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MUNU CHRYSANTUS MBIEMIEH, MHM

**THE VISION OF THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF POPE
FRANCIS: A FOCUS ON ITS MISSIONARY DIMENSION
IN THE LIGHT OF *EVANGELII GAUDIUM***

Supervisor

Rev. Dr. Patrick Roe, CSSP

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Bachelor of Arts in Theology

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DEDICATION

To my maternal grandmother – Mie-fembwain Ma-Yielleh Justina Ngwa-Mvie who
is of blessed memory.

EPIGRAPH

“We do not live better when we flee, hide, refuse to share, stop giving, and lock ourselves up in our own comfort zones. Such a life is nothing less than a slow suicide”. And he warned that being a missionary was not a part-time activity but required complete surrender to a new kind of existence - a soul-filled other-centeredness. A Church that heals by direct personal contact. Pope Francis

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is true that our prayers of thanksgiving adds nothing to the greatness of God but since it makes us grow in His love, I dare raise my heart in utter thanksgiving to Him for everything He has done and been in my life, a faithful God without deceit, a God who is right and just. Love so amazing, love so divine demands my soul, my life, my all.

I wish to also render immense thanks to my late father, Mr. Munu Augustine Ngwateh, who brought me up in the spirit of love and kindness. I am equally grateful to my mom, Mrs. Munu Christina and my siblings who were for me the immediate laboratory for experiments in love and friendship. Immense thanks equally go to the entire Mill Hill Missionary Society family for training and helping me nurture the vocation to the ministerial priesthood. I render my immense sentiments of gratitude to the entire Tangaza University family especially the lecturers in the Faculty of Theology who exposed me to this vast intellectual treasury. In this respect I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Patrick Roe, C.S.Sp., whose deep insight and fatherly corrections helped in enriching the quality of this thesis

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Theology. It has never been submitted to any other University for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed:.....

Name of Student:.....

Date:.....

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as the University College supervisor.

Signed:.....

Name of Supervisor:.....

Date:.....

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ABBREVIATIONS

al.	alii – other persons
Cf.	Confer
ed.	Edited by
EG	Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter “ <i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> ” on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World (24 November 2013)
eg.	For example
Gen.	Genesis
GS	Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World <i>Gaudium et Spes</i> (7 December 1965)
ie	id est – that is
Lk	Luke
LS	Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter <i>Laudato Si</i> on care our common Home (24 May 2015)
LG	Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. <i>Lumen Gentium</i> (21 November 1964)
Matt.	Matthew
OV	Paul VI, Apostolic Letter “ <i>Octogesima Adveniens</i> ” on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical <i>Rerum Novarum</i> (14 May 1971)
Rom.	Romans
VD	Benedict XVI, Post – Synodal apostolic exhortation “ <i>Verbum Domini</i> ” on The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church (30 September 2010)

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The charismatic words and gestures of Pope Francis continue to attract the attention of the entire world, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, and people of other religious practices and traditions from across the globe. For us Catholics, Francis' vision of what it means to be Church in our contemporary society has slowly emerged towards mission that is, going forth to others since he became pope in March 2013.¹ The Holy Father wants the Church to face outward - to have a "missionary option," to acquire a "missionary key" (*EG*, 27, 33, 34). He believes that "to go out of ourselves and to join others is healthy for us," as human beings and as a Church (*EG*, 87). This in itself is good in the order of nature and in the order of grace. In putting this into reality we imitate the Lord who went forth first proclaiming the Gospel to all (*EG*, no. 24). This missionary and charismatic overtone will eventually "affect the way we communicate the message" of the Gospel to those we encounter (*EG*, no. 34). It is from this backdrop that Paul Zulehner in his contribution on the "Missionary Transformation of the Church" points out to the fact that behind the central issue of mission lies the question of the Church's vision, by which the Holy Father is guided in his pontificate. It is primarily characterized by the renunciation of a moralizing approach in favor of a healing and therapeutic approach on the part of the Church; in which Francis refer to a

¹ Cf. R. RYAN, "Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis", 81.

hierarchy of truths and to compassion as the guiding principle in pastoral ministry.² It is from this perspective that he says the Church must be freed of its structural, middle-class-focused self-absorption, for the church will only be healed by finding its way towards people on the periphery of life.³

