

## **The Ecumenism of Pope Francis.**

### *A significant pontificate for the oikoumene*

The present pontificate may well eventually prove to be the most significant in the development of the Ecumenical Movement since that of John XXIII. I say that not to undervalue the achievements of pontiffs from Paul VI to Benedict XVI. They were significant, as Francis himself shows in frequent quotations from his two immediate predecessors. He has certainly built on their work but has also brought something extra to it, particularly in terms of his ability to reach out to churches which had previously found relationships with the Bishop of Rome and his church problematic. It was significant that his election was hailed by a conservative evangelical Anglican bishop (not a high churchman, traditionally close to the Roman Catholic tradition) in the words, 'this man is Christ centred and Spirit led'. A year into his pontificate he was greeted, at a Pentecostal rally in Caserta, by Pentecostal pastor Traettino, a personal friend of his from Argentinian days, with the words 'Pope Francis, some of us believe that the Holy Spirit was behind your election as Bishop of Rome'<sup>1</sup>. The chemistry between the Pope and his Pentecostal hosts was in marked contrast to most previous relationships between the two communities.

Pope Francis has not produced any detailed theological work addressing key thorny or contentious theological issues. In his early apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, he devoted only three paragraphs specifically to ecumenical relationships.

Those three paragraphs (244-6) are, however, vastly significant, as can now, six years later, be clearly seen. They indicate several key strands of his approach over those six years. First, we note his stress on pilgrimage, 'journeying alongside each other'. We learn with and from our fellow Christians as, together, we 'put aside all suspicion or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are seeking, the radiant peace of God's face'. Elsewhere, he stresses in a homily the Emmaus like nature of such journeys as, bit by bit, 'we come to realise with whom we have been travelling'. Mutual trust is fundamental<sup>2</sup>.

Para 246 sets ecumenism within the wider context of the search for human unity. This has remained a constant feature of Francis' teaching, related to his concern for mission. In the best tradition of the missionary spirit, as it has been received both within the Roman Catholic and Evangelical Protestant traditions, he states that 'the immense numbers of people who have not received the Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot leave us indifferent'. 'Commitment to a unity which helps them to accept Jesus Christ... is an indispensable path to evangelisation'. In June 2019, he linked the call of the Lord with that of the most

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<sup>1</sup> *Pontifical Council for Christian Unity Bulletin* (2014, no 2), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, para 244.

vulnerable. 'The Lord asks us for unity; our world, torn about by all too many divisions that affect the most vulnerable, begs for unity'<sup>3</sup>.

There are, however, important implications for the search for Christian unity across the rest of the exhortation. Francis mentions dialogue no less than fifty nine times, though far from exclusively in relation to other churches<sup>4</sup>.

Finally, Francis emphasises two further fundamentals in his approach. The first is 'the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit', from which 'we can learn so much from each other'. The second is the experience of synodality, of learning together in communion, from which, as practised by Orthodox bishops, Francis hopes his own church can learn much. 'Through an exchange of gifts, the Spirit can lead us ever more fully into truth and goodness'. In discussions of the work of the Spirit in the Church, Francis seems to put the diversity in gifts first and the gift of unity second in order of procedure. The Spirit creates both diversity and unity, enabling recognition of due diversity first, but then also building unity that preserves that diversity, enabling it to be shared in the fullest possible communion. Francis is acutely aware of the challenges that all Christians and their churches face in a globalising and secular world. He is quite convinced of the power of the Spirit to transcend division, to harmonise and to inspire mutual trust and learning. From the human side, we must have 'sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicion or mistrust'<sup>5</sup>. He continues on an affirmative note, 'how much we can learn from each other'. He commends diversity as 'a beautiful thing when it can constantly enter into a process of reconciliation and seal a sort of cultural covenant resulting in a 'reconciled diversity.'<sup>6</sup> In his 2018 address to charismatics, he stressed that the Spirit had 'enabled Catholics and Pentecostals to show their gifts and charisms, bestowed by the same Spirit in a symphony of praise to the Lord Jesus, renewing their commitment to fulfil the missionary mandate to the extreme ends of the world.'<sup>7</sup>

Francis stresses that he wants synodality to exist throughout the Church. He wants bishops to learn from their clergy and layfolk. He hopes for synodality at the most local level, between parish clergy and their layfolk. Paul McPartlan comments, 'Pope Francis wants the whole synodal process to start at local level with consultation between bishops and their people so that the bishops can bring the thoughts, concerns and insights of their people to the final Synod assembly.'<sup>8</sup> At the time of the Synod on marriage, Francis stated that it was

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<sup>3</sup> Francis on a visit to Rumania 21.6.2019.

