to two distinguished Thomists, writing in an open letter to the pope, it is Rahner and von Balthasar!² The intended stakes of Bergoglio’s systematicity (or lack thereof) thus become clear: for all its ideological diversity, the whole of the New Theology and Vatican II stands accused under the title of the “pastoral.” Its philosophical repudiation, we are led to believe, would thus constitute grounds to abandon the post-conciliar project and throw ourselves into an uncritical integralism.

Yet underneath this excessively polemical exterior lies a reality Reno points out elsewhere: that, “after effecting a revolution against the limitations of Neo-Scholasticism,” the leading figures of 20th-century Catholic thought “contributed to the emergence of a new and impoverished theological culture in which [their] own commitments and insights [became] unintelligible.”³ And while Reno goes on to claim that our only “exit” from this quagmire is a return to some kind of Thomistic consensus, it is clear that contemporary Catholic systematic theology has long found an equally powerful philosophical ally in phenomenology. Indeed, this “observation” is by now so banal that we do not even really need to go through the motions: the early Heidegger’s influence on the *Grundkurs*, Wojtyła’s personalist phenomenology, the appearance of the “theology of givenness” in the pontifical Ratzinger, etc. What is not as banal, however, is locating Bergoglio’s thought as within this phenomenological tradition – or, more modestly, outlining why such a placement is plausible and helpful.

To be clear: my aim is not to “prove” that phenomenology exercises a direct line of textual or educational influence on Francis’s theology, even as the terms he deploys in his pontifical works – “technoscience,” the icon/idol distinction, “the other,” “experience,” “the gaze,” and so forth – do make a strong argument for such an influence. (*Laudato Si’*, for example, is so shot through with the later Heidegger’s analysis of the nature of technology that to rule out Bergoglio’s at least secondary access to the tradition’s key texts seems irresponsible.) And although we could advance some reasonable hypotheses about how this access may have happened historically,⁴ the argument advanced *here* will be on the typological, not genealogical, relationship between Bergoglio and some contemporary French phenomenology of the so-called “theological turn” – in particular, the work of Emmanuel Lévinas and Jean-Luc Marion. I examine in particular two of Francis’s texts, *Evangelii gaudium* (“The Joy of the Gospel”) and *Amoris laetitia* (“The Joy of Love”). Both documents are apostolic exhortations – canonically, the second-most-authoritative species of papal document (after the encyclical, although Francis’s theology might well complicate this simple hierarchy) – and were released in 2013, at the very beginning of his pontificate, and in 2016, following the controversial Synod on the Family, respectively. Far from deploying an “improvisational” or “non-academic” language as is often proposed, closer analysis reveals that these texts are deeply steeped in a phenomenological vocabulary. Examining this vocabulary’s four key terms – the gaze, the encounter, the other, and the face – allows us, first, to build to Bergoglio’s convergence with the Lévinas of *Totality and Infinity*. This typological affinity then helps elucidate Bergoglio’s “kerygmatic hermeneutic of the Church,” which reunites moral and pastoral theology while problematizing the proper function and site of theological reasoning itself.

² Finnis and Grisez, “The misuse of *Amoris laetitia* to support errors against the Catholic faith.”

³ Reno, “Theology After the Revolution.”

⁴ Two distinct, but not mutually exclusive, historical lineages suggest themselves. The first would trace Bergoglio’s thought, through his mentor Juan Carlos Scannone’s *teología del pueblo*, to Scannone’s onetime interlocutors and professors at the University of Munich. The second might see in the more Lévinasian strands of Bergoglio’s theology the influence of Bergoglio’s longtime friend John Zizioulas, who devotes significant space to discussing, and problematizing, Lévinas’s *Autrui* in his landmark study *Communion and Otherness*. Zizioulas’s notion of “ethical apophaticism,” which he derives from the person’s irreducible uniqueness, bears significant similarities to Bergoglio’s “accompaniment” of others in their difference. Zizioulas’s social Trinitarianism is also palpable in *Amoris laetitia*’s descriptions of the human family, which in framing the family as *imago Trinitatis* departs from the transcendental, almost ‘egological’ personalism seen in, e.g., Wojtyła. I would like to thank my colleague Raúl Zegarra for leading me to consider the first of these two potential genealogies.

