

POPE FRANCIS IN POSTCOLONIAL REALITY

**Complexities, Ambiguities,
& Paradoxes**

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MAKING SPACE AT THE TABLE?

Pope Francis and the Challenge of Religious Pluralism and Inter-Religious Dialogue

HUGO CÓRDOVA QUERO

ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses the question about the future of the Roman Catholic Church regarding ecumenical and interreligious engagement in light of the election of Cardinal Bergoglio, Archbishop of Buenos Aires, as Pope Francis. Exploring the ecumenical and interreligious background of Cardinal Bergoglio could give us some elements to intuitively map the possible outcomes of his papacy in an increasingly pluralistic and secularized worldwide context. The first section of the chapter briefly outlines the history of the ecumenical movement in Latin America, with special attention to Argentina. The second section draws from mass media and interviews with key actors within the ecumenical movement in Argentina to conclude, in the final section, with the brief description of two challenges that Pope Francis would face as the head of the Roman Catholic Church.

INTRODUCTION

The election of Cardinal Bergoglio as Pope Francis opens many questions about the future of the ecumenical relations of the Roman Catholic Church with other Christian Churches as well as world religions. How will Pope Francis manage this dialogue within the worldwide context of increasing religious pluralism and rampant secularization? Although foreseeing the future is certainly a difficult task, we could get some clues on how Pope Francis, “the Pope of the People,”¹ could react to these topics if we trace back his experience as Archbishop of Buenos Aires. While holding that See, he engaged in different ecumenical and interreligious activities. This chapter deals with an “archeology” of Cardinal Bergoglio’s background as a way to infer possible lines of actions in his new role as Pope Francis.

Religious diversity and cultural pluralism are two aspects constantly present in Argentinean history, as the country was formed by successive migratory waves from literally every corner of the world. Cardinal Bergoglio himself is a descendant of Italian immigrants. When the Argentinean constitution was enacted in 1853, both its prologue and article 25 clearly stated the intention of the country to welcome migrants who are willing to work the land and in the factories as well as to contribute to science and art.² It is fair to state that ecumenism, interreligious dialogue and even the presence of an Argentinean Pope at the See of Rome is possible due to that history of immigration.

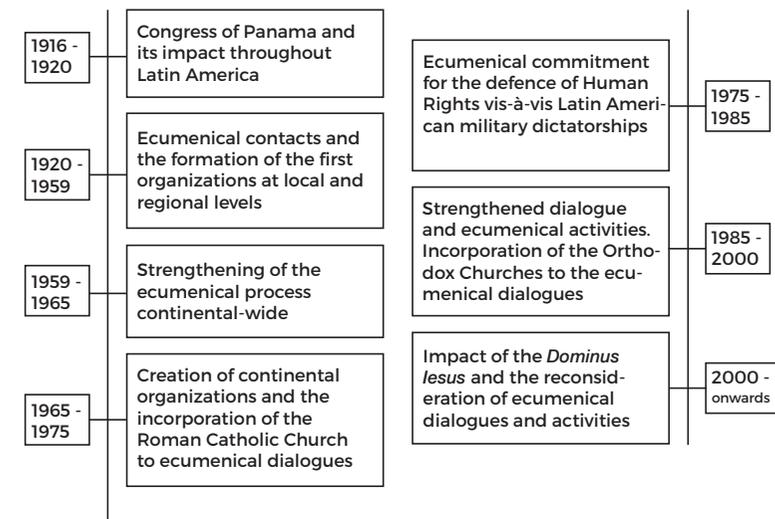
1. Maria Laura Avignolo, “Romans and Their New Bishop: A Chance for Hope,” *Clarín* (March 29, 2013), accessed May 12, 2013, http://www.clarin.com/europa/Romans-their-Bishop-chance-hope_0_891510990.html.