Flowing from this one can conclude without an iota of doubt that the ecclesiological perspective of Francis is both appealing in its vitality and overwhelming in the challenges it presents to both the Christian community as a whole and to the individual believer. Even though Pope Francis has not written a systematic treatise on the church per se, a number of salient ecclesiological themes are present in his writings and in the talks he has delivered.⁴ Francis wants a Church that is on mission, reaching out to others and accompanying them, especially those on the periphery; a merciful Church that is hospitable for all those who have been wounded in this world; a Church that builds bridges, not walls. He wants a church that is poor and for the poor, one that rejects careerism; a church that is committed to encounter, inclusion and reconciliation, not one that is confrontational, self-referential or judgmental.⁵ He wants a synodal church, in which the bishops and faithful people walk together and authority is understood as service.

The aim of this long essay will therefore be to show the missionary dimension of Pope Francis' ecclesiology in the light of *Evangelii Gaudium* and its challenges towards the transformation of our contemporary society. To accomplish this task, the work will be compartmentalized into four chapters. Chapter one, will target the preliminary considerations that surround this topic and will eventually set a background

² Cf. K. KRAMER-K. VELLGUTH eds., *Evangelii Gaudium: Voices of the Universal Church*, ix-x

³ Cf. K. Kramer-K. Vellguth eds., *Evangelii Gaudium: Voices of the Universal Church*, x

⁴ Cf. R. RYAN, "Ecclesiological Themes in the Teachings of Pope Francis", 81.

⁵ Cf. R. RYAN, "Ecclesiological Themes in the Teachings of Pope Francis", 81.

to the entire work. In chapter two, we will explore the vision of his ecclesiology in the light of mission that is the church as communion, a church in solidarity and a servant church which will form the bedrock on which the entire work will depend.⁶ This vision of the Church faces challenges both from within and without the Church which is characterized by individualism, materialism among others. These tendencies or obstacles are in opposition to Francis' missionary transformation. This will form the basis of chapter three. And finally, chapter four will focus on Francis' vision of a vibrant and accommodative Church in the light of his ecclesiology. The work will end with a conclusion and a select bibliography.

⁶ Cf. R. RYAN, "Ecclesiological Themes in the Teachings of Pope Francis", 81.

Chapter I

Preliminary Considerations

1.0 Introduction

When the Holy Father stepped out on the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica for the very first time on that cool evening of March 13, 2013, the crowd in the square below, and those watching around the world asked themselves: who is this man? What will he do as the leader of the Church?⁷ This chapter will attempt to answer the above questions and at the same time shading light on some key terminologies in order to avoid ambiguity of terms and so facilitates the reading and understanding of this project. This input will help us appreciate Francis' vision of the Church.

1.1 The Biography of Pope Francis

In order for us to be able to make a clear connection between the person of Francis and his ecclesiology it is apt for us to answer the questions: who is he and where is he coming from?

⁷ . Cf. R. MOYNIHAN, *Pray for me: The Life and Spiritual Vision of Pope Francis*, vii

1.1.1 A Panoramic View of the Life of Jorge Bergoglio up to his Elevation as Cardinal

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was born on 17 December 1936 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. His parents are Mario Bergoglio and Regina Sivori. They were blessed with five children, of whom Jorge was the eldest. He was baptized eight days after his birth, that is, on Christmas day in the Almagro basilica of Our Lady Help of Christians by Don Enrico. The single greatest childhood influence on Jorge was his grandmother Rosa, a formidable woman of deep faith and political skill, with whom he spent most of his first five years.⁸ With his dream of serving the Church as a priest, Jorge Bergoglio was admitted at the Theological Faculty of San Miguel where he studied his theology and in December 1969 he was ordained for the Society of Jesus popularly known as the Jesuits. Between 1973 and 1979 he was entrusted with the responsibility to act as the Jesuit Provincial in his home country. And shortly after 1986 he completed his doctoral thesis in Germany on the work of Romano Guardini, the German Catholic philosopher whose work in the 1930s criticized Nazi views of Jesus, by so doing emphasizing his Jewishness. After his return to Argentina he was assigned as a spiritual director and confessor in Cordoba, the second small city.⁹ In 1992, the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Cardinal Antonio Quarracino recommended him to Rome partly due to his deteriorating health to be consecrated as one of his auxiliary bishops. That same year Rome accepted the request and Bergoglio received his episcopal consecration on June with the motto *Miserando atque eligendo* that is, by having mercy and by choosing. Subsequently he was appointed the Coadjutor Archbishop of Buenos which gave him automatic right of

