

Peter A. Redpath

Adler-Aquinas Institute, Colorado Springs, USA

**Pope Francis, Common Sense
and Contemporary Ecological Science
(The Green New Deal as Neo-Catharism in Drag)**

Introduction

Before starting my presentation today, I want to thank Professor Piotr Jaroszyński for, once again, inviting me to give a tale at this annual *Man in Culture* international conference. While I would much prefer to be able to be present with you physically in Poland, I am pleased I can at least join you virtually today to speak about an issue of pressing historical and philosophical importance.

Being at present 75 years old, I have lived through the papacy of 6 popes: Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul I, John Paul II, and Francis (Jorge Mario Bergoglio). During this time, I have never experienced a pope as politically divisive among Catholics and Christians in general and as intensely disliked by people who tend to identify themselves as believing, orthodox Catholics as is Pope Francis. Among people often referred to as ‘Practicing’ (not ‘Cafeteria’) Catholics, ‘Evangelical Christians,’ and other denominational Christians who try to put into practice tenets faithful to the teachings of Jesus Christ as passed on to posterity by the Apostles, Pope Francis tends to be as intensely disliked today as is Donald Trump among the global political Left.

Why is this? What is the psychological disposition of Pope Francis that causes so many traditionally-minded Catholics and other Christians to dislike him so much and to wish for him simply to go away as soon as possible. As an enigma, apparent contradiction, and subject of philosophical wonder, Pope Francis is an excellent subject for impartial philosophical analysis to try to answer this question.

To start achieving the chief goal of this presentation of making his behavior as intelligible as possible to myself and to others, I will begin with the initial reaction that, as a Practicing-Catholic American, I had to my experience of Pope Francis's initial tour of the United States after his becoming pope. On the whole, especially because, for decades, like many other American Catholics, I had been heavily involved in the pro-life movement in the US, even ran for political office in New York City related to my opposition of the pro-abortion movement, I found Francis's initial appearance in the US to be a major disappointment, psychological letdown. It came across to me largely as a cheap political-relations marketing gimmick.

I recall two things especially that stuck out to me at the time about it:

One was a major public appearance to a large audience that Francis made exiting a compact Fiat in a large US arena. While I suspect Francis likely had no idea how this would come across to an American audience, this was the type of entrance in which Americans were used to seeing clowns engage at a Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus. Whoever recommended to him that he do this was an idiot.

The other was the crestfallen disappointment I saw on the face of my former parish priest and founder of the "Priests for Life" organization, Fr. Frank Pavone, as he talked on TV about Pope Francis's failure to criticize the US pro-abortion movement and praise members of the US pro-life movement while he was in

the United States. Father Frank looked as if someone had stabbed him in the back, which Francis, at the time, appeared to many pro-life US Catholics, including me, to have done to all of us.

Nonetheless, at the time, many of us attributed this to the behavior of Francis's public relations people in the United States, especially to Leftist bishops who were serving as his advisors and marketing representatives. None of us could believe that Pope Francis could be so lacking in political common sense as to have intentionally behaved in such a fashion.

Such being my own psychological disposition at the time, I decided to do some investigation into Francis's personal history and educational background. This initial research got me far enough to make a connection among three intellectual influences on Francis: 1) Georges Bernanos; 2) apparently through reading Bernanos, St. Thérèse of Lisieux (who became a daily inspiration and required reading for Francis) and 3) the country of Argentina. Having some familiarity with the work of Bernanos, knowing that he had corresponded with Jacques Maritain, and also being aware of the tremendous influence that Maritain had had on post-World War II Catholic philosophical, and especially, political thought in Christian democracies throughout Europe and Latin America, I had immediately suspected Maritain had had some philosophical influence on Argentinian Pope Francis.

