

Pázmány Péter Catholic University
Faculty of Theology

THESES

The Theological Grounds of Political Love In the Teachings of Pope Francis

Dissertatio ad Doctoratum

Author: *Ádám Wappler*

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Mihály Kránitz

Budapest, 2023

1. The methodology and content of the doctoral dissertation

In these theses, I present and summarize the conclusions of my dissertation by touching on the main points elaborated in the paper.

The main focus of my doctoral research was twofold: on the one hand, I examined the utterances of Pope Francis, especially with his ecclesiological-pastoral programme in view; in addition, I reviewed his thoughts and teachings in relation to political love and attempted to harmonize them. On the other hand, my research aimed at discovering South-American theology, laying emphasis on the theology of the people, including the works of Lucio Gera, Juan Carlos Scannone, Enrique Ciro Bianchi and Carlos Maria Galli. In order to gain knowledge about Pope Francis' theology, it is essential to comprehend this Latin-American context.

During completing the doctoral dissertation, the book I had written together with my colleague Ádám Sággy was published with the title "Introduction to the New Testament" (SÁGHY, Á. – WAPPLER, Á., *Bevezetés az Újszövetségbe*, SZIT, Budapest 2021, 2022). Since it is a unique blend of biblical studies, fundamental theology and spiritual theology, I used it as a source at certain parts of the dissertation.

Furthermore, the study entitled *Politika az új evangelizáció fényében* [Politics in the Light of New Evangelization] published in the journal *Vigilia* was also used in an edited and completed version (cf. WAPPLER, Á., *Politika az új evangelizáció fényében*, in *Vigilia* [2016/3.] 186–194.).

Regarding methodology, we note that the topic of our dissertation is a fundamental field of the discipline of theology, also touching on the borders of dogmatics, biblical studies, pastoral theology, spiritual theology and social studies, which we wish to bring together on the grounds of fundamental theology. This unity is expressed in the structure and language of the text.

The dissertation approaches and elaborates the possible theological foundations of political love in the teachings of Pope Francis in 5 chapters:

1. The first chapter provides a conceptual clarification, arriving at the conclusion that political love is a theological concept which may open political perspectives. According to the theological foundation of political love, politics may be one of the highest forms of love as a favoured way of evangelization. We use the Scripture to justify this point.

2. In the second chapter, we elaborate the meaning of politics rooted in “the people”, present the concept of the people, explain the analogy and difference between God’s people and the secular, social people, and highlight the biblical importance of the people. Moreover, we reflect on how the notion of God’s people returns in the church and in theology following the Second Vatican Council, liberation theology and the theology of the people, even reaching Pope Francis. In the course of this, we point out that the possible theological source of political love is the theology of the people.

3. In the third chapter, we present the ecclesiological and theological ideas Pope Francis focuses on, reflecting on the Latin-American authors who had an effect on the Pope’s theological thinking; thus the theological and philosophical roots of his work are also discussed. We claim that in order to understand Pope Francis’ theology, we do not have to examine his character on its own; to the contrary, an interrelated theological chain has evolved. We can see that the theological background of Pope Francis is significantly determined by Romano Guardini (1885–1968), as well as Amelia Podetti (1928–1979), Paulo Freire (1921–1997) and Lucio Gera (1924–2012) from the Latin-American context.

4. In the fourth chapter we attempt to harmonise theory and practice, outline the possible features of the spiritual theology of politics and harmonise political love and the ecclesiological programme of Pope Francis. We suggest that in the politics originating “from the people”, we can find the theological foundations of political love: the theological concepts of closeness to the people, identity with the people and embodiment in the people, the preference of poverty, the central role of the periphery, the emphasis on mercy, *compassio*, *sensus fidei* and *intellectum fidei*, synodality and missionary discipleship, the nature of the social mission of prophets-pastors, as well as the priority of reality and unity. In light of this, we may also outline the features of “politicians in spirit”, which may be points of reference in the practice of political love.

