

POPE FRANCIS

On Faith, Family and the Church
in the 21ST Century



ON HEAVEN AND EARTH

JORGE MARIO BERGOGLIO
ABRAHAM SKORKA

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POPE FRANCIS *on* FAITH,
FAMILY, *and the* CHURCH *in the*
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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HOW WE EXPERIENCE DIALOGUE

Abraham Skorka

“And God said to them ...”¹ It’s the first recorded conversation we encounter in the Bible. Humans are the only creatures to whom the Creator speaks in this manner. In the same section of Genesis we are shown that each of us has a special capacity to relate to nature, to our fellow man, to ourselves and to God.

Of course, these relationships which man is inclined to form are not like watertight compartments which are independent of one another. Our relationship with nature results from our observations and the detailed handiwork that we observe; relationships with our fellow man are based on our interests and life experiences; and our relationship with God, which comes from deep inside our being, is a result of self-dialogue, and is nurtured by all the other relationships mentioned above.

True dialogue is at the heart of the thinking man’s life and demands that each person tries to get to know and understand the person with whom they are conversing. As Ernesto Sabato expressed in his unique style in the prologue to his book *One and the Universe*,² “One sets off for distant lands, or seeks the knowledge of man, or investigates nature, or searches for God; only afterwards does he realize that the phantom he was chasing was Himself.”

When conversing with one’s fellow man, words are merely vehicles for communicating, although, even in societies where everyone speaks the same language, the exact same words can take on somewhat different meanings. Each person adds their own nuance to many of the words they use, which then become part of the linguistic heritage. Dialogue requires that each participant become acquainted with the other person.

“God’s candle is man’s soul which reveals the innermost parts of his being.”³ In its most profound sense, to have a conversation is to bring one’s soul nearer to another’s in order to reveal and illuminate his or her core.

When a dialogue reaches this level of magnitude, one becomes aware of what he or she has in common with the other person. He or she each has the same persistent existential questions with their various interpretations. Each soul is a reflection of the other. The Divine Breath, which both possess, knows to unite the two and then form a link with Him that will never weaken, as it is written, “A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.”⁴

There were many different opportunities which helped pave the long road of details and circumstances that brought Cardinal Bergoglio, and me closer and allowed us to get to know each other better.

One day we set a time and place so that we could just sit together and talk. The topic of discussion was life itself as seen through the prisms of local society, global concerns and the evidence of villainy and nobility that surround

us. We spoke with complete intimacy, if you don't count the presence of God. Although His name wasn't brought up consistently (perhaps it should have been?), we felt that He was always present.

The meetings became recurring events, with each one focused on a different topic. One time, our meeting took place at my office in the synagogue and I was commenting on some of the framed documents that adorn the walls. I paused to focus on some pages from a manuscript written by the great thinker Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and some of the other texts as well. Regardless, my friend had stopped following me, having spotted a greeting that I had hung next to the Heschel documents. He had presented it at the synagogue some years before on the occasion of the Jewish New Year. While I went about rearranging some things in my constantly cluttered workspace, I saw that he continued to focus on those particular pages, which he himself had signed and dated.

Curiosity seized me. What was going through his mind at that moment? What was so special about what I had done, above and beyond caring for and displaying a document that I consider a valuable testimony of what interfaith dialogue can accomplish in our world? I did not ask him. Sometimes, there are moments of silence that, in themselves, constitute a sort of answer.

Shortly thereafter, we chose the Archbishop's office for one of our meetings. The conversation turned toward the presence of religious sentiment in Latin American poetry. He told me, "I have a two volume anthology on this that I would like to lend you, please stay here while I go to the library to find them." I then found myself alone in his small study. I looked over at the bookshelf and its accompanying photos and I imagined that these must be people he truly cares for—those who mean a lot to him. Suddenly, I noticed among them a framed picture that I had given to him as a gift. The photo was of the two of us and had been taken at one of our meetings.

I was struck speechless. I had found the answer to my earlier question.

It was at that meeting that we decided to write this book.

