

Pope of the Global South? Toward a Decolonial Reading of the Francis Papacy

Mar Louie Vincent Reyes

Abstract: The election of Pope Francis in 2013 sent shockwaves throughout the Catholic world. As the first Latin American Pontiff, Francis provides an important lens into how the institutional Church perceives the Global South. Along with his Argentine background before becoming Pope, the study looks at two of Francis' papal encyclicals (*Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*) and one of his apostolic exhortations (*Evangelii Gaudium*), the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon region, and other relevant statements and activities to see the scope of the soft power and influence of the Pope over the Global South and beyond. Applying Massimo Faggioli's understanding of Francis' global Catholicity and decolonial theory provides the globalization angle of the Holy Father's discourses. From there, a critical discourse analysis of the texts helps us understand how the Pope shows particular focus on the plight of the Global South. The paper identifies key themes defining the Pope's decolonial approach to global and spiritual matters: a culture of encounter, acknowledgment of various peripheries, critiques of coloniality and forms of exploitation, and promotion of integral ecology. From these results, the study constructs the framework of a decolonial paradigm to globalization and international relations that clarifies the role of the Catholic Church in the world and fosters greater appreciation of the subjects of decoloniality and international relations among Catholics. Understanding the Global South focus of the Francis papacy provides a model for different cultures, parishes, and communities with ties to the Catholic Church in countering colonial tendencies while promoting a greater connection between religion and the environment.

Keywords: Pope Francis, Global South, decoloniality, globalization, critical discourse analysis, liminality, border thinking

I. Introduction

The election of Pope Francis on March 13, 2013 changed the Church and the world in many ways. As the first Pope from Argentina and the Society of Jesus, he could be considered an outlier or outsider entering the politics of the center of the Catholic hierarchy, Rome. He comes from a part of the world that is identified as the Global South, including regions of Asia, Africa, Oceania and, of course, Latin America. This term, “Global South” is itself loaded with meaning for both Pope Francis and the Catholic Church in the global world. A “periphery”, which most people identify as the “Third World”, the Global South is articulated beyond discourses of development or even the history of European and US colonization. When people talk about the Global South, it is all about geopolitical power relations between the prosperous “North” or center and the developing or exploited “South”, the periphery (Dados and Connell 2012). The place of Pope Francis, the former archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, is important in the ongoing discourse about the continued operation of colonization and coloniality in the globalized world because that peripheral context is now within the center of Catholic political and spiritual power, shaping billions of worldviews. Given that Argentina is a former Spanish colony and a country that continues to be plagued by the aftermath of colonization, how does Francis’ positionality translate to his perception of colonization? Is the Pope decolonial?

To answer this question, we must explore his background from accounts of his life in Argentina and of the numerous influences that have shaped his life. These texts add context to his speeches, which will be studied and appreciated through critical discourse analysis. The corpora of texts studied include encyclicals, apostolic letters, apostolic constitutions, apostolic exhortations, homilies, general audiences, messages, letters, and speeches. Critical discourse analysis is used to identify the patterns found in and nuances of the speeches of the Holy Father. Apart from detecting mentions of the Global South, the analysis underlines the employment of a decolonial tone found in the texts, applying conceptual frameworks discussing the coloniality of power.

How will a decolonial reading of the Francis papacy help the ongoing discussion of coloniality? The soft power and influence of Pope Francis affects over 1.4 billion Catholics and several others who see merit in his thoughts. Further, understanding Francis from his context, experiences, and positions is key to seeing the progress of the Church and its relations with the modern world. This reading of the Pontiff will, in turn, bring more Catholics and like-minded people face to face with the realities of the Global South that Jorge Mario Bergoglio once experienced.

II. Catholicism and (De)Colonization

Before discussing the current Pope, some context is needed to understand the involvement of the Catholic Church in colonization and decoloniality. Pope Alexander VI had decreed the partition of the undiscovered continents of the world between two Empires, Spain and Portugal, though the Church's intentions with the movement of "discovery" was to find lands to evangelize. While the Catholic Church advocated for preaching the gospel to every nation, the institution, particularly Francisco de Vitoria, did hold the view that anyone with rationality had property rights and should have their consent considered (Vitoria 1991, 239, 247). As a means to civilize pagan natives, expeditions were participated in by missionaries, though some remained inclined to view indigenous peoples as barbaric, a view that is rooted in a Western Aristotelian tradition (Reinhard 1992, 368). Such a culturally-ingrained barrier between Christians and indigenous peoples was a starting point to the Eurocentric mind that is prevalent in coloniality.

Some figures, Fray Bartolome de las Casas, for instance, advocated for the human rights of natives, though the standard was not universally applied, as black slaves were reduced to key economic commodities. In this complex matrix of coloniality, the Church has indeed benefited from the exploits of secular kingdoms, their pursuit of gold and glory justified by the pretext of "civilizing the heathen" in the name of God.

With the waning influence of the Catholic Church over European society, Popes began to focus more on understanding realities on the ground through social teachings, starting with Pope Leo XIII's groundbreaking encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, which critiqued paltry conditions in factories and the dehumanization of labor. Such encyclicals and other statements have also formed a consciousness among clergy and believers about the unfortunate consequences of development and the colonization process.