<sup>4</sup> Faggioli, M. 'Ecumenism in *Evangelii Gaudium* and in the context of Francis' pontificate' in *Perspectiva Teologia* Jan/April 2016, p.21.

<sup>5</sup> EG, para 244.

<sup>6</sup> EG, 230.

<sup>7</sup> At the fiftieth anniversary of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Cited in his audience with the PCPCU 28.9.2018, as reported in *Bollettino* of the Vatican.

<sup>8</sup> Recorded by Jonathan Lewis in an interview with McPartlan, an English Catholic, on behalf of *Crux Links*, downloaded 20.7.2019. *Episcopalis Communio* states that 'a bishop who lives among the faithful has his ears

vital for the bishops to listen to lay voices<sup>9</sup>. Massimo Faggioli argues that ‘synodality for Francis is not just a form of church government but a way of being Church<sup>10</sup>. Francis’ action testifies to his search to enable ever fuller reception of the teaching of Vatican II on the Church as the whole Pilgrim People of God. He takes very seriously the importance and value of the *sensus fidei* of the ordinary faithful, which, as Vatican II teaches, is also a source of authority<sup>11</sup>. He argues that the journey of synodality is the journey God expects of the Church in the third millennium<sup>12</sup>.

Within this emphasis on synodality, there is a stress on the need for a listening Church at all levels with everyone having something to say and all needing to listen first and foremost to what the ‘Spirit is saying to the Churches’. (Rev 2:7). Francis’ stress on synodality at all levels is consistent with the modern ecumenical consensus on the Church as communion, a topic that has been at the centre of many bilateral dialogues. Moreover, the stress on the fact that it is a matter of mutual reception, by church leaders as well as by the faithful, tunes in with many of the emphases of both Orthodox and Protestant ecclesiologies.

He is insistent that the Church must be prepared to change its structures and methods of consultation in the light of the exigencies of a changing world. It must never forget its missionary and pastoral vocation and must be mobile. In a striking simile, he compares the Church to a bicycle. It only stays up right if it is moving!<sup>13</sup>

#### *Francis’ activity across the whole Christian spectrum*

Numerous accounts, from 2013 to the present, from across the plethora of visits made, addresses and homilies given on all manner of occasions, testify to Francis’ faithfulness in pursuing his original agenda. He has consistently called for mutual receptive learning between Christians of differing traditions. He has repeatedly insisted that the traditions of others are never to be belittled or despised, ‘lest we lose ourselves the grace that we have gained’. Francis adds that we should never forget our fundamental equality. ‘The Lord has saved us in baptism and called us to be his Church.’<sup>14</sup>

The fact that Francis tersely but clearly inserts so much of his subsequent ecumenical agenda into his most significant early teaching document points to the way in which he sees ecumenism as a dimension of everything that he has to teach as Pope. It is an integral part

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open to listen to what the Spirit says to the churches and to the voice of the sheep also through those diocesan institutions whose task it is to advise the bishop’.

<sup>9</sup> Francis on 17 Oct 2015, cited in *National Catholic Reporter*.

<sup>10</sup> Cited in *La Croix*, Sept 2018.

<sup>11</sup> EG 119, ‘God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith-sensus fidei-which enables them to grasp these realities intuitively’. Moreover, Francis argued that the significance of the *sensus fidelium* ‘blurs the distinction between the ‘teaching church’ and ‘the learning church.’

<sup>12</sup> Francis on 17 Oct 2015, as reported in the *National Catholic Reporter*.

<sup>13</sup> Francis in 2018, cited by K. Colberg in her article in *Religions*, ‘Ecumenical Ecclesiology in its New Contexts’ (Sep 2018), p.3.

<sup>14</sup> Francis on 18.1.2019, as reported by Martin Brockhaus of the *Catholic News Agency*.

of the discipleship of every individual Christian and every church, community and movement. In turn, this is related to his particular understanding of what the petrine ministry is and must involve under current global conditions. Just as Augustine told his people that he was both a bishop for them whilst remaining a fellow disciple alongside them, the same is true of Francis. Like the Lord himself, he must be meek and humble of heart, docile (his own word) to the leading and prompting of the Spirit<sup>15</sup>. He must join in the common journey, for the synodality which he commends at every level in the Church must typify the journey of every Christian minister, including himself, in which all come to be drawn into deeper fellowship with each other and fuller apprehension of the fullness of the truth which the Spirit communicates. It will be in and through this Spirit led process that unity will come, the unity which is not uniformity but which is constantly enriched as Christians discover more of the gifts that Christians have given to each individual, to each local church, to each particular tradition.

