

aber nicht«. Die Präsenz dieses Türhüters in der Funktion eines Textrevisors von *Evangelii gaudium* ist leicht erkennbar, vor allem, wenn das Dokument vom priesterlichen Amt und von der Diakonie der Frau spricht (vgl. EG 104).

In einer immer noch von patriarchalen Strukturen geprägten Klassengesellschaft steht die These von der gleichen Würde zwischen Männern und Frauen, die aber das nur Männern vorbehaltene sakramentale Priesteramt nicht zur Diskussion stellt, von vornherein unter Ideologieverdacht. Darf man das sakramentale Priestertum auf eine quasi arbeitsteilige Funktionsebene herabstufen, um die behauptete gleiche Würde von Mann und Frau zu retten (vgl. EG 104)? Wenn man die »große« Christenwürde an der Geburt, hier also an der Taufe, festzumachen versucht, reproduziert man da nicht, historisch und gesellschaftlich verspätet, das höfische Modell einer Feudalgesellschaft, in der die Geburt als Mann oder Frau, als Herr oder Knecht über den Rest der Lebenschancen entschieden hat?

In vielen Fragen stößt der Papst an die Grenzen des Spielraums seiner professionellen Freiheit. Franziskus wird darauf achten müssen, dass der innovatorische Duktus seiner freien Rede nicht in den Kontinuitätsneurosen kurialer Türhüter abgewürgt wird. Zum Beispiel kann nahezu mit Sicherheit gesagt werden, dass ein Text, der von Ausdrucksformen anderer Religionen sagt, dass sie »nicht die Bedeutung und die Wirksamkeit der von Christus eingesetzten Sakramente« (EG 254) haben, nicht aus der Feder von Franziskus stammt. Hier hat sich die Internationale Theologenkommission selbstreferentiell eingebracht, wobei es viel mehr Gewicht gehabt hätte, *Gaudium et spes* mit seiner weltkirchlichen Autorität zu zitieren als eben diese postkonziliare Theologenkommission (GS 22,5; vgl. EG, Fußnote 199, 200).

Bei seinen Aufbrüchen müssen wir Papst Franziskus durch kritische Solidarität

stützen und an seinen eigenen Wagemut erinnern: »Wagen wir ein wenig mehr, die Initiative zu ergreifen!« (EG 24). Voraussetzung für die Freude des Evangeliums ist, dass es von einer barmherzigen und angstfreien Kirche verkündet wird. Barmherzigkeit ist die dem Bösen gesetzte Grenze, welche die angstfreie Kirche grenzenlos sein lässt. Diese Kirche hat Franziskus wohl vor Augen, wenn er uns einlädt mit ihm »die ›Mystik‹ zu entdecken [...], die darin liegt, zusammen zu leben, uns unter die anderen zu mischen, einander zu begegnen, uns in den Armen zu halten, uns anzulehnen, teilzuhaben an dieser etwas chaotischen Menge, die sich in eine wahre Erfahrung von Geschwisterlichkeit verwandeln kann, in eine solidarische Karawane, in eine heilige Wallfahrt« (EG 87). ♦

Vom Autor eingesehene

Übersetzung aus dem Portugiesischen:

Norbert Arntz, Kleve

The Concept of ›Poor‹ in *Evangelii gaudium*

by Joseph Loic Mben SJ

Introduction

The peculiar feature of Pope Francis' pontificate is his emphasis on the poor or poverty. This »preferential option« has been discernable through some events or decisions. Pope Francis decided to stay at the Casa Santa Martha instead of the apostolic palace. He has accepted the gift of a 30-year old utility car. He celebrated Holy Thursday 2013 in a Juvenile Correction Center, and washed the feet of

twelve inmates among which two Muslim girls. During his trip in Brazil he visited a favela -slum- in Rio de Janeiro. He kissed a disfigured man in St Peter's Square in Rome. These examples could be multiplied ad infinitum. We could even go back to his time as the archbishop of Buenos Aires to see how this commitment for the poor was expressed.

In this essay, I intend to look at how the notion or the concept of poor is used and expressed in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*. I am interested at two things. First, I want to see if there is a consistency in the use of the word »poor« in Francis' thought. Second, I want to see whether the poor are agent and actors the pope's thought. I have deliberately kept the notion of poverty out of the scope of this essay.