Although every rabbi makes a special commitment to God during his training, once he begins his work as a teacher of the Law he has the obligation to set an example, more than any other Jew, to show people how one must fulfill their obligations to the Creator. Just as the prophets had done after experiencing moments of spiritual elevation while alone, the rabbi should go back to the people and teach them based on this acquired spirituality. After all, the dimensions of spiritual life that one attains by oneself only acquire meaning, according to biblical teachings, when they are used to help uplift others.

Regardless of the fact that rabbis communicate more frequently using the spoken word, there's always an underlying challenge to capture and refine those ideas so that they can be put on paper. A spoken word can become blurred or distorted over time. Written ideas become permanent testimonies that allow more people to access them.

When I'm with Cardinal Bergoglio, these two lessons become one. During our chats, the main topic and focus of concern was, and continues to be,

individual people and their problems. We let the conversations flow spontaneously as opposed to following written agendas. As such, giving expression to our intimate conversations in book form meant that we each had to take turns strengthening the bonds between us. We have transformed our dialogue into a group conversation, exposing our souls. We accept all of the risks this implies, yet remain profoundly convinced that this is the only way for us to understand what it means to be a human being, moving ever closer to God.

[1](#) Genesis 1:28

[2](#) *Uno y El Universo* Edición definitiva, Seix Barral, Buenos Aires, 1995

[3](#) Proverbs 20:27

[4](#) Ecclesiastes 4:12

THE FAÇADE AS A MIRROR

Jorge Bergoglio

Rabbi Abraham Skorka, in one of his earlier writings, made reference to the façade of the Metropolitan Cathedral that depicts the encounter between Joseph and his brothers. Decades of misunderstandings converge in that embrace. There is weeping among them and also an endearing question: Is my father still alive? During the times of national organization,⁵ this was the image they proposed, and not without reason. It represented the longing for a reuniting of Argentines. This scene aims to work to establish a “culture of encounter.” Many times I alluded to the difficulty that we as Argentines have to consolidate that “culture of encounter;” instead it seems that we are seduced into dispersion and the abysses that history has created. At times, we are better able to identify ourselves as builders of walls than as builders of bridges. We lack the embrace, the weeping and the question about the father, for our patrimony, for the roots of our Fatherland. There is an absence of dialogue.

Is it true that we Argentines do not want dialogue? I would not say it that way. Rather I think that we succumb to attitudes that do not permit us to dialogue: domination, not knowing how to listen, annoyance in our speech, preconceived judgments and so many others.

Dialogue is born from a respectful attitude toward the other person, from a conviction that the other person has something good to say. It supposes that we can make room in our heart for their point of view, their opinion and their proposals. Dialogue entails a warm reception and not a preemptive condemnation. To dialogue, one must know how to lower the defenses, to open the doors of one’s home and to offer warmth.

There are many barriers in everyday life that impede dialogue: misinformation, gossip, prejudices, defamation, and slander. All of these realities make up a certain cultural sensationalism that drowns out any possibility of openness to others. Thus, dialogue and encounter falter.

But the façade of the Cathedral is still there, like an invitation.

Rabbi Skorka and I have been able to dialogue, and it has done us good. I do not remember how our dialogue started, but I can remember that there were no barriers or reservations. His simplicity was without pretense, and this facilitated things. I could even ask him jokingly, after a loss by River Plate, if that day he was going to eat “hen soup.”⁶

When he proposed to me that we publish some of our dialogues, my “yes” was spontaneous. Reflecting later, in solitude, I thought that the explanation for this quick response was due to our experience of dialogue during quite a bit of time; a rich experience that consolidated a friendship and that would give testimony of our walk together from our distinct religious identities.

With Rabbi Skorka I never had to compromise my Catholic identity, just like he never had to with his Jewish identity, and this was not only out of the respect that we have for each other, but also because of how we understand interreligious dialogue. The challenge consisted in walking the path of respect and affection, walking in the presence of God and striving to be faultless.

This book is a testimony to that path. I consider Rabbi Skorka a brother and a friend; and I believe that both of us, through these reflections, never stopped looking with the eyes of our heart at the façade of the Cathedral, so eloquent and promising.

[5](#) Ed. Note: The national organization (organización nacional) marks a period in Argentina's history between 1852 and 1880. During this time, a national constitution was approved that defined the federal nature of the government. Education and communications were also dramatically expanded. Although regarded as a time that forged Argentina's strength and identity, it also came with social upheaval.