⁸ Cf. A. IVEREIGH, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, 11-13

⁹ Cf. P. VALLELY, *Pope Francis Untying the Knots*, 58-59.

succession in case Cardinal Quarracino retires or dies. And in 1998, after the death of Antonio, he succeeded him as the chief shepherd of the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires¹⁰

As Archbishop, Bergoglio's reputation began to spread even beyond the Church circles. Instead of moving into the elegant Archbishop's house in Olivos which was close to the presidential estate, he chose to remain in the four Spartan rooms made up of an office, bedroom, library and chapel attached to the archdiocesan office adjacent to the cathedral in down town Buenos Aires.¹¹ As a result of his good leadership as Archbishop Jorge Bergoglio was raised and proclaimed Cardinal in the consistory of February 2001, with the title of St. Roberto Bellarmino by Pope John Paul II who later became a saint. As cardinal he served the Church as a member of the following Vatican dicasteries: Congregations of Divine Worship and Discipline of Sacraments, Clergy, Consecrated Life, the Family among others. He often set social outreach, rather than doctrinal battles, as priorities of his pastoral approach.¹²

1.1.2 Some Major Highlights of Jorge Bergoglio as Cardinal

Jorge cardinal Bergoglio during his reign as archbishop and cardinal in Argentina was very courageous and outspoken, both in religious and civil matters. He accused fellow church leaders of hypocrisy and reminded them that Jesus Christ bathed lepers and ate with prostitutes. Jesus teaches us another way: "Go out." *Go out and share your testimony, go out and interact with your brothers and sisters, go out and share, go out and ask.* Become the Word in body as well as spirit, Bergoglio told Argentina's priests. Bergoglio's legacy as cardinal includes his efforts to repair the reputation of a Church that lost many followers by failing to openly challenge

¹⁰ Cf. P. VALLELY, *Pope Francis Untying the Knots*, 60-61.

¹¹ Cf. P. VALLELY, *Pope Francis Untying the Knots*, 102.

¹² Cf. A. IVEREIGH, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, 265.

Argentina's murderous 1976 to 1983 dictatorship. He also worked very hard to recover the Church's traditional political influence in society, but his outspoken criticism of President Cristina Kirchner couldn't stop her from imposing socially liberal measures that are anathema to the church, from gay marriage and adoption of free contraceptives for all. But he fought tirelessly against these policies which were against the dignity of humanity.¹³

He lamented the fact that within the ecclesiastical region there are priests who do not baptize the children of single mothers because they were not conceived in the sanctity of marriage, Bergoglio told his priests. These are today's hypocrites, those who clericalize the Church, those who separate the people of God from salvation. And this poor girl who, rather than returning the child to sender, had the courage to carry the baby into the world, must wander from parish to parish so that the baby may be baptized! Jorge Cardinal Bergoglio compared this concept of Catholicism, this Church of come inside so we make decisions and announcements between ourselves, and those who don't come in, don't belong, to the Pharisees of Christ's time that is, people who congratulate themselves while condemning others. This sort of pastoral approach, aimed at capturing more souls and building walls to keep others outside is bizarre.¹⁴

Another landmark during his reign as a cardinal, which is still very glaring in his pontificate, is his humility. He was always comfortable taking a very low profile, and his personal style was the antithesis of Vatican splendor. It's a very curious thing: When bishops meet, he always wants to sit in the back rows. This sense of humility is very evident in Rome, during the 2013 conclave to choose Benedict's successor. He was sitting at the last bench in the Sistine Chapel. Where others were put up in their colleges

¹³ Cf. A. IVEREIGH, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, 219.