1 The Use of Poor in *Evangelii gaudium*

The apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (EG) was released on November 24, 2013 on the solemnity of Christ the King of the Universe. It is devoted to the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world. The document has 288 numbered paragraphs divided in six parts. The first part (nn. 1-18), which is introductory, sets the tone by situating the reality of evangelizing in the present day church. Then Chapter one follows (nn. 19-49), and is dedicated to the Church's missionary transformation. Chapter 2 (nn. 50-109) points out some challenges raised by the Church's communal commitment from the outside society as well as from within the Church. The next chapter (nn. 110-175) focuses on the proclamation of the Gospel. A special attention is devoted to the homily. Chapter four (nn. 175-258) weighs in the social aspect of evangelization. Four dimensions are considered: social commitment as a consequence of the profession of faith, the place of the poor in society, the common good and social peace, and social

dialogue. The last chapter (nn. 259-288) speaks of spirit-filled evangelizers. It is a call for renewal with a focus on Mary, »mother of evangelization.«

The word »poor« appears in 43 numbered paragraphs, and is mentioned with its derivatives at least seventy-nine (79) times. In addition, it appears in every part of EG, although most of it is located in chapter four where the word and its derivative is mentioned fifty (50) times in twenty-two (22) numbered paragraphs. At first glance, one can notice that the word »poor« is foremost for the pope a social, political and economic reality. In the next section, I will try to show what meanings are associated with this notion.

2 The Meaning of »Poor« in EG

The use of the word »poor« by Francis is very fluid. The word is used in various situations. In general, it refers to individuals (see nn. 2, 48, 57-58, 123, 125 ...). Francis uses it for social groups such as families, communities or nations (nn. 59-60, 190, 197), and even places (n. 76). It is tied though rarely to behavior (nn. 191, 288) or just as a qualifier (nn. 156, 188). With regard to behavior, it has always a negative connotation. As persons, the poor are understood as a broad category (n. 21, 97) that encompasses all those who are marginalized, oppressed, exploited, deprived and/or experiencing hardship. There are also meanings such as the identification of the poor as a socio-economic group such as the homeless for instance (n. 189, 202, 211-212), or with women who are »doubly« poor (n. 212). This fluid use of the notion is not anecdotal. Whether the poor is a single individual or a community, influences the understanding and ways of tackling the issue of poverty. It demonstrates that Francis does not have a simplistic view of the poor, which are multi-faceted. Poverty affects groups or places in different ways as the case of women demonstrates it.

Francis' perception of the poor is deeply religious, and takes its roots in a theological vision inspired by Revelation. Christ himself was born in a manger and became poor (nn. 186, 197-198; 2 Cor 8:9). Furthermore, Jesus' praxis demonstrates his closeness with poor people (n. 186). He even identifies with them (n. 209). The latter are at the heart of his mission and the privileged recipients of his predication (nn. 48, 197). They hold a special place in the heart of God who hears their cry (nn. 187, 197), and is attentive to their demands. As Francis puts it: »Jesus' whole life, his way of dealing with the poor, his actions, his integrity, his simple daily acts of generosity, and finally his complete self-giving, is precious and reveals the mystery of his divine life (n.265).« This theological vision informs the reflection and praxis of the community at two levels: in the large society and within the Church.

In the large society, special attention must be paid to the issue of justice. One must work to eliminate structural causes of poverty and promote the liberation and integral development of the poor (nn. 188-189, 199). The virtue of solidarity plays a critical role in this project. Solidarity puts community and the dignity of life over the appropriation of goods by a few (n. 188). Solidarity is a spontaneous reaction initiated by »those who recognize that the social function of property and the universal destination of goods which come before private property« (n. 189; Mt 25). The dignity of the person and the pursuit of the common good should be at the heart of any good economic system (n. 203). For this reason, Francis rejects the theory of the invisible hand that is supposed to guide financial markets and the economy (n. 204). The recent economic downturn (2008) has exposed the abuses of banks and multinational corporations interested mainly in making profit through reckless speculation. In addition, if governments such as the U. S. had not intervened through financial bailouts and stimulus packages, the financial sphere would have eventually

collapsed. This undermines the credibility of the invisible hand theory. However, to those who could level charges of communist ideology and anti-capitalist rhetoric against him, Francis rejects irresponsible populism and welfare mentality. This would only make the poor to remain assisted and not in charge of their destiny. The critical word here is »growth.« Economic growth has to be paralleled with growth in justice (n. 204). Growth in social justice requires »decisions, programmes, mechanisms and processes specifically geared to a better distribution of income, the creation of sources of employment and an integral promotion of the poor« (n. 204). This is why Francis rejects an »absolute autonomy« of financial markets. Unless a durable and viable solution is found to the problems of the poor, no sound answer to the problems of the world will emerge, since inequality is at the roots of social ills (n. 202). There cannot be real peace without social justice. A social system that silences or merely appeases the poor to the benefit of the more affluent is not peaceful (n. 218), rather it fosters the domination and exploitation of one group on the other. Deep inside, lies the vision of an inclusive society where everyone –the poor alike- finds a place for themselves (n. 236). Underneath, there is a critique of a society that only gives room to the fittest, smartest, successful, and the most efficient at the expense of the slow, the weak and less talented (n. 209).