[6](#) Ed. Note: River Plate is one of the most popular soccer teams in Argentina. Its Archrival is Boca Juniors. Eating "hen soup" (*cazuela de pollo*) is equivalent to the English expression "eating crow."

1. ON GOD

SKORKA: It has been many years since we first met and a brotherly bond has been forged between us. While studying the books of the Talmud, I found one that says that friendship means sharing meals and spending time together, but in the end it points out that the sign of a real friendship is the ability to reveal what is in one's heart to the other person. That is what happened over time with the two of us. I believe that undoubtedly the most important thing that brought us together was, and still is, God, who caused our paths to cross and allowed us to open our hearts to each other. Although we broached many topics during our regular conversations, we never spoke explicitly about God. Of course, it was always understood that He was present. It would be good to start this exchange, which we plan to leave as a testimony of our dialogue, by discussing Him who is so important in our lives.

BERGOGLIO: What a great word: *path!* In my personal experience with God I cannot do without the path. I would say that one encounters God walking, moving, seeking Him and allowing oneself to be sought by Him. They are two paths that meet. On one hand, there is our path that seeks Him, driven by that instinct that flows from the heart; and after, when we have encountered each other, we realize that He was the one who had been searching for us from the start. The initial religious experience is that of walking: walk to the land that I am going to give you.⁷ It is a promise that God makes to Abraham. In that promise, in this, in this walking, an alliance is established that consolidates over time. Because of this I say that my experience with God takes place along the path, both in the search and in allowing myself to be sought, even if it may be by diverse paths—of pain, of joy, of light, or of darkness.

SKORKA: What you have said reminds me of a few biblical verses. For example, when God tells Abraham: “Walk in my presence and be blameless.”⁸ Or when the prophet Micah needed to explain to the Israelites what God wanted from them, and he tells them to “do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God.”⁹

Without a doubt, experiencing God is dynamic, to use a word that we learn in our mutual study of basic science.¹⁰ However, what do you think we can say to people nowadays when we find the idea of God to be so mangled, profaned and diminished in importance?

BERGOGLIO: What every person must be told is to look inside himself. Distraction is an interior fracture. It will never lead the person to encounter himself for it impedes him from looking into the mirror of his heart. Collecting oneself is the beginning. That is where the dialogue begins. At times, one believes He has the only answer, but that's not the case. I would tell the people of today to seek the experience of entering into the intimacy of their hearts, to

know the experience, the face of God. That is why I love what Job says after his difficult experience and the dialogues that did not help him in any way: “By hearsay I had heard of you, but now my eye has seen you.”¹¹ What I tell people is not to know God only by hearing. The Living God is He that you may see with your eyes within your heart.

SKORKA: The Book of Job teaches us a great lesson because—in short—it says that we can never know how God reveals Himself in specific circumstances. Job, a just, upright man, wanted to know why he had lost everything, even his health. His friends told him that God had punished him for his sins. He responds by saying that even if he had sinned, he had not been *that* bad. Job is comforted only when God appears to him. His questions are not answered, but the touch of God’s presence stays with him. We can find several things in this story that shape my personal perception of God. First, Job’s friends show themselves to be arrogant and nonsensical by espousing the theory that “You have sinned, therefore God has punished you,” transforming God into some sort of computer that calculates reward or punishment. At the end of the story, God tells Job—who had railed so much against the injustices of his Creator—that he should intercede and pray for his friends, because they had spoken falsely about Him.¹² Those who had cried out in suffering, demanding heavenly justice, were pleasing in God’s eyes. Those who insisted on a simplistic view of God’s nature were detested by Him. As I understand it, God reveals Himself to us subtly. Our current suffering might be an answer for others in the future. Or, perhaps we ourselves are the response to something from the past. In Judaism, God is honored by our compliance with the precepts that he revealed. As you mentioned, each person and each generation must find the path on which they can search for and feel His presence.

