

# ECUMENICAL TRENDS

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*A Ministry of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement*

Beginning in 2020, *Ecumenical Trends* will be published every other month (six times per year), with each issue more substantial than in the past. In making this change, we are not only responding to your insights and preferences (with our heartfelt thanks to all who responded to our subscriber survey!) but also working to craft each issue more strategically, with an eye to resonances between articles and through the course of the year. We are looking forward to sharing the fruits of this new structure with our readership.

## Bartholomew: The Ecumenical Patriarchate in the Early Twenty-First Century – A Personal Perspective

By William G. Rusch

To reflect about the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul (Constantinople or New Rome, the setting of so much of church history) in the early twenty-first century, it is essential to consider Bartholomew, the Ecumenical Patriarch. For almost twenty-eight years now the Patriarchate has experienced the leadership of this humble person of deep faith and great ability – Bartholomew I.

I first became acquainted with Bartholomew when he was Metropolitan of Philadelphia (in Asia Minor) more than four decades ago. Over the years our friendship grew as we met in official visits between our churches and at meetings of the World Council of Churches, especially gatherings of the Faith and Order Commission of the Council. I was privileged to be present at his enthronement on November 2<sup>nd</sup> in 1991. While the friendship continued over the years, contacts have not always been easy. Thus I was delighted

recently to be able to visit His All Holiness (Bartholomew's official title) at the Patriarchate.

Our conversation picked up as if there had never been a break. We spoke of many things. At the end of our time together, I indicated my thoughts to the Patriarch that it

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*Rev. Dr. William G. Rusch is a Lutheran pastor who served as Executive Director of the Foundation for a Conference on Faith and Order in North America and as Director of the Department of Ecumenical Affairs of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. He has written over 110 articles and edited or authored 21 books, most recently **Toward a Common Future: Ecumenical Reception and a New Consensus (2019)**. He earned his doctorate from the University of Oxford (UK) and he serves on the faculty of Yale Divinity School.*

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might be useful to share some of our conversation with a larger audience, so that a greater understanding of the Patriarchate and its present situation might be available.

We agreed that some portions of our discussion were private between friends; all of it was unofficial in the sense that we spoke to each other as individuals and not as representatives of anyone or anything, and the Patriarch would have the opportunity to review and comment on anything that I wrote. All of these conditions have been met in terms of what follows.

My first impressions of the Patriarchate on this visit were how much security had been increased since my earlier visits. No longer does one simply walk into the Patriarchal Church of Saint George or the Patriarchal compound of offices and residences. The security process is much like that of airport security around the world. Uniformed personnel will take (and return) your cell-phone, keys and wallet, and examine all briefcases. All of this is perhaps a general sign of the times, but I felt also that it was an expression of the particular state of the Patriarchate in contemporary Turkey.

After my admission to the buildings, a short wait, and conversation with one of the deacons, who was politely curious about me, I was escorted into Bartholomew's office, a room where we had met many times in the past. The Patriarch's desk was cluttered and overwhelmed with books and documents – as always. He is a busy person. He daily functions on the world scene “as the first among equals” for some 300 million members of Orthodox churches across the world from his seat in the ancient city of Constantinople, a city that has been the focus of so much history of the Church.

I did not take notes during our conversation. This would have been highly inappropriate and foreign to the relationship we enjoy. Subsequently and soon after my visit and before leaving Turkey, I did jot down some impressions of the conversation. My account of our time together is not a verbatim description of our exchange. Rather I have structured my description around one theme that reoccurred in the discussion and served as a center of attention.

The choice is not surprising in view of the interests of both participants in the discussion. Our conversation was

not structured, flowed freely, and was not comprehensive. Many aspects of the Patriarch's ministry simply did not come up. A notable example would be his commitment and tireless efforts on behalf of the environment. Although Bartholomew is generous with his time with his friends, it was apparent to me that his schedule on the day I was with him was extremely full.

Our attention turned almost immediately to the Holy and Great Council which took place on the island of Crete in June of 2016. This topic was not surprising, for the Council had occurred since my last visit to the Patriarchate (in the Phanar, a historic section of the city of Istanbul) and has been a major commitment both of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and of Bartholomew personally for many decades.

The Council, which many believed would never take place, brought together ten autocephalous Orthodox churches. It was an unprecedented event, a goal and commitment of Bartholomew even prior to his election as Patriarch. The years of preparation were not without their struggles and difficulties. Yet the Council happened and in no small measure because of the role of Bartholomew himself.

How does the Patriarch assess the Council exactly three years after the event? He is clear. For him there is no ambiguity. The Council was a success. He notes that unfortunately some churches were absent, and now they regret their lack of participation. In many ways, the gathering was a pastoral council. Bartholomew sees the Council and the documents it adopted as a resource for Orthodox believers to live their faith in the modern world. He considers the preparatory phase and the texts that it produced as valuable as the work done in Crete, where he reminded me the time was short and the pressure great.

The final agenda of the Council was composed of six items: the diaspora, autonomy, the sacrament of marriage and its impediments, the importance of fasting and its observance today, ecumenical relations, and the contemporary mission of the Orthodox Church. The Council also launched a remarkable Encyclical and a Message “to the Orthodox people and to all people of good will.” Bartholomew views

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### **Ecumenical Trends**

EDITOR, Rev. James Loughran, SA ■ ASSOCIATE EDITOR, Aaron Hollander, Ph.D. ■ ASSISTANT TO THE EDITOR, Christine Breglia ■ Ecumenical Trends, 475 Riverside Drive, Rm. 1960, New York, NY 10115 ■ Business and Subscription Office, Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute, PO Box 333, Garrison, NY 10524-0333.

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all of these as critical to Orthodox life in the twenty-first century, but understandably our comments quickly moved to ecumenical relations. Both the preparatory work for the Council and the Council itself addressed this topic. One of the documents that the Council adopted, entitled “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World,” took up directly the relationship and commitment of the Orthodox Church to the modern ecumenical movement. This text affirmed the role of the Orthodox Church in this movement and spoke positively of the importance both of the World Council of Churches and of the bilateral dialogues. The Encyclical of the Council itself contains a section with the title, “The Church: Witness in Dialogue.” Here in this shorter document, the same commitments with the above-mentioned document are repeated, sometimes in slightly different language.

For Bartholomew the message of these documents and the Council is transparent: there is a clear affirmation of Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement. He observed, and reminded me, that there are those in Orthodox Church who do not favor such participation. The inter-Orthodox discussion of such concerns must continue, but the commitment of the Orthodox Church to the movement for the visible unity of Christ’s Church, which dates more than one hundred years now, remains in place and now again is affirmed.

