

***Alynn J. Lyon, Christine A. Gustafson and Paul Christopher Manuel: Pope Francis as a Global Actor: Where Politics and Theology Meet.***

*1<sup>st</sup> edition. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 292 pages, ISBN: 978-3-319-71377-9.*

**Author:** Lenka Stolaríková, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic.

**E-mail:** stolarikova.lenka@centrum.sk.

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.32422/mv.1694>.

Since his election to the papal office in 2013, Pope Francis (born as Jorge Mario Bergoglio) has drawn the attention of the whole world. His simple life and prolific work regarding help to the underprivileged and ostracized have been praised by the media and the public. Moreover, the Pope actively warns against climate change and emphasizes the importance of dialogue and solidarity. *Pope Francis as a Global Actor: Where Politics and Theology Meet* aims to examine the theological influences on his thinking and papal agenda.

The publication is a collection of 13 works on Bergoglio's papacy edited by the American scholars Alynn J. Lyon, Christine A. Gustafson, and Paul Christopher Manuel of universities in New Hampshire and Washington, D.C. The remaining 11 authors are mostly based in the United States (ranging from California to Vermont), with one contributor residing in India. A result of four authorial meetings, the volume is presented as a product of their engagement, one of a communitarian nature.

The three editors open the book by presenting the current discourse on Pope Francis. They divide the existing publications into three distinct groups – a biographical one with a focus on his life, a hagiographical one dealing with his religious writings, and scholarship dedicated to the analysis of the Pope's policies. This book identifies with the last category; however, it borrows themes from all three.

The volume is divided into two parts. The first one traces down Francis's origins and theological influences which have formed his opinions and led him to become the man we know today. The first three chapters in this part deal with his four theological priorities, examine his Jesuit heritage, and evaluate the influence of teachings of Thomas Aquinas upon Francis's approach to the environment, respectively. The fourth chapter challenges the American binary perspective on the War of Drugs with the Pope's opinions on it. The final contribution in this section analyses his portrayal in prominent American newspapers.

The second part builds on his theological background to show Francis's individual approaches to selected world regions and current affairs. The authors gradually explore the Pope's stances on climate change and the refugee crisis, and his involvement in the regions of Western Europe, the United States, the People's Republic of China, India, and his native Latin America.

The book is, for the most part, straightforward and does not require readers to have a deeper understanding of international relations. Still, having prior knowledge of the Catholic Church and theological concepts is advised. The reader should not be misled by the title – this volume primarily traces down the ideological roots of and inspirations for the Pope's actions as a global actor. Thus it may be appreciated more by those interested in Francis's thinking than by those seeking an analysis of international affairs.

“*To understand the Pope, one must follow him home.*” Alynna J. Lyon and her fellow colleagues use this suggestion of one of Bergoglio’s associates as they embark on a journey to trace down his theological inspirations and their echoes in his contemporary actions. Throughout the volume, we can find numerous recurring themes, either prominent ones in Francis’s past or essential pillars of his papal agenda.

Almost all of the contributors highlight the Pope’s Latin American, or more specifically Argentinian, origin and his time with the Society of Jesus. Thomas Massaro, Elizabeth Carter and Christine A. Gustafson agree that his exposure to local poverty, his experience with the Dirty War and the principles of Jesuit teaching would later affect his exclusive focus on the poor and marginalized. Furthermore, the Argentinian roots are important for his association with the *theology of people*, a response of the Latin American bishops to pending social issues and liberation theology. The legacy of the 1968 Medellín Conference and the 2007 document *Aparecida* echoes in Francis’s works *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato si’*.

The philosophy of Thomas Aquinas is listed among the major influences upon Francis’s mindset and pops up throughout the book, most prominently in James T. McHugh’s Chapter 4. It suggests that the Thomistic concept of eternal law could be linked to the Pope’s efforts regarding climate change, as demonstrated in *Laudato si’*. This encyclical features Francis’s endeavour to reconcile science and religion and abandon the belief they are in competition and mutually contradictory. In addition, Thomas Aquinas’s notions of just war and structural injustice are featured later on in the book.

Supposedly, Francis uses these influences in his agenda – one that is built on four priorities: time over space, realities over ideas, the whole being greater than individual parts, and the most frequently referenced one, unity over conflict. Their execution can be seen in the Pope’s words and actions as he stands by the poor, refugees and ostracized and stresses the importance of dialogue and environmental protection.