1 Crescendo: the gaze of Christ

We begin at the site at which our three topics – encounter, otherness, Church – originate and intersect: the person of Jesus Christ. “The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus”⁵ – so read *Evangelii gaudium*’s very first lines, establishing a theme which determines the theology of both exhortations: the encounter with Jesus, or, as we will see, “the encounter,” *sine glossa*, as the encounter with Jesus. Avoiding what Marion would call the epistemological interpretation of revelation,⁶ Bergoglio quotes his predecessor’s perhaps greatest one-liner in explaining the origin of the life of faith: “being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”⁷ While duly noting that the “evangelical principle” thus formulated already marginalizes *en passant* the traditional faculties of will (“ethical choice”) and intellect (“lofty idea”) in favor of the phenomenological notion of the “event,” the vocabulary controlling Francis’s interpretation becomes even clearer when he describes this encounter as the effect of a “gaze.” Sometimes mistranslated in the English editions as “look,” the original Italian is consistent – *lo sguardo* – as is the French translation, which consistently renders it *regard*. Let us note a few moments:

If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the *gaze of Jesus*, went forth to proclaim him joyfully.⁸

I believe the secret lies in the way *Jesus gazed upon people*, seeing beyond their weaknesses and failings.⁹

Amoris laetitia repeats the formula.

Illumined by the *gaze of Jesus Christ*, [the Church] turns with love to those who participate in her life in an incomplete manner, etc.¹⁰

First and foremost, then, the Good News is expressed neither as “information” nor even, initially, as a “decision,” but as the experience of being phenomenized in a certain way by this certain person. Christ’s gaze is originary grace, as Bergoglio continually stresses. “The primacy,” he writes, “always belongs to God...the life of the Church should [thus] always reveal clearly that God takes the initiative, that ‘he has loved us first’...This conviction,” he goes on, “enables us to maintain a spirit of joy in the midst of a task so demanding and challenging that it engages our *entire life*.” In other words, this “way of the gaze,” this “secret” of the messianic ministry, is the gaze of love, settling its ethical ambiguity – since the gaze can, as we know, project a variety of problematic intentions, such as when it intends faces as objects.¹¹ Near the middle of *Amoris laetitia*, Bergoglio provides us with a further definition. “The aesthetic experience of love is expressed in that ‘gaze’ which contemplates other persons as ends in themselves.”¹² We are again slightly misled by the English, as the original mentions only *l’altro* – the other, unqualified and full stop, a terminological choice the French also retains (*l’autre*); what is more striking, however, is Bergoglio’s understanding of love as an αἴσθησις, as a “sense experience” or indeed as “lived experience” (*erlebnis*). To

⁵ *Evangelii gaudium* (hereafter: EG) §1.

⁶ Under the “epistemological interpretation of revelation,” divine revelation is understood to be consist of propositional information alone; in the history of Christian theology, Marion traces this maneuver to Thomas Aquinas materially but only formally to his (mis)interpreters, foremost among them Francisco Suárez. See Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 22 ff.

⁷ EG §7.

⁸ EG §120.

⁹ EG §141.

¹⁰ *Amoris laetitia* (hereafter: AL) §291.

¹¹ Marion often discusses the immorality of intending a face as an object; see, for example, Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, 105: “Without a doubt, in the case of an object of the world, I can always confirm the appresentation of three sides [of a parallelepiped] by that of three others at a moment later. I can always ‘think it through’ regarding this object (even though I *could never do the same with another person*)” (emphasis mine). The human face, in Marion’s thought, is one example of the saturated phenomenon (the icon, no less), and thus properly exceeds intentionality.

¹² AL §128.

love, then, is to intend the other as an end. But wait: is this not the language of the categorical imperative, which threatens to reintroduce duties and the Law into the heart of the interpersonal encounter? Not at all, for the gaze of love is precisely what suspends the general in favor of the particular. In the encounter, there is only the concrete one before me, whose needs, wants, desires, and circumstances are wholly unique. In pastorally responding to the other's unrepeatable situation, we perform what Bergoglio calls "accompaniment":

In our world, ordained ministers and other pastoral workers can make present the fragrance of Christ's closeness and his personal gaze. The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious, and laity – into this 'art of accompaniment' which teaches us to remove our sandals before the *sacred ground of the other* [*la terre sacré de l'autre*].¹³

We will return to this notion of a "sacred other" presently. To first flesh out the notion of accompaniment:

One who accompanies others has to realize that the person's [*di soggetto* – the subject's] situation before God and their life in grace are mysteries which no one can know fully from without.¹⁴

