

Pope Francis: Keys to His Thought

A new book by Mariano Fazio, Vicar of Opus Dei in Argentina, sketches key ideas dear to Pope Francis' heart and shares personal recollections of his many friendly encounters with Archbishop Bergoglio over the years.

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Msgr. Mariano Fazio, Vicar of the Prelature of Opus Dei in Argentina since 2010, first met Cardinal Bergoglio in Rome in 2000 when he

was working at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. The author of more than twenty books, he was the rector of this university from 2002 to 2008.

Over the years he has had many friendly encounters with the current Pope. This brief book sketches in a lively manner some of the key ideas dear to Pope Francis' heart, and shares personal recollections that make clear the author's great esteem for his fellow Argentinian.

Topics covered include the urgency to defend human life and marriage, and the need to "go out to the periphery" to meet people where they are. The latter concern is reflected in the strong encouragement given by Cardinal Bergoglio to the so-called "shantytown priests" for the evangelization of the poorest neighborhoods in Buenos Aires. This

effort was grounded on sacramental catechesis and educational projects that foster human dignity, and was never to be confused, Bergoglio always insisted, with an overly political "liberation theology."

John Paul II's call for a "faith that becomes culture" is also highlighted as being of great importance for Bergoglio. He sees in popular piety "the effective deposit of the cultural synthesis developed in Latin America" over the centuries (quote from *Religiosidad popular* by Cardinal Bergoglio, p. 23). "Popular piety has a deep sense of transcendence and, at the same time, is a real experience of the nearness of God . . . it offers a meaning to work, to feasts, to solidarity, to friendships, to the family, and a feeling of joy in one's own dignity, which does not feel itself undermined in spite of the poverty and simplicity in which people find

themselves" (*Religiosidad popular*, p. 25).

Mariano Fazio includes many personal recollections in the book. "I have three letters he sent me in recent years. Whenever I sent him anything, he would respond in writing, in his own hand. The format was always the same: a large card with an image of *La Virgen Desatanudos* (Our Lady Undoer of Knots), a title originating in Augsburg, Germany (*Maria Knotenlöserin*) that he had made known in Buenos Aires . . . In the blank space he writes in small letters, much like Benedict XVI, a few personal and affectionate lines. Here are some: 'I wish you a holy and happy Christmas. May Jesus bless you and our Lady take care of you. And, please, I ask that you pray and have others pray for me' . . . These notecards were always accompanied by two holy pictures: one of St.

Joseph and the other of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, saints to whom he had great devotion . . . On the back of the picture of St. Joseph is the famous text of St. Teresa of Jesus about the efficacy of devotion to the Holy Patriarch. On various occasions when, having spoken with him, I asked for his blessing, he always invoked these saints and in addition placed me under the protection of St. Josemaria.”

The book ends with a long and moving letter sent by Archbishop Bergoglio in July 2007 to the priests and religious in his diocese on the importance of prayer (Fazio points out that the letter is also very relevant for lay people).

After referring several times to Abraham's pleading with the Lord in *Genesis* to refrain from destroying the immoral cities if he can find enough just men residing there, the

Archbishop continues: in the face of “a pagan civilization that proclaims its principles and its seditious ‘values’ with such impudence and self-assuredness that it shakes our convictions,” there is a danger of “a psychology of defeat that reduces us to a defensive position. There our soul shrivels up and cowardice shows itself.” The only solution is recourse to prayer: “the prayer of the child, the poor and the simple . . . the prayer of the humble, the poor who have no recourse . . . I ask our Lord that he make us more prayerful, as he was when he lived among us; that he make us insistent beggars before the Father.”

Pope Francis: Keys to His Thought is available from **Scepter Publishers**.

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