After World War II, there was growing recognition of the movement of colonies from Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent to the African nations away from their colonial masters. They attained sovereignty and reconstituted themselves as nation-states. Pope Pius XII's 1954 Christmas Message mentions the rise of such countries and the consequences of colonial greed. Later on, we get a similar tone from John XXIII, particularly in his encyclicals, *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963), the latter of which falls within the period when the Second Vatican Council convened. In *Mater et Magistra*, John XXIII writes:

We are witnessing the break-away from colonialism and the attainment of political independence by the peoples of Asia and Africa. (John XXIII 1961, no. 49)

Pacem in Terris highlights this further with its thrust on the protection of national sovereignty:

Finally, we are confronted in this modern age with a form of society which is evolving on entirely new social and political lines. Since all peoples have either attained political independence or are on the way to attaining it, soon no nation will rule over another and none will be subject to an alien power. (John XXIII 1963, no. 42)

Even after the Council, we receive similar messaging from Paul VI, whose *Populorum Progressio* (1967) mentions ties of dependence (Paul VI 1967, no. 52) and racism (Paul VI 1967, no. 63) as “holdovers of colonialism” and obstacles to world solidarity. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), written by the same pontiff, talks about forms of neocolonialism (Paul VI 1975, no. 30).

A key document for bishops and priests in the peripheries, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) by John Paul II, recognized the rise of neocolonialism for the creation of the International Movement of Non-Aligned Nations amidst ideological conflicts (John Paul II 1987, no. 21-22). The same pontiff has also recognized the role of the Catholic Church in the colonization process, opening up a humbling moment for the institution to see its part in these crimes, particularly during his visit to the Dominican Republic in 1992 and Jamaica in 1993. Later on, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009) by Benedict XVI reviews *Populorum Progressio* and how the decolonization situation has fared:

More than forty years later, we must acknowledge how difficult this journey has been, both because of new forms of colonialism and continued dependence on old and new foreign powers, and because of grave irresponsibility within the very countries that have achieved independence. (Benedict XVI 2009, no. 33)

In the wake of the post-Vatican II responses of the popes to colonialism, other bishops followed suit. Of importance to this paper is the role of the Latin American, Asian and African bishops in raising awareness over the impact of colonialism, through events such as the General Conferences at Medellín in 1965 and at Aparecida in 2007 of CELAM (Latin American Episcopal Council). The Aparecida Conference stressed that the “decolonizing of minds and knowledge, recovery of historic memory, and enhancement of intercultural spaces and relationships are conditions for affirming the full citizenship of these peoples.”

From these statements, we see the Church’s institutional approach to colonization, which constitutes the formal basis of Pope Francis’ response to

coloniality. However, they are just part of the equation as Francis is shaped just as much, if not more, by his experiences of living in the margins within the Global South.

III. The Global South Context: Pope Francis on Decolonization

Born to and raised in a family of Italian immigrants, Jorge Mario Bergoglio was a product of the margins, exposed to the diasporic experience of those entering new cities and living away from their homelands. As a Jesuit priest, he engaged in dialogue during sermons for those in the shanties, asking them questions about liturgical readings and hearing their experiences (Berryman 2016, 64). There, he formed friendships with Anglicans, Protestants and Pentecostals. Bergoglio's experiences and *The Aparecida Document* (2007) formed his "missionary discipleship" approach, for the Church to go out of itself (Berryman 2016, 66-67). The same document also focused greatly on "urban ministry" than liberation theology, citing that too often, violence and the chaos of urban life "prevent us from seeking and contemplating the God of life also in urban environments" (CELAM 2007, no. 514). What distinguishes Bergoglio from other Latin American and liberation theologians is that he does not view himself as a theologian but as a priest serving the margins, a pastor in the slums. The focus on the urban environment is exemplified in his familiar approaches to cities in *Laudato Si'* and a number of other statements. However, one can also see the influence of another popular theological movement in Latin America, *teologia del pueblo*, which prioritizes *el pueblo* (the People) and originated in *Lumen Gentium's* (1964) description of the church as "the People of God." This includes a focus on popular piety, which was not stressed by preceding Popes. Popular piety pertains to particular expressions of faith by the masses and forms in part the *sensus fidei* or the people's appreciation of the faith from the ground, as seen in former colonies of Spain, such as the Philippines with its myriad of saintly devotions.

With his direct experience of the streets, Bergoglio also witnessed rising unemployment and economic troubles due to the populist Peronist regimes that used nationalism and protectionist policies to divide society. Due to Argentina's financial crisis and government mishandling of economic liberalization after the fall of the Perons, Bergoglio grew particularly critical of capitalism, which Argentinians called *neoliberalismo* (Gregg 2017, 365-366). His service in the slums and observation of the consequences of irresponsible governments cemented Bergoglio's criticism of ideology as a new form of colonization, along with the way profit-driven systems continue to dehumanize people within structures of bureaucracy and fast-paced growth by leaving behind many of the urban poor, the young, and the old.

IV. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis can generate an interpretation of texts based on their social context, their approach to the dominant beliefs present in the world, and, in the case of this paper, explores the timeliness of the entry of Pope Francis into the papacy as a vehicle for foregrounding the Global South's worldviews and issues. For Janks (1997, 329), there is a reason these texts are uttered at a specific point in time. Selections in the use of language have a historical dimension. In fact, this line of thinking can be found in Faggioli's approach to the liminality of Pope Francis' papacy in the context of the development of the Catholic Church's doctrine amid and relationship with the modern world. The importance of history and temporality is key to the analysis as it indicates how Pope Francis' Global South context influences his statements, writings, and worldview on specific issues.

Critical discourse consists of textual analysis (description), processing analysis (interpretation) and social analysis (explanation), and each step can be connected to a particular source or conceptual framework. Textual analysis can uncover and describe the post-colonial script within Pope Francis' statements. These unearthed texts are then processed and interpreted through the concept of liminality that is now applied in postcolonial theoretical framing. Lastly, we look at the social explanations derived from the texts and processes by understanding the coloniality of power to see how Francis understands the complex of relations in which his ecclesiology meets with the realities of the Global South.

