

Yes! It is possible to think about medievalism and religion: A case study on Pope Francis's "Urbi et Orbi" mass

Sim! É possível pensar em medievalismo e religião: Um estudo de caso sobre a missa "Urbi et Orbi" do Papa Francisco

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Abstract: This article is a contribution to the debate emerged in the studies about medievalism: a relationship between religion as a source of reflection and the theory about the appropriation of the Middle Ages in the post medieval period. This article seeks to ponder the difficulty to address themes and objects in the religious ambit. Particularly, the synchronous relationship with time, invoked as an obstacle to the progress of researches concerning medievalism. In the first part, there is an analysis of Richard Utz. We propose a theoretical approach that presents alternatives to solve the possible difficulties of thinking about the relationship between both fields of study. In the second part of the article, we develop a practical application of the initial discussion to analyze Pope Francis's *Urbi et Orbi* mass held on March 27th, 2020 in the Vatican. We argue that through categories of analysis like multi-temporality and *auctoritas*, called upon as possibilities to think about the relationship between medievalism and religion, it is possible to understand the mass as a medievalizing liturgy.

Keywords: Medievalism; Religion; Covid-19; Pope Francis; *Urbi et Orbi* mass.

Resumo: Este artigo é uma contribuição ao debate surgido no interior dos estudos sobre medievalismo: a relação entre a religião como campo de reflexão e a teoria sobre as apropriações da idade média no período pós-medieval. Pensamos a respeito da dificuldade de abordar temas e objetos vindos do âmbito religioso, particularmente, a relação sincrônica com o tempo, invocada como obstáculo ao avanço das pesquisas, dentro dos trabalhos acerca do medievalism. Na primeira parte, há um diálogo com Richard Utz, nela, propomos uma abordagem teórica apresentando saídas para resolver as possíveis dificuldades de pensar a relação entre os dois campos de estudo. Na segunda parte do artigo, realizamos uma aplicação prática da discussão inicial analisando a missa *Urbi et Orbi* do Papa Francisco, ocorrida



no dia 27 de março de 2020, no Vaticano. Argumentamos que, por meio de categorias de análise como multitemporalidade e *auctoritas*, invocadas como possibilidades para se pensar a relação entre medievalism e religião, é possível compreender a missa como uma liturgia medievalizante.

Palavras-chave: Medievalismo; Religião; Covid-19; Papa Francisco; missa *Urbi et Orbi*.

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Introduction

In this article, which is divided in two parts, we study the relationship between religion as a field of reflection and the theory of medievalism. Initially, we support the viability of the use of this theory to analyze religion. We demonstrate how the Christian religion developed the subject of Incarnation as a way to imprint the eternal God in time and History. The Middle Ages were profoundly devoted to such reflections and established a relationship with time which we call multi-temporality, whose uses and meanings we present in the first part of this article. Thereafter, we use the theory to analyze the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing given by Pope Francis "to Rome and the world". We refer to the mass celebrated on March 27th, 2020 at Saint Peter's Square in the Vatican. In this respect, the blessing will be understood as a medievalizing liturgy in which we find the multi-temporality that is characteristic of the religiousness of the medieval world.

Christianism is *per se* medievalizing

For this discussion, we will show how feasible it is to apply the theories of medievalism to religion, understood here in its theological-dogmatic dimension and not in its practical one. The fact that there are very few studies on this relationship, despite the co-disciplinary character of medievalism (HSY, 2017), is the reason for which we decided to discuss it. There are several reasons for which there are so few studies on this subject, but we believe temporalization is the main one. Since historicism, the discipline of history established an epistemology to deal with the historical temporality, which tends to emphasize the distinction between the periods, whereas religion has a synchronous relationship with time. Thus, religion keeps a counter-temporal link with it (UTZ, 2015, p. 17).

Therefore, the problem resides in the different ways of relating with time and at the same time, in the different ways of conceptualizing the relationship between past and present and the very relationship with the world. When considering time as a consciously temporalizing category, a diachronic assumption was established in the field of humanities, mostly in the field of History. This category started guiding the relationship of historians with the past, mainly with the advent of History as an academic discipline in the nineteenth century.



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Richard Utz also shows that, as a kind of byproduct of the accelerated process of temporalization and the institutionalization of History as a discipline, it was necessary to establish different ways to see the past. An example of this was the creation of an epistemological boundary, mainly from Positivism onwards. And from that time until today, historiography has been concerned with theorizing about the mentioned epistemological boundary. Hence, we should consider the insurmountable limits of a non-contiguous history. Thus, theology suffered pressure to establish a historization and therefore it instituted the disciplines of Ecclesiastic History, which despite its academic boundaries, still conceived religion and its temporality as being opposite to historicism. To confirm his argument, Utz cites the example of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist (UTZ, 2015, p. 15).

Despite the nuances between denominations, he presents some aspects that are apparently capable of straying the field of religion from the studies about medievalism. As in the case of the Eucharist, it is a common desire of all denominations to try to establish two non-contiguous bridges of time. At the center, we have the recognition of the celebration of the Eucharist as a memory of the Holy Supper to show the sempiternal nature of Christ, helping the believers establish a union with the divinity. As highlighted by the author through a reference to the gospel of Luke (22,19), there is an intention to recall this Bible passage (UTZ, 2015, p. 15). On the other hand, through the use of liturgical formulae and the ritual of the reenactment itself, the believers experience a temporary suspension of human history and even of time itself, as happens during the Eucharist. Subsequently, Utz argues that the sempiternal character of religion is the main reason for the difficulty to include religion in medievalism.

This example of the sempiternality of religion offers, I believe, a good answer to the question why scholars of medievalism studies find it difficult to engage in a critical (and 'critical' has been synonymous with 'historicizing') discussion of religion. [...] Religion, however, because it resists historicity's epistemological predominance, may remain too difficult a topic for most academic scholars, which is why they responded to this foundational epistemological aporia in a variety of ways (UTZ, 2015, p. 15).

According to this perspective, the problem concerns the manner in which religion is placed outside the epistemological field of historicity and in a certain



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way, outside of History too. After exposing the problem of temporalization, Utz presented different authors whose work corroborate the difficulty of thinking about religion through the theory of medievalism. However, in the cited article, this author does not necessarily reject the reflection of the use of this theory for the studies of religion. In fact, he summarized several points which, when addressing the relationship between medievalism and religion, should be considered to make the theory use of the theory possible.