The theological vision impacts also the church. Jesus' praxis is the foundation for the »preferential option for the poor« (nn. 198-200). This option, implicit in our faith, calls each Christian to share Jesus' concern for the poor. »There is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor« (n. 48). Without this option for the poor, the Gospel runs the risk to be reduced to mere words or being submerged by other types of message in this world of high information (n. 199). The poor should be the first target of Church's mission (n. 48). The Gospel summons us to act justly and show mercy to the

poor (n. 194). This is why even in apostolic times, the key criterion of authenticity was to never forget the poor (n. 195); this commitment for the poor helps the Church not to lose focus on her mission (n. 97). Concretely this commitment for the poor should be manifest in »privileged and preferential religious care« (n. 200). Francis regrets the lack of pastoral and spiritual care for the poor in many Christian communities (nn. 70, 200). There is a danger for a church community to »break down« if she does not cooperate in helping improving poor people's condition. That community will slip »into a spiritual worldliness camouflaged by religious practices, unproductive meetings and empty talk« (n. 207). Francis favors action over mere words, but this action has to be discerned. The Church is called to be sensitive the new forms of precariousness to be able to respond appropriately (n. 210). He cites among these »new forms« the homeless, the addicted, the refugees, indigenous people, elderly, (forced) migrants and people exploited through human trafficking.

3 On the Agency of Poor People

Does the pope see the poor as active or passive people? This is not a rhetorical question. If the poor are perceived as passive, the tendency is not to integrate them in the design of solutions supposed to liberate them. They are mere recipients of other people's generosity. They are not expected to take any initiative, and just have to wait. This could lead to infantilizing attitude. Such people will always rely on the actions of others. This recalls the structural adjustment plans, which were imposed on African countries without consulting the civil society or the local people to whom they were supposed to benefit. Plans were designed from Washington D. C. in the International Monetary Fund and in the World Bank on how to help these countries to develop themselves. The results were obvious: apart from two coun-

tries, these plans failed in all the other ones. It is important to respect people by associating them in designing possible solutions to their problems. They may not fully grasp all the intricacies, but they have a sense of what is good for them and what their priorities are.

To come back to Francis' apostolic exhortation, there is no easy answer to the question. On the one hand, poor people appear to exercise some level of agency, and on the other hand, they should rely on other people's sense of justice and generosity. At the religious level, Francis recognizes the creativity of ordinary people. Not only poor people are well disposed toward faith (n. 200), for they show an incredible thirst for God, which makes them capable of heroism and great sacrifice (n. 123). Popular piety is an area where the poor demonstrate their creativity. This popular piety is manifest in the culture of the lowly (n. 124). Nonetheless, the pope fails to notice that some forms of popular piety are strategies of coping before hardship, and of resisting oppression. For instance, during charismatic prayers people are free to voice their frustrations and anxieties, or to display behavior that would be perceived as borderline outside the context of prayer.

At the social, economic and political sphere, it is not easy to discern the poor's agency. The society is invited to be attentive to their situation (n. 187), and to show compassion to the poor (n. 54). All this is not achieved without dismantling the social structures responsible of poverty. It is not clear at this level how and what the poor could contribute. The Pope's critique is directed against systems and ways of thinking and operating that benefit some at the expense of many. Namely, those structures are the economy of exclusion, the idolatry of money, and an oppressive financial system, which give preeminence to financial gain over the dignity of the person. There is a need for conversion that will put the human person at the center of economic, financial and social progress. However, it is

not clear who is supposed to carry out this task (Francis seems to be appealing to politicians and the Church at one point). One thing is sure, the poor are not seen as actors at this level. It seems that social oppression disfigures them to the point that they cannot exercise their agency in an informed way. Hearing their cry (nn. 187, 191, 193) seems to be the point of departure of any action. This is one way of acting by taking the poor as the starting point of any initiative. The agency of the poor does not surface probably because of the complexity and diversity of situations. For instance, a person victim of human trafficking has very little room to challenge the system and get out from that ordeal. Furthermore, the pope is well aware that individuals' liberty does not operate in a vacuum. Human beings are not monads; thus, the social context affects the individual. This is a critical insight of Catholic Social Teaching: human beings are social beings. With the progress of social sciences, we know that the social context is determinant in an individual's growth and making. Hence, individuals cannot be abstracted from their social context. Indeed, the poor may be so disempowered due to many factors (illiteracy or poor education, inability to form organizations, financial and material deprivation, inability to analyze their situation and strategize, struggle for daily survival, political oppression), that in fact they may be incapable of exercising any sort of agency to fight against oppression.