V. Text Analysis: Decolonial Conceptual Frameworks

Postcolonial theory differs from decolonial theory. The former investigates and dissects the impact of the historical colonization process on the globalized world while decoloniality pertains to sets of actions and concepts to identify colonial tendencies and systems of thought that are to be detached from daily life. For the purposes of this paper, postcolonial theory is a good starting point to identify the said tendencies and systems of thought that Pope Francis interrogates in his statements.

Burney's (2012, 174-175) compilation of postcolonial terms is a good source for identifying key terms that connect to the thought and worldview of Pope Francis. The diversity of postcolonial thought demonstrates its strength in critiquing and dissecting the epistemological roots of established academic disciplines, including how they influence colonial thinking, which Said and other thinkers have attributed to literature and language. Said's term, "orientalism" has allowed many to see how colonization has forever shaped the way the globalized world views "the other", namely by "othering" the Orient, the marginalized, indigenous peoples and those considered unfamiliar or, by virtue of "othering" have been oppressed and

segregated, such as homosexuals, cultural and religious minorities and the like (Said 1978). This can even extend to women, the elderly, and children, just a few of the categories that are of interest in Pope Francis' thought.

We will not analyze every term mentioned but a number of key terms are priorities in deciphering to what extent Pope Francis' thought is postcolonial or decolonial. Of particular mention from these resources are key Saidian concepts, such as the representation of the Other, Center/Margin, Peripheries, Eurocentrism, Neocolonialism, Globalization, Hegemony and the World, all key tools for critiquing societal structures and processes, particularly from the position of the Catholic Church, which has moved since the Second Vatican Council away from Eurocentric, paternalistic paradigms.

The study will also include terms specific to decolonial studies, rooted in the concept of the colonality of power expressed by scholars such as Anibal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo. These terms refer to colonality, the matrix of power that perpetuates the colonial, Eurocentric way of perceiving knowledge and social structures ingrained in modernity (Quijano 2000, 535-540). What colonality entails is a denial of the knowledge and experiences produced by the margins in favor of the perspectives of those in the center, and it is this veiled socio-economic domination in thought and socialization that Pope Francis saw throughout his time serving the poor of the Church.

To note, Francis' first direct mention of colonization in his public addresses was in 2015, during his apostolic visit to the Philippines. However, in the ad limina visit of the bishops of Zimbabwe in 2014, he discusses the oppression of people in the present that has existed since colonial times, and while he mentions "structures of sin" embedded in the social order, he does see that they are "ultimately rooted in personal sin". Later on, such as in the 2020 post-synodal exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, Francis reflects on the experiences of the Amazon region under colonial rule:

The colonizing interests that have continued to expand – legally and illegally – the timber and mining industries, and have expelled or marginalized the indigenous peoples, the river people and those of African descent, are provoking a cry that rises up to heaven. (Francis 2020, no. 9)

Within a single sentence, Francis sums up the historical colonization and enslavement of African people, as well as ongoing neocolonial activity that, as he repeatedly says, is fueled by the "logic of profit." However, economic exploitation was not always the highlight of his clear critique of colonialism.

In his 2015 visit to the Philippines, he thoroughly highlights ideological colonization amid the country's debates on the Reproductive Health bill: "Let us be on guard against colonization by new ideologies. There are forms of ideological colonization which are out to destroy the family" (Francis 2015, para 13).

Yet, in relation to Francis' personal experiences, these come from his opposition to political ideologies and elite-driven populism that have divided his Argentina, which he did highlight during the in-flight press conference from the Philippines to Rome on January 19, 2015, when he was asked to expound the concept:

Twenty years ago, in 1995, a minister of education asked for a large loan to build schools for the poor. They gave it to her on the condition that in the schools there would be a book for the children of a certain grade level. It was a school book, a well-thought-out book, didactically speaking, in which gender theory was taught. This woman needed the money but that was the condition. Clever woman, she said yes and made another book as well and gave both of them. And that's how it happened. This is ideological colonization. They introduce an idea to the people that has nothing to do with the people. (Francis 2015, para 9).

Though ideological colonization would be a recurring theme for his 2015 addresses, this particular instance, a form of indoctrination, does seem reminiscent of colonization, to introduce concepts that are alien to the people and profit the elite at the cost of the marginalized. This exemplifies hegemony imposed by the secular state such as when it defines curricula without considering and consulting with its recipients. In this same instance, he also mentions how "Each people has its own culture, its own history". This is reminiscent of how Homi Bhabha (1994, 155-157) differentiates the concepts of cultural difference and cultural diversity. On the one hand, cultural difference is the state of being about the pre-eminence of culture as an object of knowledge that exists before the knower, with pre-given contents that hold primacy. Difference is a situation where a culture by itself is authoritative. On the other hand, cultural diversity acknowledges distinct behaviors and attitudes as secondary and not intrusive to the unity of humanity in a "relativism of distance" yet it is because it emphasizes a unified vision of humanity that it presumes culture is fixed and homogeneous. Thus this concept of originality has been used to keep away any attempts to critique and perceive the homogenizing power of certain symbols, including Eurocentric universalizing tendencies.

Applying Franz Fanon's concept of "occult instability", Bhabha purports that culture has never been unitary in themselves nor in some binary relation between the Self and Other. Cultural difference dispels the illusion that behind individual cultures is a common human culture that denies the way other cultures have

exploited and othered to form colonies. For culture to freely express itself, a Third Space of ambivalence is needed. This space is a disruptive temporality of enunciation, whereby it reveals that all cultural systems are made in contradictory, ambivalent space of enunciation and thus no culture can have a claim to originality or “purity”, revealing a hybridity of identities that can always be reread, reinterpreted in different points in changing time. Different moments, different voices.

