

# *The Warrior Pope*

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By Alfredo García Almeida

Jorge Mario Bergoglio (Francis) was a warrior pope. Much has been said about his modest way of life, but little about the violence and repression he bravely survived during the 1970s and 1980s in Argentina—a period of intense armed struggle by various guerrilla organizations against the Argentine military dictatorship. This era coincided with Bergoglio's early maturity as a priest. His six-year term as Jesuit provincial overlapped with the beginning of a dictatorship that lasted from 1976 to 1983, during which the military launched a bloody campaign against leftist guerrillas and other opponents.

Guerrilla movements in Argentina emerged in the 1960s, involving organizations such as Montoneros, the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), and the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR).

These groups, with ideologies ranging from leftist Peronism to Marxism-Leninism, sought to overthrow the de facto military government of the "Argentine Revolution" (1966–1973) and either restore Peronism to power or establish a socialist state.

In 1966, Jorge Bergoglio and several Jesuits from the University of Salvador served as spiritual directors for young Catholic members who joined the Peronist youth group Guardia de Hierro, following the bloody police repression of five faculties at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA). These faculties had been occupied by students and professors opposing the de facto government's decision to intervene in universities and annul their autonomous governance.

Guardia de Hierro was an organization that emerged during the Peronist Resistance, engaging in political activity on multiple fronts. Through his relationship with Guardia de Hierro, Bergoglio was significantly influenced by the philosopher and university professor Amelia Podetti. Podetti, a key proponent of the so-called "National Chairs," was a member of Guardia de Hierro, directed the magazine *Hechos e Ideas*, and served as the national director of culture. She shaped Bergoglio's thinking, as did the teachings of Jesuit theologian Juan Carlos Scannone, a founder of Liberation Philosophy and Theology of the People, which deeply influenced Bergoglio's worldview.

In 1976, a new military dictatorship began in Argentina, during which several priests—especially those linked to the Movement of Priests for the Third World, the "curas villeros" movement, and liberation theology—were victims of abduction, torture, and death.

The man who would become the Holy Father in 2013 was ordained a priest on December 13, 1969, at the age of 32, during the bloody dictatorship of General Juan Carlos Onganía.

During the dictatorship, Bergoglio supported the clandestine escapes of those persecuted to Brazil. By emphasizing mercy over morality, the Holy Father changed the Church's stance on the death penalty, declaring it inadmissible under any circumstances. In 2013, he told the Jesuit magazine *La Civiltà Cattolica*: "I see the Church as a field hospital after battle."

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