BERGOGLIO: Exactly. We receive creation in our hands as a gift. God gives it to us, but at the same time He gives us a task: that we subdue the Earth. This is the first form of non-culture: what man receives, the raw material that ought to be subdued to make culture—like the log that is transformed into a table. But there is a moment in which man goes too far in this task; he gets overly zealous and loses respect for nature. Then ecological problems arise, like global warming, which are new forms of non-culture. The work of man before God and before himself must maintain a constant balance between the gift and the task. When man keeps the gift alone and does not do the work, he does not complete his mission and remains primitive; when man becomes overly zealous with his work, he forgets about the gift, creating a constructivist ethic: he thinks that everything is the fruit of his labor and that there is no gift. It is what I call the Babel syndrome.

SKORKA: In rabbinic literature, there is a question as to why God did not like the Tower of Babel. Why did he halt construction by making people speak different languages? In reading the text, the simplest explanation is that the attempt to build a tower reaching Heaven was part of a pagan religion. The act was an expression of arrogance toward God. The *Midrash*¹³ states that what really bothered God was that the builders were more concerned about losing a

single brick than with losing a man who might fall from such a great height. The same thing happens now—there is a tension between the gift and the work. There needs to be a perfect equilibrium because man needs to progress so that he can become more human. Even though God is the one who planted and created everything, man is the focus of the material world and the greatest divine work. The way we are living today, the only thing that matters is the success of our economic system, and what is least important is the well-being of mankind.

BERGOGLIO: What you have said is brilliant. The Babel syndrome is not only a constructivist posture, but there is also the appearance of a confusion of languages. That is typical of situations in which there is an exaggeration of the mission, ignoring the gift, because in that case pure constructivism carries with it the lack of dialogue that at the same time entails aggression, misinformation, and annoyance ... When one reads Maimonides¹⁴ and Saint Thomas of Aquinas, two nearly contemporary philosophers, we see that they always start by putting themselves in the position of their adversary in order to understand them; they dialogue from the standpoint of the other.

SKORKA: According to the Talmudic interpretation, Nimrod was a Babylonian dictator who held a tight grip on everything, and that is why the people spoke only one language—his. This tyrant ordered the construction of a tower that would reach Heaven in order to leave his mark, and thus, presumed rather arrogantly to be physically closer to God. The point of building was not to benefit mankind. The betterment of people's lives held no importance. By building only for themselves while using one despotic language and not a universal one, each person was punished by being made to speak a language that no one else could understand. This is a very important story and it is always incredibly relevant.

[7](#) Genesis 12:1

[8](#) Genesis 17:1

[9](#) Micah 6:8

[10](#) Abraham Skorka is a doctor of chemistry, and Jorge Bergoglio is a chemical technician.

[11](#) Job 42:5

[12](#) See Job 42:7–8

[13](#) The Midrash is a group of homiletic texts from wise men of the Talmud, presenting non-literal interpretations of the Bible.

[14](#) Ed. Note: Maimonides, born Moses ben Maimon (1158–1204), is regarded as the greatest Jewish philosopher and rabbi of the medieval period. He combined religious Jewish tradition with Aristotelian philosophy, especially in his masterpiece, *The Guide for the Perplexed*.

2. ON THE DEVIL

BERGOGLIO: The Devil is, theologically, a being that opted not to accept the plan of God. The masterpiece of the Lord is man; some angels did not accept it and they rebelled. The Devil is one of them. In the book of Job he is the tempter, the one that looks to destroy the work of God, he that brings us to self-sufficiency, to pride. Jesus defines him as the Father of Lies, and the book of Wisdom says that sin entered the world through the Devil's envy of God's masterpiece. His fruits are always destruction: division, hate, and slander. And in my personal experience, I feel him every time that I am tempted to do something that is not what God wants for me. I believe that the Devil exists. Maybe his greatest achievement in these times has been to make us believe that he does not exist, and that all can be fixed on a purely human level. Man's life on Earth is warfare; Job says it meaning that people are constantly put to the test; that is to say, a test to overcome a situation and overcome oneself. Saint Paul took it and applied it to athletes that compete in an arena and who must deny themselves many things in order to achieve success. The Christian life is also a sort of sport, a struggle, a race where one has to detach oneself from the things that separate us from God. Beyond this, I want to point out that the Devil is one thing. It is quite another matter to demonize things or people. Man is tempted, but there is no need to demonize him.