The above-mentioned references to the ecumenical movement are brief. As a non-Orthodox person, I could wish for more, including some expression of what the Orthodox Church can learn from other churches and traditions in the ecumenical movement. Yet this comment of mine, which I did not fully articulate in our conversation, should not detract from the commitment expressed by the Orthodox Church at its highest level of authority. Such dedication and devotion to the cause of Christian unity should be an example to other churches in the ecumenical movement.

The views in those two texts have had a long history in the life of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, from its Encyclical on Unity from 1920 to its role as a founding member of the World Council of Churches and as an advocate for theological dialogues with a variety of churches. Thus our conversation turned to the question of how today does the Ecumenical Patriarchate function as a member of the ecumenical movement? Obvious ways include the bilateral dialogues and membership in inter-Christian ecclesiastical organizations. The Patriarch expressed his view that for a church to function in this manner there is the requirement that its clergy are educated not only in their own tradition but with ecumenical insights and sensitivities. Thus the Ecumenical Patriarchate has sent students to the World Council of Churches’ Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland, where at one time the prominent Greek

Orthodox theologian, N.A. Nissiotis, was the director, and to renowned universities abroad. Bartholomew himself as a young clergyman studied in Rome, Bossey, and Munich.

Yet the Patriarch was direct that world Orthodoxy needs an educational institution for Pan-Orthodox outreach to provide for its leadership in the twenty-first century world. For years the Patriarchate had such an institution, the Theological School of Halki on one of the Princes’ Islands in the Sea of Marmara. Numerous leaders of global Orthodoxy, including Bartholomew, are alumni of Halki. Between its opening in 1844 and its closing in 1971, about one thousand students graduated from Halki. I reminded the Patriarch that because of his kindness I have been to that beautiful island and used the library there more than once. We both observed the regrettable present situation of the school at Halki. The Patriarchate maintains the physical plant and the impressive library. In 1971 the Turkish government illegally and by force closed the operation of the school. Since that date it has not been possible for any students to attend or graduate from Halki. A major element in the life of the Greek Orthodox Church and a significant dimension in the life of other Orthodox churches have been rendered dysfunctional. Bartholomew has constantly drawn attention to this lamentable situation as he noted in our conversation. He has pressed for the reopening of the school. The Turkish government has made promises. Yet in 2020, some forty-nine years after its illegal closing, the classrooms and hallways of the School of Halki are empty and silent. In my opinion, not only persons of the Orthodox faith but all Christians, and indeed all committed to the rule of law, should speak out against this deplorable situation. It can be corrected easily if those with the authority and power wish to remedy this injustice. I mentioned to the Patriarch, I hope not immodestly, that when that happy day of reopening occurs, I hope that I might be invited to teach a course at Halki. His comment was, “you will.” We both obviously live in hope.

The challenge embodied in the School at Halki is part of the larger problem that has burdened the Patriarchate for centuries. That problem was in many ways the assumed and often unspoken issue of virtually every conversation I have had with this Patriarch and his predecessor. I firmly believe that it is a dilemma involving the security, continuing existence, and functioning of the Mother Church of Constantinople in a context that with few exceptions has been challenging to it since the fifteenth century. We did not touch on this history in our discussion, and this is not the place to describe it again. It has been shared in many places.

From my perspective as a visitor looking in, Bartholomew and his community are loyal Turkish citizens, who nevertheless, do not fully enjoy their rights under the

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# The Ecumenism of Pope Francis: A Significant Pontificate for the *Oikoumenē*

By David Carter

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 the Pentecostal pastor Giovanni 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 (244-246) 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 realize with whom we have been travelling.” Mutual trust is fundamental.<sup>2</sup>

Paragraph 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 evangelization.” In June 2019, he

linked the call of the Lord with that of the most 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 emphasizes two additional fundamentals in his approach here. 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 practiced 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 globalizing and secular world. He is quite convinced of the power of the Spirit to transcend division, to harmonize 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

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*Mr. David Carter is a church historian and has been a member of the British Catholic-Methodist dialogue and the Roman Catholic-World Methodist Council dialogue. He has been a frequent contributor to Ecumenical Trends.*

**Francis stresses that he wants synodality to exist throughout the Church.**

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 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 center 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.

Francis 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 upright 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 and addresses or 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 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 while 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 a 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, and 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 baptized 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; for example, during a visit to Lutherans, he commended a cooperative 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 interreligious 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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I would argue that, in a certain sense, Francis sees his ministry as one for all humanity: for his own communion, for all other Christians, and 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 one of 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 canonizing 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 canonization 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 Lutheran minister, who had been martyred together by the Nazis.<sup>24</sup> One wonders whether he could examine the possibility of Rome’s canonizing 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 Francis’ 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 plenary meeting 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 recognize 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 apologized, 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 defense 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 Pentecostalist

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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 recognize 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 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 Massimo 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 baptized believers, that they demonstrate clear evidence of their experience of the work of the Spirit, and that they faithfully carry out the common mission to evangelize and to serve the poor and marginalized. With such communities Francis will always seek to encourage Catholics to cooperate.<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 while 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 *oikoumené*. 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 other’s tradi-

*We note here both the stress on risk and that on walking together and mutual learning from across all Christian communities.*

tions.”<sup>32</sup> To Methodists in 2017 he said, “when we see others leading a holy life, then we recognize 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 (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 Francis’ 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 center 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 he seeks to awaken that response. The Doctrine of Justification thus expresses the essence of human existence before God.<sup>34</sup>

An (unattributed) 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 the 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

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endorsement of Luther's stress on the priority of grace seems to represent the 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." It is not recorded whether Francis' Methodist interlocutors acquainted him with this dictum, after the publication of the tenth international dialogue report, 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 hard-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 recognizing as such a person who had not technically been in communion with the see of Rome.<sup>40</sup>

Francis' relations with Pentecostals have also 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 em-

phasis 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, 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, as "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," while 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 Pentecostal 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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*Francis' relations with Pentecostals have also been particularly warm.*

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 proselytize. It is only listening, welcoming, accompanying and moving forward, but imposing nothing. Fear drives us to proselytize, 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 practiced 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 connectional 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 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 among all the baptized, their baptism and 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 center 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

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*A particular challenge comes to all traditions from Francis' stress on journeying together.*

century. Already, cumulatively, the Pentecostal churches constitute the second largest Christian communion across the world even though they lack any central body to coordinate 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 Pentecostals are still strongly opposed 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 the 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 neighbor is (particularly of the poor). The uniting factor is God's great plan of redemption and fulfilment for his entire creation which must ultimately 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 and 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 cooperate with the Pope in issuing a letter, detailing the key emphases of the Gospel in the current world situation.<sup>55</sup> Francis' ecumenical teaching should encourage us all to look again at these suggestions.