From this understanding, Francis speaks of cultural difference. In *Laudato Si'*, he sees culture as “more than what we have inherited from the past; it is also, and above all, a living, dynamic and participatory present reality, which cannot be excluded as we rethink the relationship between human beings and the environment” (Francis 2015, no. 144). He links culture with the environment intrinsically, as if it is an organic product of human connections with the land. Again, Francis highlights how “a consumerist vision of human beings, encouraged by the mechanisms of today’s globalized economy, has a leveling effect on cultures, diminishing the immense variety which is the heritage of all humanity” (ibid). Here, Francis critiques the attempts by more powerful entities to resolve problems with “uniform regulations or technical interventions”, critiquing globalization’s “universalism” and bureaucratic measures that “can lead to overlooking the complexities of local problems which demand the active participation of all members of the community” (ibid).

Much later during a dialogue with the students, teachers and parents of Collegio San Carlo of Milan in April 6, 2019, Francis talks about the importance of having a particular identity, saying:

With my identity I dialogue with you who have your identity, and we both move forward. But it is important to be aware of my identity and to know who I am and that I am different from others. (Francis 2019, para 5)

In the culture of encounter, what is prefaced first is that every person has a particular experience that cannot be compared with any other and for anyone to have sovereignty, they must be mindful of their identity. Culture goes beyond being an “object of knowledge”.

It is in *Fratelli Tutti* where he connects culture of encounter with what can be equated to Bhabha’s difference:

Indeed, when we open our hearts to those who are different, this enables them, while continuing to be themselves, to develop in new ways. The different cultures that have flourished over the centuries need to be preserved, lest our

world be impoverished. At the same time, those cultures should be encouraged to be open to new experiences through their encounter with other realities, for the risk of succumbing to cultural sclerosis is always present. That is why “we need to communicate with each other, to discover the gifts of each person, to promote that which unites us, and to regard our differences as an opportunity to grow in mutual respect.” (Francis 2020, no. 134)

Francis adds two examples where culture is not homogenous but in fact changing, using the experience of realities and peripheries rather than theoretical talk:

Here I would mention some examples that I have used in the past. Latino culture is “a ferment of values and possibilities that can greatly enrich the United States”, for “intense immigration always ends up influencing and transforming the culture of a place... In Argentina, intense immigration from Italy has left a mark on the culture of the society, and the presence of some 200,000 Jews has a great effect on the cultural ‘style’ of Buenos Aires. (Francis 2020, no. 135)

Within these statements, Francis seems to understand Bhabha’s difference but using these particular, unfixed entities of cultures as opportunities for engagement among “othered” entities. Given the context of Francis’ speeches to the European Union, where we see his approach to the West as an individualistic society, the added emphases on cultural differences as “shared sources of enrichment” does understand culture not solely as objects of knowledge predating the knower but as specific experiences that develop and grow with every encounter in the ever-changing world, without regard for a hegemony of any particular entity. During the 2019 International Conference on Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals, he even uses the culture of encounter to present the value of indigenous people in the fight to preserve the environment, encouraging the same “creative participation” by including their voices, voices from the margins, in any discussion regarding sustainable development. Quoting UNESCO, Francis says “Although (indigenous people) represent only five percent of the world’s population, they look after about twenty-two percent of the earth’s landmass. Living in areas such as the Amazon and the Arctic, they help protect approximately eighty percent of the planet’s biodiversity.” (Francis 2019, para 13) This was mentioned to be part of the Pan-Amazonia Synod later that year.

One particular link Francis gives to ideological colonization is the phenomenon of globalization, calling out its attempts to universalize Western

norms. Without calling them out, he clearly alludes to the West in his address to the Italian High Council of the Judiciary on June 13, 2015 as follows:

Likewise globalization — as it was appropriately recalled — in fact also brings with it aspects of potential confusion and uncertainty, such as when it becomes a means of introducing customs, concepts, even rules, extraneous to a social fabric, with the consequent deterioration of the cultural roots of reality which should instead be respected; and this is the result of the tendencies proper to other cultures which are economically advanced but ethically debilitated (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 62). So many times I have spoken of ideological colonization when I refer to this problem. (Francis 2015, para 3)

To note, the critique against universality does not suggest Pope Francis advocates for moral relativism, which he has condemned as a consequence of individualism. Rather, using *Evangelii Gaudium*'s (2013) maxim of “Reality is greater than ideas”, it is a call to examine the realities of exploitation and oppression that demand clear attention to the absolute and apparent dignity shared by all humans, with the preferential option for the poor highlighting who are most in need of justice and mercy.

What he sees as a problem with ideas, particularly of ideologies, lies in his understanding of the phenomenon of triumphalism, where dominant elites declare a moral victory over a perceived threat. As he notes in *Fratelli Tutti*:

Opening up to the world” is an expression that has been co-opted by the economic and financial sector and is now used exclusively of openness to foreign interests or to the freedom of economic powers to invest without obstacles or complications in all countries. Local conflicts and disregard for the common good are exploited by the global economy in order to impose a single cultural model. This culture unifies the world, but divides persons and nations, for “as society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbors, but does not make us brothers”. We are more alone than ever in an increasingly massified world that promotes individual interests and weakens the communitarian dimension of life. Indeed, there are markets where individuals become mere consumers or bystanders. As a rule, the advance of this kind of globalism strengthens the identity of the more powerful, who can protect themselves, but it tends to diminish the identity of the

weaker and poorer regions, making them more vulnerable and dependent. In this way, political life becomes increasingly fragile in the face of transnational economic powers that operate with the principle of “divide and conquer. (Francis 2020, no. 12)