To test the hypothesis that Jesuit Pope Francis might actually have some Thomistic influence on him, even consider himself to be a Thomist, I decided to email my Jesuit friend, the great James V. Schall, and suggested these possibilities to him. To my shock, not only did Fr. Schall see no influence of Aquinas on Francis, this was the first and only email in which he appeared to me to express evident emotional hostility to the idea I had expressed in it. To my hypothetical suggestion, he curtly replied: "I see no similarity whatsoever between St. Thomas Aquinas and Jorge Mario Bergoglio."

Despite Fr. Schall's strongly negative reaction to my initial hypothesis, I was convinced that it contained a grain of truth. And I was most happy to see verification of this conviction come several years later from the lips of Pope Francis himself. The first occurred on 30 September 2013 in the Jesuit journal *America* (in an interview with Antonio Spadaro, S.J., entitled "A Big Heart Open to God: An Interview with Pope Francis") in which Francis said: "The church has experienced times of brilliance, like that of Thomas Aquinas. But the church has lived also times of decline in its ability to think. For example, we must not confuse the genius of Thomas Aquinas with the age of decadent Thomist commentaries. Unfortunately, I studied philosophy from textbooks that came from decadent or largely bankrupt Thomism. In thinking of the human being, therefore, the church should strive for genius and not for decadence."

The truth of this conviction is also supported by what in a report entitled "*Amoris Laetitia* Is Built on Traditional Thomist Morality, Pope Says" (posted on 28 September 2017 at TheBostonPilot.com by Carol Glatz), in which Francis said the following in Cartegna, Columbia, on 10 September 2017, in defense of what he called his "Thomistic," apostolic exhortation on the family entitled *Amoris Laetitia*:

In order to understand *Amoris Laetitia*, you must read it from the beginning to the 'end,' reading each chapter in order, reading what got said during the synods of bishops on the family in 2014 and 2015, and reflecting on all of it, he said. To those who maintain that the morality underlying the document is not 'a Catholic morality' or a morality that can be certain or sure, 'I want to repeat clearly that the morality of *Amoris Laetitia* is Thomist,' that is, 'built on the moral philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas,' he said. One of best and 'most mature' theologians today who can explain the document, he told them, is Austrian Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna. 'I want to say this

so that you can help those who believe that morality is purely casuistic,' he said, meaning a morality that changes according to particular cases and circumstances rather than one that determines a general approach that should guide the church's pastoral activity.

This same report continues that, during his meeting with Jesuits gathered in Rome for their general congregation in 2016, Pope Francis had made a similar point, stating:

In the field of morality, we must advance without falling into situationalism.

St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure affirm that the general principle holds for all but—they say it explicitly—as one moves to the particular, the question becomes diversified and many nuances arise without changing the principle, he had said. It is a method that was used for the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and *Amoris Laetitia*, he added.

Beyond this, in the same report, Pope Francis appears, as he just did immediately above, to make direct appeals to the need to use common sense, or discernment, when applying moral principles to individual situations. Hence, to the above, he immediately adds:

It is evident that, in the field of morality, one must proceed with scientific rigor and with love for the church and discernment. There are certain points of morality on which only in prayer can one have sufficient light to continue reflecting theologically. And on this, allow me to repeat it, one must do 'theology on one's knees.' You cannot do theology without prayer. This is a key point and it must be done this way,' he had told the Jesuits in Rome.

Even before this in this same report made by Carol Glatz in the *Boston Pilot*, she refers to Francis as asserting the following, *commonsense*-Catholic theological conviction that:

The theology of Jesus was the most real thing of all; it

began with reality and rose up to the Father, he said during a private audience Sept. 10 in Cartagena, Colombia. . . . ‘Philosophy, like theology,’ the pope said, cannot be done in ‘a laboratory,’ but must be done ‘in life, in dialogue with reality.’

‘Pope Benedict XVI spoke of truth as an encounter, that is to say, no longer a classification, but a path,’ Pope Francis said. It always has to be done ‘in dialogue with reality because you cannot do philosophy with a logarithm table.’

The same sort of dialogue, he said, applies to theology, which is not ‘to bastardize’ theology or make it impure. Rather, ‘quite the opposite’ is true. Jesus, who is ‘the greatest reality’ of all, always started with people’s real lives to lead them toward God.