SKORKA: There is a wide variety of opinions on this topic in Judaism. In Jewish mysticism there is what is called "the other power"—something that can be likened to evil forces. Although the well-known primal image of the snake that appears in the Bible can be interpreted as an evil force that incited man against God, in the case of Job's Satan, as well as the one that appears to Baalam, it is more of a hypostasis of God. In Job's case, Satan presents God with the doubts that surface in our own minds when we see an upstanding man thanking God when he lacks for nothing. If He blesses a man with everything, why would that person not be thankful to God? Would he do likewise in a time of distress? In Baalam's case, when he was hired by Balak to curse the Israelites,¹⁵ Satan placed himself in front of Balaam so that he would not disobey God's command to deny the King of Moab's request. When we talk about the manifestation of good and evil in creation, to me, the verse that explains it best appears in the book of Isaiah¹⁶ where it says that God forms the light and creates darkness and that He makes peace and creates evil. It is a very complex verse, which I interpret to say that darkness does not exist in and of itself, but as the absence of light. Likewise, evil occurs when good is removed from a situation. It also cannot exist by itself. I prefer to talk about instincts rather than angels. For me, it is not about an external force so much as it is something within man that challenges the Lord.

BERGOGLIO: In Catholic theology there is also an internal element that we can explain with the fall of nature after original sin. We agree on what you call instinct, in the sense that when someone does something inappropriate it is not always because the Devil encouraged it. Someone can do something bad through his own nature, by “instinct,” which is encouraged by an external temptation. In the Gospels it is striking how Jesus starts his ministry with forty days of fasting and prayer in the desert, and it is in that moment that Satan tempts him with stones that he can turn into bread, with the assurance that nothing would happen to him if he threw himself from the temple and with promise that he would have anything he wanted if Jesus would just adore him. That is to say, the Devil uses the existential situation of fasting and proposes to Jesus an “omnipotent way out,” centered in himself (a satisfying, vain and prideful way out) that would take Jesus away from his mission and identity as Yahweh’s Servant.

SKORKA: In the end, accepting the general concept of evil is up to the free will of each individual. All the rest depends on our perceptions and interpretations of the texts that we consider sacred. What remains clear is that something exists, whether it is instinct or the Devil, which presents itself as a challenge for us to overcome so that we can uproot evil. We cannot be ruled by evil.

BERGOGLIO: That is precisely man’s battle on Earth.

[15](#) Numbers 22

[16](#) 45:7

3. ON ATHEISTS

BERGOGLIO: When I speak with atheists, I will sometimes discuss social concerns, but I do not propose the problem of God as a starting point, except in the case that they propose it to me. If this occurs, I tell them why I believe. But that which is human is so rich to share and to work at that very easily we can mutually complement our richness. As I am a believer, I know that these riches are a gift from God. I also know that the other person, the atheist, does not know that. I do not approach the relationship in order to proselytize, or convert the atheist; I respect him and I show myself as I am. Where there is knowledge, there begins to appear esteem, affection, and friendship. I do not have any type of reluctance, nor would I say that his life is condemned, because I am convinced that I do not have the right to make a judgment about the honesty of that person; even less, if he shows me those human virtues that exalt others and do me good. At any rate, I know more agnostic people than atheists; the first are more uncertain, the second are more convinced. We have to be coherent with the message that we receive from the Bible: every man is the image of God, whether he is a believer or not. For that reason alone everyone has a series of virtues, qualities, and a greatness of his own. If he has some vileness, as I do, we can share that in order to mutually help one another and overcome it.