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. 

#### Notes:

1. *Pontifical Council for Christian Unity Bulletin* (2014, no 2), p. 3.
2. *Evangelii Gaudium*, para. 244.
3. Francis on a visit to Romania 21.6.2019.
4. Faggioli, M. "Ecumenism in *Evangelii Gaudium* and in the context of Francis' pontificate" in *Perspectiva Teologia* Jan/April 2016, p.21.
5. EG, para. 244.
6. EG, para. 230.
7. 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.
8. Recorded by Jonathan Lewis in an interview with Paul 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 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."
9. Francis on 17 Oct 2015, cited in *National Catholic Reporter*.
10. Cited in *La Croix*, Sept 2018.
11. 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.'"
12. Francis on 17.10.2015, as reported in the *National Catholic Reporter*.
13. Francis in 2018, cited by K. Colberg in her article in *Religions*, "Ecumenical Ecclesiology in its New Contexts" (Sep 2018), p.3.

14. Francis on 18.1.2019, as reported by Martin Brockhaus of the *Catholic News Agency*.
15. On 17.10.2015, 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 baptized.
16. *Laudato Si’*, para. 66.
17. 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.
18. The document on synodality talks of synodality as “promoting the participation of all the baptized *and people of good will*” (my italics), a clear indication of Francis’ desire to encourage serious dialogue *beyond* the Christian community.
19. Francis on 17.10.2015.
20. *Evangelii Gaudium*, section 5.
21. In the Hymn “All praise to our redeeming Lord.” *Singing The Faith* (2011), no. 608.
22. As e.g. in his interview with A. Torielli of *La Stampa*, 6.12.2013.
23. In an address “The Ecumenism of the Martyrs” given in context of The Way of the Cross procession on 1.4.1994, reported and accessed 30.8.2019 from Vatican website.
24. *PCPCU Bulletin* (2013), no. 2, p. 6.
25. Cf. John 15:13.
26. 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.”
27. Address of The Holy Father to participants in the *Plenary of the PCPCU*, 29.9.18, as reported by the *Holy See Press Office*.
28. 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.”
29. Cited from the abstract to an article by Massimo Faggioli, “Ecumenism in *Evangelii Gaudium* and in the context of Francis’ pontificate.” *Perspective Teologia*, Jan/April 2016, pp. 17-35.
30. As can be seen, for example, in his very recent appeal to the Waldensians, cited in *Crux*, accessed 27.8.2019.
31. Faggioli, op. cit., pp. 33-34, 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*.”
32. *PCPCU Bulletin*, (2016, no. 2), pp. 11-18.
33. *PCPCU Bulletin*, (2017, no. 2), p. 6.
34. 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.
35. 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.
36. In his frequent appreciations of Luther’s serious spiritual intent and in his acknowledgment of the grace given in the Lutheran Lord’s Supper.
37. Herve Legrand analyzes this in an article in *Unite des Chretiens*, Oct 2013, pp. 22-5.
38. Faggioli, op. cit., p. 30.
39. *PCPCU Bulletin* (2016, no. 2), p. 11.
40. *PCPCU Bulletin* (2015, no. 1), p. 16. Francis also warmly reveres their longstanding faithfulness under persecution.
41. *Pontifical Council for Christian Unity Bulletin* (2014, no. 2), pp. 3-6.
42. Brauer, M. “Pope Francis and Ecumenism” in *The Ecumenical Review*, March 2017, p. 6.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
44. Report in *Crux*, accessed 27.8.19, by John L. Allen.
45. *PCPCU Bulletin* (2018), pp. 6-7. 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.
46. *PCPCU Bulletin* (2018), no. 2, pp. 6-7.
47. *PCPCU Bulletin* (2018), no. 2, pp. 50-51.
48. 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.
49. 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.”
50. Malleve, M, *Les evangeliques* (2015).
51. 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.
52. *Laudato Si’*, para. 66.
53. Revelation 22:17.
54. *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.”
55. 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).

# Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2020

## Martin Luther King, Jr. – Homily Notes

By Catherine E. Williams

Hospitality wasn't always an industry. Before it became a commercial enterprise in the 1950s, it was a social value found in just about every known world culture. Before it became an industry, hospitality was essentially taking care of travelers. It meant being kind to strangers, especially those with basic needs such as food and shelter. How many of us have traveled to a foreign place, whether a domestic or international destination, where the newness and strangeness of things around us made us feel vulnerable and insecure? How many of us in that state of vulnerability had hospitality extended to us by complete strangers – the teenager who pointed wordlessly in the direction of the restroom, the non-English speaker who smiled a broad, genuine welcome as we stepped into a café, or the server in the café who explained the menu in her best Spanish or French, or whatever our first language might be? Do you remember the gratitude you felt when you heard your native tongue spoken – it didn't matter how haltingly – in that foreign place?

Acts of hospitality can express values such as inclusion, kindness, generosity, and reciprocity. This last value of reciprocity is not the transactional kind where I repay your kindness in order to release myself from any future obligation to you. Rather it is the understanding that in any human encounter giving and receiving are implicit and often intangible. We live in a time, particularly those of us in the United States, where these values of inclusion, kindness, generosity, and reciprocity are drowned out by the sound of violence in human interaction at all levels of society. What about the love Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of so passionately in his speeches and his writings? Every January for the past twenty-five years, the United States has been celebrating the memory and legacy of this prophet and preacher with a national holiday that has been called a “day on” instead of a “day off.” There are many ways this year to commemorate this 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther King Day, “the only federal holiday designated as a national day of service to encourage all Americans to volunteer to improve their communities.”<sup>1</sup> One powerful means of commemoration suggested by this year's Graymoor Ecumenical and Interreligious Institute theme is the way of “unusual kindness,” or called by another name, radical hospitality.