It is worth mentioning that from 2015 until the present, other intellectuals have proposed reflections in the field of medievalism and religion, but they have effectively progressed little or almost nothing in Utz questionings. In 2017, D'Alcântara presented a graduation paper which, despite not analyzing the problems about the relationship between medievalism and religion, it showed similarities between the way Valdemiro Santiago (the leader of the World Church of God's Power) narrated his experience in a shipwreck on the coast of Mozambique and the medieval hagiographies (D'ALCÂNTARA, 2017). However, she was unable to convincingly systematize the similarities. Moreover, she supported the use of the theory of medievalism through the notion of a medieval appropriation with legitimation objectives, in line with Gentry and Müller's proposal. For the authors, this theory is used to study cases in which the Middle Ages were appropriated to serve as a form of legitimation in post-medieval periods (GENTRY; MÜLLER, 1991). The problem resides in an overinterpretation, since these authors state that the appropriation of the Middle Ages must be explicit and intentional and D'Alcântara did not demonstrate this. However, the work had the merit of bringing the analysis to Brazil. Besides, it also showed in a practical way, without the appropriate theoretical reflection, a relationship between medievalism and religion, in the specific case of neo-Pentecostalism.

In 2019, the first work to relate medievalism to religion in the international context brought a theoretical proposal, although in our opinion it didn't analyze the matter of temporalization, which was important to reflect about the relationship between religion and this theory. It addressed the article about Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'* of 2015 (D'ACENS; MONAGLE, 2019). The authors proposed the concept of "medievalizing text". That is, a text grounded in the medieval *auctoritas*, namely, the authority of Saint Thomas and Saint Francis, which would allow the reading of the encyclical whose authority resides in the Middle Ages. Despite not addressing the question of temporalization, they brought an essential element to the debate, which is the notion that



medieval rationality was based on the idea of authority.

Still in 2019, there was a publication of Clinio Amaral and João Rangel about the way the Religious Association of the Heralds of the Gospel shaped its image to the medieval saint Raimundo de Penãfort, evincing an enchanted Medieval Age (AMARAL; RANGEL, 2019). Yet, like all the previous authors, it brought little theoretical reflection about the relationship between medievalism and religion. In fact, they supported the argument based on the analysis between the text structure and the medieval hagiographies and the way the Heralds used the hagiography of Peñafort in order to become linked to the Middle Ages. We highlight that the authors explained that the aforementioned association deliberately wishes to have its image linked to the Middle Ages. In this way, despite not commenting on Utz's work, they have brought to the field of medievalism the case of the religious institutions that deliberately link their image to the medieval period as a way of identity and institutional legitimation, something that is also widely popular in Brazil nowadays.

In 2020, D'Alcântara defended a dissertation which is a theoretical reflection lined on the work of D'Arcens and Monagle, as mentioned before. The author demonstrated how in the book *O grande livramento*, the author Valdemiro Santiago uses the biblical *auctoritas* in the fashion of medieval authors to portray himself as a holly man. The author sustained the hypothesis that Valdemiro's text is a medievalizing hagiography (D'ALCÂNTARA, 2020). Nonetheless, the author evaded the debate concerning temporalization proposed by Utz.

Before analyzing the mass, it is important to return to Richard Utz's contribution, specifically to his conclusion: "To me, this example leaves no doubt that scholars in medievalism studies have an ethical obligation to investigate and historicize religion and theology, at least in all its temporal manifestations" (UTZ, 2015, p. 18-19). Although we find Utz's questions about temporalization pertinent, we think that he misunderstood the dogmatic and theological aspects as being intrinsic to religion.

It is important to highlight that most of what Utz wrote about temporalization is a medieval reflection. Notably regarding Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas, despite the different propositions of these authors about time and History. Both medieval philosophers sought to demonstrate how God, who is in Eternity and not in time, is imprinted in history. And according to Utz, History is organized diachronically, at least since the nineteenth century. Let's return to his arguments.

[...] and I believe the main reason may be the radically different



approaches to temporality proposed by these two ways of conceptualizing the world and the relationship between past and present. As cultural and semantic historians have demonstrated, time itself and a consciously temporalizing perspective on all subject matter become lead indicators for the advent of modernity. In fact, since the early nineteenth-century temporalization has become the central weapon in the arsenal of historicism, the thought paradigm that not only can dissect and structure the present and past, but also guide all academic study at the modern university toward distinguishable periodicities (UTZ, 2015, p. 13-14).

In this way, the temporalization of history, including other human sciences in general, could be incompatible with the particular way in which religion relates with time, that is, with the multi-temporalities. However, we sustain that although there are different forms of temporalization in Christianity, one must not forget that religion is an object of Human Sciences and not an ontological revelation as it is for Theology. Therefore, religion also has a diachronic relationship with time and here resides the answer to Utz's problem. The synchronous relationship with time alluded by this author is not intrinsic to religion, but rather a social construction, to a large extent medieval, and it is able to engender multi-temporalities through a number of performed rituals and liturgies, as in the case of a mass or in the way the Bible is read.

The investigator, when studying themes linked to religion based on medievalism, must consider that in several moments *e.g.*, masses, processions or blessings, the celebrant consciously reaches out for a medieval reflection and updates it in contemporaneous terms. As already demonstrated, the Middle Ages were responsible for dealing with a series of what may be called multi-temporalities, including the very suspension of time during the Eucharist. In fact, Theology uses this period as a source of authority and identity (GY, 2007, p. 520-521). As said before, the objections reported by Utz about the way the believer relates to time have its origins in the medieval reflection about time. Therefore, in several aspects of the religious field, there isn't necessarily the need to explicitly link the ceremonies to the Medieval Ages, since the relationship with the multi-temporality is already *per se* an aspect that must be analyzed through medievalism.