5. In our fifth and closing chapter, we marginally express theological considerations regarding the challenges of the present world, which may form the basis of future researches and further ideas. Thus we discuss the key role of human dignity, and in this regard offer a possible answer from the church to the protection of life, the ethical concerns regarding capital punishment and the challenges of refugees and migration. We separately reflect on the programme of the three “T”s – *la tierra, el techo y el trabajo* (land, home, work), which are together responsible for ensuring human dignity and which determine the activity of the people’s movement.

2. Summarizing theses to the possible foundation of political love

2.1. Theses regarding the theology and ecclesiology of Pope Francis

- a) In order to understand the theology of Pope Francis, we do not have to examine his character on its own; to the contrary, an interrelated theological chain has evolved, connecting Pope John XXIII and Pope Francis through liberation theology, the theology of the people, the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, the COEPAL (*Comisión Episcopal de Pastoral*, 1966), the Latin-American Synods – Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979) –, *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975) and the Aparecida Document (2007). *Evangelii gaudium* apostolic exhortation (2013) appeared and its ecclesiological points could be analyzed at the end of this process.
- b) The theological background of Pope Francis is significantly determined by Romano Guardini (1885–1968), as well as Amelia Podetti (1928–1979), Paulo Freire (1921–1997) and Lucio Gera (1924–2012) from Latin-America among others.
- c) The Pact of the Catacombs (16 November 1965) was a significant inspiration to the church and theology for returning to the notion of poverty, shifting focus onto the peripheries. It was first adopted and developed by Southern-American theology, but John Paul II and Benedict XVI also followed. This is how it has reached us today, and has become the central element of Pope Francis’s papacy.
- d) In Francis’ view, the people are the theological key concept and significant element of reality that creates some kind of synthesis between the areas of pastoral, ecclesiological and political theology.
- e) In the course of interpreting “the people”, Pope Francis does refer to a country, a nation or a geographical area, but rather to what “the feeling of belonging to the people” expresses, in relation to history, language and culture, which provide nourishment, emphasising first and foremost the significance of collective wisdom and memory.
- f) Pope Francis’ approach starts out from the theological notion of the people, but it creates a synthesis with the people in the secular, social sense of the word, so that God’s saint people live in society and serve among the people, but do not reign above them. This approach also provides guidance for politics concerning how to lead and serve the people. We refer to politics rooted in “the people” in this regard.
- g) We may find a possible source of Pope Francis’ ecclesiological thinking in Paulo Freire’s conception of liberation pedagogy. The teacher-student relationship in

Freire's critical pedagogical conception and Pope Francis' concept of "missionary disciple" are clearly similar; moreover, both approaches include the poor's capacity for evangelization. We may also discover the landmarks of Freire's conception in the pope's theological thinking regarding the significance of identifying with the people and in the relationship between peripheries and centre.

- h) In Pope Francis' view on the synthesis of unity and diversity, Ignatian discernment and Romano Guardini's thinking also plays a role. He does not only use these ideas for the life of individuals, but also for the life of the people and God's people; so his pastoral approach also has a political perspective in this regard.
- i) We can see that Pope Francis is not engaged "in politics" but rather in evangelical pedagogy. His pastoral and ecclesiological utterances may fit into the framework of political practice, founding the hermeneutics of political love. Therefore, political love means evangelical pedagogy, in which leading the people is leadership with the people and especially with the poor, striving to liberate oppositions resulting from oppression.

2.2. Theses about the concept of the people

- a) The fostering of social education and social justice necessarily connects to the people and cannot be separated from them, because the people embody human culture and values, including spiritual values, which are the source of their sense of dignity.
- b) Not only may we discover differences and limitations, but also analogies, parallels and an important connection between God's people and the secular, social people, which may determine the attitude towards the people in the social sense and the nature of political love.
- c) Pope Francis' ecclesiological and pastoral programme growing from the bottom up may not only be a source for ecclesiology, but also for politics, by opening a perspective of politics made together with the people and rooted in the people.
- d) The theology of the people is practically the theology of culture; culture is the *locus theologiae*, the subject of which is the people themselves..
- e) Politics rooted in the people expresses that political service is inseparable from the category of the people: if politics is broken away from the people, the people are only a mass and a tool, and politics reigns but does not serve. This claim also stands on the level of ecclesiology and with regard to faith: church appears as God's people, and this close relationship also has significance concerning ecclesiology and pastoral theology.