This kind of hospitality, demonstrated by the Maltese residents in Acts 28:1-10, is noteworthy for all kinds of reasons. These shipwreck survivors, making their way ashore on pieces of the ship's flotsam, are prisoners and captors. Their island hosts are allegedly barbarians, there are sharp religious and cultural contrasts at play, there are power dif-

ferentials all around, and the language barrier is very real. In the midst of the chaos and uncertainty the narrator writes: “*the natives showed us unusual kindness. Since it had begun to rain and was cold, they kindled a fire and welcomed all of us around it*” (Acts 28:2). Can you feel the relief and the deep surprise of the ship's crew and passengers? These island residents are not obligated to respond to the strangers' needs in this way. Yet this initial, unexpected kindness continues over the duration of Paul's stay in Malta. When the group sets sail three months after being washed ashore, their newfound friends supply them with all the provisions they need for the remainder of their journey. This is hospitality that goes beyond what might be reasonably expected. This is care that responds deeply and critically to the perceived need. This is radical hospitality!

Radical implies a departure from what is traditional or orthodox. Radical opts for a different path than the expected or the ordinary. Ordinary hospitality might keep us within our comfort zones, radical hospitality takes us outside our comfort zones and may even place us at risk. Martin Luther King knew of this kind of risk-taking even as he stood firmly rooted in the idea of nonviolent resistance. King's passionate belief in the power of radical love was the foundation of his steady nonviolent stance. Reflecting on his month-long trip to India, where he studied Ghandi's legacy at close range, King writes, “True nonviolent resistance is not unrealistic submission to evil power. It is rather a courageous confrontation of evil by the power of love... Nonviolent resistance does call for love, but it is not a sentimental love. It is a very stern love that would organize itself into collective action to right a wrong by taking on itself suffering.”<sup>2</sup> Today's preacher is invited to reflect on the power of such love. Where does it have its origin? Where can we find examples?

Preaching on this Acts 28 text against the backdrop of a national day of service in honor of King's legacy, the preacher will do well to help the congregation consider how they might infuse unusual hospitality into their acts of community service. This calls for a nuanced look at hospitality that separates it from its commercial and industrial moorings;

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**Rev. Catherine E. Williams, PhD, is Assistant Professor of Preaching and Worship at Lancaster Theological Seminary. Rev. Williams earned her PhD from Princeton Theological Seminary, where her dissertation focused on developing a distinctive, post-colonial homiletic for Trinidad and Tobago rooted in the indigenous music of calypso.**

this is not the for-profit, transactional kind of neighborliness. Matter of fact, this calls for rooting Christian hospitality in the John 3:16 kind of love God first showed us. This is the premise of Joshua W. Jipp's book *Saved by Faith and Hospitality*. Jipp takes great pains in his book to show how intrinsic to Christian faith hospitality is. Intrinsic because God first showed us hospitality, when we were strangers to God; therefore, as God's people, we are to be extensions and reflections of such divine hospitality to the strangers around us. Jipp writes:

Israel in the Old Testament and the church in the New Testament understood its identity as founded upon God's hospitality, a divine welcome that joined Israel and the church to God. In a sense, then, we learn something about who God is from the human practice of hospitality to strangers, given that the practice is predicated upon our understanding of who God is – the one who extends hospitality to the stranger.<sup>3</sup>

Consider how easy it is - on a national holiday dedicated to acts of service - for those of us who do community service to a) check off that item on our list of good deeds, b) pat ourselves on the back for doing something for those less fortunate than we are, or c) brag about – or even just mention – our volunteerism to someone else: “Oh I can't join you for dinner this evening, I'm going to be tutoring at the Elementary School after-school program after work.”

Volunteering that is grounded in God's hospitality to us puts us in the shadows of humility rather than the limelight of accomplishment. It reminds us that we only know how to love God because God first loved us – it is God who teaches us how to love God. It reminds us that we love our neighbor because God, in Jesus, gives us an example of this other-centered love. Awareness of God's hospitality to us offers us an example of how to extend such hospitality, inclusion, welcome, kindness, and generosity to others. It also opens us up to the possibility that we may receive something of intangible value from those to whom we show kindness. How many times have I heard the congregation's teenagers return from their week-long mission trips to help make homes safer, drier, and warmer, overwhelmed by some unusual kindness shown to them? These teenagers return with the intangible gift of an altered perspective on life that takes into account realities they had not previously imagined. They return with the gift of their own heightened gratitude for the amenities they daily take for granted. I have heard the young people say things like: “The family grilled burgers for us on our last day, something they can only afford to eat at rare and special occasions. This was their way of lavishly saying ‘thank you.’” This is the kind of reciprocity involved in radical hospitality, where we leave the encounter with a sense that we are richer than before, that in this new relationship with God's people we have been standing on “holy ground.”<sup>4</sup>

*Volunteering that is grounded in God's hospitality to us puts us in the shadows of humility rather than the limelight of accomplishment.*

The sermon on this day of service would do well to inspire people to consider immigrant and refugee groups in the community. There are not too many neighborhoods these days that have not felt the impact of these “strangers.” What light does the biblical notion of hospitality, or love of the stranger, shed on our response to the refugees or immigrants in our communities? Over and over in the Old Testament, God commands Israel to be hospitable to the most vulnerable among them. The basis for their hospitality was the collective memory of their own vulnerability: “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt” (Deut. 16:12). When we in the United States pause to consider that, apart from the first peoples or Native Americans, all other ancestors were pilgrims, strangers, travelers who came to this place from somewhere else, this should temper how we treat contemporary pilgrims, strangers, and travelers who come to this place, by whatever means, for food and shelter. *Remember where you came from* was the divine injunction to the people of God then. *Remember where you came from* is the divine injunction to the people of God today. This memory should serve up large doses of gratitude, out of which we do our service to others.

Today's sermon can also encourage listeners to consider acts of community service that are rooted in the two greatest commandments – love of God and love of neighbor. This kind of hospitality is unusual because it is a) welcoming and inclusive, b) focused on kindness, c) tilted towards generosity, d) crossing boundaries and other-centered, and e) humbly reciprocal. The anchoring idea of this kind of sermon is that King's passionate belief in the power of divinely-inspired love can be perpetuated through our acts of radical hospitality and service on this MLK Day of Service. There are Gospel texts that resonate with this kind of service. Among the most well-known ones is the Luke 4:18-19 passage where Jesus lays out the foundation of his life of service to the poor, the captives, those who will not see, and the oppressed. A second Gospel text that resonates with this kind of radical service is Matthew 25:35-36, where more specific acts of service are highlighted. The preacher is invited to linger deeply with this Matthew passage because of its ever-increasing relevance today. World hunger is spreading, refugee and immigration systems are becoming more

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punitive and inhumane, hospitals and prisons are overcrowded and increasingly populated with those with whom Jesus associates: “the least of these.” How – for the sake of Jesus, and in the legacy of a great African-American prophet – will we honor this national day of service?