SKORKA: I agree with what you have said; the first step is respecting your fellow man. But I would add one more point of view. When a person says, “I am an atheist,” I believe he or she is taking an arrogant position. He who doubts has a more nuanced position. An agnostic thinks that he or she has not yet found the answer, but an atheist is 100 percent convinced that God does not exist. It is the same arrogance that leads some to assert that God definitely exists, just like the chair I am sitting on. Religious people are believers, but we do not know for certain that He exists. We can perceive Him in an extremely profound sense, but we never see Him. We receive subtle replies from Him. According to the Torah, Moses was the only person to have spoken directly, face to face, with God. As for everyone else—Jacob, Isaac, etc.—the presence of God appeared to them in dreams or by some messenger. Even though I personally believe that God exists, it is arrogant to say that He exists as if it were just another certainty in life. I would not casually affirm His existence because I need to live the same humility that I demand of the atheist. The right thing to do would be to point out—as Maimonides did in his thirteen principals of faith—that “I believe with complete faith that God is the Creator.” Following Maimonides’ line of thought, we can say what God is not, but we can never be sure of what God is. We can talk about His qualities and attributes, but in no way can we describe His form. I would remind the atheist that the perfection of

the natural world is sending us a message. We can gain an understanding of how it works, but not its essence.

BERGOGLIO: The spiritual experience of encounter with God is not controllable. One feels that God is there, one has the certainty, but he cannot control God. We are made to subdue nature; that is what God commands. We cannot, however, subdue our Creator. As a result, in the experience of God there is always an unanswered question, an opportunity to be submerged in faith. Rabbi, you said one thing, which in part, is certain: we can say what God is not, we can speak of His attributes, but we cannot say what He is. That apophatic¹⁷ dimension, which reveals how I speak about God, is critical to our theology. The English mystics speak a lot about this theme. There is a book by one of them, from the thirteenth century, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, that attempts again and again to describe God and always finishes pointing to what He is not. The mission of theology is to reflect and explain religious facts, and among them, God. I would also classify as arrogant those theologies that not only attempted to define with certainty and exactness God's attributes, but also had the pretense of saying who He was. The book of Job is a continuous discussion about the definition of God. There are four wise men that elaborate this theological search and everything ends with Job's expression: "By hearsay I had heard of you, but now my eye has seen you."¹⁸ Job's final image of God is different from his vision of God in the beginning. The intention of this story is that the notion that the four theologians have is not true, because God always is being sought and found. We are presented with this paradox: we seek Him to find Him and because we find Him, we seek Him. It is a very Augustinian game.

SKORKA: I believe with complete faith that God exists. As opposed to the atheist who is sure that He does not exist and does not entertain any doubts, I implicitly reveal a margin of uncertainty by using the word "faith." At a minimum, I have to acknowledge what Sigmund Freud wrote: that we need the idea of God to temper our existential angst. Nevertheless, after having done an in-depth analysis of positions that negate the existence of God, I still believe. When my work was done, I still felt God's presence. I retain a certain amount of doubt in any case since this is an existential problem and not a mathematical theory, although there is some room for doubt in mathematical theories as well. That said, when we think about God we have to do so with special terminology. Everyday logic does not apply. Maimonides put forth that idea long ago. Agnostics will continue to create their famous paradoxes. For example, if God is omnipotent, surely He could create a rock that He Himself could not lift; but if He created such a rock, that would mean He is not omnipotent. God is above and beyond any logic and its paradoxes. Maimonides explains that He knows everything in its complete form. We have only limited knowledge. If we had the same understanding that God has, we would be gods ourselves.

¹⁷ Ed. Note: *Apophatic* is a term that refers to an intellectual approach to God

through what is known as “negative theology.” Through this way, one attempts to describe God by what He is not, that is, what may not be said about His perfect goodness (“God is unknowable”). It stands in contrast with cataphatic or “positive” theology.

