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"Unity Prevails over Conflict"

**Santiago Madrigal Terraraz**

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*Pope Francis' Eucumenism*



VATICAN PUBLISHING HOUSE



SANTIAGO MADRIGAL SJ

“UNITY PREVAILS  
OVER CONFLICT”

POPE FRANCIS AND ECUMENISM

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AL	<i>Amoris Laetitia</i>
EG	<i>Evangelii Gaudium</i>
EN	<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i>
LF	<i>Lumen Fidei</i>
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i>
LS	<i>Laudato Si'</i>
MeM	<i>Misericordia et Misera</i>
MM	<i>Mater et Magistra</i>
MV	<i>Misericordiae Vultus</i>
RM	<i>Redemptoris Mater</i>
SE	<i>Spiritual Exercises</i>
UR	<i>Unitatis Redintegratio</i>
UUS	<i>Ut Unum Sint</i>

## PREFACE TO THE SERIES

From the time of his first appearance in St Peter's Square on the evening of his election, it was more than clear that Francis' pontificate would be adopting a new style. His modest apparel, calling himself the Bishop of Rome, asking the people to pray for him – in the 'deafening silence' of a packed square – and greeting them with a simple '*buonasera*' (good evening) ... these were all eloquent signs of the fact that there was a change taking place in the way the Pope related to people, and thus in the 'language' used.

The gestures and words that have followed from that occasion only confirm and strengthen this first impression. Indeed, it could be said that over the ensuing years, the image of the papacy has been decidedly transformed, involving a change that affects homilies, addresses and documents promulgated as well.

As could be predicted, this has generated divergent opinions, especially regarding his teaching. While many have in fact welcomed his magisterium with enthusiasm and deep interest, sensing the fresh wind of the gospel, some others have approached it in a more detached way and, at times, with suspicion. There has been no lack of more absolute views, even going as far as to doubt the existence of a theology in Francis' teaching.

A summary judgement of this kind could come from the very different backgrounds of Francis and his predecessor, Benedict XVI. The latter, we know, has been one of the most

outstanding and important theologians of the twentieth century and undoubtedly relied on his personal theological development in his rich papal magisterium. We have not yet fully appreciated, nor will we cease to appreciate, the depth of this magisterium. What Bergoglio has behind him, on the other hand, is his long and deep-rooted experience as a religious and a pastor.

However, this does not mean that his magisterium is without a theology. The fact that he was not mostly, or only, a 'professional' theologian does not mean that his magisterium is not supported by a theology. Were this the case, we could say that, strictly speaking, the majority of his predecessors were without a theology, given that Ratzinger represents the exception rather than the rule.

In any case, the fact that we can discuss the theological significance of Francis' magisterium, as well as the fact that, very often, some of his highly evocative and very immediate expressions have been so abused as to rob them of their profundity – in the journalistic as well as the ecclesial ambit – makes the response of this series, which I have the honour of presenting, a significant one.

By drawing on the competence and rigorous study of theologians of proven worth, coming from diverse contexts, the series has sought to research the theological thinking which supports the Pope's teaching. It explores its roots, its freshness, and its continuity with earlier magisterium.

The result can be found in the eleven volumes which make up this series with its simple and direct title: 'The Theology of Pope Francis'.

They can be read independently of one another, obviously; they have been written by individual authors independently of each other. Nevertheless, the hope is that a reading of the entire series would not only be a valuable aid for grasping the theology upon which Francis' teaching is based, in the various theological fields of knowledge, but also an introduction to the key points of his thinking and teaching overall.

The intention, then, is not one of 'apologetics', and even less so is it to add further voices to the many already speaking about the Pope. The aim is to try to see, and to help others to see, what theological thinking Francis bases himself on and expresses, in such a fresh way in his teaching.

Among the many discoveries the reader could make in reading these volumes, would certainly be that of observing how so much of the beneficial freshness of the Council's teaching flows into Francis' magisterium. This is true both of the theological preparation he has had, and of what has followed from it. Given that it is perhaps still too soon for all this wealth to become common patrimony, peacefully and fully received by everyone, it should be no surprise that the Pope's teaching is sometimes not immediately understood by everyone.