¹⁴ Cf. A. IVEREIGH, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, 220.

or hosted by relatives in large hotels, he stayed as he always did in Rome, in a simple priests' guesthouse number seventy Via della Scrofa. When others were driven to the Vatican by priest secretaries, he walked alone each morning over the Tiber.¹⁵

1.1.3 *Habemus Papam*

On 13 March 2013 at 7:05, Rome time, a large puff of white smoke billowed out from the temporary chimney on the roof the Sistine Chapel. As jubilation swept across the crowd, the bells of St. Peter's began to ring. The crowd took up the chants, *viva il papa*, that is, long live the pope and *Habemus papam*, we have a new pope. After nearly an hour, Cardinal Jean-Louis Pierre Tauran, the senior cardinal-deacon, stepped onto the balcony above the main entrance of St. Peter's Basilica. "*Annuntio vobis gaudium magnum. Habemus papam!*" He declared His Most Eminent and Reverend Jorge Cardinal Bergoglio, SJ, who has chosen for himself the name Francis. Prior to this historic moment in the life of the church, the crowd and the world at large had been avidly discussing the *papabili*-the cardinals thought likely to be elected pope. But they did not recognize the name Bergoglio. He did not figure in their list of anticipated popes.¹⁶

Guided by the Holy Spirit he was elected Supreme Pontiff on the second day of the Conclave, on the fifth ballot. Known until Wednesday as Jorge Bergoglio, the 76-year-old is known as a humble man who denied himself the luxuries that previous Buenos Aires cardinals enjoyed. He came close to becoming pope last time, reportedly gaining the second-highest vote total in several rounds of voting before the election of Pope Benedict XVI. Groups of supporters waved Argentine flags in St. Peter's Square

¹⁵ Cf. A. IVEREIGH, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, 262.

¹⁶ Cf. T. CRAUGHWELL, *Pope Francis: The Pope from the End of the Earth*, 23-24

as Francis, wearing simple white robes, made his first public appearance as pope. “Ladies and Gentlemen, good evening,” he said before making a reference to his roots in Latin America, that his “brother Cardinals have gone almost to the ends of the earth to get him (...) but here we are”. After this informal greeting, Francis’ thoughts and prayers turned to his predecessor, Bishop Emeritus Benedict XVI. And now let us begin this journey, the bishop and the people, this journey of the Church of Rome which presides in charity over all the Churches, a journey of brotherhood in love, of mutual trust. Francis in all humility asks for their prayers and blessings before giving out his papal blessing.¹⁷

1.2 Clarification of Terms

In order for us to avoid ambiguity of terminologies in this thesis, it is important for us to clarify some of the major terms that we will come across in the course of reading this thesis.

1.2.1 The Church

The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* defines the Church as the people of God. This image possesses a considerable juridical dimension and the ascent is on the common condition that all members of the Church share by virtue of their baptism, regardless of their respective roles, in realizing the mission entrusted to them by Christ (Cf. *LG*, 6).¹⁸ It is from this perspective that the Holy Father asserts that: “the church is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, and who bear fruit and rejoice” (*EG*, 24). Therefore, according to him, every single activity of this church should be seen from a missionary perspective. By

¹⁷ Cf. T. CRAUGHWELL, *Pope Francis: The Pope from the End of the Earth*, 28-29.

¹⁸ Cf. J. ARRIETA, *Governance Structure within the Catholic Church*, 1.

relating the Church to a missionary dimension, he emphasized the fact that, the church exists not to talk about itself nor to be talked about, but to announce the Gospel, or better still to talk about Jesus Christ to the world and with the world.¹⁹

1.2.2 Communion

According to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the concept of communion *koinonnia*, which appears with a certain prominence in the texts of the Second Vatican Council, is very suitable for expressing the core of the Mystery of the Church, and can certainly be a key for the renewal of Catholic ecclesiology.²⁰ Communion is the assembling of the Church where we use our talents, abilities, gifts, and possessions to help the poor, needy, and all people with the objective of improving the world in union with the Holy Spirit. This ability of the church where we are invited to use our talents and possessions to help one another is what the Holy Father calls communion or the logic of the incarnation. He frequently describes the Christian life as a call to communion with Christ and with others.²¹ In other words communion is a theological term used by the church to denote bonds of unity.²²