The following five perspectives on hospitality may generate some ideas and attitudes as we prepare to move into action.

Hospitality that is welcoming and inclusive:

- Who are the people in our community who may feel most unwelcome?
- What gestures of welcome can we make that are meaningful to them? Here the emphasis is on *their* perspective rather than ours.
- Reflect on the immediate, profoundly practical welcome given to the strangers in Acts 28.

Hospitality that is focused on unusual kindness:

- What might be the level of kindness expected of us? How might we transcend that expectation in genuine love?
- What messages about the recipients of our kindness might we need to move past? Messages, for example, about what “these people deserve.” How might we move into the realm of mercy, which is treating others better than they deserve?
- Reflect on the social expectations of both strangers and residents in the biblical text, and on how those expectations were transcended.

Hospitality tilted towards generosity:

- How can we find a way to do just a little more than we would normally do, give a little more than we would normally give, spend a little more time than we normally would?
- How can we tap into God’s generous disposition towards us?

- Reflect on the generosity of the Maltese islanders so that the travelers who arrived empty left filled and overflowing with provisions.

Hospitality that is other-centered and boundary-crossing:

- How can we offer service based on the perceived needs of the recipients?
- How can we respect the agency of the recipients of our service?
- Reflect on the social and language boundaries that had to be negotiated between the soldiers, crew, prisoners, and islanders.

Hospitality that is reciprocal:

- How open are we to meeting God in that place of service?
- How willing are we to receive even as we give?
- Reflect on how the Maltese residents received gifts of healing and wholeness even as they gave provisions and shelter.

A meaningful homily for this MLK Day of Service will be grounded in nuanced reflections on the Acts narrative, the origin and significance of the National Day of Service, and the existential realities of the communities serviced by the congregation. May the Spirit of God infuse divine energy into preachers and listeners alike. 

**Notes:**

1. <https://www.nationalservice.gov/serve-your-community/mlk-day-service>. Accessed December 19, 2019.
2. Martin Luther King, Jr., *I Have a Dream: Written Speeches that Changed the World*, edited by James M. Washington (NYC: HarperCollins, 1992), 44.
3. Joshua W. Jipp, *Saved by Faith and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 3.
4. John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers and Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 2.

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**BARTHOLOMEW: THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE..., from page 3**

law. This situation has resulted throughout the centuries in this community being the object of discrimination in varying degrees. In spite of this history and present situation, and perhaps because of it, the witness of this Patriarch and his Church has an authenticity in the contemporary world. However, this positive aspect should not overshadow the unnecessary injustice and pain of many years.

It was a privilege once again to renew, in an all too brief time, a friendship of great meaning. My hope is that

in conveying something of that relationship to a larger audience, something that I have not done in the past, I have been able to move it beyond the limits of a personal bond and to remind others of the continuing witness of Bartholomew I.<sup>1</sup> 

**Notes:**

1. If that concluding phrase sounds similar, it picks up the title of a book which several of us published in 2013: *The Witness of Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch*.

# Holiness Unbound: A Brief History of Ecumenical Engagement in the Jesuit Bollandist Society

By Bernard Joassart, SJ

Translated by Iriini de Saint Sernin and Aaron Hollander

The notions of sainthood and holiness have been underpinning Christianity from its very beginning. Saints have been honored and treasured from time immemorial and this is still the case for most of the Christian churches – each in its own way. One cannot understand what Christianity has meant, and what it means today, without taking the saints into account. Saints’ stories have long fascinated and inspired the public, and therefore it was to be expected that many different scholars would decide to publish collections of saints’ lives in the Middle Ages. However, it is with the scholarship of the Bollandist Fathers, beginning in the sixteenth century, that the dedicated study of hagiography developed in earnest – a study that required the input and collaboration of scholars representing numerous Christian traditions. Today, more than four hundred years later, this community of Jesuits in Belgium is still considered the standard reference point in the field of hagiography. As such, the Bollandist Society is committed to being a bridge on which the divided churches can reflect together on the lives and afterlives of the saints.

It was around the turn of the sixteenth century that the Jesuit Héribert Rosweyde (1569-1629) developed a project to publish a collection of lives of some 1300 saints, in accordance with the most rigorous historical and philological criteria of his time; this project’s definitive agenda would be described in Rosweyde’s booklet, *Fasti Sanctorum* (Antwerp, 1607). This was a time when Protestant reforms were prevalent and divisive across Europe. Rosweyde himself was born in the Netherlands (Utrecht, specifically), where Calvinism was the majority denomination and the other confessions remained tolerated; like many of his Jesuit colleagues from that area (from which several of the first Bollandists would also hail), he had to enter the Jesuit Province of Belgium (which covers the southern Netherlands as well). Yet Rosweyde was also well aware of the situation of the Holy Roman Empire (deeply divided between Catholics and Lutherans), of the persecutions endured by Catholics in England (following the schism of Henry VIII), as well as the clashes between Catholics and Protestants in France despite the recently signed Edict of Nantes (1598), which was supposed to pacify minds.

Rosweyde’s collection was not universal; some very well-known saints are not mentioned in his survey since he was working on the basis of manuscripts discovered in the southern Netherlands and northern France and there was little chance that some texts, even in Latin translation, would be found there. And yet, in his *Fasti Sanctorum*, with the

1300 characters selected for the eventual collection of lives, he was committed to commemorating not only European or Mediterranean saints but also about 160 saints who lived in one or another region of the East. Rosweyde’s project, ultimately, never saw the light of day, consumed as he was by other tasks. However, he left behind a masterpiece, the *Vitae Patrum* (Antwerp, 1616), which brings together the lives of saints with historical and spiritual writings relating to the origins of monasticism in Egypt and Syria.

In 1630, Jean Bolland (1596-1665) took over the project and expanded it beyond its originator’s already ambitious perimeter. In the *Acta Sanctorum* collection, Bolland envisioned providing the portfolio of all the saints of each day of the year, in which he would present a synthesis of all the available knowledge he could gather from the texts relating to their lives and the history of their worship.