Utz (2015) did not consider the fact that religion, despite its synchronous relationship with time, also has a diachronic relationship with it. And in the specific case of Christianity, it is historical and narrative. Hence, it is a

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mistake to assert that due to this synchronous relationship with time it would be difficult to use the theory of medievalism, because this assertion disregards the nature of Christian temporalization and its relationship with history. Nonetheless, there is in fact a problem, because contrary to most objects studied by *medievalism*, such as films, games, books, etc., the layman present in a liturgy does not necessarily notice the underlying relationship between the theology that was mostly developed during the Medieval Ages, and the contemporary use of Theology that is being made during today's ceremonies. As an exception, we have the groups that explicitly establish this relationship, like the Association of the Heralds of the Gospel among others. Therefore, to consider the use of the theory of medievalism, we necessarily have to resort to its co-disciplinary character and to a theoretical relationship with Theology and why not, to the very medieval philosophy. According to what we defend, it is important to consider the following aspects to use this theory: a) the peculiar way in which religion deals with time, that is, in a multitemporal and sometimes even atemporal manner; b) the resource of *auctoritas* as a source of legitimation and identity; c) and finally, the criticism to the disenchantment of the world created by Enlightenment. In other words: religion is by excellence the field of *mirabilia*, which is a medieval construct.

As demonstrated by Alain Boureau (2004), the main originality of Christianity concerns the fact that it is based on a narrative much more than on its precepts. Christianity has always been grounded in history. Notably, in a precise moment of history: The Incarnation, that is, the coming of God to Earth. With his coming to Earth, God imprinted himself in historical time and at the same time in the duration of history, whose end (the so-called "Final Judgement") was also announced at this precise moment of temporal inflection caused by the coming to Earth. The theological base of Christianity is a paradox: on the one hand, God, represented in eternity and therefore out of time, also imprinted himself in time and history with his coming to Earth. And on the other hand, he brought the promise of the end of history and temporality with salvation and life in eternity. Thus, human temporality blends definitely into the atemporality represented by the eternal God.

Because of the event of Incarnation, Christianity established the need to report this story constituting itself as a religion of narrative whose elaboration leads, according to this author, to a series of endless events which are in practice reconstructions and reinventions of the coming of Christ and the promise of Parousia. Therefore, atemporality; the beginning of temporality



(which is the Incarnation, the coming to Earth); and the promise of his return; created a cyclical temporal perspective. This perspective is marked by the aforementioned temporal inflexion, which is represented by Jesus himself, the human and temporal God Son who brought the promise of the end of time (the Final Judgment) and at the same time, promotes his own "real presence" in the *hic et nunc* through the Eucharist. The juxtaposition of these diverse temporalities created multi-temporalities and a cyclical historical narrative, present for example in the liturgy of the masses and in several stained-glass windows of gothic cathedrals.

Since the Middle Ages, the Roman church has been transposing the narrative of the temporal inflexion caused by the Incarnation and the resulting juxtaposition of temporalities to the saints and the relics through the notion of *transitus* during the celebration of the mass, as we will analyze in the second part of this article.

Thus, we have a teleological dimension of history because on the one hand "we head to the Final Judgement", and on the other hand, we have the inscription of the cyclical time of the liturgy, especially of its medieval elaboration over the mass. Among these temporalities, the Christians, as demonstrated Francisco Gomes, are placed as pilgrims (*viator*) in search of the Father's house and waiting for fulfillment in the Kingdom of God.

[...] he lives the present time as a time of opportunity and decision, like a *Kairós*; as an intermediary time between the gift confirmed in the past and the fulfillment, in the future, of a promise that has not yet come true. Christians live between the origin and destiny, between the temporary and the definite, between a time which is called 'today' and eternity (GOMES, 2012, p. 201).

The Christian theology addressed such reflections. Men live in time and history, waiting for the atemporality, narrating and reinventing the Christian narrative of the Gospels. From the liturgical point of view, the ritual of the mass represents all these multi-temporalities and it also represents the memory of the Christian narrative in the ritual, because it has a cyclical liturgical calendar. The mass has the role of recalling the past and creating a moment of suspension of human time through the Eucharist. Besides all this, we highlight that during the homily the priest establishes oftentimes a relationship between the past, the present and the future. The priest comments the Bible text, guided by his authority, and applies it to the urgency of the present, which is the Covid-19



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pandemic in the case of this article, and he does this without losing track of the need to relate it to the economy of salvation, that is, the dimension of the future interrelated to the promise of an eternal life. Hence, past, present, future and atemporality, materialized in the interpretation of the narrative, synthesize the multi-temporalities so characteristic of Christianity and its theology of history.

Beyond the medieval reflection of the mass, we underline that similar to the medieval reflection on temporalization, the Middle Ages developed another key concept to think about religion, which also allows us, *a priori*, to defend the relationship *per se* between medievalism and religion. We refer to *auctoritas* as a cornerstone of this relation.

Catholic thought is always couched within tradition. Thinking self-consciously as a Catholic requires identifying the appropriate form of canonical authority (biblical, patristic, scholastic) and making claims within a particular reading of the source. This is why Catholic thought is always medievalist, to some degree, because so much of what the Church is today was bedded down structurally and ideologically in the Middle Ages, particularly in relation to core doctrine (such as transubstantiation) and the sacramental regime (such as the mass). This not to say that there has not been significant historical change within the Church, but it is to say as an institution it understands itself with pride of be a medieval institution and seeks out those foundations deliberately (D'ARCENS; MONAGLE, 2019, p. 52).

Although the authors do not deny a historical perspective in the ecclesiastic thought, they rightly highlight that the way the church sees itself today is related to its medieval foundations e.g., the mass and the sacramentals among others. Moreover, they draw attention again to the weight of tradition, specifically the biblical exegesis (patristic and in other forms). As we see, the bases of the church, many of which are medieval, allow it to self-consciously define itself as a medieval institution. Therefore, in the case of the Catholic Church and a considerable number of Protestant denominations, the relationship between the use of the medieval past and the present serves as a form of legitimation and identity. However, as a liturgical rite, it has the explicit intention of creating the intersection between the multi-temporalities, whether in the Middle Ages or in Contemporaneity.