By the same token, a point of no return has been reached in Francis' teaching, one that recent theology and the Council have both taught: that doctrine cannot be something extraneous to so-called pastoral theology and ministry. The truth that the Church is called to watch over is the truth of Christ's gospel, which needs to be

communicated to the women and men of every time and place. This is why the task of the ecclesial magisterium must also be one of favouring this communication of the gospel. Hence, theology can never be reduced to a dry, desk-bound exercise, disconnected from the life of the people of God and its mission. This mission is that the women and men of every age encounter the perennial and inexhaustible freshness of Jesus' gospel.

Over these years there have been those who have heard some of Francis' own critical statements regarding theology or theologians, and have concluded that he holds it and them in low esteem. Perhaps a more detailed study of the Pope's teaching, such as offered by this series, could also be helpful for showing that, while we always need to be critical of a theology that loses its vital connection to the living faith of the Church, it is also essential to have a theology which takes up the task of thinking critically about this very faith, and doing so with 'creative fidelity', so that it may continue to be proclaimed.

Francis' teaching is certainly not lacking in a theology of this kind; and a theology of the kind is certainly one much desired by a magisterium such as his, which so wants God's mercy to continue to touch the minds and hearts of the women and men of our time.

Editor-in-chief  
ROBERTO REPOLE

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PROLOGUE  
THE HISTORY I NEED TO CONTEMPLATE

It is just a few months since the Catholic Church entered the fifth year of pontificate of Jorge Mario Bergoglio, elected on 13 March 2013 as ‘the Pope of surprises’, in the words of Italian historian Andrea Riccardi.<sup>1</sup> In this regard we will indicate two exceptional circumstances: on the one hand we are dealing with the first Latin American, non-European pope for more than a thousand years. He has come from the ends of the earth, and looks at reality – as he likes to say – from the periphery, the outer fringes, and not from the centre. On the other hand, he is the first Jesuit pope in the Church’s history, a man forged in the spirit of the mission and in the existential logic of Ignatian discernment.

What surprise has the Argentinian Pope provided us with in the broad world of ecumenism? By way of hypothesis, we could say in advance that Francis has made us feel a renewed impatience for Christian unity through his own manner and style and his own parameters, which are social harmony and peace as part of the context of constructing a culture of encounter. With a view to describing our task and the chapters in this book, this is the *leitmotiv* of the history I need to contemplate, put in the well-known terms of Saint Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*.

1 A Riccardi, *La sorpresa del papa Francisco: crisis y futuro de la Iglesia*, San Pablo, Madrid 2014.

1. *Go to the land I will give you*

The vivid image of the journey Francis made to Egypt in the recent spring, with a view to supporting Coptic Christians, certainly remains in the memory of many Christians and non-Christians, victims of a cruel attack by Islamic State which caused some thirty deaths at the Church of Sts Peter and Paul at Christmas time 2016. The object of this journey was to personally express his solidarity to Patriarch Tawadros II. On 28 April 2017, at the end of their meeting, Francis and Tawadros signed a *Common Declaration* at the Patriarchal headquarters in Cairo. They remind us in this text that ‘when Christians pray together, they come to realize that what unites them is much greater than what divides them,’ and they add: ‘ecumenism of martyrdom unites us and encourages us along the way to peace and reconciliation.’<sup>2</sup>

Curiously, if we cast our minds back – and the aforementioned Declaration mentions this expressly – we see that four years earlier, on 10 May 2013, the first public meeting took place between the new pontiff and the leader of a non-Catholic Community: Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and head of the Orthodox Coptic Church of Egypt.<sup>3</sup>

We can allow these two dates to symbolically mark the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem* of the journey the

2 Common Declaration by His Holiness Francis and His Holiness Tawadros II, 28 April 2017.

3 Cf. AAS 105 (2013) 464-466. R BURIGANA, *Un cuore solo*.

Church has taken under Francis, a journey which continues, and will continue, to be open. I use the word ‘journey’ (*camino* in Spanish) intentionally, a term of basic spiritual significance in Jorge Mario Bergoglio’s thinking: God comes out to meet us along the journey of life. He puts it very beautifully in his conversations with Jewish Rabbi Abraham Skorka:

In my personal experience of God I cannot avoid the journey. I would say that one encounters God while journeying, being on the move, looking for him and letting oneself be sought out by him. These two journeys meet. On the one hand our journey seeking him, urged on by this instinct that flows from our heart. And afterwards when we meet, we become aware that he was first seeking us: *he took the first step*. The initial religious experience is that of the journey: ‘Set out for the land I am going to give you.’ It is a promise that God makes to Abraham. And in this promise, on this journey, a Covenant is established that is consolidated over the centuries. This is why I say that my experience with God comes from the journey, the search, from letting myself be sought out. It can be on different journeys, one of sorrow, happiness, light, and darkness.<sup>4</sup>

*Papa Francesco e l’unità della Chiesa*, Edizioni Terra Santa, Milan, 2014, 26.