Amoris laetitia has even more to say on this topic, although there in the specific context of family life as *imago Trinitatis*. Bergoglio here writes that to "develop the habit of giving real importance to the other" is to "appreciate them and to recognize their *right to exist*,"¹⁵ to "set aside all illusions and accept the other as he or she *actually is*."¹⁶ In summary, then, the gaze of Christ, synonymous with that of love, is one which sees the other's inability to fully become an object of knowledge (the "mysteries...no one can know") as her ownmost reality or characteristic. To be seen as an "end" is thus not at all to be seen as one beneficiary among many of some perfected Kantian moral calculus; rather, it is to be seen as a phenomenon that pre- or exceeds the norm and thus provokes, as Francis writes in *Amoris laetitia*, a "certain dread."¹⁷ Seeing the other incites a "fear of God," a "fear and trembling" – or, in post-conciliar vocabulary, "wonder and awe."

2 Covergence: the face of the other

It is telling that nowhere in these two documents does Francis use traditional, capacities-centered language of the *imago Dei* to defend the other's sacredness. That term actually does not appear at all in *Evangelii gaudium*, and although it does in *Amoris laetitia*, the *imago* there refers exclusively to the *communio personarum* and thus refers back to encounter. Bergoglio rather establishes the other's sacredness by means of scriptural citation. Returning to the language of "removing our sandals before the sacred ground of the other," we notice that the text places there a Hebrew Bible reference, Exodus 3:5, which takes us, of course, to Moses's encounter on Mount Horeb! Now not only does Bergoglio perform by this reference the very equivocation Dominique Janicaud identified in *Totality and Infinity* as the moment phenomenology takes the "theological turn" – namely, of equating "the alterity of the Other and of the Most-High"¹⁸ – but confirms that the issue here is the intuitive anteriority and/or excess of personal identity, because at the same time that it proclaims liberation, the encounter at the burning bush ends with God's refusal of predication (Ex. 3:14).

Like God, then, the other appears without matching a corresponding intention, and while phenomenology has thematized this mismatch in diverse ways, Bergoglio does name it correctly. The English reads, at *Evangelii gaudium* §88, that "the Gospel tells us to run the risk of a *face-to-face* encounter with others"; but the French, following the Italian text's unusual use of *volto* instead of *faccia* much more closely – and, for our interpretation, decisively – speaks of "*le risque de la rencontre avec le visage de*

¹³ EG §169.

¹⁴ EG §172.

¹⁵ AL §138.

¹⁶ AL §218.

¹⁷ AL §127.

¹⁸ Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 34.

l'autre,” “the risk of the encounter with the *face of the other*.” At this moment, Bergoglio’s vocabulary maps so closely onto that of *Totality and Infinity* III-B that an actual genetic relationship between these two texts becomes plausible. *Amoris laetitia* §12 offers a similar suggestion, which in describing what amounts to a phenomenology of marriage speaks again of “*la rencontre avec un visage, un ‘tu’*,” – “the encounter with a face, a ‘Thou’.” Although Bergoglio here is clearly conflating Lévinas’s position with Martin Buber’s, we can spy this artifact’s precise origin in *Totality and Infinity* as well: I-B-5, where Lévinas reviews Buber’s egalitarian dialectic only in order to then reject it in favor of the *Vous* and its “dimension of height.”¹⁹

However uncanny these terminological similarities may be, however, the structural role the the encounter with the face plays in both Lévinas and Bergoglio is just as critical. For Lévinas, as we know, the face is what suspends ontology: it is the phenomenon of the other’s irruption into “the same,” frustrating philosophy’s endless attempt to achieve what he calls, in “Ethics as first philosophy,” the absolute “correlation between knowledge and being.”²⁰ The quest for absolute knowledge, which begins as the *ego*’s attempt to secure its own freedom in the world, ironically ends up denying the *ego* this privilege by dissolving it in the ontological totality. “The opposition between I and non-I disappears in an impersonal reason. Freedom is not maintained but reduced to being the reflection of a universal order which maintains itself and justifies itself all by itself.”²¹ Universal reason can thus justify the other’s “right to exist,” to use Bergoglio’s wording, but only by sublimating that right via the general category. The other would then no longer appear as a face, but as one more instance of “the rights-bearer,” the “moral reasoner,” or whatever other category the ontologist invents in an attempt to safeguard the face’s originary ethical phenomenality. In his homage to Lévinas in “The Intentionality of Love,” Marion draws out this precise problem when he writes that

the injunction of obligation toward the other leads, in reality, to the neutralization of the other as such. The other is neutralized as other, for another can always be substituted who can offer the face of the other that the universal moral law requires. [Thus,] no face can claim to be irreplaceable because, if it in fact became so...the act accomplished in regard to him would cease to satisfy the universality of the law.²²