Building on his teaching, the authors offer their own portrayal of Pope Francis. They recognize three distinct levels of his authority: firstly, his authority as a teacher of the church and a supervisor of priests; secondly, his authority as the head of a sovereign state; and thirdly, his authority as a head of a transnational entity with members around the world. They point out that despite the privileges of his status, Francis opts for leading a simple, humble life. He is depicted as a man of dialogue, one who builds bridges and brings people together. To find a common language, he might draw from his experience with authoritarian regimes in Latin America – being kind yet willing to exert his papal authority. In the book, the Pope’s thinking is said to be exceptional if perceived from the authors’ native perspectives. They stress that from the U.S. point of view, he stands neither on the progressive nor the conservative side. He is innovative, yet without changing key teachings of the Catholic Church. With his views and actions, he challenges the binary optics of American society.

The work often compares Francis’s papacy with those of his immediate predecessors, John Paul II and Benedict XVI. It juxtaposes their efforts in international relations and uses available data to evaluate their popularity and media coverage. Francis is shown as a policy entrepreneur with his own agenda, offering solutions to particular issues of his interest. The authors argue that he can pursue his goals through numerous diplomatic means – in his case, addresses, publications, social media and highly publicized visits abroad. He is portrayed as a rare spokesman for the whole world, one who represents the interests of humankind. The Pope’s leadership skills combined with his charismatic approach and his will to help those in need present him in a good light – as a promising partner in social changes, a mediator, and the one who brings together religion and science in his effort to save the environment.

Due to the nature of this volume, it seems more appropriate to judge the ups and downs of individual contributions than the publication as a whole. While most of them are generally well-structured and argument-driven, some move away from the persona of Pope Francis to explore other themes instead. That is the case with McHugh's Chapter 4. It provides extensive insight into the teachings of Thomas Aquinas and his thoughts on the eternal law but slightly neglects the Pope in the process.

John Chathanatt's Chapter 12 on Francis's involvement in India is a demonstration of faulty argumentation. He paraphrases the Pope's Easter prayer for the victims of natural disasters in Iran, China, Argentina and the United States, which did not contain any mention of India. The author, however, adds that "[we can] assume that his mindset includes India too, though he may not have specifically mentioned it." Chathanatt continues to build his case on this belief. There are other instances of this very problem throughout the chapter. It gives the reader the impression that given his Indian origin, the author opted for unconvincing evidence only to have a contribution on Francis's attitude towards India.

Chathanatt is not the only author in the book to have such problems. Other authors, especially in the first part of the book, work with the recollections of Bergoglio's friends and contemporaries to find his theological influences. While these assumptions might be correct, the authors do not support their claims with evidence from Francis's own statements or writings. In addition, some of his secular inspirations (e.g. his scientific career, Peronism) are mentioned but barely touched upon. It would have been interesting to see an evaluation of the varying importance of his theological and worldly influences in order to get a more well-rounded study of the Pope's background.

The structure of this volume is generally clear and neat. However, two important aspects are missing from this publication. Firstly, since the book is supposed to focus on the Pope being a global actor, the foreword should have featured at least a basic introduction to how the authors understand the concept and how they used it in their respective works. Secondly, there is the lack of an overall conclusion. Since some of the contributors provided claims that contradicted other authors' claims (e.g. the Pope being strongly against populism yet possibly being a populist himself), that could have been reflected upon by the editors at the end of the book.

Still, there are many parts to applaud. The authors decided to draw inspiration from Pope Francis himself. Focusing on his four priorities of time, reality, the whole and unity, they managed to cover their respective origins in Bergoglio's life and his theological influences. Moreover, they built on papal priorities to provide a well-rounded portrayal of Francis – a global leader yet a person of humility and solidarity, a compassionate man of dialogue who focuses on the now.

Despite its proper title, the volume does not primarily define the Pope's power as a global actor, nor does it extensively analyse his actions in various world regions. Instead, the subtitle seems to be a more appropriate description. The book follows Francis into his past to find the roots of his beliefs, the theological influences which have shaped him into the man he is today. It suggests that if we understand Francis's origin, we will be better able to make sense of his actions as a global actor, one who is both a man of politics and a man of theology.

#### **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

Lenka Stoláriková is an MA student of Area Studies and a Research Assistant within the Department of European Studies at Charles University. In her research, she focuses mostly on the concept of Anglosphere and other forms of British imperial nostalgia.