2. Gladys S. Onega, *La Inmigración en la Literatura Argentina (1880-1910)* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1982), 9, cited by Fernando Ainsa, “Entre Babel y la Tierra Prometida. Narrativa e Inmigración en la Argentina,” *Amérique Latine Histoire et Mémoire. Les Cahiers ALHIM* 1 (2000): 2, accessed May 13, 2013, <http://alhim.revues.org/index87.html>.

THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT IN LATIN AMERICA

The ecumenical movement in Latin America is very recent, being its initial milestone the ecumenical interest in Latin America at the Congress of Panama in 1916. According to the late theologian José Míguez Bonino, this was the “turning point in Latin American Protestantism self.”³ The “ecumenical spirit” was born in Latin America amidst Protestantism as the Roman Catholic Church joined the movement only after Vatican II. Almost a century of ecumenical relations can be roughly periodized into seven major stages (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Stages in the History of the Latin American Ecumenical Movement



3. Míguez Bonino, José, *Rostros del Protestantismo Latinoamericano* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Creación, 1995), 15.

One of the tasks undertaken by all actors in the ecumenical movement has always been the dialogue. However, ecumenical relations has been a difficult path in which the doctrinal, historical and institutional issues played an important role in discouraging or promoting dialogue.

A pivotal milestone in Argentina was the creation of an organization of Comisión Ecuménica de Iglesias Cristianas en la Argentina⁴ (hereinafter cited as CEICA, for its acronym in Spanish) which has played an important role in shaping the interreligious dialogue. Founded in 1988, CEICA's membership includes the following churches: Anglican Church of the Southern Cone of America, Armenian Apostolic Church (Holy See of Etchmiadzin), Christian Church Disciples of Christ, Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, Evangelical Church of the River Plate, Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina, Orthodox Church of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Orthodox Church of the Patriarchate of Antioch, Orthodox Church of the Patriarchate of Moscow, Reformed Church of Argentina, Roman Catholic Church, Saint Andrew Presbyterian Church, Syrian Orthodox Church, United Evangelical Lutheran Church, and Waldensian Evangelical Church.⁵ Many of these churches are the fruit of immigrant communities and evidence the religious plurality of Argentina.⁶

To the tension that characterized the relationship of Roman Catholicism with other Christian denominations and religions,

1965 initiated more formal ecumenical dialogues.⁷ The creation of CEICA constituted an important ecumenical commitment of Roman Catholicism. In his role as the President of the Catholic Bishop's Conference and then as Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Cardinal Bergoglio strengthened the labor of CEICA.

Because of his involvement in CEICA, Cardinal Bergoglio tied relations with Protestant, Evangelical, Anglican and Orthodox churches as well as Judaism and Islam. The interreligious dialogue among these churches and religions has intensified in recent year.⁸ Protestant and Evangelical churches have been involved in ecumenism for almost a century. Cardinal Bergoglio was keen in acknowledging this and making very explicit his respect for those churches. When he was elected as Pope Francis, the news about his practice of praying with people from other Christian denominations became a known fact,⁹ as well as his sharing of the communion table with Lutheran and Reformed churches.¹⁰ According to David Cela Heffel, Secretary of the General of Board of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI):

During the time that Archbishop Jorge Mario Bergoglio was Cardinal Primate of the Roman Catholic Church of Argentina the interaction with Protestant churches, through their leaders, was fluid and friendly. It was a moment where we truly recognize among ourselves as

4. Ecumenical Commission of Christian Churches in Argentina.

5. "Member Churches: CEICA," World Council of Churches, last modified April 17, 2013, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/latin-america/argentina/ceica>.

6. While 76.5 percent of population in Argentina define themselves as "Roman Catholics," Protestant/Evangelicals account for 9.7 percent and agnostics/atheists account for 11.3 percent. Fortunato Mallimaci and others, "Primera Encuesta sobre Creencias y Actitudes Religiosas en Argentina," (Buenos Aires: CEIL PIETTE/CONICET/FONCYT, 2008), accessed May 21, 2013, <http://www.culto.gov.ar/encuestareligion.pdf>.