[18](#) Job 42:5

4. ON RELIGIONS

SKORKA: Each person's relationship with God is unique. Is it not true that each of us has different personalities, different preferences and different life experiences? Each person's relationship and dialogue with God is special. The various religious traditions also exert their own influence on that dialogue. People often ask, "Why are there different religions?" I believe the answer is that individuals have different experiences. A religion is formed when a common denominator is found as these different experiences are shared. In Judaism's case, since it is a religion that is thousands of years old, it needs to be interpreted in ancient terms. In Rome, there was a differentiation between religion, the nation and the people. In Judaism, the origin of which predates that of Rome by about a thousand years, the three concepts are indivisible. To be a part of the Jewish people means having to accept its religion, as Ruth declared to Naomi, "Your people shall be my people and your God, my God."¹⁹ In addition, Judaism contains the concept of being "the chosen people," which causes a lot of confusion. Abraham had an encounter with God that resulted in them creating a pact, and Abraham committed his offspring to its fulfillment. The core of the agreement was that the people would maintain an ethical standard based on precepts that God was going to reveal to them so that they could then testify to God's presence in man's reality. As Amos said, "You alone I have known, among all the families of the Earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."²⁰ In Chapter 9, Verse 7, the same prophet states in God's name, "Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O Israelites?—oracle of the LORD—Did I not bring the Israelites from the land of Egypt as I brought the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?" We are the people specifically chosen by God for the task, and each generation must choose to renew this pact with Him. Unfortunately, those that hate us label us as a people that believe ourselves to be a "superior race," to paraphrase the Nazi definition of their own people, while at the same time they considered Jews to be an "inferior race." Christianity expanded the concept of "the people of Israel" to include all those that embrace its own faith as well.

BERGOGLIO: God makes Himself felt in the heart of each person. He also respects the culture of all people. Each nation picks up that vision of God and translates it in accordance with the culture, and elaborates, purifies and gives it a system. Some cultures are primitive in their explanations, but God is open to all people. He calls everyone. He moves everyone to seek Him and to discover Him through creation. In our case, that of Judaism and Christianity, we have a personal revelation. God Himself encounters us; He reveals Himself to us, He shows us the way and He accompanies us; He tells us His name, He guides us through the prophets. Christians believe, ultimately, that He manifested

Himself to us and gave Himself to us through Jesus Christ. Moreover, throughout history, there have existed circumstances that created schisms and constructed diverse communities that have different ways of living Christianity, like the Reformation. We lived through a thirty year war and it shaped different faiths. It is very hard to accept and it was a disgraceful time, but that is the reality. God is patient, He waits, and God does not kill. It is man that wants to do so on God's behalf. To kill in the name of God is blasphemy.

SKORKA: How can it be that there are people who speak poorly of others that practice a different religion if those others are sincere and are trying to help people get closer to God? Those that present themselves as knowing the absolute truth, judging everyone else and their actions with condescension, have gotten used to the frequent practice of this disgraceful pagan principle. Paganism is a central theme in biblical literature. When ancient Israel performed sacrifices on Yom Kippur,²¹ they needed to take two goats. Tradition says that the goats needed to be as similar as possible.²² One would be sacrificed to God, while the other would be sacrificed out in the desert, carrying with it the sins of the people. This naturally begs the question, "Does God really need sacrifices?" Maimonides²³ thought that men felt they ought to do it as a show of gratitude, and God conceded them the opportunity to get closer to Him in that way—but with certain limitations. For example, there were no human sacrifices. Since men felt the need to express themselves with offerings, He regulated them. Getting back to the previous topic, when I study this aspect of the Yom Kippur ritual, I wonder, "Why did the two goats need to be similar?" The answer I found was that sometimes one might find different things packed in the same wrapping. One can speak in the name of God and use clothing that symbolizes purity or spiritually uplifting actions, yet from under this same mantle the worst things can ooze out. Sometimes there is a fine line between the pagan and the pure. During the twentieth century, deadly passions were ignited in the masses by the use of methods that some considered religious rituals. At that time, God was pushed aside.

BERGOGLIO: To kill in the name of God is to make ideological the religious experience. When this happens, political maneuvering enters and a divinization of power emerges in the name of God. Those who do it are people that construct themselves as God. In the twentieth century they devastated entire nations because they considered themselves God. The Turkish did it with the Armenians, the Stalinist Communists did it with the Ukrainians, and the Nazis with the Jews. They used a discourse of divine attributes to kill people. It really is a sophisticated way of killing people through the use of an inflated ego. The second commandment proposes that you love your neighbor as yourself. No believer can limit the faith to himself, his clan, his family, or his city. A believer is essentially someone who goes into an encounter with other believers, or non-believers, to give them a hand. The Bible in this sense is impressive; the Prophet Amos is a scourge to those who commit injustices to their brothers, to those who do not go out and help, to those who do not bring the presence of God to the poor and to the destitute. There also appears in the