



Asian Journal of Religious Studies

“The Lord is truly among us.”

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Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Editorial: Pope Francis’ Mercy-Drenched Geopolitical Vision | 3 |
| Sabbath in the Hebrew Bible | 5 |
| <i>Thomas Karimundackal SJ</i> | |
| Mary, Full of Grace: Dogmas, Devotions and Implications | 14 |
| <i>Jomin Nirappel</i> | |
| The Apostolate of Being | 25 |
| <i>Noel Dias</i> | |
| Responding Truthfully and Gently: A Tribute to Prof Noel Sheth SJ | 29 |
| <i>Errol D’lima SJ</i> | |
| Homily Notes | 32 |





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Editorial

Pope Francis Mercy-Drenched Geopolitical Vision

In October 2017 Fr Antonio Spadaro, a close friend of Pope Francis, delivered a lecture at the University of Notre Dame titled “The Diplomacy and Geopolitics of Mercy: The World of Pope Francis.” We tend to think of mercy as a personal quality, and it is, but Spadaro sees it as a theme that also runs through the pope’s vision of politics and society.

“For Francis, mercy is not an abstract concept. It is the action of God within the life of this world: in societies, in human groups, in families and individuals,” he said. “God not only acts through the lives of individual people, but through the historical processes of peoples and nations. Even the most complex and intricate ones.”

Spadaro recalls Francis going to the war-torn Central African Republic to open the Holy Door for the Jubilee Year of Mercy at the cathedral in Bangui, before opening the Holy Door at St. Peter’s in Rome. This is why Francis made clear to the diplomatic corps, again in his talk of 2016, that the “opening of the Holy Door of Bangui Cathedral was meant as a sign of encouragement to look ahead, to set out anew and resume dialogue.”

Here then is a great image of mercy: the door. The sign of the “Holy Door” has a clear political meaning for Pope Francis. This opening was made symbolically more effective through the presence of thousands and thousands of Holy Doors around the world, writes Michael Sean Winters in *National Catholic Reporter*.

What, then, does mercy as a political category mean? Summing it up in a sentence we could say: never consider anyone or anything as definitively “lost” in relations between nations, peoples and states. This is the heart of the political significance of mercy. No

one, absolutely no one, is beyond the reach of God's mercy, even you know who.

After citing some recent interventions by the Holy See in the diplomatic sphere, such as working for peace in Colombia and better relations with Cuba and China, Spadaro elaborates: "As these and other cases show, the pope's position consists not in saying who is right and who is wrong, for at the root of all conflict is a fight for power or regional dominance, or what the pope calls a 'vain pretext.' There is no need to take sides for moral reasons. The pope rejects the mixing of politics, morals and religion that leads to the use of a language that divides reality between the absolute good and the absolute evil, between an axis of evil and an axis of good, between goodies and baddies. For Francis, the history of the world is not a Hollywood film, in which 'our boys' come to save us from 'those people.' He knows there are always different interests at stake, and that different sides act out of standpoints that are usually morally ambiguous."

Spadaro then discusses how the vision of Francis is the exact opposite of that espoused by fundamentalists of all stripes, "the jihadists and the neo-crusaders."

It is against this "abusive version" of religious experience that Francis is "carrying forward a systematic counternarrative to the narrative of fear." Spadaro adds that the pope's vision is, ultimately, the only one available to the sincere Christian: "The love typical of the Christian is not only love for the 'neighbor,' but also love for the 'enemy.' When we look at those doing evil through the eyes of pietas, then what triumphs is something that is humanly inexplicable — and perhaps also 'scandalous.' It is the intimate force of the Gospel of Christ: love of our enemies. This is the triumph of mercy."

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ
The Editor

Indebted to: Winters, M. S. (2017, October 13). Fr. Antonio Spadaro spells out Francis' mercy-drenched vision | *National Catholic Reporter*. Retrieved October 16, 2017, from <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/fr-antonio-spadaro-spells-out-francis-mercy-drenched-vision>