7. Carmelo E. Alvarez, "Protestantism in Latin America and the Caribbean: Searching for its Identity," *Voices* 35, No. 2 (April-June 2012): 17-25.

8. "El Ejemplo del Diálogo Interreligioso," *La Nación*, June 26, 2005, accessed May 21, 2013, <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/716095-el-ejemplo-del-dialogo-interreligioso>.

9. "Evangélicos Saludan la Elección del Papa Francisco," AICA, March 18, 2013, accessed May 21, 2013, <http://www.aica.org/print.php?id=5591>

10. "Luteranos y Catolicos," *Revista Criterio* 2216, May 1998, accessed May 18, 2013, <http://www.revistacriterio.com.ar/iglesia/luteranos-y-catolicos>.

sisters and brothers in faith, regardless of our theological positions.¹¹

Concurrently, Cardinal Bergoglio was also very respectful of the presence of the Orthodox Churches in Argentina: Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, Patriarchate of Moscow, Armenian Church, Syriac Orthodox Church, Serbian Orthodox Church, Rumanian Orthodox Church, and Ucrainian Orthodox Church. He participated in different festivities and celebrations held by these churches, and whenever the dates of Easter were different, he invited the Orthodox Archbishops and Priests to Resurrection mass at Buenos Aires Metropolitan Cathedral.¹² Elías Crisóstomo Abramides, Director of Ecumenical Relations of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Buenos Aires and South America, states:

It has already been many years of working together very well, very fraternal in relationships. For the last twenty-two years Cardinal Bergoglio has always attended the activities organized by CEICA as well as the meetings in our churches, and everyone has always have much sympathy and affection for him as he was very different from the previous Archbishops of Buenos Aires. Therefore, I would say that the relationship was always very good between our churches and Cardinal Bergoglio, today Pope Francis.¹³

From his position as Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Cardinal Bergoglio promoted the Holy Scriptures as a locus for concrete ecumenism. Current Public Relations Officer at Archdioceses of Buenos Aires' Channel 21 and former head of Sociedad Bíblica Argentina, Marcelo Figueroa, declares:

[Cardinal Bergoglio] ... understood the enormous responsibility of his place: to promote the Bible as a meeting place. [Cardinal] Bergoglio always said: "do not worry about the obstacles of ecumenism, we need to continue walking that path."¹⁴

Additionally, Cardinal Bergoglio specially related to Charismatics and Neoevangelical sectors, which for many years were characterized as anti-ecumenical. In the case of Evangelical and Roman Catholic charismatics, even when they shared common faith experiences such as the preeminence of the Holy Spirit, they were not in any relation until very recently. They began holding meetings called Encuentros Fraternos de Evangélicos y Católicos¹⁵ since 2004. Meanwhile, since 2011, every meeting is preceded by a retreat of priests and ministers.¹⁶ As a fruit of these meetings a new organization was formed: *Comunión Renovada de Evangélicos y Católicos en el Espíritu* (CRECES),¹⁷ of which Cardinal Bergoglio has been a strong supporter, as he expressed in 2005:

I strongly encourage you to persevere on this path of praise and worship, reconciliation and spiritual ecumenism which started last year. ... Do not tire of praising and worshiping together to our common Father and to work together for our brothers in need. Do not tire of begging the Father, in the Name of Jesus,

11. David Cela Heffel, interview June 9, 2013.

12. Elías Crisóstomo Abramides, interview June 10, 2013.

13. Ibid.

14. Marcelo Figueroa, Interview June 19, 2013.

15. Fraternal meetings of Evangelicals and Roman Catholics.

16. "Argentina: Vivir el Vaticano II, Hoy," *Radio Vaticana*, October 17, 2012, accessed May 28, 2012, http://es.radiovaticana.va/storico/2012/10/17/argentina:_vivir_el_vaticano_ii_hoy/spa-630782.