- f) The pastoral style close to the people is a style that may also be an inspiring source for political practice. By applying it, we may discover that we live among the people and belong to them, which call for responsibility for the people.
- g) The alliance with the people (בְּרִית – *brit*) is not merely a formal legal act and contract between JHWH and the people, but such a personal relationship and communion of love in which the people are not simply God's property, but his "treasure". The original Hebrew text contains the word סְגֻלָּה (*s'gulá*), meaning treasure. "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people" (Exo 19.5).
- h) God's people are defined by the communion of love with God, which is expressed by liberation; in the biblical term, liberation is the synonym of salvation; thus, in the end the community of God's people is to be interpreted in relation to salvation, joined by the concept of the Messiah. On the other hand, this perspective of salvation is missing from the people in the sense of society.
- i) While in the Old Testament, the most significant elements in the identity of "God's people" are liberation and closeness to God, in the New Testament, Peter's first letter opens new horizons on belonging to God's people by experiencing mercy. "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10). Accordingly, the church becomes God's people by "receiving mercy", which is an important ecclesiological point.
- j) The Bible suggests throughout that the primary recipients of the gospel are the poor. This idea is emphasised in liberation theology, then developed in the theology of the people and has appeared in the teachings of Pope Francis.
- k) The theology of the people – considering culture the foundation of the people – has established the significance of cultivating and passing along the cultural and historical traditions and inheritance that form an important part of national politics.
- l) Salvation and the history of salvation originate from the people; therefore, the people are one of the roots of the mystery of salvation.
- m) Belonging to the people does not only entail cultural embedding, the acquisition of the national and historical inheritance, the preservation and love of traditions, but also identification, which theology expresses by embodiment or incarnation (cf. John 1:14).
- n) The self-definition of the church plays a role in its political definition, and the political and social thinking of the church has an effect on ecclesiology. The ecclesiology

represented by Pope Francis may be the source of the new theology of politics. Accordingly, the first step of implementing this approach is the “conversion of the church” and the return to a comprehensive ecclesiology, preceding “social conversion”.

- o) Social conversion is based on the conversion of the church and the pastors.

2.3. Theses on the concept of the peripheries

- a) In Pope Francis’ thinking, the expression periphery is not meant in a geographical, but rather in an existential and theological sense that also has ecclesiological, social and political relevance.
- b) Existential peripheries are a theological concept originating from the Bible, in connection with or parallel to the theology of poverty: those living on the existential peripheries can be described by different categories of poverty. From this perspective, they are the people who are called “scrapped” or “rejected” by the economic system, who are poor in the spiritual, moral and material sense of the word, the people excluded from society and pushed to the margins, who often live without hope and perspective.
- c) The peripheries only exist if there is also a centre. In this sense, the content of the peripheries is relative, because those who are considered “living on the peripheries” by the centre do not necessarily interpret their condition and position in that way. This can be true in the political, cultural or theological sense. From this point of view, the concept of “the peripheries” has an existential significance, and a revaluation and shift may take place as a result of which “the peripheries” become the centre.
- d) In Pope Francis’ view of the church, the theology of the peripheries can be connected to his efforts of decentralisation and the appreciation of local religious communities with regard to synodality; moreover, this theology may be paralleled to the principles of subsidiarity and municipality observed in the political practice.

2.4. Theses on the features of political love and political spirituality

- a) We do not interpret politics on the conception level of party politics or speculation of authority, but rather as service and the manifestation of love, as a blessed way of evangelization. Political love thus fits into God’s work of love.