In the press conference during his return from his Apostolic Journey to Thailand and Japan on November 26, 2019, Francis sums up his view of the West with a maxim: “*Lux ex Oriente, ex Occidente luxus*” (“Light comes from the East, luxury, consumerism comes from the West.”) (Francis 2019, para 2). Simply put, for Francis, the West lacks transcendence, becoming more relativistic, individualistic, isolated and thus, not a creative culture, which he contrasts with the contributions of the margins, the Indigenous people who have maintained a positive relationship with the environment. For Francis, the loss of transcendence in religion and the continuing material conditions that make society individualistic and less ethical create the circumstances for exploitative religious and ideological movements that take advantage of the people, with these groups, like structural or societal elites, able to divide people against each other by filling up what secular rationalism and individualist, consumerist culture opened up (Francis 2013, no. 63). The monolithic view of culture Francis critiques in *Evangelii Gaudium* pertains to Eurocentrism in particular, looking at the dreary uniformity of economic globalization and the triumphalism of “exclusive groups” as symptoms of “worldliness”. Triumphalism is more applied in the expressions of faith within the Church that prioritize exclusivity of identity and is a form of what Francis calls “spiritual worldliness”. As with colonization, Francis sees triumphalism as a product of the exploitative nature of elite-driven ideologies.

From the application of Eurocentrism, globalization, universality and cultural difference, we see Francis’ awareness of postcolonial issues and an application of postcolonial conceptual frameworks based on his dialogues with bishops and experience in the margins. As we will see later, Pope Francis applies the center-margin dichotomy to brilliant effect when we apply Massimo Faggioli’s concept of liminality. With liminality, we can connect the decolonial terms to the way Pope Francis encourages border thinking, being the Pontifex, the bridge builder that defines borders for the Catholic world.

VI. Processing Analysis: How Liminality Helps us Francis’ Ecclesiology

Having understood where Pope Francis came from back in his days as Argentine bishop Jorge Bergoglio is one thing. However, we also need to consider the greater scope of Francis’ place in the overall history of the Church. In Massimo Faggioli’s book *The Liminal Papacy of Pope Francis: Moving toward Global Catholicity* (2020), liminality is what defines the pontifex, the term describing a

“bridge builder” and as someone who reshapes and redefines borders (2020, 3). His thesis is built on the idea that a Pope from the liminal edge, “of the ends of the earth” can bring the focus of the center of ecclesial Rome towards the peripheries and the ongoing realities of global Catholics. It is a fitting tool for the purpose of processing the texts and thus peruse its deeper postcolonial and decolonial meanings.

How is this done? The liminality of Pope Francis, that is to say, his position as one who experiences and acts in the margins, “re-contextualizes” the faith based from a reading within his particular position (Faggioli 2020, 67-68). Different moments, different voices. His reception of Vatican II documents, especially *Gaudium et spes*, signifies that the Church cannot act from a distance found in the traditional “ideologization and virtualization of the faith experience”. More than vague theological pronouncements and generalizations that universalizes particular matters of faiths distinct to all contexts, Francis seeks a “listening church” that goes out to the streets to reach out to those abandoned by the sense of exclusion felt from “those above”. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis forwards:

Here I repeat for the entire Church what I have often said to the priests and laity of Buenos Aires: I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures. If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life.” (Francis, 2013 no. 49)

To combat globalization’s universalization, Francis uses the context of the church’s missionary thrust (*Evangelii Gaudium*) to realize that the Church cannot address everything with a one-size-fits-all approach but to listen to different voices to understand different situations. Francis speaks about the knowledge of the popular culture as being what the Church should listen to in order to make sense of the faith. His focus on “popular culture” shows his frame of reference as the people, befitting *teologia del pueblo*, and the need for the Church to listen to the peripheries, to the *sensus fidei*. He sees the elite-based, individualistic “devotions” promoted by a few as exclusionary models do not belong in a church, who are called People of God.

As Faggioli notes, “Francis’ thrust of recovering Catholic universality is free from Latin universalism and not about a cultural resistance against modernity and

postmodernity” (58). In other words, a polyhedron model of globalization (Francis 2013, no. 236), rather than Eurocentric coloniality and elite-driven universalization, which fits Francis’ personal and institutional experience combatting populism.

That being said, with regards to hierarchy, Pope Francis is not wholly anti-hierarchical. In his 2019 meeting with Pontifical Theological Faculty of Southern Italy, Francis sees two complementary movements in theology, a bottom-up movement engaging in a culture of dialogue with every person they encounter and a top-down where the Magisterium determines the signs of our times to find the “Kingdom of God in history” and trends that “disfigure the soul and human history.” This still fits with the idea of a “listening church” (Francis 2019, para. 7).

The liminality of Francis has also produced a particular spiritual geography. Being the bridge builder, Pontifex sees the need for the Church to expand its understanding of borders and worldly problems not being fixed to particular zones in the world. Francis also emphasizes the importance of cities as part of his spiritual geography, an aspect of both *teologia del pueblo* and his contact with the marginalized in Argentine slums and the city environment. In fact, it is cities which enable cultural differences (using Bhabha’s terminology) to be encountered as it encourages the culture of encounter itself between groups of people who recognize their particular value.

In his Address to the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation on May 25, 2013, Francis would talk about “rethinking” socio-economic issues (Francis 2013, para 5-6), a train of thought he would bring up when discussing the labor crisis during this period. However, even within this economic problem, Francis brought attention to the reality that this “something wrong no longer regards only the south of the world but also the entire planet” and calls also for the rethinking of the virtue of solidarity that was usually aimed at the labor class and the economically exploited (Francis 2013, para 8).