17. Renewed Communion of Evangelicals and Roman Catholics in the Holy Spirit.

by the power of the Holy Spirit, the crave for unity in reconciled diversity.¹⁸

With these words of encouragement, Roman Catholic Charismatics have maintained regular meetings with Evangelicals. Every meeting takes place in Luna park stadium, right in the heart of down-town Buenos Aires. The event is now well-known because in the third meeting (2006), Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Neoevangelical ministers led by Rev. Carlos Mraida laid hands on Cardinal Bergoglio and prayed for him.¹⁹ Marcelo Figueroa explains how this came to happen:

On the one hand, every time Cardinal Bergoglio says farewell, he asks: “pray for me.” This marks his natural sense of humility. It is very rare for someone who exercises authority—who gives the blessing—to ask “to be blessed.” On the other hand, in the evangelical world when someone asks the community of faithful “pray for me,”... they pray immediately. In that event these two different ways met: [Cardinal] Bergoglio knelt; [Reverend] Mraida laid hands on him. This was a case of a new ecumenical encounter in which there were elements not usually handled by the other party, and that caused a bit of a problem among some Evangelicals and some Roman Catholics.²⁰

Nonetheless, the event created a better relationship between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics. For example, Cardinal Bergoglio’s election as Pope Francis was well-received by these churches,

18. “La Experiencia del Espíritu Santo Abre Caminos Ecuménicos entre Católicos y Evangélicos,” *Zenit*, July 11, 2005, accessed May 28, 2012, <http://www.zenit.org/es/articles/la-experiencia-del-espiritu-santo-abre-caminos-ecumenicos-entre-catolicos-y-evangelicos>.

19. Silvina Premat, “Masiva Oración por la Unidad Cristiana: Encuentro de Católicos y Evangélicos,” *La Nación* (Buenos Aires), June 20, 2006, accessed May 18, 2013, <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/816217-masiva-oracion-por-la-unidad-cristiana>.

20. Figueroa, interview.

as Norberto Saracco, Coordinator of the Pastors Council of the City of Buenos Aires, states:

His election has been an answer to our prayers. ... [Cardinal] Bergoglio is a man of God. He is passionate for the unity of the Church—but not just at the institutional level. His priority is unity at the level of the people.²¹

However, Cardinal Bergoglio’s ecumenism with Evangelical sectors of Christianity goes beyond prayers and worship, as he allied with them in order to oppose several socio-legal issues. The first episode was the decision of Mauricio Macri, Major of the Autonomous City of Buenos, to support the ruling by Judge Gabriela Seijasa in November 13, 2009, to legalize same-sex marriage by declaring unconstitutional articles 172 and 188 of the Civil Code as “they limited the rights of all citizens.”²² Later, the alliance was more evident in light of the debates over the congress bill legalizing same-sex marriage nationwide in Argentina, especially since Cardinal Bergoglio framed the discussion in a “war against God”.²³ He called for an interreligious demonstration on July 14, 2010 co-sponsored by Asociación de Iglesias Cristianas de la República Argentina (ACIERA), Federación Confraternidad Evangélica Pentecostal (FECEP) and Departamento de Laicos (DEPLAI) of the

21. Jeremy Weber, “Argentine Evangelicals Say Bergoglio as Pope Francis Is ‘Answer to Our Prayers,’” *Christianity Today*, 14 March, 2013, accessed May 12, 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/march-web-only/argentine-evangelicals-say-bergoglio-as-pope-francis-is-ans.html>.

22. “Una jueza autoriza el casamiento entre dos hombres en la Capital,” *Diario C* (Catamarca), November 14, 2009, accessed June 2, 2013, http://www.diarioc.com.ar/inf_general/Una_jueza_autoriza_el_casamiento_entre_dos_hombres_en_la_Capital/128212. Article 172 ruled over the consent of “a man and a woman” to get married, and article 188 over the power of the state to declare them as “husband and wife.”

23. Horacio Verbitsky, “La Inquisición,” *Página/12*, accessed 10 June 2013, <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-149246-2010-07-11.html>.