This primarily historical enterprise was aligned with the overall objectives of the Society of Jesus, striving to bring “separated brethren” back into the unity of the faith. Bolland’s masterful general introduction to the *Acta Sanctorum*, placed at the beginning of the first volume of January, contains a call to “dissidents” to read the *Lives* of saints, precisely so as to find the answers to many of their doctrinal objections and thereafter to re-enter the fold of the Catholic Church. He wrote:

I address you who, deceived by the seductions of your foolish masters or raised among heretics, have been instructed in false doctrines of religion from your tenderest years; to you who, however, are not so hardened that you would not want to go back if you were convinced of your mistakes. You certainly have reasons to doubt and to seek the truth seriously, since you are not unaware that you are facing off against the sensibility of those many provinces that keep intact the religion received from their ancestors, and where so many men of deep science and eminent virtue demonstrate, by their writings, by the preaching of true doctrine, by all their conduct, that they have preserved the mysteries of faith as they were in the Apostles’ time. If, perhaps, these thoughts have never occurred to you, then at last take up their books, either to study antiquity or to satisfy your desire to know; I only ask you to reflect in this way.

You will see – not only in recent centuries, but also from the cradle of our religion – that the Supreme Pontiff has possessed supreme and sacred authority to define

*continued on page 16*

**Fr. Bernard Joassart, SJ, is a professional historian and the archivist of the Société des Bollandistes.**

*This primarily historical enterprise was aligned with the overall objectives of the Society of Jesus, striving to bring “separated brethren” back into the unity of the faith.*

the dogmas of faith and to judge all controversies that arise in matters of doctrine; that it is by his order that the general councils have been assembled; that it is by his decision that they have been approved; that it is on his advice that all parts of the Christian Republic have been based and supported. You will learn that the saints were venerated and honored even during the heroic times of Christianity; that their relics were placed and preserved with honor; that the practice of good works has always been in force; that there is no trace of this imputed holiness preached to you by your teachers. Going back to the highest antiquity, you will not find a man fanatical enough to have said that the crimes defended and punished by God come by the order of his providence; you will not meet anyone who remains unpunished, after having been guilty of it, no matter how great his faith may have been, unless he has at the same time made worthy fruits of penance. You will also learn that Christ, the author of our salvation, is truly received in the Eucharist; that sins must be confessed to priests according to ancient practice; that priests must be consecrated by bishops to exercise their powers legitimately; that the faithful are accustomed to be anointed with holy chrism by the hands of the bishops, and the dying to receive extreme unction from the hands of priests, as a sign of the particular grace that strengthens them: the latter against the attacks of the devil at the last moment of life, the former against the wrath of the tyrants. Finally, you will recognize that from the beginning faith has always been pure in the Church, that she has always had the same discipline, the same degrees in her hierarchy, the same liturgy... Open your eyes to this divine truth, and embrace the holiness of life that she prescribes for you.<sup>1</sup>

This “holiness of life” prescribed by the church, of course, is what Bolland identifies as manifested most vividly and persuasively in the lives of the saints. Bolland’s project was “Roman Catholic” above all, but he was convinced that, over time, openings for reunion with the separated churches would widen – albeit cautiously. He and his first immediate collaborators, Godefroid Henschenius (1601-1681) and Daniel Papebroch (1628-1714), were strongly encouraged, particularly by their religious colleague Pierre Poussines (1609-1686), to publish Greek hagiographical texts in their original language and no longer in Latin translation alone. But above all, it was during a long scientific journey through Germany, Italy, and France, from July 1660 to December 1662, that Henschenius and Papebroch came into more direct contact with the “Greek” world. The riches

of the great libraries, particularly those of Italy and France, would enable them to discover a large number of manuscripts containing “Greek” lives that, gradually, would be published in the *Acta Sanctorum*. In Paris, Papebroch discovered the famous “Sirmond’s Synaxary,” which would go on to serve a glorious purpose in the twentieth century when Papebroch’s successor, Hippolyte Delehaye (1859-1941), made use of this document while preparing his edition of the Constantinople Synaxary (1905). We will come back to this later.

One of the early means used by Bollandists to obtain documentation for the publication of their works was correspondence with the scholarly world of their time. Scholars of all Christian denominations appreciated the quality of the Bollandists’ scientific work. The Bollandist Fathers remained staunchly Roman Catholic, despite attracting on various occasions Rome’s wrath and suspicion of heterodoxy. But this did not prevent them from maintaining correspondence with scholars who did not share this Roman Catholic affiliation. They counted, for example, James Ussher (1581-1656), Anglican Archbishop of Armagh, and Protestant Godefroid Leibnitz (1643-1716), among their scholarly friends. Even within Catholicism, the Bollandists would develop relationships with openly Jansenist scholars. Among others, we can mention the Oratorian Pasquier Quesnel (1634-1719), the Parisian Canon Claude Chastelain (1639-1712), and the Auxerre Canon Jean Lebeuf (1687-1760).

The work of the Bollandists stopped between 1795 and 1837, a hiatus due first to the suppression of the Society of Jesus, and later because of the annexation of the territory in which they operated by the French revolutionary army. The revival of their work in 1837 was particularly difficult as no Bollandist from the last generation had survived and their Library, renowned for its richness, had been pillaged and then dispersed. However, what we would today call an “ecumenical” outlook (the term was, of course, not yet in use at the time) was on the rise among the new generation that rebuilt the society and renewed its scholarly efforts. Quite quickly, for instance, the Christian East aroused the curiosity of some Bollandists, such as Antoine Tinnebroeck (1816-1855), Édouard Carpentier (1822-1868), and Henri Matagne (1833-1872). Unfortunately, these men would die too young, without being able to give the full measure of their talent.

We must also mention Victor De Buck (1817-1876) in this category of “ecumenically” minded Bollandists. De Buck was certainly above all a specialist in the Latin world, but the man was curious about everything – a real “jack of all trades,” in the good sense of the phrase. His hagiographical research gave him an in-depth knowledge of the Church’s ancient history of the centuries before the

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great divisions. He was also a friend of Ivan Gagarin (1814-1882) and Ivan Martynov (1821-1894), Russian Orthodox by birth, who later professed their Catholic faith and entered the Society of Jesus in France.

The first of these two, a former diplomat of the high aristocracy of the Tsarist Empire, launched the famous magazine *Études* with the help of a French Jesuit, Charles Daniel. Gagarin wanted the Russian Church to be reconciled with Rome: in his eyes, such reconciliation would be the best chance for the survival of Holy Russia. He spoke at length with the Bollandist De Buck to see precisely how to convince both the tsar and the high dignitaries of the Russian Church of the necessity of this reconciliation.