What Francis commends in his two most widely known writings, *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si*, is an holistic vision of the Christian discipleship which the Spirit demands, and even more importantly *enables*, in each Christian and community. When speaking at the innumerable ecumenical events which he has addressed, Francis comes back constantly to the basics. He insists in *Laudato Si* that there are three relationships which every Christian has a duty to pursue, with the Lord, with his or her fellow human beings, with the rest of creation in the light of the stewardship for its proper use bestowed on humankind<sup>16</sup>. Francis begins *Evangelii Gaudium* by reminding us that God rejoices over his people and that the Gospel brings joy to those who accept and act upon it in their lives.

Francis sees the specific Christian duty of seeking unity with all the baptised believers in the light of God's love for the whole of creation and for the prevailing of justice and peace for all its inhabitants, non-human as well as human. It is striking how often he brings these matters into ecumenical addresses as when, for example, during a visit to Lutherans, he commended a co-operative agreement between Caritas and the Lutheran World Federation's parallel body. Francis sets the search for human unity within the context of Christian unity but also the search for inter-religious dialogue. He acknowledges that everyone has something to say, experience to share and that must be respected by all<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> On 17 Oct 2015, Francis stressed the need of 'everyone in the Church, from the Pope down, to listen and learn from others', referring also to the common gift of the Spirit to the baptised..

<sup>16</sup> *Laudato Si*, para 66.

<sup>17</sup> In an address to young people. During a visit to Morocco, Francis called for 'dialogue with our muslim brothers and sisters', stating that 'dialogue involved following the example of Jesus himself, who is meek and humble of heart'. It involved fervent and disinterested love, without calculations and limitations and with respect for others'. Report by M. Brockhaus of *Catholic News Agency*, 31.3.2019.

I would argue that Francis sees his ministry as one, in a certain sense, for all humanity, for his own communion, for all other Christians, for all people of goodwill<sup>18</sup>. It is his calling to encourage true synodality, true meeting and sharing of understanding, and not just between himself and his brother bishops. He has recently talked of the need for bishops to listen to their priests, for all ordained ministers to listen to the *sensus fidelium* within the congregations for which they are responsible. He has more than once referred to the journey of the two disciples with Christ on the road to Emmaus as a paradigm of the listening journey as we listen to Christ and to Him sometimes as speaking to us through each other. 'Synodality is a thoroughly spiritual process in which the Church tries to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches (Rev 2:29)'. 'The journey of synodality is the journey that God wants from his Church in the third millennium'<sup>19</sup>.

Francis' stress on synodality can surely be welcomed by Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant Christians. It shows his ministry as one of enablement and empowerment of both other ministers and layfolk. He denounces clericalism in the Church as a distortion of the reality that God wills which is for Spirit filled ministers and layfolk in every sphere of secular life, church fellowship and mission alike<sup>20</sup>. He clearly believes in what my fellow Methodists call 'the ministry of the whole people of God', in what we sing of in Charles Wesley's words 'build we each the other up'<sup>21</sup>. Synodality particularly resonates with the Methodist tradition of conferencing.

One particular aspect of Francis' teaching is his constant stress on the ecumenism of blood, that there have been martyrs, particularly over the last century, in *all* the churches. He points out that when persecutors kill Christians they kill them as Christians and do not distinguish them denominationally<sup>22</sup>. In this, of course, he builds on the heritage of Paul VI and John Paul II. The former, when canonising the Ugandan Catholic martyrs, also mentioned the Anglicans who had died alongside them for Christ, even saying that he longed for the moment when the Roman Catholic Church would again be able to embrace her ever beloved sister, the Anglican Church. John-Paul II called for a common martyrology<sup>23</sup>. Francis states 'there is one (i.e. Satan) who knows that we are all one'.

Francis implicitly questions current discipline that demands that any martyr candidate for canonisation should have been in communion with Rome. He mentions meeting a priest in Hamburg who was anxious to promote the cause of both a Roman Catholic priest and a

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<sup>18</sup> The document on synodality talks of synodality as 'promoting the participation of all the baptised *and people of good will*' (my italics), a clear indication of Francis' desire to encourage serious dialogue *beyond* the Christian community.

<sup>19</sup> Francis 17. Oct 2015.

<sup>20</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, section 5.

<sup>21</sup> In the Hymn 'All praise to our redeeming Lord. *Singing The Faith* (2011), no 608.

<sup>22</sup> As e.g. in his interview with A. Torielli of *La Stampa*, 6.12.2013..

<sup>23</sup> In an address 'The Ecumenism of the martyrs' given in context of The Way of the Cross procession on 1 April 1994, reported and accessed 30.8.2019 from Vatican website.