Conferencia Episcopal Argentina.²⁴ In the rally, both Evangelicals and Roman Catholics read statements calling the Congresswomen and Congressmen to repeal the bill. Cardinal Bergoglio sent a letter in support of the event and stating his position against the bill.²⁵ Cella Heffel explains how this showed differences in theological positions compared to Protestant churches:

Although we had similar viewpoints on some issues such as poverty—considered immoral and unjust, a product of humanity’s political and economic system of avarice and greed—... on the other hand, there was not a shared vision, for example, in the event of the promulgation in July 2010 of the equal marriage law, which established the right of everyone citizen to marry regardless of their gender.²⁶

Despite the efforts and opposition carried out by the connubial of Evangelicals and Roman Catholics, the Argentinean Congress passed the bill on July 15, 2010.²⁷

Argentina has the third largest Jewish community after Israel, and the largest community in Latin America.²⁸ It is a community with a long history in Argentina, as the Jewish “official” immigrants were among the first to arrive to the country around 1894, although there were many Jews in Argentina when the country was still a colony of Spain. These latter Jewish are also

24. Daniel Jones, “Derrota Parlamentaria y Reposicionamiento Político de Actores Religiosos: el Rechazo de la Federación Alianza Cristiana de Iglesias Evangélicas de la República Argentina (ACIERA) a la Ley de Matrimonio Igualitario,” *Sociedad y Religión* 37, No. 22 (2012): 104.

25. “Católicos y Evangélicos se Movilizan contra la Boda Gay,” *Clarín*, July 13, 2010, accessed June 3, 2013, http://www.clarin.com/sociedad/Catolicos-evangelicos-movilizan-boda-gay_0_297570323.html.

26. David Cella Heffel, Interview June 9, 2013.

27. Soledad Vallejos, “El Derecho a la Igualdad Llegó al Matrimonio,” *Página/12*, July 15, 2010, accessed June 3, 2013, <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-149544-2010-07-15.html>.

28. Isaac Caro, “Comunidades Judías y Surgimiento de Nuevas Identidades: El Caso Argentino,” *Persona y Sociedad* 43, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2006): 43.

known as “cripto-Jewish” because they needed to preserve their identity in hiding, although many of them “converted” to Roman Catholicism.²⁹ It is a community well-organized, that in time has created several organizations and whose members have integrated to Argentinean society relatively well long before there was a State of Israel (formed in 1948). The Jewish community is very diverse linguistically, culturally, and ideologically.³⁰ As a visible religious and social actor in Argentina, it suffered two terrorist attacks in premises of the Embassy of Israel in Argentina (1992) and the building of the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (1994).³¹

Cardinal Bergoglio is characterized as having a good relationship with the Jewish community in Argentina. He participated in religious, cultural and even political events organized by different

29. Mario Eduardo Cohen, “Los que Abrieron las Puertas: Los Sefardíes en la Etapa Colonial,” in *Buenos Aires Sefaradí*, ed. by Carlos Szwarcer (Temas de Patrimonio Cultural #22) (Buenos Aires: Comisión para la Preservación del Patrimonio Cultural de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, 2008), 24.

30. See Enrique Herszkowich, *Historia de la Comunidad Judía Argentina: Su Aporte y Participación en el País* (Cuadernos del CES) (Buenos Aires: DAIA, 2006); Perla Sneh (ed.), *Buenos Aires Idish* (Temas de Patrimonio Cultural #9) (Buenos Aires: Comisión para la Preservación del Patrimonio Cultural de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, 2006), 15; and Emmanuel Taub, “La Otrredad Oculta. Lengua e Identidad entre los Migrantes Judíos de Alepo y Damasco en la Argentina de Principios del Siglo XX,” Documento de Trabajo N° 150, (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Belgrano, 2006, accessed June 3, 2012, http://www.ub.edu.ar/investigaciones/dt_nuevos/150_taub.pdf, among others.