In the same speech, Francis applies a Kafkaesque critique about how “concern with the idols of power, profit and money” became a criterion for organization (Francis 2013, para 9). He leans on the idea that bureaucracies and hierarchies have transcended beyond persons but have become a cage where human value is reduced and confined to, as Francis says, “the parameters of the market” (*ibid.*), specifying capitalistic structures as dehumanizing and thus alienating one another. After all, coloniality continually operates on its inevitability to those who are dependent on its epistemology. This is why he calls for an ethical and anthropological, rather than an economic and financial approach to the peripheries, for people to accompany one another in a culture of encounter, not only of different cultures but also of “new peripheries”, to minorities left discarded by the world’s throwaway culture. For Francis, solidarity is social citizenship and to defy the logic of the market involves the need “to offer them the possibility of living a dignified life

and of actively participating in the common good” (ibid). One emphasis Francis has is on the concept of sovereignty, “both the national and supranational planes”, having mentioned calls for liberation of the oppressed while enabling improved conditions that allow human beings to determine their present and futures without undue interference. This call also speaks to coloniality, as it goes beyond historical and economic colonization.

VII. Social Analysis: Francis and the Coloniality of Power – Towards a Decolonial Ecclesiology

Finally, for our critical discourse, we need to place Pope Francis in the greater scope of the continuing decoloniality of the Church. While we may identify some of his statements and viewpoints with certain postcolonial conceptual frameworks, it is another thing to see how Francis understands the coloniality of power. Anibal Quijano (2000, 533; 545-546) postulates on the existence of the coloniality of power, a matrix that defines the way we know the world today and is a part of the phenomenon of modernity. Martinot (2004) notes that “we all live within a multiplicity of colonialities” and using Mignolo’s terminology, we are subjects in both mind and body because we are dominated by coloniality, which is not simply persons in power or the elite but a mentality that excludes and divides individuals from each other, from “the othered”. Coloniality is overpowering a structure of control as “it speaks for us so forcefully that we see no recourse but to represent it.”

Coloniality of power takes three forms: systems of hierarchies, systems of knowledge, and cultural systems and is considered “the dark side of modernity”. First, systems of hierarchies are made through racial classifications where colonists ascribe superiority and inferiority based on colors, claims to superior biological traits, etc. all done to justify the domination of Europeans and, indirectly create Eurocentrism as the main mode of thinking for much of the modern world. This hegemonic model of race division is also important economically, as colonized areas have divided natives into a labor sector that made them dependent on the colonizers for their wages, creating a system of dependency that adds to the “inescapability” of the colonial matrix.

Second, systems of knowledge see the “naturalization of colonial relations between Europeans and non-Europeans”, whereby Europeans produce knowledge and prioritize the way Europeans view the world, Europeans who are not from the place they colonized and declare the area “discovered” by those who have not originally been there or understood its inhabitants. As a hierarchy that divides between “civilized whites” and “uncivilized others”, Eurocentric systems of knowledge result in the denial of knowledge production to the conquered peoples, the repression of their traditional understanding of knowledge and the world simply on the basis of superiority/inferiority relationship enforced by the hierarchy. This is

key to modernity, as we often neglect how the center's definition of the world ignores the realities of the margins.

Third, cultural systems reinforce Eurocentric economic and knowledge production systems while antagonizing and setting aside different cultures as "othered", "exotic" or "hostile" worldviews. Reinforced in the state and economy, such a cultural system would stress the traits of "capitalist economic systems, rationality, neoliberalism, and science" in a tone similar to religious triumphalism, which presumes a set victory over an other, such as the "uncivilized". In other words, racism justifies oppressive politics.

Pope Francis applies a similar approach to his critiques of throwaway culture, economic globalization and ideological colonization that divide people and distance Christians from the peripheries of life. In his words, throwaway culture sends the marginalized to the margins, the vulnerable to live alone with their vulnerabilities, and the exploited to depend on their exploitation. This is because in the greater system of advancement and modernity, there are those who are left behind, viewed as inconvenient, which Francis identifies the young and the old in particular, as well as women, Indigenous people and others among the marginalized. Along with his experiences, Francis sees in these "new peripheries" the ways by which modernity has victimized the othered as inferior and unwanted.

In fact, one can argue there are some similarities between decolonial theory's "coloniality of power" model to Pope Francis' conceptualization of the Christian mission in *Evangelii Gaudium*, his four points being: (a) "Time is greater than space" (no. 222-225), "unity prevails over conflict" (no. 226-230), "realities are more important than ideas" (no. 231-233) and, "the whole is greater than the part" (no. 234-237). Rather than a center that defines dominant narratives, this can arguably be from Francis' critique of ideologies and the way elites govern and divide people to hegemonize their way of thinking, rather than listen to the peripheries and their realities.

Another aspect of decoloniality is the ways by which we try to detach ourselves from the coloniality of power. Walter D. Mignolo articulates this form of "epistemological disobedience", particularly through border thinking. Border thinking sees the existence of theories from beyond the logic of the colonial matrix of power and produces those who are excluded from the production of knowledge. For Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006, 206), theories have a living dimension to them, formed from the experiences of the periphery in response to the effect of modernity on their lives. Rather a homogenized cosmopolitanism and universality dictated by European givens, Mignolo calls for pluriversality, to understand "different colonial histories entangled with imperial modernity" (2007, 498), and thus engage in border thinking, to create a world here many languages and actors can speak, many worlds

can co-exist in one. This is key to the paper as Francis counters homogenized globalization.

Border thinking, then, is thinking from the outside, applying alternative knowledge expressions. Faggiolo's liminality, the "Magellan's gaze" looking at the whole from the margins, rather than from the center, can be thought of as the Church's form of border thinking to hear different voices and ensure, via Mignolo's terminology, the coexistence of many worlds. In drifting away from the dominant Latin center, Francis re-contextualizes borders as he goes to its original Latin roots. Faggioli again says that the border is not just limes ("rigid frontier") but also limen ("threshold"). This method of approaching borders fits within a world of "new walls", "new peripheries" where suffering is not exclusively in one location of the Global South but, through his liminality-based critique of European civilization, an ethical and anthropological problem of the human person dehumanized in exploitative, profit-driven systems. Francis brings the Church from its separation from the world into the uncomfortable realities of the peripheries.