Lutheran minister, who had been martyred together by the Nazis<sup>24</sup>. One wonders whether he could examine the possibility of Rome's canonising Orthodox and Protestant martyrs where clear evidence can be shown that they died rather than deny their faith and its consequences for their witness and ministry. Martyrdom is surely the *ultimate* fulfilment of baptism; one cannot do *more* than lay down one's life for one's friends<sup>25</sup>.

Another particular feature of his ministry has been the encouragement of charismatics, both within the Roman Catholic Church and elsewhere<sup>26</sup>. His pilgrimage in this respect, both as Archbishop in Argentina and as pope is remarkable. At a meeting of a plenary of the PCPCU in 2018, specifically devoted to 'Pentecostals, charismatics and evangelicals: impact on the concept of unity', Francis stressed, first, 'the duty to discern and recognise the presence of the Holy Spirit in these communities, trying to construct bonds of authentic fraternity with them'. Next, he stressed his own personal journey of conversion on the matter.

'I would like to offer you a personal experience and declare a *mea culpa*. When I was a provincial (superior), I had forbidden Jesuits to enter into relationships with these people- with the catholic Renewal- and I said that more than a prayer meeting it sounded like a 'samba school'. Then, I apologised, and as a bishop I had a good relationship with them...but it takes a journey to understand'. That journey led Francis to appreciate exactly how much there could be in common between Pentecostals and Catholics, 'prayer, listening to the word of God, service of the needy, the proclamation of the Gospel, the defence of the dignity of the person and of human life'. He received a whole new set of insights into the potential fruitfulness of relationships with Christian communities which, on the surface, seemed to differ so much from his own but which were able to 'live the faith, praise God and witness to the Gospel in charity'. Finally, in his message to the plenary, and influenced no doubt by his warm welcome, as pontiff, in Italy, by his friend Traettino, he expressed the hope that Pentecostals would be enabled to overcome their prejudices against Catholics and see the Holy Spirit at work in 'the priceless treasure of tradition'.

He is quite clear that the trans-denominational charismatic movement, including both charismatics within the Roman Catholic Church and in the many Pentecostal churches is a work of the Spirit and that it was 'born ecumenical'. He stresses that all the gifts come from 'the same Spirit in a symphony of praise for the Lord Jesus, renewing their commitment to fulfil the missionary mandate to the extreme ends of the earth.'<sup>27</sup> He continues, 'we have a duty to discern and recognise the presence of the Holy Spirit in these communities, trying to construct bonds of authentic fraternity with them...many communities are inspired by these movements and live authentic Christian experiences in contact with the word of God and in

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<sup>24</sup> *PCPCU Bulletin* (2013), no 2, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Cf John 15:13.

<sup>26</sup> Faggioli (p. 28) notes the key influence of *Lumen Gentium* 12 on Francis; thought, stressing that, for him, charisms in the Church 'are not exceptional, they are rather common, diverse, inclusive and universal'.

<sup>27</sup> Address of The Holy Father to participants in the *Plenary of the PCPCU*, 29.9.18, as reported by the *Holy See Press Office*.

obedience to the action of the Spirit, which leads us to love, witness and serve...Catholics can welcome those riches that, under the guidance of the Spirit, contribute greatly to the fulfilment of the mission of proclaiming the Gospel'<sup>28</sup>. Finally, he stresses that 'the Holy Spirit is always new...it is therefore necessary to avoid settling on static and immutable positions, to embrace the risk of venturing into the promotion of unity.'

We note here both the stress on risk and that on walking together and mutual learning from across all Christian communities. This is perhaps also the point where one might cite the opinion of Professor Faggioli that Francis' ecumenism marks an important step forward from that of Vatican II and his immediate predecessors. Faggioli states that 'overall, Francis' ecumenical ecclesiology is non-ecclesiocentric, and in this sense it is a step forward from the mixed ecclesiologies of Vatican II where institutional ecclesiology had the last word over ecumenical ecclesiology'<sup>29</sup>. I would add that Francis is apparently more concerned with establishing three facts about any Christian community, that they are communities of baptised believers, that they demonstrate clear evidence of their experience of the work of the Spirit and that they faithfully carry of the common mission to evangelise and to serve the poor and marginalised. With such communities Francis will always seek to encourage Catholics to co-operate<sup>30</sup>. He is perhaps less interested in the question of whether they have valid ministerial orders, though he still observes a distinction in the formalities of greeting other Christian leaders-thus Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox patriarchs and bishops are addressed as 'venerable brethren', Anglican and Protestant leaders as brothers and sisters<sup>31</sup>. Maybe he is happy for the time being to leave these technical questions to one side whilst concentrating on the three points common to all Christian communities, urgently so in a dysfunctional world threatened by possible climatic catastrophe.