31. The attack was at the Israel Embassy in Argentina in March 17, 1992 killed 29 individuals and injured 242. See “Más Reclamos y Poca Presencia Oficial en el Aniversario de la Embajada de Israel,” *Clarín*, March 15 2013, accessed May 15, 2013, http://www.clarin.com/politica/reclamos-presencia-aniversario-Embajada-Israel_0_883111918.html. The attack at Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) in July 18, 1994 killed 85 people and injured more than 300. See Sergio Kiernan, “El Silencio es el Crimen,” *Página/12* (Buenos Aires), July 18, 2012, accessed May 15, 2013, <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/subnotas/198970-59791-2012-07-18.html>.

Jewish Synagogues and organizations.³² The friendship with Rabbi Abraham Skorka led them to co-author a book entitled *Sobre el Cielo y la Tierra* [about heaven and earth].³³ Rabbi Skorka states: “His main concern was to convey—I interpret—an image that could provide a profound message of spirituality in a world summed in disbelief, skepticism and concurrently in dramatic need of faith.”³⁴ Immigrants who professed Islam as their religion arrived to Argentina around the same time as Jewish immigrants. For example, as early as 1880, immigrants from Syria and Lebanon as well as Arab minorities settled throughout the country.³⁵ A significant number of immigrants settled primarily in the cities of in Buenos Aires, Rosario, La Rioja and Tucumán.³⁶ As in the case of Judaism, Protestant and Orthodox churches, Muslim immigrants found a country where the power exercised by the Roman Catholic

Church denied them from certain rights, which on time changed as society became more diverse.

The Muslim community in Argentina represents Sunni, Shi’a, Sufi and Alawite (Syrian) traditions as well as the Druze faith, a religion that has its origins in Islam.³⁷ The first Islamic center, Centro Islamico de la Republica Argentina, was established in 1936.³⁸ Currently, the Islamic community in Argentina is composed of about 900,000 members, while some projections even place the number at 1,000,000.³⁹ Given its large size, the role of this community in interreligious dialogue has been very visible and rich. Cardinal Bergoglio has been a strong supporter of Roman Catholic-Islam dialogue, and became a “friend” of the Muslim community.⁴⁰ Indeed, Andrea de Vita, Director of the Registro Nacional de Cultos,⁴¹ evaluates, “There was excellent contacts with the Islamic leadership ... [especially] with the Centro Islamico de la Republica Argentina (CIRA) under president Samir Saleh (who died in March 2012).”⁴²

Undoubtedly, in a world where the relations among the monotheistic religions—Christianity, Judaism and Islam—are constantly shaken by historic, political, economic, geographical

32. See “Se reúnen el Congreso Judío y Bergoglio”, *Clarín*, April 16, 2012, accessed June 10, 2013, http://www.clarin.com/sociedad/reunen-Congreso-Judio-Bergoglio_0_683331795.html; and “El Card. Bergoglio destacó los lazos que unen Janucá con la Navidad”, AICA, December 14, 2012, accessed June 10, 2013, <http://www.aica.org/print.php?id=4532>.

33. Jorge Mario Bergoglio and Abraham Skorka, *Sobre el Cielo y la Tierra* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2010).

34. Natalio Cosoy, “El Papa Francisco Según su Amigo, el Rabino Skorka,” *BBC Mundo*, March 15, 2013, accessed May 12, 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo/noticias/2013/03/130314_papa_bergoglio_franco_argentina_rabino_skorka_nc.shtml.

35. Gladys Jozami, “The Manifestation of Islam in Argentina”. *The Americas* 53, No. 1 (July 1996): 83.

36. Marta A. Saleh de Canuto and Susana Budeguer, *El aporte de sirios y libaneses a Tucumán* (San Miguel de Tucumán: Editorial America, 1979); Abdelwahed Akmir, “La Inserción de los Inmigrantes Árabes en Argentina (1880-1980): Implicaciones Sociales,” *Anaquel de Estudios Árabes* 2 (1991): 237-259; Beatriz Vitar Mukdsi, “Testimonios Orales de los Descendientes de Sirio Libaneses en San Miguel de Tucumán (Argentina). La Identificación Étnica,” *Trocadero* 14-15 (2002-2003): 171-187; Solène Bérodot and María Isabel Pozzo, “La Inmigración Sirio-Libanesa en la Ciudad de Rosario, Argentina: Continuidades, Desvanecencias e Intercambios Socioculturales,” *Amerika* 5 (2011), accessed June 10, 2013, <http://amerika.revues.org/2746>.