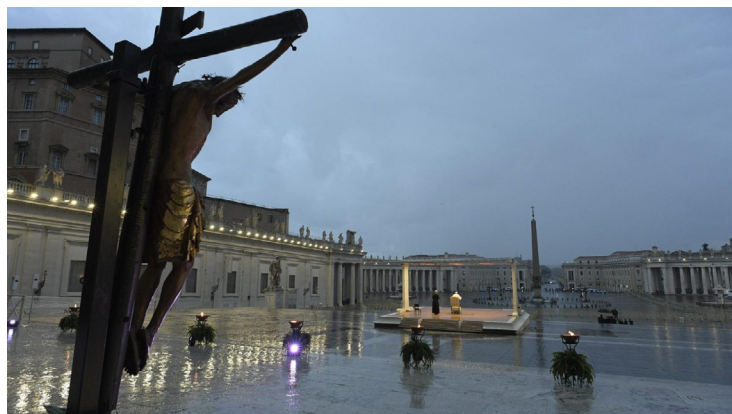
La messe associe deux temps successifs, celui de la Parole, au cours duquel sont proclamés des textes de l'Écriture, et celui de l'action eucharistique, qui appelle la récitation du canon et le partage des espèces consacrées. La prière qui précède immédiatement le canon est la préface, dont l'Église latine a pris l'habitude de faire varier le contenu selon les périodes du temps liturgique. Au XIII^e siècle, la standardisation des textes s'accroît, sous l'impulsion des ordres mendiants (BÉRIOU, 2010, p. 376).

Due to their biblical origin, the time of the Word of God and the incarnation of God's Son join the suspension of time through the liturgy that engenders the multi-temporalities. In the case of Pope Francis's mass, this was done with images and relics. We defend that he started a medievalizing papacy and the celebration of the mass analyzed here is another evidence of this. In fact, in what concerns the discourse of anti-modernity, the Pope manifested himself, as in the *Laudato Si'*, against a series of primacies considered modern mainly after the nineteenth century. At the same time, he defended a neo-Franciscan attitude. He deliberately reached out to the Middle Ages to harshly criticize our society and at the same time he proclaimed plenary indulgence in relation to Covid-19.

To Rome and to the world, a medievalizing papacy

On March 27th, 2020, Pope Francis prayed alone in an empty St Peter Square and granted the blessing and plenary indulgence to the faithful in a world facing the Sars-Cov-2 pandemic. It is an unprecedented ritual that did not count with the presence of devoted Catholics in Italy, who, ravaged by the virus, locked down in quarantine.

Picture 1 - Urbi et Orbi Prayer and blessing at St Peter Square



Source: Prayer and blessing at St Peter Square (Vatican Media, 03/27/2020). Available on: < <https://www.vaticannews.va/pt/papa/news/2020-03/papa-francisco-homilia-oracao-bencao-urbe-et-orbi-27-marco.html> > Accessed on December 8th, 2020.



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The image of Jorge Mario Bergoglio, solitary, standing and speaking to a rainy, dark, and empty square, is one of the historical scenes that will best represent the moment in which the world faced Covid-19. The beam of light from the Vatican lit up the pontiff and the two relics placed at the entrance of St Peter's Basilica for the mass. At the moment the scene took place, approximately one thousand people had been victims of the virus in the previous twenty-four hours only in Italy. In the world, thousands had also succumbed to Covid-19. The sensation provoked by the image but also by the mass, is that humanity desperately implores for help. Nonetheless, the dreary environment of the square seems to deaden the cries. And in this context the main character, Pope Francis, at the age of 83, visibly in pain due to the sciatic nerve pains, implores to God on behalf of humanity, that, despite all its rationalist arrogance, resorts to the transcendent as a desperate request for help.

The blessing allowed around 1.3 billion Catholics to get a full indulgence, that is, the pardon of their sins during the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing. This blessing is traditionally given on December 25th and on Easter Sunday; dates on which Jesus' birth and resurrection are celebrated. Francis anticipated the Easter blessing due to the pandemic that ravaged the world to make an alert to the Catholics about the real meaning of existence, declaring in his homily that we live in a sick world, where Christian values seem to be lost before "false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, habits and priorities" (FRANCIS, 2020).

In the second part of this article, we will analyze the blessing and its association to the relics as a medieval liturgy that incorporates the multi-temporalities, the *auctoritas*, and the recourse to the Middle Ages as a source of legitimacy and identity for the Catholic Church, as well as a source of symbolic capital able to corroborate the anti-modernizing discourse adopted by the Pope in some moments

Picture 2 - Pope Francis



Source: Oração Prayer and blessing at St Peter Square (Vatican Media, 03/27/2020). Available on: < <https://www.vaticannews.va/pt/papa/news/2020-03/papa-francisco-homilia-oracao-bencao-urbe-et-orbi-27-marco.html> > Accessed on December 8th, 2020.



of his papacy. These elements, related to the previously mentioned theoretical perspectives, corroborate our arguments about a medievalizing popedom that uses the Middle Ages to oppose the consumeristic, individualistic, and capitalistic ethics that mark the contemporaneous society.

From 2013 to this day, there has been evidence to defend that Pope Francis has started a medievalizing popedom. For D’Arcens and Monagle (2019), the specific case of this popedom draws attention to how the Thomist and Franciscan thought is present, although St Thomas and St Francis have different church and government models. Saint Thomas Aquinas is, roughly speaking, a defender of an authoritarian and centralized church, granted by the doctrine. Whereas Saint Francis is linked to radical alterity in the Church, which also roughly speaking, refers to a “counterculture” and an anticlerical Church linked to a combination of immanence and detachment of the world. This combination explains why Jorge Mario Bergoglio named himself Francis. D’Arcens and Monagle also declared that the Argentinian cardinal Bergoglio, a Jesuit who adopted the name Francis when elected in March 2013, broke with the tradition and became the first pope to directly link himself to this medieval saint.

Francis, whose decision had immediate repercussion, would have been inspired by the “leftism” of the popular Middle Ages saint, admired by many, due to his exemplary humbleness and sense of social justice, revealed mainly through his renunciation of earthly possessions and his concern for the poor and marginalized. “Francis was declaring himself adept of the radical reformist tradition of the Church, one that had not been prominent in the preceding papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, which had evinced a strong concern with orthodoxy written in a Thomistic mode” (D’ARCENS; MONAGLE, 2019, p. 53).

Such conclusions lead to the debate on the neo-Franciscan aspects of the present Pope. To exemplify, they mentioned the episodes of the Holy Thursday, namely the Washing of the Feet, when Pope Francis chose to highlight the marginalized and “forgotten” in the contemporaneous world like the refugees, the prisoners, the Muslims, etc. The authors demonstrated how, through the *Laudato Si’*, the Pope can conceive a Saint Thomas compatible with the Franciscan spirituality through tradition. It is a temporal injunction through which the Middle Ages emerge as a fantasized unity.