A key feature of Francis' pontificate has been his repeated encouragement and affirmation of other communions in their gifts and contributions to the oikoumene. We may mention his tributes to Anglicans and Methodists, respectively. To Anglicans in 2016, he said that differences should never hold us back from discovering and rejoicing in the deep Christian faith and holiness we find in each others' traditions'<sup>32</sup>. To Methodists in 2017 he said, 'when we see others leading a holy life, then we recognise the working of the Holy Spirit in other Christian confessions. We cannot but rejoice...other members of God's household can help us grow closer to the Lord and bear more faithful witness...the blessing of the last fifty years

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<sup>28</sup> Here Francis also reminds Catholics of the teaching of the Decree on Ecumenism, para 3, that non-Catholic communities 'are not devoid of meaning and value in the mystery of salvation'.

<sup>29</sup> Cited from abstract to article by Massimo Faggioli, 'Ecumenism in *Evangelii Gaudium* and in the context of Francis' pontificate.' *Perspective Teologia*, Jan/April 2016, pp. 17-35.

<sup>30</sup> As can be seen, for example, in his very recent appeal to the Waldensians, cited in Crux, accessed 27.8.2019.

<sup>31</sup> Faggioli, op cit, pp33-34, comments 'Francis receives from the magisterium the distinction between churches and ecclesial communities but transcends it. His ecumenical theology receives but goes beyond *Gaudium et Spes* and *Unitatis Redintegratio*'.

<sup>32</sup> *PCPCU Bulletin*, (2016, no 2), pp. 11-18.

(i.e. of the Methodist-Roman Catholic dialogue) resides in the grace we have discovered in one another'<sup>33</sup>.

Perhaps most impressive of all in his relationships with the traditionally ecumenically engaged western communions was his address at the service in 2016 commemorating the five hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation. In his homily, he acknowledged the results of fifty years of particularly creative Lutheran-Catholic dialogue. He affirmed the key positive achievement of Luther and the Reformation.

'The Reformation has helped to place the Holy Scriptures at the centre of the Church. The spiritual experience of Martin Luther challenges us to remember that, apart from God we can do nothing. 'How can I get a propitious God?' This is the question that haunted Luther. In effect, the question of a just relationship with God is the decisive question for our lives...With the concept of 'by grace alone', he reminds us that God always takes the initiative, prior to any human response, even as she seeks to awaken that response. The Doctrine of Justification thus expresses the essence of human existence before God'<sup>34</sup>.

The author of an article in the Italian periodical *Sedos* argues that it is Francis who, above all, has made a key difference to the wider reception of the earlier Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, which had done so much to place both Luther himself and the whole process that developed in the years 1517-55 in a new light<sup>35</sup>. In 2013, the dialogue committee produced a seminal report *From Conflict to Communion* pointing to the real possibility of closer convergence. It was Francis, however, who gave it real impetus in a series of statements and meetings, leading up to the Lund celebration and the joint commitment then issued by Himself and Lutheran Bishop Younan, pledging both communions to work to end the pain of division at the one eucharistic table and to work for justice, peace and reconciliation in the world.

We should acknowledge Benedict XVI's role in preparing for this<sup>36</sup>. Nevertheless, Francis' wholehearted endorsement of Luther's stress on the priority of grace, seems to represent fullest endorsement yet of the central affirmation of a separated Christian tradition, anticipated of course in the famous *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* of 1999, but now receiving additional emphasis.

John Wesley used to tell his preachers, 'Go not to those who need you but to those who need you most'. Whether his Methodist interlocutors, after the publication of the tenth

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<sup>33</sup> *PCPCU Bulletin*, (2017, no2), p.6.

<sup>34</sup> In his address on 31.8.2016 at Lund, cited in *Sedos* (Service of Documentation and Study on Global Mission), accessed 27.7.2019, p. 13 (article not attributed).

<sup>35</sup> The writer argues 'to date, some representatives of the Catholic-Lutheran Research have opted for different approaches to Luther and the Reformation without making any significant impact on ecclesiastical opinion and regret. With Pope Francis, this has changed in an astonishing and wonderful way'. p.8.