37. Pedro Brieger and Enrique Herszkowich, “The Muslim Community of Argentina”. *The Muslim World* 92, Nos. 1-2 (Spring 2002): 158.

38. Ibid. Lit. Islamic Center of the Argentine Republic.

39. Pew Research Center, “The Future of the Global Muslim Population: An Interactive Feature.” The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life Project, accessed June 10, 2013, <http://features.pewforum.org/muslim-population/?sort=Pop2010>.

40. “Pope Francis ‘a friend of the Islamic community’”. *Buenos Aires Herald*, 14 May 2013, accessed June 8, 2013, <http://www.buenosairesherald.com/article/126369/pope-francis-a-friend-of-the-islamic-community>.

41. Religious National Registry, a governmental office whose task is to “[...] list and inscribe all religious organizations other than the Roman Catholic Church” in order to obtain their “recognition” by the Argentinean Government and, thus, functioning in the country. Andrea de Vita, personal communication 16 June 2013.

42. Ibid.

and ethnic contingencies, Argentina emerges as a test-site for the pacific coexistence and collaboration between them.⁴³ Certainly, Cardinal Bergoglio played a central role in that development, as Dr. Sumer Noufoury affirms: “[Cardinal Bergoglio is a] ... respectful, pro-dialogue person who knows Islam. Argentina is a model of dialogue and coexistence that, God willing, could be exported to the world.”⁴⁴

POPE FRANCIS AND THE FUTURE OF ECUMENISM

Based on the previous section, it is fair to assume that Pope Francis will continue to encourage ecumenical and interreligious dialogue at least with monotheist religions. Although it is not possible to know in advance what will happen to ecumenism under Pope Francis, I give prominence to two challenges that would, eventually, require his attention.

Although Cardinal Bergoglio was ecumenically active with Christian Churches and other monotheist religions, his interactions with non-monotheistic and native north/central/south-American religions was almost non-existent, except for a few interreligious meetings.⁴⁵ This constitutes the first ecumenical challenge for his papacy. Given his history in Buenos Aires, he certainly will not commit the mistakes done by his predecessor. Pope Francis does not see religious pluralism as a ‘threat’ for the faith, even when he

is emphatic in the renovation of Roman Catholicism. This constitutes a major difference with (ex)Pope Benedict XVI.⁴⁶

Concurrently, because of the increasing pluralism amidst Latin American societies, it is not uncommon that many Roman Catholics would hold double religious affiliations, for example also attending the Umbanda temple in Rio de Janeiro or the Zen Buddhist Shanga in Buenos Aires while baptizing their children at the local parish. Pope Francis must address seriously the relation with non-monotheistic and, especially, with native north/central/south-American religions, a debt that Roman Catholicism holds for more than 500 years. Perhaps Pope Francis is moving into this direction as seems to indicate his recent meeting with Mr. Félix Díaz, qarasha of the Potae Napocna Navogoh Qom Nation and nationwide representative of Argentina’s first nations population.⁴⁷

Finally, taken one step forward, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue must necessarily lead us to the joint efforts with peoples of other faiths, with whom we share the same passion to harbor justice, peace and the welfare of all creation.⁴⁸

A second aspect that Pope Francis should be attentive of is the development of contextual theologies, a topic that involves new forms of church organization and ministry. This has been the case of the Base-Community Churches (hereinafter cited as BCC) in Latin America since the 1960s. As a result of Vatican II, many sectors

43. Sheij Mohsen Ali, “Argentina y Bergoglio, verdaderos ejemplos de convivencia”. *Ambito.com*, 19 March 2013, accessed June 10, 2013, <http://www.ambito.com/noticia.asp?id=680423>.