4 JM BERGOGLIO – A SKORKA, *Sobre el cielo y la tierra*,

In the language of the Argentinian Pope, the term '*camino*' or journey serves to describe the essence of the Church, which is the people on pilgrimage to God, and the theological concept of 'ecumenism' means to walk in the presence of God. Before all else, ecumenism is a journey.

Between these two precise dates runs the history we would like to contemplate in order to feel and inwardly savour the novel dimension the current Pope has brought to progress in the ancient cause of unity. A little more than fifty years ago, the Roman Catholic Church signed its commitment to the cause of the ecumenical movement with the Council Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* (1964). Certainly, Francis follows a form his predecessors, from Saint John XXIII to Benedict XVI, made their own by adopting the ecumenical initiatives and commitment sealed by Vatican Council II. By contrast with Ratzinger and Wojtyła, Bergoglio did not take part in Council sessions. This makes it more interesting to analyze how in practice he has taken up the ecumenical theology inspired by the Council.

As a starting point, it is worth drawing attention to his style and procedure, already shaped by his use of language 'far from the paradigm of ideas and philosophy, and decisively inserted into the living narrative of life': 'Pope Francis' language,' Spadaro explains 'is not speculative but missionary, as attentive to the interlocutor as it is to the message, spoken not to be "studied" but to be "listened to" and consequently

Debate, Barcelona 2013, 17. Available in English as *On Heaven and Earth*, Penguin Random House, New York, 2015.

addressed to whoever listens to it, and arousing a reaction.<sup>5</sup> Whoever listens to him experiences the itch and impatience for unity: journeying, praying, working together.

## 2. *How this essay develops*

We will be reconstructing this history in four instances or chapters. In the first chapter we will recall the early steps, gestures and words of Francis' pontificate, which contain an undoubted ecumenical potential. In the second chapter, we will trace the roots of this ecumenical attitude in his life story: From whence, and how did this concern for unity originate? How did he nurture it in his years as Archbishop and Cardinal of Buenos Aires? We will see how this ecumenical engagement is part of the broader framework of his activity as leader of the Church in Argentina and as a promoter of the common good in the search for peaceful co-existence. Over the years of his intense pastoral activity which found a real point of emphasis in the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops at Aparecida (2007), we can also trace the embryonic notions of his ecumenical vision. Its principles were inspired by the Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (1995).

In a third chapter we will show Francis' personal contribution to the ecumenical cause, going back over his activity and words, meetings, texts. In the interests of brevity we will focus our analysis on the two great elements depicted in the current ecumenical panorama: the Orthodox

5 A SPADARO, *El sueño del papa Francisco. El rostro futuro de la Iglesia*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 2013, 32.

Churches and the Ecclesial Communities resulting from the Reform initiated by Luther.

Beginning with these premises, our fourth chapter deals with distilling Pope Bergoglio's ecumenical program contained in the agenda-setting document of his pontificate, the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. Coming from a profound desire to go to the roots of the gospel, his ecumenical vision revolves around issues like: unity in diversity, the hierarchy of truths, exchange of gifts. We will conclude with an epilogue of Ignatian flavour: time is God's messenger.

The unity we seek is the fruit and gift of the Holy Spirit. Francis really believes in this Creative Spirit who makes all things new. Thus did he remind us in his homily on Pentecost Sunday, 4 June 2017. The Holy Spirit creates diversity with imagination and unpredictability, giving rise to new and different charisms. However, this same Spirit brings about unity and rebuilds harmony. He is the guarantee of the 'true unity' which is not uniformity but unity in difference. Francis returns to the words of St Cyril of Alexandria: 'Of his own accord he converts to unity those who are distinct from one another.'<sup>6</sup> Therefore, his ultimate message is well picked up by the exhortation to avoid two temptations: seeking diversity without unity, and unity without diversity.

Madrid, 29 June 2017, Feasts of St Peter and Paul.

<sup>6</sup> FRANCIS, *Homily at the Mass for Pentecost*, 4 June 2017.