‘It began with a seed, a parable,’ a specific incident, and then Jesus would explain, he said; Jesus wanted to do a ‘deep,’ profound theology.

‘To be a good theologian, in addition to studying, dedicating oneself, having sharp insight and grasping reality,’ one must reflect and pray ‘on one’s knees,’ he said.

A man or a woman ‘who doesn’t pray cannot be a theologian,’ he said. He or she may know every doctrine that ever existed and ‘be a walking *Denzinger*,’ the Pope said, referring to the 19th-century *Handbook of Creeds and Definitions* by Heinrich Denzinger, ‘but they will not be doing theology.’

It all comes down to ‘how you express who God is,’ how the Holy Spirit is manifested, the mystery and ‘the wounds of Christ,’ he said. ‘How you are teaching this encounter—that is the grace.’

Clearly, the above-cited observations made by Pope Francis are filled with sound, commonsense theological and philosophical realist teachings of St. Thomas, one that comprehends the personalistic and psychologically-complicated nature of philoso-

phy/science, that St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI sought to revive through a proper, personalistic, psychologically-fitting understanding of *logos*, especially as *right reason*, to halt Western cultural decline and promote global peace. In so doing, like Francis, both had recognized that a personalistic element had been missing from, at the time, the necessarily-apologetical ‘Systematic Thomism’ they had been taught in their ‘manual’ and ‘commentarian’ seminary training, to which they had attempted to add by reading other authors.

I think Pope Francis has a somewhat similar, but more hostile, attitude toward his apologetical seminary training in Thomism as John Paul II and Benedict. Unlike John Paul II and Benedict, Francis does not appear to me as fully as did they to appreciate the necessity of the great commentarian tradition for the preservation of the works of St. Thomas and the later manual, apologetical, scholastic defenses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as an essential part of philosophy/revealed theology as historical/cultural enterprises involving standing on the shoulders of intellectual giants. The scholastic pedagogies and his seminary instructors in the commentarian Thomistic tradition and manual neo-Thomism appear to have left a deep emotional scar on him, and resentment within him, which he carries to this day. Viscerally, this exposure appears to me intensely to anger him almost to an irrational level. Nonetheless, I do not think that Pope Francis is totally anti-Thomistic, totally hostile to the thought of St. Thomas. That portrait does not appear to me to be accurate.

Understanding Romano Guardini’s influence on Pope Francis to help comprehend Francis’s interest in contemporary ecological science, not the Leftist Green New Deal

One of the authors Francis read that I think helped lead him toward a more personalistic way of understanding the commonsense wisdom of St. Thomas was the great Austrian Catholic theologian

Romano Guardini. After the end of World War II, when Europe, including Germany, was about the work of rebuilding cities, states, and cultures, like his contemporaries Mortimer J. Adler, Jacques Maritain, Yves R. Simon, Étienne Henri Gilson, and Josef Pieper, in his famous 1956 book, *The End of the Modern World*, Romano Guardini had recognized that, in the task of reconstructing itself, the West had become consumed by focus of attention on work, and had started to misunderstand the natures of work and leisure and their relationship to religion and culture. The popular understanding at the time (which, as Pope Francis appears to recognize, continues to this day) started to develop that ‘a culture is a world,’ largely a place, of ‘total work,’ in which, at best, leisure is a short time off to recharge batteries, a break, intermission, or a ‘time out,’ to regain strength (a time of physical relaxation spent, as it typically was before the winter/spring/summer of 2020 and COVID-19, being idle, perhaps watching a football game and drinking beer). Like his European and American confreres mentioned in the above paragraph, Guardini had become alarmed by this situation. As far back as his beautiful *Letters from Lake Como*, written during the mid-1920s, Guardini had started to see how the modernist, anti-contemplative, mechanistic attitudes first articulated in the West by Sir Francis Bacon and René Descartes were starting to change 20th-century psychological attitudes toward, do violence to, pollute, and destroy the physical environment in Europe.