But let us return to the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing, performed on March the 27th, 2020 by the first Argentine Pope in history. The analysis of the liturgy itself will



be done through the words said by the pontiff, available in the official website of the Vatican and whose images were provided officially by the Vatican TV. We analyze the mass through the lenses of the cameramen and editors who produced these images.

A medievalizing liturgy

"We are again in 1347, my dear...". This was the WhatsApp message we received from a friend when the first Covid-19 cases were diagnosed in Brazil. Amid the new coronavirus pandemic, the references to the Middle Ages emerged in several ways. The scourges suffered by Europe during the Black Death in the fourteenth-century were mentioned in talks and in the media, associating the medieval scourge to the coronavirus pandemic.

The feeling that we were going through the experiences lived by the fourteenth-century men is more and more real. This was the perception of many when watching the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing on March 27th, 2020. The liturgy prayed by the Pope in the Vatican reminded to a medievalizing ritual since it is related to the multi-temporalities that characterize the medieval religiousness and spirituality. When resorting to a liturgy with references to symbols of the fight against the plague and the search for salvation through the pardon of the sins, the Pope takes us back to medieval Christianity; a time in which the multiple layers of time interrelated in the name of Christian religiousness.

In this sense, Francis utilizes the medieval rite and symbols, loaded with multitemporalities, in an attempt to rescue the perception of the pre-modern time of humanity which he believes is lost. Francis is after the Middle Ages, characterized by religious identity and at the same time, by the *auctoritas*. As previously pointed out by D'Arcens and Monagle (2019), in respect to the analysis of the *Laudatio Si'*, the Pope links himself to the Middle Ages by rescuing a combination of two mainstream symbols of medieval thought: the mystic Saint Francis and the scholastic of Saint Thomas.

During the mass, the pontiff preached the notion of human fraternity and union, that is, the perception that everyone is in the same boat, facing the same storm. And to face it, one needs to oppose the false vanities and comforts of modern society. In D'Arcens and Monagle's study (2019), we observe that Pope Francis tries to build a perception of the planet as being everyone's home. Thus, he considers the preservation of the environment a universal demand in opposition to the destruction and greed that devastates nature. For these authors, "Franciscan environmentalism" is legitimized by the Church's



medieval authority present in the *Laudato Si'*. They underline the existence of neo-Franciscan medievalism, revealed by the reference to the *Canticle of the Creatures* by Saint Francis of Assisi in this encyclical. This is aligned with several similar attitudes that the Pope has had since the beginning of his papacy. When he chose the name Francis, the Pope established continuity regarding the medieval saint, besides establishing a clear rupture with the papacy of his predecessor. Pope Francis distinguishes himself by the simplicity of his attire as well as having chosen to live in Saint Martha's House instead of the Apostolic Palace.

We highlight the symbolism of this because it represents the personification of the Franciscan simplicity, corroborated ideologically by an unmistakable condemnation to market-oriented production and to the systemic social inequality mentioned in his early pronouncements as a pontiff (D'ARCENS; MONAGLE, 2019, p. 58). According to the authors, in his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, on November 24th, 2013, the Pope cited Saint Francis of Assisi as an example in the search for social justice. The bottom line is that the Pope and the saint to whom he decided to link himself with his name choice, represent, from the ethical and theological point of view, an alternative to the spiritual breakup brought by the neoliberal existence.

In the same way, in the blessing of March the 27, we observe how the Pope, reinforces the notion that humanity needs to unite against the evils that are destroying human lives, after mentioning the gospel of St Mark (Mk 4:35-40) in which Jesus and His disciples face the storm in the sea of Galilee:

For weeks now, it has been evening. Thick darkness has gathered over our squares, our streets and our cities; it has taken over our lives, filling everything with a deafening silence and a distressing void, that stops everything as it passes by; we feel it in the air, we notice it in people's gestures, their glances give them away. We find ourselves afraid and lost. Like the disciples in the Gospel we were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm. We have realized that we are in the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other. On this boat [...] are all of us (FRANCIS, 2020).

The union to fight back this pandemic that ravages the world demands the search of what "nourishes, sustains, and strengthens our lives and our communities" (FRANCIS, 2020). In this sense, we observe that Pope Francis is



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in search of a Christian temporality in which the prayers, the union, and the devotion to the images approach the faithful to the true food to the soul, which can heal in moments of storm.

In this episode specifically, he used the authority of the biblical text to corroborate his argument, according to which, metaphorically, the episode of the boat is analogous to our present situation. And the apostles, in their human imperfection, represent the scared humanity. Before Covid-19, we are just like the apostles: desperate with the situation and crying for help. And Jesus, immediately, with a single gesture or word, calms the wind and the sea and then scolds the apostles for their lack of faith (GERARD, 2008, p. 1315). Symbolically, besides bringing Jesus to the "here and now" with the citation of the biblical text, the Pope reprimands humanity for its lack of faith using this synchronous relationship with time between March the 27th and the episode of Jesus and the apostles in the boat. A lack of faith that in his view is caused by the loss of human dimension occasioned by capitalism. Let us return once again to D'Arcens and Monagle's analysis of the 2015 encyclical where they highlighted the creation of a genealogy related to the medieval Christian temporality to refute the primacy of secular modernity.

In the homily of March 27th, Pope Francis speaks precisely against a modern society that loses itself in false appearances and vanities that make Christians forget the weapons they have to fight evil.

The tempest lays bare all our prepackaged ideas and forgetfulness of what nourishes our people's souls; all those attempts that anesthetize us with ways of thinking and acting that supposedly "save" us, but instead prove incapable of putting us in touch with our roots and keeping alive the memory of those who have gone before us. We deprive ourselves of the antibodies we need to confront adversity (FRANCIS, 2020).

In this moment of pandemic, the true food of the soul needs to be rescued. We need to go in search of a temporality prior to secular modernity, suggests the liturgy of March 27th. Simultaneously, the Pope resorts to Christian history and to the Middle Ages as a source of authority and identity, as presented earlier by Alain Boureau (2004). Thus, we have the unfolding of cyclical history, the liturgical time and the recreation of the endless events that are inter-related to Parousie. The possibility of salvation exists, but only if men go back to the source of Christian faith, namely, the Middle Ages.