44. Palash Ghosh, “Pope Francis: A Friend To Muslims?” *International Business Times*, 15 March 2013, accessed May 12, 2013, <http://www.ibtimes.com/pope-francis-friend-muslims-1130225#>.

45. Figueroa, interview.

46. See Thomas R. Rourke, *The Social and Political Thought of Benedict XVI* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 124-125; Robert Carle, “Pope Benedict XVI Confronts Religious Relativism”, *Society* 45, No. 6 (December 2008): 549-555; and “Para el Islam Bergoglio no es igual a Ratzinger”, *Los Andes* (Mendoza), June 8, 2013, accessed June 10, 2013, <http://www.losandes.com.ar/notas/2013/6/8/para-islam-bergoglio-igual-ratzinger-719367.asp>.

47. “El papa Francisco recibió al líder qom Félix Díaz,” *La Voz del Interior* (Córdoba), June 24, 2013, accessed July 1, 2013, <http://www.lavoz.com.ar/noticias/politica/papa-francisco-recibio-al-lider-qom-felix-diaz>.

48. Hugo Córdova Quero, “Algunas Observaciones en Torno a la Pluralidad Religiosa, el Diálogo Interreligioso y la Misión Cristiana,” *Religión e Incidencia Pública* 1 (2013): 102, accessed June 10, 2013, <http://www.gemrip.com.ar>.

of the Roman Catholic Church encouraged the role of catechists, altar servers or Bible studies leaders. Those involved in Church activities and leadership—predominantly females—may not have academic training. However, many of them are increasingly heading to Seminaries to obtain catechetical or Bible training.

Since the widened spread of Latin American Liberation Theology (hereinafter cited as TLL), the Roman Curia became concerned on its effects in the ecclesiastical power structure. Pope John Paul the II⁴⁹ and Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) as Head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF),⁵⁰ initiated a campaign to disband the effects of TLL amidst Latin American Roman Catholicism. Pope Francis takes office in a Church that has been systematically decimated. The growth not only of Pentecostal, Neo-Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches but also non-monotheistic religions and New Religious Movements in Latin America certainly would require a serious restructuring of both the dynamics of power and the interpretation of ministry within Roman Catholicism.

Historically, Protestant Churches, Evangelical, and later Pentecostal Churches have been characterized for diversifying their ministries by allowing the laity to take many responsibilities at the local and regional levels. Although the BCC sparked this type of process within the Latin American Roman Catholicism, the tendency to narrow dynamics of power and centralization in Rome, which peaked during the pontificate of Benedict XVI, have regressed to an environment very close to Pre-Vatican II, constituting a serious challenge to Pope Francis' leadership nowadays. It seems that Pope Francis is taking into account the specific experience of Anglican

49. Paul E. Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads: Democracy Or Revolution?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 99-101.

50. Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology: Essential Facts About the Revolutionary Religious Movement in Latin America and Beyond* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1987), 109-110.

and Orthodox Churches, whose leadership governs these churches through councils of bishops. As evaluated by Elias Abrahmides, the recent designation of a council of eight cardinals to help him “govern the church” conveys that expression.⁵¹

These two challenges are important—summed to other issues raised in the chapters of this book—in order to renew the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the 21st century. It could be that Pope Francis is moving in the right direction in order to avoid what theologian Hans Küng blatantly stated: “[T]he [Roman] Catholic Church would live a new ice-age instead of a spring and run the risk of being reduced to a petty largest sect.”⁵² Only time can say otherwise.

51. Abramides, Interview. See also Irene Hernández Velasco, “El Papa nombra un consejo de ocho asesores para que le ayuden a gobernar”, *El País* (Madrid), April 13, 2013, accessed July 1, 2013, <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2013/04/13/internacional/1365848785.html>.

52. Hans Küng, ¿Es el Papa Francisco una Paradoja?, *El País*, May 10, 2013, accessed May 21, 2013, http://sociedad.elpais.com/sociedad/2013/05/10/actualidad/1368203233_166060.html.