Bergoglio’s fundamental insight is that, despite its best intentions, when moral theology attempts to apply universal ethical rules indiscriminately, it falls prey to this same distortion and so betrays that which it was meant to protect – the other’s absolute worth. “Ethics” itself thus becomes an ambiguous term, because although the drive to act ethically stems from an experience of encounter, an “ethic,” when built up into a system of total knowledge, undermines the conditions of possibility for those encounters. In his exhortations, Bergoglio describes this as the theological attempt to ignore the “concrete,” the “particular,” or the “situation” of persons. For examples, and to most fully understand the thick relationship between the encounter with the other and Bergoglio’s theological method as a whole, let us examine a few longer passages from *Amoris laetitia*.

There is a need to avoid judgments which do not take into account the complexity of various situations and to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience distress because of their condition.²³

[Persons] can find themselves in a variety of situations, which should not be pigeonholed or fit into overly rigid classifications leaving no room for personal and pastoral discernment.²⁴

It is reductive simply to consider whether or not an individual’s actions correspond to a general law or rule, because that is not enough to discern and ensure full fidelity to God in the concrete life of a human being...[While] it is true that general rules set forth a good which can never be disregarded or neglected, in their formulation they cannot provide absolutely

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁰ Lévinas, “Ethics as First Philosophy,” 76.

²¹ Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 87.

²² Jean-Luc Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 93.

²³ AL §296.

²⁴ AL §298.

for all particular situations...precisely for that reason, what is part of a practical discernment in particular circumstances cannot be elevated to the level of a rule.²⁵

And, finally, summing up the exhortation's entire method, he writes:

Neither the Synod [on the Family] nor this Exhortation could be expected to provide a new set of general rules, canonical in nature and applicable to all cases. What is possible is simply a renewed encouragement to undertake a personal and pastoral discernment of particular cases, one which would recognize that, since the degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases, the consequences or effects of a rule need not necessarily always be the same.²⁶

It is precisely here that Bergoglio's fiercest misinterpreters confuse his call to engage in the pastoral encounter that precedes the canon with the claim that a pastoral decision undertaken in response to some given encounter is a universal possibility. Pastoral discernment does not take place outside the encounter with the face; any attempt to generalize a decision made within or following a specific encounter – as proposed by some who see Bergoglio's pastoral theology as reforming church doctrine – commits the phenomenological error of intending the face, which cannot become a noema. To this one could object immediately, of course, that Lévinas himself make possible the canon's universal aspirations when he displaces the face's injunction onto the commandment, the precept *par excellence*: “thou shalt not kill (me).”²⁷ Indeed, but as Marion points out so rightly in *In Excess*, we must not be overly literal. ““To kill,”” he writes, “is not limited to putting to death... [It] indicates the destruction of the other person or thing, its objectivization into an insignificant term, entirely annulled... [Murder] is in fact *first* a question...of removing the irreducible autonomy of a non-objectivizable, unknowable other person, the unforeseeable center of initiatives and intentionality.”²⁸ We thus come full circle to that which, in Bergoglio's pastoral theology, the loving gaze respects and honors: the “mystery” of the other person's life. If moral theology does not leave room for pastoral discernment – in other words, if it constructs an airtight conceptual totality which does not permit the other's exteriority to appear – it effectively “kills” the other. Accordingly, Francis has harsh words for this kind of spirituality: it is a “self-absorbed promethean neopelaganism of those who ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules.”²⁹