In the 1980s, while he never completed it, Jorge Bergoglio began work on a doctoral dissertation on Guardini. Pope Francis cited Guardini’s *The End of the Modern World* eight times in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato si’*, more often than any other modern thinker who was not a pope. Reading the German intellectual Guardini’s *Letters from Lake Como* in conjunction with his *The End of the Modern World* helps explain Francis’s interest in ecological studies and the need to develop an environmental theology. What

strikes the Pope as common sense is that, recently, the physical universe we have attempted to dominate is starting to pay us back for our foolishness. We have lost metaphysical respect for understanding the physical universe as part of a created order. Like Gilson, Jorge Bergoglio recognizes that bad philosophy, lack of metaphysical respect, tends to bury its undertakers. Hence, Francis clearly sees his encyclical *Laudato si'* to be more than a social tract. It is chiefly a metaphysical and moral one, in which the Pope expresses opposition to the entire throwaway and totalitarian, contemporary liberal culture of the West (including abortion, embryonic stem cell research, population control) and its disdain for individual dignity and personal liberty: the Leftist Green New Deal, which is simply secularized Augustinianism: Augustine in Drag/neo-Catharism and neo-Pelagianism.

The nature of common sense

As far as I understand it, common sense is what most human beings call *common knowledge*, or *common understanding*. The term *common sense* appears to be simply a different way of saying *common knowledge*, or *common understanding*: knowing what anyone familiar with some subject evidently knows to be true. In general, a person with common sense is someone possessed of what Aristotle and St. Thomas had identified as the natural and acquired intellectual habit (*habitus*) and virtue (*virtus*: virtual, or intensive quantity [quality]), of understanding. Such a person is someone who, in relation to observational (what Aristotle and St. Thomas had called *speculative* or *theoretical*) knowledge immediately understands (induces, intuits) some thing or action to be what it is, or be true; or, in relation to practical and productive knowing, through practical or productive experience at living, immediately induces (intuits), understands, what something is or is not, or right or wrong to choose.

For this reason, the person who lacks common sense is often publicly ridiculed, is the butt of jokes. University professors, people who tend “to live in ivory towers,” especially some logicians (those with little practical experience at living), incline to be such individuals. In college, I had a friend like this to whom I used to refer as an “encyclopedia open to the wrong page.” While he was terrific in some forms of academic work, he tended to have no practical skills, or if he did, not know when and/or how to apply them.

How are we to account for Pope Francis’s lack of common sense, if he does lack common sense?

Like all human beings, Pope Francis lacks common sense in areas of knowing where he lacks human understanding, familiarity with a subject. We predicate the term *common sense* analogously. While we might possess it a great deal in one area of knowing, we can totally lack it in another. Regarding his lack of common sense such as: 1) I described in his first trip to the United States or in report of his recently congratulating *president-elect* Biden for his becoming the United States *president-elect* (even though this never happened, could only happen in the U.S. on and after 14 December 2020); or 2) in apparently politically stabbing in the back Chinese Catholics and Cardinal Joseph Zen in his recent political dealings with the mainland Communist Chinese government, once again, these actions appear to me likely to have been largely the result of Francis being given bad advice from badly-educated Enlightenment-influenced, Vatican advisors, the Vatican Deep State.

Such a situation, combined with what appears to me to be an imperfect understanding of the nature of philosophy/science (which we all share today) accounts for Francis’s often-apparent lack of political, and other forms of, prudence. In reality, I benignly interpret such egregious political mistakes to bureaucratic stupidity or maliciousness of Deep State operatives. Commonsense

wisdom from practical experience at living tells me that anyone who was once a Bar Bouncer in Buenos Aires and swept floors as a janitor could never be that dumb, so lacking in political common sense to do such things. Much more likely from a common sense wisdom point of view is that this is the sort of behavior one would expect from a seasoned Deep State Vatican bureaucrat.