1.2.3 Solidarity

The term “solidarity” as the Holy Father notes, is “poorly understood” by many people; it goes beyond “a few sporadic acts of generosity.” Solidarity for him entails or presumes “the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few” (EG no. 188). He goes further to ascertain that “we are not simply talking about ensuring nourishment or

¹⁹ Cf. A. Spadaro, *My Door is always Open*, 73

²⁰ Cf. J. RATZINGER, *The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, 7

²¹ Cf. A. SPADARO, *My Door is always Open*, 69

²² Cf. A. IVEREIGH, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, 262

a “dignified sustenance” for all people, but also their “general temporal welfare and prosperity” (*EG*, 159). This means education, access to health care, and above all employment, for it is through free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive labor that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives. A just wage enables them to have adequate access to all the other goods which are destined for our common use (*EG*, 192). In this context, solidarity is not simply an invitation to help the poor, but rather it discloses the very essence and identity of the church.

1.2.4 The Poor

According to the Holy Father, when we refer to the “poor,” we are not in any way taking sides with one social class, but what we are doing is inviting all the social classes, rich and poor without distinction, to take seriously the cause of the poor as though it were our own, indeed, as what it really is, the cause of Jesus’ mission. To effectively do this one must “follow Jesus” by following the poor and oppressed. He then reiterates the fact that the poor have shown the church the true way to go. This explains why he teaches that a church that does not join the poor in order to speak out from the side of the poor against the injustices committed against them, is not the true church of Jesus Christ. The poor are supposed to be the privileged recipients of the Gospel (cf. *EG*, 48).

1.2.5 Servant

When Pope Francis speaks of the church as servant, he means a church in which ministry *ad intra* and mission *ad extra* is imbued with the spirit of faithful, humble service as exemplified by Jesus in his ministry.²³ This explains why he says the ministry

²³ Cf. R. RYAN, “Ecclesiological Themes in the Teachings of Pope Francis”, 88

of the Church is that of service which washes, cleans and relieves with mercy.²⁴ Rather than being just a church that welcomes and receives. We try to be a Church that goes out to the world, and goes towards the men and women who do not attend it, who do not know it, who have not been to it, and who are indifferent to it.²⁵

1.2.6 Mission

First and foremost, Francis envisages mission as the need to go to the outskirts to preach the Gospel. That is why he insists that every baptized member of the Catholic faith is called to evangelize and is called to be a missionary disciple. By virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of mission (*EG*, 120). This explains why he places mission at the very heart or centre of the people, and not just a part time occupation, or a badge I can take off; it is not an “extra” or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. He goes on to assert that we exist on this planet because of this mission, the mission to reach out to others.²⁶

1.3 Conclusion

Having completed the important preliminary task of setting forth the background of this work, it is worthwhile at this juncture, to explore the vision of Francis’ ecclesiology in the light of mission. This vision of Francis’ ecclesiology is not a complete rupture from the teachings of his predecessors but he seeks to build his

²⁴ Cf. A. SPADARO, *My Door is Always Open*, 73

²⁵ Cf. A. SPADARO, *My Door is Always Open*, 83

²⁶ Cf. A. IVEREIGH, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, 212

ecclesiology on the solid foundation laid by his predecessors with emphasis on mission and care of the poor in our contemporary society.

Chapter II

The Vision of the Ecclesiology of Pope Francis in the Light of Mission

2.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have explored the life history of Pope Francis from childhood up to when he was elected as the Vicar of Christ. In that same chapter, I also attempted to render less cumbersome some key terminologies by giving a concise definition or better still a descriptive explanation for the sake of clarity and easy digestion of this thesis. This indeed will set a better foundation to the understanding of his vision of the Church which is missionary oriented. This therefore leads us to what this chapter seeks to explore. My concern in this chapter is to find out what exactly is Francis' vision of the Church in this twenty first century which is characterized by so many challenges both from within and without the Church. As I have already highlighted in the previous chapter we will discover that Francis' ecclesiology is not a complete rupture from the teachings of his predecessors and Vatican II but a development of what they held and taught.