CHAPTER I  
FIRST WORDS AND GESTURES OF FRANCIS,  
BISHOP OF ROME

1. *Bishop of Rome*

On 13 March 2013, when night had already fallen in Rome, the powerful symbol of the *fumata*, the white smoke, had seen an increase in the number of faithful, and the merely curious, who had been thronging St Peter's Square throughout the day. When Jorge Mario Bergoglio, by now dressed in white, appeared on the balcony, he opened his pontificate with a simple message, 'brothers and sisters, *buonasera*,' bringing thunderous applause.<sup>1</sup>

With a contained emotion which allowed his humility and timidity to shine through, he underlined the fact that the conclave had fulfilled its duty of 'giving Rome a bishop,' that his brother cardinals had gone searching 'almost to the ends of the earth.' With this comment, which included a light touch of humour, he was insinuating that his electors wanted the ship that is the Church to be seen to be driven by fresh winds from the south. Thus did a way of living and understanding Christianity, inculturated within the coordinates of the Latin

<sup>1</sup> Cf. AAS 105 (2013) 363. E PIQUÉ, *Francisco. Vida y revolución*, La Esfera de los libros, Madrid 2014, 49 (available in English as *Pope Francis: Life and Revolution*, Loyola Press, Chicago 2013).

The image of the Church I like is that of the holy, faithful people of God. This is the definition I often use, and then there is that image from the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (no.12). Belonging to a people has a strong theological value. In the history of salvation God has saved a people. There is no full identity without belonging to a people... And the Church is the people of God on the journey through history, with joys and sorrows. Thinking with the Church, therefore, is my way of being a part of this people. And all the faithful, considered as a whole are infallible in matters of belief... through a supernatural sense of the faith of all the people walking together. This is what I understand today as the 'thinking with the Church' of which St Ignatius speaks.<sup>5</sup>

These words condense a good part of this Argentinian theology of the people, and the culture which accommodates the aspirations of the poor, and popular Catholicism, but it distances itself from currents of liberation theology inspired by Marxism, and sociological analysis, on the one hand, and rigid traditionalism on the other. To specify his idea of the Church, he continued by saying:<sup>6</sup>

5 Cf. A SPADARO, Interview with Pope Francis, [w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130921\\_intervista-spadaro.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html)

6 *Ibid.*, 259. Cf. JC SCANNONE, *La teología del pueblo. Raíces*

And, of course, we must be very careful not to think that this *infallibilitas* of all the faithful I am talking about in the light of Vatican II is a form of populism. No; it is the experience of 'holy mother, the hierarchical Church': as St Ignatius called it, the Church as the People of God, pastors and people together. The Church is the totality of God's people.

### 3. 'Francis, go and repair my house'

On the other hand, Jorge Mario Bergoglio has been very aware of the extraordinary circumstances which brought about his election, that is, the historic resignation of his predecessor, theologian Pope Joseph Ratzinger, announced on 11 February 2013. He made this clear at his first meeting with journalists on 16 March. Employing a catechetical tone, he reminded them of the spiritual nature of the Church, 'the holy people of God making its way to encounter with Jesus Christ.' And he wanted to offer them a hermeneutical framework for focusing the vivid events of those days before and during the conclave: 'Christ is the Church's pastor,' and his presence comes 'through the freedom of human beings; from their midst one of them is chosen to serve as his Vicar.'<sup>7</sup>

*teológicas del Papa Francisco*, Sal Terrae, Santander 2017, 15-40. Article published in English as 'Pope Francis and the theology of the people', *Theological Studies*, March 2016, Volume: 77 issue: 1, page(s): 118-135.

7 Cf. AAS 105 (2013) 379-381. *Francisco. Palabra profética y misión*, Ediciones Copygraph, Santiago de Chile 2016, 14-15 (This is also available on the Vatican website, listed under

However, the ultimate actor is the Holy Spirit who inspired the decision of Benedict XVI and guided the choice of the cardinals.

On that occasion he explained the reasons for his choice of name. He himself joked about the suggestions some cardinals made to him: 'You should call yourself Hadrian like the great reformer' because there is need of reform. Another told him, 'Your name should be Clement, Clement XV'; 'And why that one?' 'That way you come after Clement XIV who suppressed the Jesuits.' Some thought of Francis Xavier, Francis de Sales or Francis of Assisi. By his own account, the choice of name had to do with the words of congratulation addressed to him by Brazilian Cardinal Claudio Hummes, when he obtained the majority of votes: *Do not forget the poor*. At that moment, in relation to the poor, the Cardinal of Buenos Aires thought of Francis of Assisi, the man of poverty, peace, and guardian of creation. 'Ah!' he exclaimed, 'How I would like a poor Church and a Church for the poor!'<sup>8</sup> No pontiff had dared use the name of the *poverello* of Assisi.