<sup>36</sup> In his frequent appreciations of Luther's serious spiritual intent and in his acknowledgment of the grace given in the Lutheran Lord's Supper.



international dialogue report, acquainted Francis with this dictum is not recorded, but he did speak of his delight at meeting them and finding so much to learn from their tradition. He has certainly made relationships with those who had previously been resistant to them, with the harder-line Orthodox, with the Waldensians, with Pentecostals. Where the Orthodox are concerned, work for unity with them has medieval roots as well as the impetus given in 1895, by Leo XIII in *Orientalium Dignitas*. However, the Orthodox have never managed to react uniformly to the initiatives of popes from Leo to Francis himself<sup>37</sup>. Some have continued to take a hard line approach, even regarding the papacy as the source of all later western Christendom's heresy-others have been far more welcoming. Francis, like his immediate predecessors from John XXIII, has enjoyed good relationships with successive patriarchs of Constantinople<sup>38</sup>. Some other Orthodox leaders have been more reserved. When Francis was able to meet Russian Patriarch Kirill, it was on the studiously neutral territory of Cuba and the meeting was without joint prayer. When Francis went to Bulgaria, there was again no liturgical celebration involved. However, a visit to Georgia, a Byzantine rather than Oriental Orthodox country, made an incredible impression on Francis, who openly admitted on the flight home that he had never imagined he would meet 'so much culture, so much faith, so much Christianity there'<sup>39</sup>.

With the Oriental Orthodox, where there is not the same bitter legacy of direct schism at work, relations have been warm. Francis' recognition of the Armenian theologian, St Gregory of Narek, as a doctor of the Universal Church, was unprecedented in recognising as such a person who had not technically been in communion with the see of Rome<sup>40</sup>.

Francis' relations with Pentecostals have been particularly warm. In Argentina before his election as pope, he had allowed Pentecostal pastors to pray with him and for and over him. When Pope Francis made one of his most significant visits of all, significant despite being 'unofficial', a visit to a Pentecostal rally in Caserta, he was greeted by his old friend, Traettino, thus.

'Dearest Pope Francis, my beloved brother, our joy is great because of your visit, my personal joy, that of my family and our whole community...it is a great and unexpected gift, unthinkable a time ago'.

Traettino went on to pay tribute to the Cardinal Archbishop of Florence and to Cardinal Kasper and to emphasise the particular vocation of his own community, named the Church of the Reconciliation to signify its vocation. Francis went on to greet his brother, Pastor Giovanni, and to speak of the Gospel as 'truth, but also love and beauty' and to say, finally,

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<sup>37</sup> Herve Legrand analyses this in an article in *Unite des Chretiens*, Oct 2013, pp 22-5.

<sup>38</sup> Faggioli, op cit, p.30.

<sup>39</sup> *PCPCU Bulletin* (2016), no 2, p.11.

<sup>40</sup> *PCPCU Bulletin* (2015, no 1), p. 16. Francis also warmly reveres their longstanding faithfulness under persecution.

that some might be shocked by his action, but he had come to visit his brothers because they had first come to visit him in Argentina<sup>41</sup>.

In 2015, Francis was invited as a guest to the Waldensian Church in Turin, ‘an explicit ecumenical signal and a palpable indication of the need for healing of traumatic and still virulent memories.’<sup>42</sup> Speaking to the congregation, Francis said, “On behalf of the Catholic Church, I ask your forgiveness for unchristian-like and even inhuman attitudes and conduct which, historically, we have had against you. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, forgive us”. A subsequent Waldensian Synod thanked the Pope for his ‘clear desire to begin a new chapter with our church which is different from the past’, whilst also querying whether it could forgive in the name of those who had experienced past persecution for their witness to the evangelical faith. At a reciprocal visit to the Vatican, a pastor talked of ‘promoting co-operation and fellowship between our churches, in spite of the distinctive differences, and, sometimes, divergences between us’. The Evangelical Alliance in Italy, however, persisted in arguing that there was an unbridgeable gap between catholic and evangelical faith. It also denounced what it called ‘unscriptural’ views of unity<sup>43</sup>.

A very recent report indicates that Francis has not given up hope of future better relationships with Waldensians. In August 2019, he sent a message to their synod in Torre Pellice, expressing his ‘fraternal closeness and that of the entire Catholic Church’ and stating a common calling to ‘a path of reciprocal knowledge and understanding and collaboration, in order to give witness to Jesus and his Gospel of charity’<sup>44</sup>.

The reaction of the Italian Evangelical Alliance has not put Francis off making further approaches to other newer evangelical and Pentecostalist churches. In 2015, he met leaders of African evangelical churches at Bangui and in 2018 welcomed the wish of the African Instituted Churches to initiate a relationship<sup>45</sup>. He took the opportunity to place his hopes in the widest possible context of the search for the common good of all humanity. He argued that, ‘despite significant differences on theological and ecclesiological matters, there are many areas where the leaders and members of the various communities of the Christian family can set common goals and work together for the benefit of all’. He then invoked the Spirit, ‘May the Spirit shed his light...that we may all succeed in how best to promote co-operation between all, Christians, traditional religions and muslims, for the sake of a better Africa’<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> *Pontifical Council for Christian Unity Bulletin* (2014, no2), pp 3-6.,

<sup>42</sup> Brauer, M. ‘Pope Francis and Ecumenism’ in *The Ecumenical Review*, March 2017, p 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> Report in *Crux*, accessed 27.8.19, by John L. Allen.

