

## 24.6.2015. Francis: A pope to challenge the world

With Pope Francis, the Catholic Church has appointed a world leader who, while reforming his organisation from within, is also renewing his diplomatic efforts abroad. Cuba, Colombia, the Middle East, Ukraine, Mediterranean boat-people, global warming: his efforts have substantial weight in areas where his predecessors seemed much less engaged.

Let us quickly review two already striking cases where his influence on the progress achieved has been acknowledged by all observers. In Cuba, it was his diplomacy that fostered exchanges between the Castro regime and the Obama administration, with the rapid and significant results that are there for all to see. In Columbia, negotiations between the Columbian government and the revolutionary guerrilla group FARC were encouraged by his interventions. Renewed tensions in 2014 were overcome at his insistence, and very recently the Columbian government has welcomed a fall to one tenth in the victims of this conflict over the year. During 2015, Francis has announced that he will visit Columbia "to bring Christ's message of peace." In short, progress is being made and Columbia is no longer the leading country for narcotics traffickers, with a significant fall in cocaine production, which flourished during times of insecurity. These two successes alone could be a lifetime's achievement. It has taken two years to get there.

As the leader of Christianity, Francis is also very involved in the defence of eastern Christians massacred by Islamic State fanatics, in Egypt (Copts), in Syria and in Iraq. The strategy is ecumenical - a rapprochement with orthodox Christians and other threatened churches. This inter-faith dialogue is reflected in Europe in the case of Ukraine, through a ceaseless effort to heal a conflict that could ignite in dangerous fashion. And in his attempts to improve the fate of the Mediterranean boat people, many of whom are Christians fleeing from the massacres in the Middle East. In all these delicate areas, the Pope is a diplomatic player whose voice is heard, whose word reaches further than those of all the European leaders combined. None of his predecessors have had such a wide-ranging impact; the action of John-Paul II was focused on the fall of the iron curtain in Europe.

His most recent feat was the publication of the encyclical *Laudato si* devoted to the defence of the environment, which rigorously condemns the "consumerist paradigm" and calls for an "ecological citizenship": "today, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenceless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule. [...] The failure of global summits on the environment makes it plain that our politics are subject to technology and finance." In the wake of these assertions, the conservative US broadcaster Fox News did not hesitate to describe Pope Francis as "the most dangerous person on the planet" because of the publication of this encyclical. There is little chance, alas, that François Hollande will receive the same accolade next December in Paris, when he hosts the COP21, the UN conference aimed at reaching an international agreement on climate change. In any event, Pope Francis' particularly assertive position has already done more for the conference than all the Nicolas Hulots on the planet!

Will the new wind blowing from Rome reach the coast of Corsica? "Corsican patriots" will appreciate this passage, published in 2010 before Francis became Pope: "I prefer to talk about

the 'fatherland'. A country, in the last instance, is a geographical fact and a nation is a legal, constitutional fact. But the fatherland is the source of your identity. A person who loves the place where they live is not described as a 'country-ist' or a nationalist, but as a patriot. Fatherland comes from father."

And they will be keen to echo the message of tolerance and anti-racism that the Pope repeats on every occasion. In Corsica too there are suffering peoples from the Mediterranean, and racist attitudes must be forbidden and condemned. In Prunelli di Fium'Orbu as elsewhere.