'I took his name,' he confessed in his Encyclical *Laudato Si'* (no. 10) 'as my guide and inspiration when I was elected

Francis' speeches: 16 March 2013, address to representatives of communication media).

8 For more details, E PIQUÉ, *Vida y revolución* p. 207-223. [English edition, *Pope Francis: Life and Revolution*]. Cf. VM FERNÁNDEZ – P RODARI, *La Iglesia del Papa Francisco. Los desafíos desde Evangelii gaudium*, San Pablo, Madrid 2014, 13-30. This is available in English as *The Francis Project: Where He Wants to Take the Church*, Paulist Press, New York, 2016.

Bishop of Rome.' It is a name which is a program of government (*nomen est omen*) as if the words the son of a rich Italian merchant heard on 1205, before the crucifix in the Church of St Damien on the outskirts of Assisi, were being re-issued: 'Francis, go and repair my house. Can you not see that it is in ruins?' The new Pope sees, in Francis, the example of care for what is weak, particular attention to God's creation and the poorest and most abandoned. He sees a mystic and pilgrim who in all simplicity experienced a marvellous harmony with God, others, nature and with himself. In that holy man we find inseparably united 'concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and interior peace' (*LS* 10).

With the passing of time we have seen that the current Pope is capable of recovering all these aspects which adorn the beautiful figure of the saint from Assisi: his concern for creation has been well reflected in his second Encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, in the same way that the Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* includes in its program of missionary reform the desire for a Church that is poor and for the poor. In the Bull *Misericordiae Vultus*, with a view to setting the Jubilee Year of Mercy in motion, he placed passionate union with Jesus Christ and his love for the least in society at the centre.

#### 4. *Custodian of creation and custodian of humankind*

Once again, we turn our gaze back to the beginning of the ministry of the new 'Bishop of Rome, successor of Peter.' These are the papal titles Francis used in his first homily

on 19 March, coinciding with the Solemnity of St Joseph, husband of the Virgin Mary and Patron of the Universal Church. It also coincided with his predecessor's Name day. As the central motif of his preaching, the new Pope took the figure of St Joseph, guardian of Mary and Jesus, and also – as St John Paul II reminded us – guardian and protector of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ.<sup>9</sup>

From the text of the retreat that Jorge Mario Bergoglio preached to the Spanish Bishops from 15-22 January 2006, we can gather his special devotion to the figure of the Virgin Mary's spouse. On that occasion, he offered a meditation on St Joseph, taking this man who receives a mission from God to be a powerful and tangible image 'as the faithful and far-seeing *episkopo* given to the Lord in his family.'<sup>10</sup> However, let us return to the opening homily of his Petrine ministry.

He examines how Joseph exercised and lived his calling as guardian of Mary, Jesus and the Church with discretion, humility, in silence, faithfully and with total availability to God's plan. In this, Christ appears as the centre of the Christian vocation. However, this idea is extended to a prior dimension, a simply human one: watching over the beauty of creation and the people, especially the weakest and most fragile of them. Bergoglio emphasized an area which was given a specific reflection in his most recent Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*: look after one

9 Cf. AAS 105 (2013) 383-386 (As previously noted, available on Vatican website in English).

10 JM BERGOGLIO, *En Él solo la esperanza*, 34; 60-62. (*In Him Alone is Our Hope ...*)

another (husband and wife, parents and children) in the family. In Joseph's example, concern, care, guardianship also emerge, characteristics that Francis has sought to stamp on his pontificate: a great tenderness.<sup>11</sup>

This is the theological framework within which the beginning of his Petrine ministry is situated, and he expressly indicated that it 'involves a certain power.' To describe this power, he appealed to the three questions Jesus put to Peter about love, followed by the threefold invitation to 'Feed my lambs, feed my sheep.' Finally, and as a culmination, he explained that 'power is service,' in these terms:

The Pope too, when exercising power, must enter ever more fully into that service which reaches its radiant culmination on the Cross. He must be inspired by the lowly, concrete and faithful service which marked Saint Joseph, and, like him, he must open his arms to protect all God's people and embrace with tender affection the whole of humanity, especially the poorest, the weakest, the least important, those whom Matthew lists in the final judgement on love: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison (cf. Mt 25:31-46). Only those who serve with love are able to protect!<sup>12</sup>

11 Cf. W KASPER, *El papa Francisco. Revolución de la ternura y el amor*, Sal Terrae, Santander 2015, 53-60. Available in English as *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, Paulist Press 2015.