<sup>45</sup> *PCPCU Bulletin* (2018), pp6-7. The African Instituted churches originated in schisms from missionary founded churches, representing a reaction against what they saw as over-control by overseas missionaries. Others have developed independently since. Many incorporate elements from traditional religions with some other churches seeing these as invalidly syncretistic, others sometimes accepting them as valid inculturation.

<sup>46</sup> *PCPCU Bulletin* (2018), no2, pp 6-7.

One may perhaps sum up the tenor of Francis overall pastoral and ecumenical approach by quoting from his address to a meeting of young people in 2018.

‘We do not make this journey as peacemakers with believers alone, but with everyone. Everyone has something to say to us and we have something to say to everyone. You young people should know this. When a Christian community is truly listening, it does not proselytise. It is only listening, welcoming, accompanying and moving forward, but imposing nothing. Fear drives us to proselytise, but fraternity is something else, an open heart and a fraternal embrace’<sup>47</sup>.

In Pope Francis, we see a Christian leader seeking to display the seamless robe of Christian life in all its fullness. Inextricably interlinked are mission, diakonia or service, pastoral care, ecumenism and true communion of all in the one Christ in a unity that affirms and allows all charisms to flourish. All of this can come about through reliance on the leadership, guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, to be experienced as we journey together, listening to Christ, listening to each other.

*What can we now expect for the future of the Ecumenical Movement?*

First, from Pope Francis and the rest of the Roman Catholic Church. We can, I think, expect, increased emphasis on synodality and attempts to embody it more fully particularly in terms of greater use of the Synod of Bishops and more reliance on it rather than on the Curia. We can expect more exploration of ways in which the *sensus fidelium* of the *whole* people of God can be ascertained and more consideration of ways in which synodality can be practised at the most local level in parishes.

Already the most recent ARCIC report has considered both primacy and synodality at various levels within the two partner communions. There is, I venture to suggest, a case for broadening the ecclesiological dialogue with other partner communions. Both the way in which synodality is experienced within Methodist connexional structures and that in which it exists in local congregations meeting to discern the mind of Christ through the local church meeting in the Baptist and independent traditions might help Catholics seeking wisdom on greater synodality at the most local level. In mutual challenge, Baptists and Independents might look at how synods and personal oversight at regional, national and universal levels might help their wider cohesion, witness and service without infringing the right and duty of the local congregation to discern the mind of Christ for their local ministry under the invisible headship of Christ.

A particular challenge comes to all traditions from Francis’ stress on journeying together. It is clear that he sees the formation of close spiritual friendships in such journeying as vital to the process of coming to a real understanding of the gifts of others where members of any one tradition can begin to see and be challenged to receive the insights in gifts of others. He

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<sup>47</sup> *PCPCU Bulletin* (2018), no2, pp 50-51.

sees praying together as vital and said that when asked, 'can a Catholic pray with an Orthodox, a Lutheran, a Pentecostal?', the reply is 'not simply a 'may' but a 'must'-such prayer should happen as widely as possible amongst all the baptised, their baptism, their resultant common allegiance to Christ being more important than any differences!<sup>48</sup> Working together on any acts of service, particularly of the poor, is also a key path to mutual discovery.

At the centre of this is growth in the wholehearted discovery affirmation and reception of what the Spirit is doing in the other(s). Formal theological dialogue remains important and continues to be commended and encouraged by Francis, who regularly speaks affirmatively to the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity. However, one gets the feeling that Francis, with his intense emphasis on pastors having the 'smell of the sheep', knows that something more than dialogue in the formal sense is needed at the most local level<sup>49</sup>.

I would suggest that a practical line of approach might be to encourage ordinary Christians with experience of living in more than one tradition to share their experiences. I think particularly of people in mixed marriages, many of whom try to support their partner's denomination and parish/congregation as faithfully as possible, many regularly attending and taking part in worship to the extent allowed by their own tradition. I think also of those in single congregation Local Ecumenical Partnerships in England which experience something of two or more traditions. There are also many Christians who, having transferred from allegiance to one tradition to another, still value what they had received from their previous tradition.