Amid this strong symbolical scene, the pontiff prays alone in an empty, rainy square for an end to the war against an invisible enemy and repeats the question: "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" (FRANCIS, 2020). In search of a post-modern Christian time, he invites the faithful to stand before the words of the gospel of Mark, before the Christian relics of the crucifix of *San Marcello al Corso* and the image of *Salus Populi romani* and lastly, before the Holy Sacrament. The salvation presupposes prayers and acts of devotion to the relics that are able to make the *transitus* between the temporality and eternity and, in this way, work miracles like, for example, freeing ourselves from the pandemic as they did in the Middle Ages. The very temporalization in which the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing happens, slow and contemplative, sends us to a temporality in which the modern world has not stopped accelerating. That is, the Catholic mass experiences a rhythm that seems to oppose the swiftness of time and the immediateness that are so characteristic of the modern world.

Francis, in order to restore medieval religiousness, utilized the multitemporalities the same way the medieval man did. And the medieval man was able to reason in several layers of time and space. The past, the present, and the future become present in the medieval liturgy. In the same manner, the pontiff sought to join the past of Mark's gospel and the Christian relics, as well as the present of the pandemic spreading throughout the world and a future of healing and union around Christian principles.

We observe that the blessing of March 27th bases its efficacy on the authority of the religious elements used by the Pope. This authority is assured by tradition, which allows the recourse to the ritual, the relics, the full indulgence and the Holy Sacrament in order have the same power and vitality they had in previous centuries.

The conception of cyclical time engendered by the liturgical service of the mass allows the Bible text, which is able to tell all of human history, to subordinate History to Theology. This subordination confers medieval authority to Mark's text because the rationality used in this type of analysis is medieval, that is, based in the principle of *auctoritas*. Any and all knowledge guides their credibility on an element of corroboration in the Bible text. This kind of interpretation gives the world a sacralized view. And despite this interpretation being related to the medieval context itself, we support that the social imaginary represented in it highlights a "situation of religious unanimity and compliance. All institutions display a sacral and officially Christian character. Moreover, the fundamentals of the social and natural order find their justification/explanation in the divine



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order, in the *sacred*" (GOMES, 1997, p. 44).

The symbology set by the exhibition of the images – mainly a crucifix that in the past would have saved Rome from the pest – uses a set of gestures and a temporality that are able to evoke religious unanimity. It is as though all the scene was sacralized. There is no contradiction in the several layers of time that we can contemplate during the liturgy, for all the elements incorporated to the ritual carry the Christian tradition that guarantees the necessary authority for the Pope's purpose: the fight against the invisible pest that has spread so much pain around the world. The liturgy of the mass celebrated at Saint Peter's Square, as well as the prayer before the relics of *Salus Populi Romani* and the crucified Christ (both powerful to fight the plague in the Middle Ages) use the authority granted by tradition, insuring its authenticity and therefore the miraculous power that the Pope may reach out for and bring to the moment of the mass:

Dear brothers and sisters, from this place that tells of Peter's rock-solid faith, I would like this evening to entrust all of you to the Lord, through the intercession of Mary, Health of the People and Star of the stormy Sea. From this colonnade that embraces Rome and the whole world, may God's blessing come down upon you as a consoling embrace. Lord, may you bless the world, give health to our bodies, and comfort our hearts! [...] (FRANCIS, 2020).

Picture 3 - *Salus Populi Romani*



Source: Wikipedia *Salus populi romani*. Available on: < https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salus_Populi_Romani >. Accessed on December 8th, 2020.

After the homily, Pope Francis walks with a certain difficulty in the light rain to the entrance of Saint Peter's Basilica and prays before the two relics he had exposed for the mass. First, Francis heads to *Salus Populi Romani* for his prayers and when he finishes, he stretches his hand to it. After that, he walks to the crucifix of *San Marcello al Corso* before which he also prays and forthwith kisses the foot of the crucified Christ.

When analyzing the relics used for the blessing on March 27th, it is interesting to observe what they



represented for the medieval man. According to Patrick Geary (1993), the relics were considered an essential element of daily life in the Middle Ages, mainly in the central period:

[...] les reliques dont il est question ici sont toutes authentiques, tant que des contemporains n'ont pas apporté la preuve du contraire ; ces reliques sont miraculeuses, il s'en dégage des odeurs plaisantes lorsqu'on les touche, elles guérissent les malades et expriment d'autres façons encore la volonté des saints dont ce sont les restes. Si l'on ne s'accorde pas sur ces postulats, c'est le phénomène tout entier qui devient incompréhensible, [...] (GEARY, 1993, p. 23).

Thus, we observe how the relics, authentic if there are no contrary proofs, carry a miraculous power able to heal. These relics were used countless times in the Middle Ages against the outbreaks of pests and diseases that spread around Europe from time to time. Supported on the medieval tradition of the reports of the miracles worked by the relics, Pope Francis chose particularly two of them to be part of his mass and asked for the end of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Let us see a little of the history and the multi-temporalities that these sacred objects carry. *Salus Populi Romani* is an image of the Virgin Mary carrying a child in her arms. She is dressed in a blue mantle, a color that represented the church since the Middle Ages. The mantle covers the whole head and the chest and leaves the face uncovered. She holds an embroidered handkerchief used for ceremonials. The background is golden. The child wears a kind of brownish tunic and holds a book. The image is 117 by 79 cm. It was painted on gessoed canvas applied to a wooden board, a widely used technique in the Middle Ages.

Tradition affirms that the icon came from Jerusalem and was painted by Saint Luke. There are many stories and miracles attributed to the image. The simple fact that it had contact with the evangelist grants it great miraculous power. Having had contact with a saint granted great authority to several relics in the medieval world due to the spread of the concept of *transitus*, according to which an image or a relic could be in contact with the Eternal and therefore enjoy privileged powers capable of healing through the intersection of the saint, or in this case, through the intersection of the Virgin.

