

Suburbs of space, suburbs of existence: the approach to the town of Pope Francis

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Abstract

The first Pope who comes from a megacities. Ideas and reflections on Pope Francis and the surrounding areas. His approach “globalized” to the church, evangelization, and about the spaces of the power in the city.

Keywords: suburbs; Pope; globalization; Bergoglio; urban sociology

Introduction

“It is the margin that makes the page”

**Jean-Luc Godard*

“The universe is such that every point is the center and the periphery”

**Giordano Bruno*

“Starting afresh from Christ means not being afraid to go with him in the suburbs. God always goes well, God is not afraid of the suburbs. God is always faithful, is creative, is not closed, and this is never rigid, welcomes us, comes to us, understands us”

**Pope Francis*

Any relationship between the papacy and the city could not exist without this thought: first, the Pope is the Pope because he is the Bishop of Rome (same in the Roman Empire) and as such he organizes and relates to the exercise of his ministry in relation to the spaces of the city. If the Pope’s throne (from Latin word solium) is the “place where he sit”, the seat of the papal throne, Paul VI and Pope Wojtyla were the first Pope of the present age to be called “traveller”. Wojtyla- first non Italian Pope from the Hadrian VI era - lived in Rome as a city to which to apply its program of pontifical recapture the faith of a “public space”. He was responsible for the major events of World Youth Day in St. Peter’s Square. But is Pope Francis that is putting at the center of his reflections the city and her contradictions.

Analysis

Bergoglio before becoming Pope, in one of the congregations pre-conclave said: “The Church is called to come out of herself and go to the suburbs, not just geographical but also existential”. After his election, many media wrote that Bergoglio came from the “end of the world” (the “land of fire” in Argentina). And perhaps more correct to

say that this is the first pope who is from the bowels buttons of a metropolis, as wrote Marco Politi¹.

In the bowels of Buenos Aires is possible make experience in a tangle of existence of a city that has more than 3 million people concentrated in its nucleus, another 10 million who gravitate to the “centers” of a city, where you pass by elegant buildings thirties, a modern high-rise buildings to fall into the jungles of housing and falling into the galaxy of the slums.

“Villa Ramon Carrillo” is the latest township abusive when Archbishop Bergoglio wanted to build a church. The words of Francis, who later became Pope, December 31, 2013 are those of a person who seems to regard Rome in its complex and unresolved identity underground.

Rome, said Pope Francis, “Is a city of unique beauty, but there are so many people marked by material and moral misery, poor, miserable, suffering, that appeals to the conscience of every citizen in Rome, he added, “we feel more strongly the contrast between the majestic and the social problems of those who make it harder”.

Jesus was born in Nazharet, on the outskirts, but he was later to go to Jerusalem to die. Christianity is a movement that starts from the suburbs but with St. Paul it became an urban movement, because St. Paul brings with him a vision of Hellenistic society that you can read in the Letter to the Corinthians and Romans. In Revelation are important letters to seven churches (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea) to understand the approach to the city. Pope Francis seems have a grammar of simplicity in form and content, but expressed in the same year (2013) in which two beautiful movie set in Rome as “Big Beauty” by Paolo Sorrentino and “Sacred GRA” by Gianfranco Rosi, have brought to the fore all the dramatic duplicity of Rome, and constant contrast between center and periphery.

The lexicon of Pope Francis, far more than his predecessor Ratzinger, also consists of terminology “urban”. Go to the suburbs for Francis is an exercise “to become as pastors with the smell of sheep, shepherds in the midst of his flock, and fishers of men.”

Pope Francis wrote: “If the Church does not come from itself to evangelize, becomes self-referential and get sick. The Church must therefore look to the suburbs of existence: the mystery of sin, pain, injustice, ignorance... the thought of all the misery”.

It’s drammatically clear that in many parts of the world, cities are scenes of mass protests where thousands of people are demanding freedom, participation, justice and the various claims which, if not properly understood, it’s not possible put to rest with the force.