A fruitfully developing relationship between the Pentecostal and 'new' churches with the older 'traditional' churches should be an important part of ecumenism in this century. Already, cumulatively, the Pentecostal churches constitute the second largest Christian communion across the world even though they lack any central body to co-ordinate their life and witness fully. They are engaged in dialogue with other traditions, particularly the Roman Catholic Church (the sixth such dialogue has just issued its report). There are situations where Pentecostal (and some other conservative evangelical churches) feel closer to Rome than to liberal Protestants. Michel Malleve affirms this is the case in France<sup>50</sup>. There are even signs that some Pentecostals share some of the sacramental emphasis of Roman Catholicism and some have hierarchical episcopal structures, a few even claiming ministries in traditional apostolic succession<sup>51</sup>. The position is complex and some

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<sup>48</sup> We note also Francis' welcome to Archbishop Welby's united prayer appeal, 'Thy Kingdom come', as noted by *Anglican Communion News Service*, 29.5.2019.

<sup>49</sup> As he stresses very strongly in a report published in *The Tablet* 24.5.2019. 'a bishop must be both teacher and disciple...he listens to the voice of Christ, speaking through the people of God, making it infallible in credendo...a bishop who lives among the faithful has his ears open to listen to the voice of the sheep.'

<sup>50</sup> Malleve, M. *Les evangeliques* (2015).

<sup>51</sup> See the article by Cheryl Bridges Johns, 'Of Like Passion: a Pentecostal Appreciation of Benedict XVI' in Rusch, William G (ed), *The Pontificate of Benedict XVI*. She mentions the sacramental and eucharistic stress of some modern Pentecostal theologians, pp. 111-2.

Pentecostals are still strongly opposed both to Catholicism. However, the strength of both Roman Catholics and Pentecostals in the global south in their common confrontation with the problems of poverty, are likely to lead to both traditions seeking a closer relationship, one that will continue to be warmly welcomed and encouraged by Francis.

The final key question is the future evolution and possible wider reception of petrine ministry. This has been profoundly affected by the present pontificate. It is more than simply a matter of Francis' engaging style, gift of the Spirit though that is. It is more than his very helpful and creative stress on synodality. It is a recovery of a full emphasis on leading, guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, something which both Orthodox and Pentecostals, albeit with varying emphases, have often felt lacking in both the Roman Catholic Church and the main Reformation churches. Concurrent with this is the stress on the *joy* of the Gospel. The Gospel is demanding, certainly, but it is also 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Romans 14:17).

Francis' key gift, both to the Church Universal and to the evolution of the ministry to which he is called, is his stress on the need for a balanced understanding of what the discipleship of Jesus Christ involves both of each individual disciple and each Christian community. This balanced understanding links three key relationships already stressed in *Laudato Si*<sup>52</sup>. The balance must be carefully maintained. Francis stresses that mission is more than service, important as service of neighbour, and particularly the poor, is. The uniting factor is God's great plan of redemption and fulfilment for his entire creation which must ultimately must come with the co-working of a united Church offering the divine vision of unity and pointing to the enabling grace and vision of the Spirit-it is a matter of 'Come, say the Spirit and the Bride'<sup>53</sup>. All are invited to the conversation, all are invited to bring what God has given them ad to share in the marriage feast of the Lamb.

In Francis' vision, everything fits together. It does so in a way that I think every Christian church can see both affirms and complements its particular emphases. Two suggestions made before his pontificate may guide us all towards a degree of common recognition of the unique role of the petrine ministry. One was the call in the ARCIC report, *The Gift of Authority*, for Anglicans to consider some way in which they might receive the petrine ministry even in advance of full reunion<sup>54</sup>, the other was Geoffrey Wainwright's suggestion, in the wake of *Ut Unum Sint*, that a group of church leaders might co-operate with the Pope in issuing a letter, detailing the key emphases of the Gospel in the current world situation<sup>55</sup>. Francis' ecumenical and teaching should encourage us all to look again at these suggestions.

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<sup>52</sup> *Laudato Si*, para 66.

<sup>53</sup> Revelation 22:17.

<sup>54</sup> *The Gift of Authority*, para 62. 'that Anglicans be open to and desire a recovery and re-reception under certain clear conditions of the exercise of universal primacy by the Bishop of Rome'.

<sup>55</sup> G. Wainwright in 'The Gift which He on one bestows, we all delight to prove' in Puglisi, J (ed) *The Petrine Ministry and the Unity of the Church* (1999), pp. 59-82 (p 82 for the specific suggestion).

There remain problems to be resolved concerning exactly how churches of Orthodox or Protestant tradition could relate to the petrine ministry. However, the breadth of vision in Francis' teaching and practice will encourage people to pick up the challenge originally made by John Paul II and to tackle it, with the aid of the vastly added value stemming from Francis' approach to his calling.

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