- b) Political love is a theological concept that may open political horizons. According to the theological foundation of political love, politics is one of the highest forms of love, being one of the distinguished ways of evangelization.
- c) Political love is sharing God's work of love. Political love is the art of *compassio* and mercy.
- d) Examining the theological foundations of political love, the threefold unity of ἀγάπη, ἐρως and רחם develops before us, in which the “downward” emanation of ἀγάπη, the “upward” reditio of ἐρως and the horizontal operation of רחם are simultaneously and mutually present. This relationship may possibly be interpreted as God's *immanent creation continua*. It may also reveal the immanent operation of the Spirit (רוח יהוה), which could open a completely new Pneumatological dimension. This dimension intensively connects to politics and may become part of the spiritual theology of politics.
- e) Political love means evangelical pedagogy, in which leading the people is leadership with the people and especially with the poor, striving to liberate oppositions resulting from oppression.
- f) Politics – serving the common good and promoting justice – is an evangelic mission, a missionary profession, grown out of and built on the gospel announced by Jesus.
- g) If we presume that love is commitment, then political love involves social commitment, which is the manifestation of the prophetic mission of the church.
- h) God's preference of closeness, compassion and tenderness, which make him turn towards the people and which are recurring key concepts in Pope Francis' thinking with regard to pastoral behaviour and spirituality, are not only features characteristic of pastors who are close to the people, but also of “politicians in spirit” (EG 273.)
- i) We may discover through the pastoral style close to the people that we live among the people and belong to the people, which call for taking responsibility for the people.
- j) Responsibility, commitment, love and *compassio* for each person among the people define the concept of belonging to the people. In fact, the joint experience of these is expressed in the behaviour of patriotism.
- k) Jesus was not only a pastor, but also a sheep – not a leader above the people, but someone who completely identified with the people.
- l) The programme of “see, judge, act” is not merely a pastoral compass, but also a resource for social action.

- m) Instead of political Christianity, Christian politics in the theological sense is the authentic vision that establishes politics according to the principles of Christian faith, inspired by the theological sources of political love, standing on the grounds of evangelic realism. It does not adjust the Christian message to politics, but rather adjusts politics to Christianity.
- n) As the redemptive action of Jesus did not begin in Jerusalem, the political, cultural and religious centre, but rather in Bethlehem, a city considered insignificant and small (c.f. Micah 5:1), we may claim that social renewal also begins with the small.
- o) *Compassio* is originally a Christological concept; Christology, in return, determines ecclesiology, which may theologially inspire political love. Thus, from this perspective, *compassio* is not only a theological key concept, but an important driving force of social connections.
- p) Politics is not merely based on social contract, but also on *compassio* for the individual and society. The *compassio*-based social contract may open the perspective of a socially sensitive society and politics that have in view the interests of the people of the peripheries and lead towards the universal idea of fraternity.
- q) According to the logic of the Gospel, in the course of political action focusing on the poor, the poor become the standards of political action. Therefore, the indicator of the true power of a country, a people, do not primarily result from its military potential or economic or material significance or geographical size, but rather from its social sensitivity, the development of the social system and the quality of socio-political measures, *compassio* for the most vulnerable; in other words, it is mostly expressed by its compassion in action.
- r) We can point out an analogy between priest and politician: since both are pastors of the people, their activity correlates.
- s) The methods of action and mission of the pastors of God's people may be paralleled to the practice of the leaders of the secular people; hence politicians may be seen as pastors and prophets. Thus the service of the common good appears to us as a prophetic mission.

2.5. Theses on the harmonization between Pope Francis' ecclesiological-pastoral programme and political love

- a) The ecclesiological theories of Pope Francis may be transferred to political practice.

- b) As the theology of the people draws an analogy between God's people and the secular people, we may suggest an analogy between the pastoral utterances of Pope Francis about the governance of God's people and the ideas about the leading of the secular people, in other words, politics. Pope Francis' utterances to the leaders of the people in an ecclesiastical sense correspond with the directions given to the leaders of the people in a political sense; so we may discuss these utterances as political-spiritual-theological principles.
- c) *Sensus fidei* is considered a key concept in understanding the church interpreted as the totality of God's people, which should be experienced and implemented in practice on a social as well as political level.
- d) The practical way of *sensus fidei* is related to synodality; it develops where every baptized person, "all the people" "adopt the teaching of faith in their lives more and more" (cf. LG 12).
- e) Synodality is a form of action that may be fruitful to both politics and social relations.
- f) The synodality is also the way of decentralization, which correlates in the political practice with the fundamental ecclesiastical-social teaching of subsidiarity by recognizing and appreciating the autonomy and sovereignty of local communities.