¹ M. Politi, Francesco tra i lupi

The first visit of the Pope Francis in the Diocese of Rome in May 2013 was the Church of Saints Elizabeth and Zechariah in the northern suburbs of Rome where Pope Francis had emphasized the fact that “is better understood from the suburbs” and the center. His first apostolic trip in Italy was in Lampedusa. Or the washing of the feet did the boys in the juvenile detention in Roman “Casal del Marmo”. Gestures full of symbolism that also speak of the relationship of a pontiff with the entire city, not just the one contained in the Leonine Wall or as a center of power, but with the spaces of exclusion as slums or free services, prisons, places of transit and port of death and suffering as Lampedusa.

It does not escape certain to Francis, that 60% of the world population (Unicef report 2012) live in urban areas but above 10% it lives in the slums. The approaches to the believers in the public squares, with a search proxemics unusual compared to the popes who preceded him, remember some scenes of the film “Habemus Papam” by Nanni Moretti in 2011 when the new Pope (actor Michel Piccoli), annoyed by loss of human contact in the Vatican halls, escapes and turns the bus. The film is a tribute to the inadequacy of fill that role.

Francis often spoke of the relationship between people and the city. The apostolic exhortation of Cardinal Bergoglio named “*Evangelii Gaudium*” he talk about the town, in particular, in paragraph 71 and following (24 November 2013). The title of his talk was “Challenges of urban cultures.” Consider reading some passages:

“The New Jerusalem, the holy city that is the goal towards which has set out the whole of humanity. It is interesting that the revelation tells us that the fullness of humanity and the story takes place in a city. We need to recognize the city from a contemplative look, or a look of faith discover that the God who dwells in its houses, its streets, its squares. The presence of God that accompanies the sincere search for people and groups to find support and make sense of their lives. He lives among the people promoting solidarity, brotherhood, the desire for goodness, truth, justice”.

Bergoglio seen in the metropolis on the challenge of the new evangelization: “It is necessary evangelization that illuminate new ways of relating with God, with others and with the environment, and raise fundamental values. You need to go where they form new stories and paradigms, catch up with the Word of Jesus the deepest core of the soul of the city. Do not forget that the city is a multicultural context. In the big cities, you see a connective tissue in which groups of people share the same way of life and dream imagery and the like are formed into new areas in Persons, cultural territories in Invisible Cities. The city produces a kind of permanent ambivalence because, while offering infinite possibilities for its citizens, also appear numerous difficulties for the full development of the lives of many. This contradiction causes excruciating pain”.

Only a pope who is from the metropolis may see aspects of multiculturalism. Bergoglio comes from a town where he had to deal with the exploitation of child labor, and sexual exploitation. His attention to the urban dimension of existence is found as early as August 2011, when Buenos Aires was organized an event involving the 11 dioceses of the metropolis to reflect on urban change, the urban pastoral. Bergoglio intervened with a report entitled *God lives in the city*, "Faith tells us that God lives in the city, in the midst of his joys, desires and hopes, as well as in the midst of his sorrows and sufferings."

In 1990 in Argentina, the poor were 4%. Today, because of the greed of the national and international capital, have risen to 30%. It's not just numbers. The Church of which he returned to speak Francesco is a church founded by a poor Christ for all the "poor of the earth." Economically poor, the sick, the marginalized, despised, destitute, oppressed, morally compliant. The suburbs often suffer from amnesia urban, removal of the primary objective of building a settlement, which is to make you live the people and to give them another chance of happiness. In many suburban areas, there is a square, replaced by large green spaces and unused shopping center, which would be their surrogate.

It is in the megalopolis that you play in the future of Christianity and this pope has got it right. Other popes before Francis, came from a little cultural horizon of the province or country. Bergoglio have in front of his eyes, ethnic stratification economic and social: Buenos Aires.

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