De Buck embraced the views of his Russian friend. He did not hesitate to publish in *Études* two “Essays on Conciliation”: one on the Holy Spirit, and another on eschatology (with a third on the government of the Church unfortunately remaining in draft form). These three elements of the Christian faith are, it can be said, apples of discord between the Catholic and Orthodox confessions – yet, in the eyes of the Bollandist, they were not irreparable and could be resolved! De Buck strongly encouraged Gagarin in all the latter’s endeavors to bring the two churches closer together.

Martynov, also a collaborator on *Études* with Gagarin, was truly a researcher in the Bollandist spirit. He would even be approached at one point to join the group of Belgian hagiographers but it led nowhere due to the opposition of the Belgian government. This, however, did not prevent Martynov from collaborating with the *Acta Sanctorum*. He researched several saints’ portfolios, but more importantly he published the thick in-folio *Annus ecclesiasticus graeco-slavicus* in 1863, on the occasion of the millennial commemoration of Sts. Cyril and Methodius beginning their work among the Slavs. It was soon included in the *Acta Sanctorum* collection.

Anglicanism also attracted De Buck’s attention as presenting possibilities for partnership. The Oxford Movement was very active at the time and De Buck became convinced that the High Church of England observed a faith very close to that of Catholicism. To him, Anglicanism was capable of being part of the ecclesial communion that existed prior to the schism of Henry VIII, and therefore, in his view, Anglican ordinations were valid.

This openness of the Bollandist, certainly marked by a little naivety (while he was an attentive observer of both national and international politics, he was probably not sensitive enough to the political aspects that so often accompany divisions between Christians), would lead him to be chosen as the personal theologian of his General, Pierre Beckx, during the first Vatican Council. It would also

be a source of trouble for him with the Roman authorities, which were obviously not yet ready, as they had become by the Second Vatican Council, to recognize that the churches which are not in full communion with Rome have nonetheless retained parts, and often important parts, of the faith inherited from the Apostles.

The generation of Bollandists that succeeded De Buck were led by Charles De Smedt (1833-1911), who introduced the methods of positive criticism into the Bollandist workshop; this generation would include some members particularly interested in the Eastern Christian arena. However, it was not until Paul Peeters (1870-1950) was appointed to the Society in 1904 that Bollandism spread its wings to the distant lands of Russia and the entire Caucasian world – even as the Bolshevik revolution proved a powerful brake that closed many doors to the enterprise. Peeters worked from the brilliant intuition – though it would take him a long time to substantiate it – that not every Eastern Christian text is necessarily a translation of an original Greek text (as had been the widely accepted theory). Examples of his studies in this field include his long treatises on *The Canonization of Saints in the Russian Church* (1914) and his *Georgian Monastic Histories* (1922).

In the Byzantine domain, Hippolyte Delehaye carried the torch lit by Papebroch. Very early on, Delehaye was noteworthy for his studies in this field. One of his masterpieces was his edition of the Synaxary of the Church of Constantinople (1902), a majestic in-folio work based on the famous Sirmond Synaxary. Even if today’s specialists detect errors in the details, this publication still remains an essential reference.

The Bollandist posture of openness to other churches was maintained and amplified among Delehaye and his collaborators. As the historical-critical method was gaining in reputation, many scholars of Delehaye’s day took to publishing critical editions of sources. Germany in particular had a strong presence in this field, and the Bollandists seized the opportunity not only to benefit from these publications but also to maintain friendly relations with their producers, regardless of the Christian tradition to which they belonged. They valued the contributions of the Protestant Adolf von Harnack, for example, even if they did not endorse all his opinions. Russia was no less active than Germany, and the St. Petersburg National Library became an inexhaustible reservoir of hagiographic texts. The Bollandists’ connections with the Assumptionist center in Kadıköy also led them to the Greek Church, and on the Anglican side they had many contacts as well. Staying regularly in Oxford, Delehaye maintained especially friendly relations with the Anglican exegete Cuthbert Turner, not hesitating to seek hospitality in his Oxford college – a notable breach of the

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Society's rule that a Jesuit travelling abroad should take up residence in a house of his Order if there is one where he is going.

When he wrote his volume *Sanctus* (1927), Delehaye devoted the last chapter of the book to "holiness"; he had, not least, to ask himself about the existence of holiness outside Catholicism. As an eminent Byzantinist he was well aware of the neomartyrs, those victims of Ottoman imperialism, which led him to consider the East in its entirety and its diversity (his treatment of the Protestant world is somewhat less sympathetic). It is worthwhile to study the pages he devotes to this subject, here translated into English for the first time. Of course, the spirit of Vatican II will not be found there, but it is clear that Delehaye recognizes that the "separated churches" have maintained something essential and authentic of holiness:

All Christian groups, except Protestants, give the saints the same honors as we do. Their 'sanctoral' includes two parts: the saints who also appear in the Catholic calendar, the Blessed Virgin, the apostles, the martyrs of the first persecutions, the former Fathers; and a part specific to each of the national churches that were formed after the separation. Orientals (Copts, Ethiopians, Syrians, Armenians, Georgians) have their saints whom the Roman Church ignores; the Greeks equally so, and the Russians. In recent centuries, they have included in their calendars many new saints, following a procedure inspired by the Roman discipline of canonization. ... So what to say about the saints in this calendar from after the fullness of the schism? And what about holiness in general in the separated churches?

First of all, it should be noted that the Greek schism was not a one-day affair, and that no attempt should be made to set a date for total separation from Rome. The split was slow. It was first accomplished in the higher echelons, and it took many years, let us say centuries, to reach the disastrous consequences that were the logical outcome. For a long time, the links between Rome and Byzantium had been rather loose, and the rupture did not produce a violent tremor. The religious life of the people was not significantly affected. The monastery system remained intact. As before, there were solitaries and cenobites who distinguished themselves by their piety and the practices of austere penance. And for a long time, hagiography continued to bear no trace of the dissent that separated the two churches. What can be said about the saints registered in the Greek calendar since the schism ... is that the Church does not canonically recognize them. But will we go so far as to say that, from that day on, holiness withdrew from the Greek Church?

On the subject of holiness in the separated churches, recent theologians have taken up ideas already stated by the Fathers of old. They first point out that these churches are not completely deprived of the means of sanctification available to the Catholic Church. The Oriental and Orthodox churches are indeed well-equipped with them. ... Protestants participate less well in these means, but even they do not lack spiritual help.