We may find miraculous accounts attributed to the icon. Catholic tradition says that after the crucifixion, Mary moved to Saint John's home and took a few belongings with her, among which was a table built by Jesus himself in Saint Joseph's workshop. This wood base ended up in the hands of a pious lady in

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Jerusalem who convinced Luke, the evangelist, to paint the image of Our Lady on it. The icon remained in Jerusalem until it was discovered by Saint Helena, mother of the emperor Constantine. The image was taken to Constantinople together with other objects, where the emperor ordered the construction of a church to honor it. When, in 730, the Byzantine emperor Leon ordered the destruction of the icons, the Patriarch Saint Germain, fervent defender of the sacred images, was removed from his post and exiled from the city. Before leaving Byzantium, he wrote a letter to Pope Gregory III, attached it to the icon and threw it into the sea. The image of the saint got to Rome in a single day. Pope Gregory, warned in a dream, welcomed it accompanied by churchmen on the banks of the Tiber.

Barbara Jatta, director of the Vatican museums, historian and specialist in religious art, took part in the restoration process carried out between 2017 and 2018. On this occasion, she had the opportunity to investigate the work as reported in the article *Restaurata la Salus Populi romani* (JATTA, 2018). She affirms that the image shows characteristics of a later period, which does not coincide with the date given by Christian tradition. According to Barbara Jatta, the design of the chromatic mixtures that join the drawing of the hands and the faces with the colors of the clothes and the accessories, approaches the painting to other well-known copies from the Roman Middle Ages, more precisely between the ninth and thirteenth centuries.

Beyond the analysis of style, Jatta was able to carry out a fine work of restoration using technical resources. Besides the wear of time, the icon had been successively modified with the passing of time. By using spectroscopy, fluorescent ultraviolet, infrared, and radiography in the diagnostic laboratory for the conservation and restoration of the Vatican Museums, it was possible to determine the pigments used; and even the wood was analyzed by radiocarbon to know the date. The study concluded with an eighty percent probability that the main wood board was dated between the end of the ninth century and the beginning of the eleventh and the border dated from the period between the end of the tenth century and the first half of the eleventh.

The relic was produced during the medieval period according to the studies Jatta performed in the laboratories of the Museums of the Vatican. Nonetheless, the precise date obtained through the lab analysis does not have the authority conferred by tradition, which states that the image was not only painted by Saint Luke but also healed victim of the plagues in Rome in some occasions. On the Vatican website, we find one of the official versions of the miraculous healings



attributed to the relic, like the one happening in 590 under the popedom of Gregory the Great, when Rome was attacked by a plague. The Pope carried the icon in procession and the epidemics ended. Catholic tradition also says that the same blessing happened in the fifteenth century when the image was transported to Saint Peter's Square as was the wish of Saint Pius V. As we said before about the homily, the kind of liturgy and the use of the image subject history to theology. Thus, we see a medievalizing use of it throughout all the ritual. In this case, there is also a subordination of science to theology because despite all the technical data of the restoration being known by the Pope, his relationship with the image is, by excellence, grounded in Christian tradition.

The Popes' devotion to *Salus Populi Romani* is also expressed by a symbolic gesture: the coronation of the representation of the Virgin. This ritual seeks to confirm his authority and devotion to her. Clement III was the first pontiff to start this tradition. Pope Pius XII celebrated the first mass in April 1899 and in 1953 the image was carried in a procession around Rome to celebrate the Marian Year of the Catholic Church.

Since 1613, the image is found in the Borghese Chapel in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major. It is known that the Argentine Pope has a special devotion to *Salus Populi Romani*, whom he visits before and after his long trips. His prayers before the image ask for its healing powers once again to save Rome and the rest of the world from the *storm* caused by the spread of Covid-19.

The other religious object used during the mass was the crucifix of *Saint Marcello al Corso*, which one can find in the church previously called San Marcello in via Lata, located at the end of via Corso, close to Venezia Square. According to information provided by Federico Giannini and Ilaria Baratta, the architect was Jacopo Sansovino, born in Florence in 1486. He was responsible for the reconstruction of the church that caught fire on May 22nd, 1519 (GIANNINI; BARATTA, 2020). However, according to the official website of the Church, Sansovino didn't complete the work. Other architects, namely Giovanni Mangone and Giovanni da Firenze and Annibale Lippi were responsible for the side of church. The facade was finalized in the seventeenth by Carlo Fontana.

Tradition says that only the wooden crucifix of *San Marcello* survived the fire. The information concerning the date of the crucifix is inconsistent. In the official site of the church, San Marcello al Corso is described as being characteristic of the fourteenth century. (ORDINE DEI SERVI DI MARIA, 2020). However, this information may not be precise. In 2013, in the book *Roma al tempo di Avignone. Sculture nel contesto*, D'Alberto analyzes wooden sculptures



that were popularized in the fourteenth century about which very little is known in respect to their date, their author, or who ordered them.

Questi manufatti devono una loro coerente e omogenea sopravvivenza al fatto di aver acquisito, a partire verso la seconda metà del XIV, un vero e proprio status miracoloso che hanno poi mantenuto inalterato nel corso del tempo, sino a essere divenuti strumenti della devozione controriformata (D'ALBERTO, 2013, p. 125).

D'Alberto searches a few devotional elements to obtain information concerning the dates of the sculptures, among which was the crucifix of *San Marcello*. She defends an earlier date to the one found in the official website of the church of San Marcello. Using Barbara Fabjan's study about the restoration process of the crucifix published in *Kermes* in 2001, D'Alberto dated their production in the seventies of the XIV century. According to the author, the crucifix had been used as a model to Santa Maria sopra Minerva in the beginning of the fifteenth century. Among the artistic production of the *trecento* found in Roman churches, the crucifix of *San Marcello* has similar characteristics to the crucifix of *San Lorenzo in Damaso*, which dates back to the first quarter of the thirteenth century.

Picture 4 - The crucifix of San Marcello al Corso



Source: Pope Francis prays in front of crucifix at church San Marcello al Corso (Vatican Media). Available on: < <https://www.vaticannews.va/pt/papa/news/2020-03/papa-francisco-homilia-oracao-bencao-urbe-et-orbi-27-marco.html> >. Accessed on December 8th, 2020.

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According to Giannini and Baratta, despite being produced almost half a century apart, both sculptures have a common matrix: a model brought from the north of Europe. The crucifix of *San Lorenzo in Damaso* is linked to Saint Bridget of Sweden. The saint lived part of her life in Rome and according to her writings, especially *Sermo Angelicus*, she was devoted to the mentioned crucifix. Giannini and Baratta demonstrated that due to such devotion, it's not hard to believe that the artists spared no talent in the numerous reproductions of the archetypal image, as the crucifix of *San Marcello al Corso* proves.