No matter the level of poverty and exploitation, the person retains a dignity as the pope acknowledges. He recognizes the dignity of the poor (n. 199). People manage to fight their ways even in dire conditions. The Cameroonian sociologist and theologian Jean-Marc Ela (1936-2008) stresses how oppressed groups like peasants and women organize and strategize before oppressive social forces (Ela 1994). Ela shows how women's investment in the informal sector of economy in Cameroon is a response to their exclusion by the formal economy and

big corporations. In the same way that we recognize the poor's creativity at the religious level, it is important to appreciate how they operate at the economic and political level. It is our ability of reaching out to the poor in the heart of their struggles as church and community, that will allow us to journey with them, and together devise sound strategies to change unjust social structures and to empower them at the same time.

4 Conclusion

The word ›poor‹ is polysemic word in the mouth of Pope Francis that can signify the oppressed, marginalized, exploited, excluded and all those who suffer. That notion is key in his apostolic exhortation EG, and appears throughout. One sure thing is that Francis does not have a romanticized or spiritualized idea of poverty. His vision is that of a believer not a social activist. The foundation is theological. Jesus is presented as a paradigm and an inspiration on how to relate to the poor. The poor are at the heart of his ministry and he identifies with them. This theological vision influences the social realm and the church. Society must make room for the poor and dismantle unjust structures that prevent the full expression of the poor. The economic sector receives a special attention, because the logic of material gain eclipses the inalienable dignity of the person. Likewise, the church needs to pay attention to the poor, if she wants to remain consistent with Christ's praxis and teaching. The other point I looked at was the issue of the poor's agency. If it is obvious in the religious sphere, it is not in the social and political realm. It does not seem to be considered or even part of the Pope's perspective. Two things need to be noted. First, the diversity and complexity of situations might render this notion irrelevant in some cases. Second, human beings are social beings and are not isolated individuals; an individual cannot be understood outside of their social, political

and economical context. Hence, the context can remove any kind of social agency from the individual by disempowering him or her. Nonetheless, the poor still retain some capacity to fight. Marginalized groups invent strategies in order to survive in a hostile environment. ♦

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Evangelii gaudium – Reflections from Asia

by Felix Wilfred

The fresh air Pope Francis has brought into the Church blows also through his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, a follow-up to the Synod of Bishops held in October 2012. Used to reading the heavy and circuitous pontifical documents, I could not but be struck by Pope Francis' simple and direct language – a reflection of his own person and style. For a number of reasons, *Evangelii gaudium* is finding grand welcome among Asians, sign of which is that within two weeks 25 000

translated copies of this document were sold out in South Korea. Also non-Christian South Koreans read it as a means of getting to know more about the Church and the pope as they look forward to his visit in the country in August, 2014.¹ Critically thinking Christians in India who rarely bothered about papal document in the past are quoting from *Evangelii gaudium*. The resonance among Asians is due to the spirit of this document, its style and orientation, and the way it addresses questions and issues that are vital for the life and mission of the Asian Churches. The document seems to embody some of the key-themes that will characterize the pontificate of Pope Francis, and it augurs well for the Asian Churches.

I have hardly found documents of bishops' conferences being quoted in papal writings, and was overjoyed to see a statement of Catholic Bishops' Conference of India cited when the pope speaks of inter-religious dialogue; Brazilian Bishops' conference when he speaks of poor and poverty; and the Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, when speaking of environmental issues. There are references also to the U.S. and other bishops' conferences. In this way, it seems to me that Pope Francis is giving concrete expression to the truth that the universal Church is made up of local Churches whose voices need to be listened to. He is probably bringing to a close the discussion on the relationship of the local church and the universal Church in the interpretation of Vatican II which has been for some years now a hot point of debate. It would seem that the pope is questioning the claim that »the universal Church is ontologically and temporally prior to the local church«. ² The position of Pope Francis seems to be that both local Church and universal Church exist simultaneously and there is no question of speaking about priority. In this way, pope stems the trend of bringing back the Roman centralism quite contrary to the spirit and teachings of Vatican II. Confirmation of this is the fact that he presented himself right from the time of his