3 Consequence: the pastoral turn and the “kerygmatic hermeneutic”

This incendiary condemnation raises one final, central question: if the encounter with the other precedes the precept, then what exactly, in Bergoglio's moral theology, is the relationship between the encounter, the life of the Church, and the role of the norms and rules that govern that life? For although these two exhortations obviously want to carve out a foundational status for the exception (i.e. as vs. the rule), they traffic in no cheap antinomianism, especially considering that they summon the Church to specific, concrete initiatives such as evangelization, social justice, and dialogue. *Amoris laetitia* §295 explains, citing Wojtyła: “the so-called ‘law of gradualness’...is not a ‘gradualness of the law’ but rather a gradualness in the prudential exercise of free acts on the part of subjects who are not in a position to understand, appreciate, or fully carry out the objective demands of the law. For the law is itself a gift of God which points out the way, a gift for everyone without exception: it can be followed with the help of grace.” This might sound very nominalist if we forget that Bergoglio's definition of grace is phenomenological, not ontological: we are not speaking here of an “infusion of potencies,” but of experiencing Christ's loving gaze. “It is” thus, the exhortation clarifies soon afterward, “a matter of reaching out to everyone, of needing to help each person find his or her own proper way

²⁵ AL §304.

²⁶ AL §300.

²⁷ Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 198.

²⁸ Marion, *In Excess*, 126.

²⁹ EG §94.

of participating in the ecclesial community and thus to experience being touched by an ‘unmerited, unconditional, and gratuitous’ mercy.”³⁰

Despite the obvious temptation to do so, we should not hastily map onto this clash between grace and – what is its other term: being? nature? – a choice between the theology of the Cross and the theology of glory. Rhetorically, of course, Bergoglio opts for the former – for “the salvation which God offers us is the work of his mercy. No human efforts, however good they may be, can enable us to merit so great a gift. God, by his sheer grace, draws us to himself... This principle of the primacy of grace must be a beacon which constantly illuminates our...evangelization,” etc.³¹ At the same time, however, Francis eschews any doctrine of two kingdoms and offers instead what we could call a “density principle.” Under the clear influence of Henri de Lubac – whose ecclesiology *Evangelii gaudium* §93 explicitly cites – Bergoglio thinks the church/world distinction not as absolute dichotomy, but as the first nested and “blended,” in decreasing degrees, with the second. In this, he follows the same conceptual model Ratzinger maps onto the charity/justice distinction in *Caritas in veritate*,³² to say nothing of the diverse “nestings” in Marion’s theology: gift/being, Trinity/unity, eschaton/history, etc. The density principle’s basic theme is that although certain moral situations are ideal and fully express the Church’s eschatological reality, other situations can express aspects of this reality in imperfect ways. Discussing the issue of divorce and remarriage in the Church, for example, Bergoglio writes that “some forms of union radically contradict this ideal [of marriage], while others realize it in at least a partial and analogous way.”³³ In other passages he applies the density principle to the *ecclesiola*, or “domestic church,” that loving families model for society. Rather than serving as a respite from the “natural attitude,” the family is meant to serve as the heart of a communal charity that, because purest, produces distributive justice in broader society.³⁴

The reason Bergoglio’s model remains phenomenological, however, is because at the center of his Church of increasing density stands Jesus Christ, who converts through the gaze. It is Christ’s gaze of love, felt *first* as mercy, which impels the believer to take up this same gaze toward the other. Thus, “it becomes clear that Christian morality is not a form of stoicism, self-denial, or merely a practical philosophy or catalogue of sins...Before all else, the Gospel invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us, to *see God in others*” – the gaze of love – “and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others...All of the virtues are at the service of this response of love.”³⁵ Bergoglio thus inverts the encounter’s chronology as Lévinas and, to some extent, even Marion see it. No longer does the face’s self-manifestation impose responsibility upon me *ipso facto*, as in *Totality and Infinity*,³⁶ but rather it is the experience of *being seen as a face by another* that launches my personal salvation history. To speak like Marion, the believer does see the other as an icon of Christ, but only as a response to having become an icon *for another* first. “An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first...Such a community has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father’s infinite mercy.”³⁷

Like a chain of falling dominoes, the Church is the community that transmits the apostolic experience of being seen, by Christ, as icons of his Father; and thus, to be even more precise, the mutual iconicity (the “face to face”) witnessed within the ecclesial community becomes an icon of the whole of Trinitarian life. Francis explicitly uses this terminology. Speaking of the family – the supernatural Church’s natural

³⁰ AL §297

³¹ EG §112.

³² See, e.g., *Caritas in veritate* §6: “Charity goes beyond justice, because to love is to give, to offer what is ‘mine’ to the other; but it never lacks justice, which prompts us to give the other what is ‘his,’ what is due to him by reason of his being or his acting... If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them... On the other hand, charity transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving. The *earthly city* is promoted not just by relationships of rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy and communion.”