12 FRANCIS, *Palabra profética y misión*, 13. Cf. AAS 105 (2013) 385 (also available in English on the Vatican website under

### 5. *Outline and preview of an ecumenical program*

Up to this point we have considered three brief addresses of Francis – from the balcony of St Peter’s, the meeting with journalists, the opening Mass of his pontificate – which have enabled us to perceive in a nutshell a whole program of action, the smooth setting in motion of the revolution of mercy and tenderness with this understanding of the Bishop of Rome seen from the perspective of ‘watching over’ creation and humanity, taking care of the poorest especially. To these initial words and gestures we have to add his meeting with representatives of Churches, Ecclesial communities and other Religions, who took part in the opening ceremony of his pontificate. The meeting took place on 20 March. In response to the words of Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, he laid down the foundation of a model of apostolic fraternity for the primacy with this greeting: *my brother Andrew*. This meeting follows a tradition begun by John Paul II and continued by Benedict XVI.<sup>13</sup>

Francis’ developed his address of reply in three parts, one for each addressee: the first was directed to Christians (delegates from the Orthodox Churches, the ancient Eastern Churches, Ecclesial Communities from the West),

Francis’ homilies: for 19 March 2013, beginning of the Petrine Ministry).

<sup>13</sup> R BURIGANA, *Un cuore solo*, 21-22. Cf. AAS 105 (2013) 420-422 (also available in English on the Vatican website under Francis’ speeches: 20 March 2013, audience with representatives of Churches, etc.).

the second to Jews, and the third to the other Religions, especially Muslims.

The new Pope showed that he was moved by the presence of a broad number of communities who came to intensify their prayer for the unity of believers in Christ. Addressing himself to Christians he recalled the Year of Faith which Benedict XVI had opened on 11 October 2012, reminding them thus of the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of Vatican Council II. He thought of the Year of Faith as a kind of pilgrimage, so that all Christians would journey together toward the centre of the Christian experience of faith, that is, the personal and transforming relationship with Christ. The desire to proclaim the nature of this encounter constitutes ‘the core message of the Council’ which points out to the Catholic Church its task of building visible unity in a spirit of listening, dialogue and ongoing conversion of heart. Vatican II, Bergoglio insists, constitutes a fundamental step along the ecumenical journey. Along these lines he quoted a passage from John XXIII’s opening address *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, in which Roncalli indicated as a priority task for the Church the realization ‘of the great mystery of that unity for which Jesus Christ prayed so earnestly to his heavenly Father on the eve of his great sacrifice.’ All Christians are called by the Word of God to work at building up visible unity: *ut unum sint*.

A week after his election, the new Pope left a pointer to a program of ecumenical nature in the shape of this prayer:

Let us ask the Father of mercies to enable us to live fully the faith graciously bestowed upon us



on the day of our Baptism and to bear witness to it freely, joyfully and courageously. This will be the best service we can offer to the cause of Christian unity, a service of hope for a world still torn by divisions, conflicts and rivalries. The more we are faithful to his will, in our thoughts, words and actions, the more we will progress, really and substantially, towards unity. For my part, I wish to assure you that, in continuity with my predecessors, it is my firm intention to pursue the path of ecumenical dialogue.<sup>14</sup>

In his greeting to all the Christian Communities, he also asked them for a special prayer for himself 'that I might be a pastor according to the heart of Christ.' With regard to the other religions, Bergoglio sought to give continuity to the fraternal dialogue stipulated by the Council Declaration *Nostra Aetate*. For Francis, religions should cooperate in watching over creation and caring for their common home, alleviating the material and spiritual poverty of the human being, promoting justice and reconciliation and, above all, in the struggle against economic and social systems which try to reduce the human creature to something purely material.

In setting out his program, Francis was calling on all Christians from the heart of Vatican Council II, bringing into play a series of basic elements like the joy of encounter, the need for common witness, the biblical basis of the ecumenical journey. As we will see in our next chapter,

<sup>14</sup> AAS 105 (2013) 421. (Cf. Previous footnote for English reference).

all these aspects form part of the spiritual and intellectual baggage of the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, and his way of understanding and assimilating the message of his predecessors and Council teaching.

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