We can see that, after the investigation performed at the time of the restoration of the crucifix of *San Marcello*, they concluded that it was crafted in the medieval period, precisely in the second half of the *trecento*. Nonetheless, we noted that there isn't a single sentence giving any information about the date in the official website of the church of San Marcello al Corso, where the artwork is found (ORDINE DEI SERVI DI MARIA, 2020). Actually, this does not seem to be relevant to the faithful. In the same way, as in the case of *Salus Populi romani*, the value of the crucifix lies in its miraculous character. Therefore, the authority of the relic of *San Marcello al Corso* is based on the tradition of the reports about its power of healing.

According to the version found in the website of the church of San Marcello, the crucifix became an object of devotion in Rome after it miraculously survived the violent fire that destroyed the church in the night of May 22nd, 1519. This miraculous event touched the Romans and since that moment, a group of faithful gathered around the crucifix to adore it. Three years later, a serious plague spread throughout the city. On this occasion, the Spanish cardinal Raimondo Vich, titular of the church of San Marcello ordered a solemn 16-day procession through the streets of Rome with the crucifix to implore clemency and salvation for the citizens. The narrators affirm unanimously that the plague ceased where the crucifix passed. From these events in August 1522 onwards, the great miraculous power of the crucifix has been acknowledged. The procession of the crucifix was attested during the jubilees in 1575, 1933-1934 and 2000 when it is taken to Saint Peter's Square and honored by Pope John Paul II.

The relics and the Christian multitemporalities

With the analysis of *Salus Populi Romani* and the crucifix of *San Marcello al Corso* used in the mass of March 27th, 2020, we underline a few issues



concerning the relics. According to the *Dictionnaire d'archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie des RR.* (LECLERCQ, 1948), the word *reliquiae*, with the meaning of relic, appeared at the end of the fourth century. The use of the word was used in St Augustine writings. However, the relics became more and more common along the Middle Ages, spreading everywhere. At this time, the relics were so carefully preserved and venerated that a church was built in the place where they were found or where they had performed a miracle. Geary recalls the close relation established between the relic itself and the place where it was found (GEARY, 1993, p. 24).

The building where the relic is exposed and venerated reinforces its miraculous character. The medieval church strived to keep not only the memory of the relic but specially its miraculous power. Grace could be obtained whenever the relic was venerated or touched. Thus, it invokes a miraculous past and a future of achieved grace. The relic carries a multi-temporality that is verified while its cult is kept alive. When it is invoked, it brings the miraculous past to the present. Therefore, it is the *auctoritas* of the relic that makes its divine blessing present. A miraculous report, a hagiography or the power of tradition are responsible for confirming and keeping the devotion to a relic alive.

Geary recalls that the relics by themselves are deprived of meaning because they are neutral and passive. The sheer study does not constitute a problem for a historian. It's up to the researchers to question the meaning given to the relics by the people who relate to them, for they were responsible for attributing value and social meaning to them (GEARY, 1993, p. 21). Geary observes that when dealing with the Middle Ages, mainly the period that corresponds to the interval between the ninth and eleventh centuries, the relics were considered a central element of daily life. The essential role was to keep the connection with divinity and afterlife. They were like intercessors between the earthly world and the divine one.

In the mass of March 27th, the Pope venerated the relics with the hope of bringing their miraculous power to the present and he evoked the cure to the Covid-19 pandemic. In this way, based on the tradition of evoking the relics as the Middle Ages men used to do, he seeks protection of the Eternal God and His atemporality. The Pope seeks to make present the time in which the relics were fundamental for the survival and maintenance of life. A time prior to the secular modernity in which human life was influenced by this relationship. It's under these multiple layers of time that the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing took place in



Saint Peter's Square.

Why are you afraid? Have you no faith? Lord, your word this evening strikes us and regards us, all of us. In this world, that you love more than we do, we have gone ahead at breakneck speed, feeling powerful and able to do anything. Greedy for profit, we let ourselves get caught up in things, and lured away by haste. We did not stop at your reproach to us, we were not shaken awake by wars or injustice across the world, nor did we listen to the cry of the poor or of our ailing planet. We carried on regardless, thinking we would stay healthy in a world that was sick. Now that we are in a stormy sea, we implore you: 'Wake up, Lord!' (FRANCIS, 2020).

Francis seeks to wake people up to a delicate moment lived by a seriously sick planet; referring to both, the covid-19 sickness as well as the sickness of modernity. At the same time, he requested humanity to change spiritually and socially. According to the analysis of D'Arcens and Monagle about the multi-temporalities evoked by the Pope in the *Laudatio Si'*, he evokes a time in the planet prior to capitalism, in which the world was full of corals, untouched forests and men and planet interacted harmoniously. However, in the last 200 years, we started harming our common home. For the authors, this historical imaginary is grounded on a profound anti-modernity (D'ARCENS; MONOAGLE, 2019, p. 60).

"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" Faith begins when we realize we need salvation. We are not self-sufficient; by ourselves we founder: we need the Lord, like ancient navigators needed the stars. Let us invite Jesus into the boats of our lives. Let us hand over our fears to him so that he can conquer them. Like the disciples, we will experience that with him on board there will be no shipwreck. Because this is God's strength: turning to the good everything that happens to us, even the bad things. He brings serenity into our storms, because with God life never dies (FRANCIS, 2020).

To conclude, it is important to point out a few aspects of this article. Initially, we defend new studies that address the relationship between medievalism and religion. The advance of Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America and the internal disputes in the Catholic Church corroborated in the mentioned homily

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due to Pope's position, point to the urgency to place religion in the field of *medievalism*. It is necessary that scholars think about religion as an appropriated and reframed object that is grounded on its medieval authority and identity. Posteriorly, we reaffirm the use of the Middle Ages by the Pope in a particular way to defend a humanist and anti-capitalist agenda whereas movements like the Religious Association of the Heralds of the Gospel use the Middle Ages to legitimate a conservative agenda. The appropriation of the "medieval religion" is therefore at the center of international politics today. Finally, it would be interesting to address this relationship to widen the range of co-disciplinarity of medievalism, bringing Theology, Sociology and the History of Religion to this field. In short, let us talk about religion and medievalism!

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Footnotes

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