Burney (2012, 175-176) brings up re-presentation as a counter-discourse to rewrite and resist colonial thought patterns and processes, a form of "epistemological rebellion" if we use Walter Mignolo's terminology. This connects with Faggioli's concept of re-contextualization. Richard Terdiman's (1985) "counter-discourse" fits this approach of re-contextualization, which Francis does with globalization. Just as a globalization from the center universalizes norms based on its particular experiences to dominate over other societies, for a liminal Pope, globalization from the margins is not round but a polyhedron, with multiple sides representing the differences of particular cultures engaging in dialogue, the coexistence of many worlds. Rather than be defined by the center (Rome or Western civilization), global society is a polyhedron, "which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness....There is a place for the poor and their culture, their aspirations and their potential.... It is the convergence of peoples who, within the universal order, maintain their own individuality; it is the sum total of persons within a society which pursues the common good, which truly has a place for everyone," (Francis 2013, no. 236). Applying Francis' approach to cultural difference, we see a specific worldview from the margins whereby the center is not greater than any other part and that every part is within a much greater whole. At the core of *Evangelii Gaudium's* counter-discourse of globalization is the idea that the Church has no strict borders as the peripheries exist everywhere. The model of the city, taken from his time in the slums, has always represented the convergence of multiple cultures encountering difference but also emancipating from dominant models.

VIII. Conclusion: Decolonizing the Church via a Global South Ecclesiology

The importance of a Global South ecclesiology lies in how Francis builds upon his experience in the margins and engages in a form of decolonial de-linking by virtue of his actualization on the preferential option that Vatican II has always expressed. From his liminality, we see a re-contextualization of the legacy of Vatican II, from a more theological approach to the Church's relation to the world into one where the Church processes the experiences of the margins.

We also see more praxis in his discourses about social issues, even calling every person to be participants, bringing more meaning to the Christian mission. Francis tends to apply the inputs of bishops' conference when discussing the realities of the faithful. *Evangelii Gaudium*, as we see with later documents, also shows this liminality as Francis discusses the realities of the ground constantly, quoting observations of national bishops, rather than repeating points from previous church fathers. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis mentions how African bishops have seen ongoing neocolonial mechanisms at work and even apply the encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* to make their observation, showing the praxis of Catholic theology in seeing how individualistic coloniality continues to exploit the peripheries (Francis 2013, no. 62). *Laudato Si'* applied research reports together with multiple accounts from bishops to look at the overall environmental degradation. *Querida Amazonia* (2020) not only gathers points from the Pan-Amazonia synod but also from the words and expressions of the Amazonia people themselves and bishops in the area.

Additionally, we also see the Global South Pope as someone whose approach to combating colonization is not through pure conflict but in the power of the people. Notice how Francis phrases social change as "creative". His focus is not purely on the conflict at hand but on the transformative power of the people and on communities' abilities to create, as seen in his calls for "free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive labor" (Francis 2013, no. 192) "creative concern and effective cooperation in helping the poor" (Francis 2013, no. 207) and more, each invoking not only the Biblical sense of the word "creative", to bring form and life, but also Francis' approach to innovation, inventiveness and such virtues valued by the modern capitalist world, which ultimately supports the ego and the system. Creative participation reveals humanity's capability to participate in creation itself by preserving and caring for our common home. This word usage also clashes with, for instance, the stiffness of "unproductive meetings" or "spiritual worldliness", the striving of spiritual exclusiveness that is ultimately rooted in worldliness and egoism. Along with its connection to popular piety and reform from the bottom, Francis invokes familiar themes in *teologia del pueblo* on the wisdom and faith of the people as the way to combat the exploitation of elite hierarchies and coloniality, as a path to a Global South ecclesiology.

There is certainly key praxis to be had through the Pope's encouraging decolonial rhetoric beyond the hierarchy. Pope Francis has called for people to "meddling into politics" ("Pray for politicians that they govern us well" 2013), in a departure from how Benedict XVI's *Deus Caritas Est* expresses hesitation to actively participate in politics, saying "the Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible" (Benedict XVI 2005, no. 28). One can see this in how Francis encourages popular movements, even reverberating their call of "No family without housing, no farmworker without land, no worker without rights, no one without the dignity that work provides" (Address to the Participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements, 2014). Here, we see where he is most concentrated on: the tangible promotion of the common good. Stressing Pope Francis' awareness of the conditions of the Philippines, Imbong (2020, 5-7) emphasizes on the mission of policymakers and Catholic faithful alike to serve the poor more directly and help shape economic policies on human dignity and the common good. In redistributing power, resources and opportunities to the masses, the Church can holistically implement the new evangelization, especially in the peripheries.

So, is Pope Francis decolonial? The paper highlights that beyond his location is his experience as a priest, beyond his position as the Pope is his rootedness in the margins. Bergoglio's experiences with the economic and political instability of Argentina, along with his closeness to the slums, has given him insight to the consequences of foreign intervention and the exploitation of ideologies applied by oligarchic forces. One would say that the liminality of Pope Francis is not so much a change of pace but a truly decolonial move. In the act of detaching from a fixation on the center, Pope Francis also reminds Catholics of the realities Jesus taught in, where he brought truth to power to uplift the oppressed of his day and to give people in the modern day a renewed fervor to approach uncomfortable realities with the gentleness, meekness, and mercy of the Gospel. Rather than be defined by a basis of givens, Pope Francis engages in critical theory, in border thinking, through the simple act of listening to different voices to interrogate elitist policies and enable the peripheries to express their *sensus fidei*.

Acknowledgements.