³³ AL §292.

³⁴ AL §§194, 279.

³⁵ EG §39.

³⁶ Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 200 ff. *Givenness and Revelation* essentially theologizes this same chronology when it describes the believer’s initial experience of Christ as being one of Christ’s iconic status, as accomplished through the working of the Holy Spirit.

³⁷ EG §24.

archetype – *Amoris laetitia* says, “the couple...is a true, living icon – not an idol like those of stone or gold...The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection.”³⁸ Though the inherent attractiveness of this ecclesial life sometimes causes the Church to turn inward, Bergoglio insists that she must resist this temptation, remember the gift, and turn outward to “the peripheries.” For those “who experience the power of love know that this love is called to bind the wounds of the outcast, to foster a culture of encounter and to fight for justice. God has given the family the job of ‘domesticating the world’ and helping each person to see fellow human beings as brothers and sisters.”³⁹ While some would see here an endorsement of a merely secular egalitarianism, through the density principle, we can understand this as the coequality of siblings, of personal origination – indeed, as Lévinas says, of a “fraternity radically opposed to the conception of a humanity united by resemblance... [I]t” instead “involves the commonness of a father... Monotheism signifies this human kinship, this idea of a human race that refers back to the approach of the Other in the face”⁴⁰ – for Bergoglio, as for Marion, the Father’s face as glimpsed in the face of Christ, and Christ’s as glimpsed in the face of the Other. To carry Christ’s merciful gaze forward, and outward, in history is thus Church’s preeminent task and defining characteristic. *Evangelii gaudium* §27:

I dream of a “missionary option,” that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her [i.e., the Church’s] self-preservation.

This is Bergoglio’s “kerygmatic hermeneutic of the Church.”

And so we arrive at his fundamental methodological gamble, one that attempts to resolve the abyss between pastoral and moral-theological reasoning we first noted. “Return to the things themselves!” Through the kerygmatic hermeneutic, Bergoglio takes this phenomenological principle of principles and insists that, for the Church, this “thing,” this *πρᾶγμα*, this “matter” must always be proclaiming the Gospel, the task to which all ecclesial activity, *including* theological discourse itself, must be subordinated. “In catechesis too, we have discovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or kerygma, which needs to be the center of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal. The kerygma is Trinitarian,”⁴¹ etc. But if the kerygma is proclaimed first in the encounter, and if the encounter means “learning to find Jesus in the face of the others [*le visage des autres*], in their voices, in their pleas,”⁴² then the phenomenological primacy of lived experience means that the pastoral becomes the only proper site of moral theology. The law, especially in its “natural” costume, is not annulled, but becomes rather “a source of objective inspiration for the deeply personal process of making decisions”⁴³ – a process that always takes place *in vivo* and not from the depersonalized distance of the armchair or theological commission. Would this mean that, in the life of the Church, the law is imposed only so that the Gospel can suspend it? Though Bergoglio’s rhetoric might risk this direction, the density principle asks us to avoid this binary and opt instead to think of degrees, of the moral law’s ever-contextual application and (re)interpretation. Like the creeds, moral-theological norms become *analogiae fidei*: symbols gesturing toward a *reality already but not yet*, yet never equaling that reality’s contents. A particularly striking turn of phrase sums it all up. “Rather than offering the healing power of grace and the light of the Gospel message, some would ‘indoctrinate’ that message, turning it into a ‘dead stone to be hurled at others.’”⁴⁴ “*Indottrinare*” – to brainwash, yes, but also to “place into a doctrine.” Circumscribed by the doctrine’s noetic frame, the Gospel encounter surrenders its interpersonal basis, its face-to-face origin. If it were to keep its kerygmatic character, then,

³⁸ AL §11.

³⁹ AL §183.

⁴⁰ Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 214.

⁴¹ EG §164. Ratzinger, in *Caritas in veritate*, anticipates this insight. See *Caritas in veritate*, §15: “These important teachings form the basis for the missionary aspect of the Church’s social doctrine, which is an essential element of evangelization. The Church’s social doctrine proclaims and bears witness to faith.”

⁴² EG §91.

⁴³ AL §305.

⁴⁴ AL §49.

moral theology would need to re-place its *logos* from the anonymity of a “logic” to the speaking face of the incarnate Word – theology, not first as science, but as homily.⁴⁵

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