Moreover, there is a distinction to be made between the first perpetrators of dissent, the outlaws themselves, and the masses dragged along the path traced by those leaders – between those whose conscience has warned them [in vain] of the duty to return to the fold and the vast majority of those others whose formation has left the almost indelible and imbued mark of secular prejudices that are morally impossible to shake. Among the latter, there are undoubtedly some who seek God with all their heart. To these God does not refuse his gifts, and it is not up to us to set limits to his liberalities and to exclude free gifts or mystical graces. ... [And] nothing prevents us from finding, outside the visible Church, the heroic virtues, even martyrdom, in a word holiness.<sup>2</sup>

Did the following generations of Bollandists retain the same interest in the saints of other Christian churches? Did their interest develop following the ecumenical opening of Vatican II? Paul Devos (1913-1995), Michel van Esbroeck (1934-2003), and Ugo Zanetti (1948-) can be mentioned here, as they all focused on Eastern lands, inevitably encountering those saints who do not fall within the canonical frameworks of the Church of Rome, but who are nevertheless authentic disciples of Christ. Bollandist relations with non-Catholic scholars and church leaders remain very real and cordial to this day. The contemporary Bollandists, for example, had the pleasure and privilege of the visit of Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens to the Bollandists' library during his trip to Brussels in 2003. He was welcomed with joy. Among the Bollandists' friends today is Metropolitan Athanasius of Achaia, the official representative of the Church of Greece to the European Union, who does not hesitate to come and work in the library and maintain friendly relations.

Last but not least, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I has expressed his admiration for the Bollandists' scholarship and stated his wish to come and visit our centre of hagiographical studies during one of his trips to Brussels in the very near future. Our study of saintly exemplars has been conceived as all-encompassing from the very beginning, and today's Bollandists still strive to accomplish Rosweyde's and Bolland's plan so clearly stated in the full title of the *Acta Sanctorum*, *Acta Sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur*: "the Acts of the Saints wherever in the world they are celebrated." 

#### Notes:

1. Jean Bolland, Introduction to *Acta Sanctorum* 1, Chapter 5 §III (Brussels: Bollandist Society, 1643).

2. Hippolyte Delehaye, *Sanctus: essai sur le culte des saints dans l'antiquité* [Holiness: An essay on the cult of the cult of the saints in antiquity] (Brussels: Bollandist Society, 1927), 255-257.

# Helping to Get the Word Out: Digitizing Ecumenical Resources at the Centro Pro Unione

By Diane C. Kessler

The Centro Pro Unione, an ecumenical research and action center of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement in Rome, Italy, is in the process of digitizing and indexing all the official texts of international ecumenical dialogues, and is making them available on its website, [www.prounione.it](http://www.prounione.it). These texts are, in the words of my former professor Gabriel Fackre, “a gift of the Christian community.” The Centro has offered a new way to open the gift.

According to the Director of the Centro, Fr. James Puglisi, SA, this initiative, which began five years ago and is in continuing process, will include a historical page for each dialogue, with information about dates, meeting locations, themes, and bibliography, as well as the complete text of agreed statements. “These dialogues,” Fr. Puglisi said, “years in the making, sometimes lead to significant breakthroughs which, in turn, have the potential to impact relationships in local settings. We want to help get the word out.”

To locate a particular text, go to the Centro’s website; choose “Ecumenism” on the top bar, then select “Interconfessional Dialogues” and “Full-text Documents Collection.” The texts will be of particular value to theologians, scholars, and researchers; to those responsible for ecumenical leadership in local settings, as touchstones and reference materials; and to those in subsequent dialogues who want to build on what already has been accomplished.

They also, however, may appeal to the ecumenically curious, who, for example, want to see what the Catholic Church and the World Evangelical Alliance have said about “the church, evangelization, and the bonds of *koinonia*” [Feb. 17-26, 2002, Second Series]; what Lutherans and Catholics said about “Martin Luther – witness to Jesus Christ” [May 2-7, 1983, Second Phase]; what Anglicans and Roman Catholics said about “learning to be the church – local, regional, universal” [May 14-10, 2017, ARCIC Third Phase]; what churches, together, have said about ecumenical dialogue on moral issues [Joint Working Group (JWG), Phase 1991-1998]; an analysis of Roman Catholic participation in councils of churches [JWG, Phase 1998-2005]; studies of reception, a key to ecumenical progress, and of the spiritual roots of ecumenism [JWG, Phase 2006-2013].

Fr. Puglisi said that he, the librarian and the Centro’s web-master are collaborating in the effort. The undertaking is ambitious. “It takes several hours to do one document,” Fr. Puglisi said. They began with dialogues in which the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) is one of the partners. The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU)

is cross-referencing that material. All reports of the Joint Working Group, created after Vatican II to facilitate the relationship between the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, now are available.

Although the Centro is located at Piazza Navona in Rome, its voluminous resources are accessible throughout the globe. Its library specializes in ecumenical materials and, with 22,500 volumes and 400 periodicals, it is widely regarded as the most significant such collection in the world. The library’s records are updated daily and are searchable in an online catalogue. The website also has information about the Centro’s three week summer course on ecumenical and interreligious movements, held in Rome; material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; forthcoming ecumenical and inter-religious events, particularly in Rome; a collection of audio podcasts from ecumenical leaders such as Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, and Walter Cardinal Kasper, President Emeritus of the PCPCU; and “120 Seconds of Ecumenism.” In the words of Dr. Teresa Rossi, Associate Director of the Centro and creator of “120 Seconds,” the brief interviews with ecumenical leaders offer a “visual space of ecumenical formation, an increasingly urgent task for all churches.” Full disclosure: I gave an interview for “120 Seconds” on ecumenical hospitality.

The Centro has been a center for ecumenical hospitality from its foundation. During the Second Vatican Council, it was the location for conversations among ecumenical observers, who were guests of the then Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, and between these visiting experts and various Catholic bishops. It is fitting, then, that in this digital age, the Centro is making available the fruits of so many ecumenical dialogues that were inspired by the vision of the Vatican II’s Decree on Ecumenism. 

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*Diane Kessler retired as executive director of the Massachusetts Council of Churches in 2007, after serving the Council for thirty-two years. A graduate of Oberlin College and Andover Newton Theological School, she is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. She edited the English report of the 8th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) held in Harare, Zimbabwe, and served two terms on the Joint Working Group (1999-2006, 2007-2013) responsible for fostering relationships between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church. She has authored or edited six books and numerous articles pertaining to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.*

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