The author received no financial support for the research and publication of this essay.

Author Information

Mar Louie Vincent C. Reyes is currently an MA student in Political Science at the University of San Carlos, where he also earned his BA Political Science major in International Relations and Foreign Service. His research interests include Catholicism, church-state relations, existentialism, phenomenology, literary

criticism (especially of anime and manga), and international relations. He is a member of the Philippine International Studies Organization (PHISO) and its Steering Committee.

References

- Alcoff, Linda Martín. 2007. "Mignolo's Epistemology of Coloniality." *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 7(3): 79–101. Available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41949566>.
- Benedict XVI. 2005. *Deus Caritas Est*. Accessed October 1, 2020. Available at [Vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).
- . 2009. *Caritas in Veritate*. Accessed October 1, 2020. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html.
- Berryman, Phillip. 2016. "The Argentine and Latin American Background of Pope Francis." *American Catholic Studies*, 127(2): 55–70.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Burney, Shehla. 2012. "Conceptual Frameworks in Postcolonial Theory: Applications for Educational Critique." *Counterpoints*, 417: 173–193.
- CELAM, 2007, Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean Concluding Document, Aparecida, Brazil.
- Dados, Nour, and Raewyn Connell. 2012. "The Global South." *Contexts* 11(1): 12–13.
- Dussel, Enrique. 1995. *The Invention of the Americas*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company.
- E-International Relations. 2017. "Interview – Walter D. Mignolo." Available at <https://www.e-ir.info/2017/06/01/interview-walter-d-mignolo/>
- Faggioli, Massimo. 2020. *The Liminal Papacy of Pope Francis: Moving toward Global Catholicity*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Francis. 2013. *Evangelii Gaudium*. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

- . 2013. “Pray for Politicians That They Govern Us Well”. *Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae*. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2013/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20130916_politicians.html.
- . 2014. *Address to the Participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements*. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2013/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20130916_politicians.html.
- . 2015. Meeting with Families Address of His Holiness Pope Francis. *Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Sri Lanka and The Philippines (12-19 January 2015)*. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/january/documents/papa-francesco_20150116_srilanka-filippine-incontro-famiglie.html.
- . 2015. In-Flight Press Conference of His Holiness Pope Francis from the Philippines to Rome. *Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Sri Lanka and The Philippines (12-19 January 2015)*. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/january/documents/papa-francesco_20150119_srilanka-filippine-conferenza-stampa.html.
- . 2015. *Laudato Si*. Accessed November 9, 2020. Available at http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.
- . 2015. *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Members of the High Council of the Judiciary*. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/june/documents/papa-francesco_20150613_csm.html.
- . 2019. *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants at the Conference on "Religions and The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Listening To The Cry Of The Earth And Of The Poor"*. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/march/documents/papa-francesco_20190308_religioni-svilupposostenibile.html.
- . 2019. *Dialogue between His Holiness Pope Francis and the Students, Teachers, and Parents of Collegio San Carlo of Milan*. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/april/documents/papa-francesco_20190406_istitutosancarlo-milano.html.

- . 2019. Meeting on the Theme “Theology after Veritatis Gaudium in the Context of the Mediterranean”, *Promoted by the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Southern Italy – San Luigi Section – of Naples*. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/june/documents/papa-francesco_20190621_teologia-napoli.html.
- . 2019. Press conference on the return flight to Rome. *Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis To Thailand And Japan (19-26 November 2019)*. Available at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/events/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/en/2022/4/3/malta-volo-ritorno.html>.
- . 2020. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia*. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20200202_querida-amazonia.html.
- . 2020. *Fratelli Tutti*. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.
- Gregg, Samuel. 2017. “Understanding Pope Francis: ‘Argentina, Economic Failure, and the Teología Del Pueblo.’” *The Independent Review*, 21(3): 361–74.
- Hinze, Bradford E. 2016. “Decolonizing Everyday Practices: Sites of Struggle in Church and Society.” *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings*, 71: 46–61.
- Imbong, Jerry D. 2021. “The Political and Economic Vision of Pope Francis: Implications for Philippine Church Mission.” *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, 45(3): 212–20.
- Janks, Hilary. 1997. “Critical Discourse Analysis as a Research Tool.” *Discourse: Studies in The Cultural Politics of Education*, 18: 329–342.
- John XXIII 1961. *Mater et Magistra*. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater.html.
- . 1963. *Pacem in Terris*. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html.
- John Paul II. 1987. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. Available at <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul->

ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html.

Martinot, Steve. n.d. "The Coloniality of Power: Notes Toward De-Colonization." Available at <https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~marto/coloniality.htm>

Mignolo, Walter D., and Madina V. Tlostanova. 2006. "Theorizing from the Borders: Shifting to Geo- and Body-Politics of Knowledge." *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9(2): 205–221.

———. 2007. "Delinking." *Cultural Studies* 21(2-3): 449–514.

Nassar, Matilda. n.d. "Concept: Integral Ecology." *Kellogg Institute for International Studies*. Available at <https://kellogg.nd.edu/ihd-research-lab-integral-ecology>.

Paul VI. 1965. *Lumen Gentium. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*. Available at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/s/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

———. 1967. *Populorum Progressio*. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html.

———. 1975. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html.

Quijano, Anibal, and Ennis, Michael. 2000. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America." *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1(3): 533–580.

Reinhard, Wolfgang. 1992. "Missionaries, Humanists and Natives in the Sixteenth-Century Spanish Indies – a Failed Encounter of Two Worlds?" *Renaissance Studies* 6(3-4): 360–76.

Terdiman, Richard. 1985. *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Said, Edward Wadie. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Vitoria, Francisco de. 1991. "On the American Indians." *Vitoria: Political Writings*. Edited by Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrance, 231–92. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.