2.1 The Foundation of Francis' Vision of the Church

The themes of communion, solidarity and servant Church which Pope Francis takes on board were very instrumental and central in the teaching of Vatican II about the nature and mission of the Church. The council fathers in *Lumen Gentium*, describes the Church as “the Church in Christ is in the nature of sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men...” (*LG*, 1). *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World elaborated on this idea when it teaches that the risen Christ, through the gift of the Spirit, established a new communion among the members of his body, “in which everyone as members one of the other would render mutual service in the measure of the different gifts bestowed on each” (*GS*, 32).²⁷

This ecclesiology of communion has been prominent in official church teachings over the last fifty years. This idea of a Church as *communio* was also very central in the teachings of Pope Saint John Paul II and his immediate successor Benedict XVI. Saint John Paul II during his pontificate proposed an incisive observation about the nature of our contemporary Church on the eve of the new millennium when he insinuated the fact that, “we have to make the Church the home and school of communion: that is the challenge facing us in the new millennium”.²⁸ It is from this perspective that Benedict XVI in one of his encyclicals *Deus Caritas Est* beautifully links communion with Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist with the summons to communion with all Christians in these words: “I cannot possess Jesus Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become his own. Communion draws me out of myself towards

²⁷ Cf. R. RYAN, “Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis”, 81.

²⁸ POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 43.

him, and thus towards unity with all Christians” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 14).²⁹ The essential message here is that the Church is not an island but a body that is called to live in constant union with the other parts of the body. It is from this perspective that Francis further develops his vision of a church as communion.

Vatican II beautifully summarizes the ecclesiology of solidarity in *Gaudium et Spes* as one who reaches out to connect with its contemporary audience through a vivid portrayal of the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. For there is a community of the people of God united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit in their pilgrimage towards the Father’s kingdom. That is why they cherish a deep feeling of solidarity with the human race and its history.³⁰ This is what we are invited to be as Christians. To identify with one another in our daily struggles and joys.

In one of his masterpieces, *Models of the Church*, Avery Dulles talks about the Church as a servant. According to him this notion of the Church is deeply rooted in the teachings of Vatican II, especially the detailed description of the Church’s mission in *Gaudium et Spes*. This Pastoral Constitution spells out clearly the ministry of Jesus as that of constant service to others, and it therefore calls the Church to emulate the Lord by being at the service of the world, especially through fostering the brotherhood and sisterhood of the entire humanity (*GS*, 3). Dulles goes further to discuss this image of servant Church as it is expounded in the work of some prominent theologians such as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Henri de Lubac and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.³¹

²⁹ Cf. R. RYAN, “Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis”, 82.

³⁰ Cf. W. MADGES, *Vatican II Forty Years Later*, 165.

³¹ Cf. R. RYAN, “Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis”, 87.

It is from the same perspective that Francis takes on board and further develops his vision of a Church with great emphasis on mission that is reaching out to all especially to those who are neglected by the society or even the Church.

2.1.1 The Church as Communion

Flowing from the above exposition, it is explicitly clear that Pope Francis' concept of the Church as communion is significantly influenced by his predecessors' and other influential theologians' understanding of the Church as posited above. He frequently describes the Christian life as a call to communion with Christ and with the entire human race irrespective of their gender or color. Francis emphasizes the importance of fostering collegiality in the Church at all levels. This was made evident during the ceremony of blessing and the bestowing of the *pallium* on metropolitan archbishops that took place just a few months after his election as pope; he cited the description in *Lumen Gentium* of the College of Bishops as the expression of the variety and unity of the people of God (*LG*, 22).³² By referring to the Church as a communion, Francis is in other words insinuating the fact that the Church has its own constitutional structure that governs its activities. But he goes further to buttress the fact that this "constitutional structure" of the Church is neither a federal system, where by the individual local Churches affiliate themselves with the universal Church, nor is it a centralized system, in which the local Churches are provinces of the world Church, depended upon the central office. In other words the Universal Church exists in and from the local Churches (Cf. *LG*, 23); conversely the particular Churches live in and from the universal Church. This implies that there is a mutual interpenetration that

³² Cf. R. RYAN, "Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis", 82.

exists between the particular Churches and the Universal Church.³³ It is from this backdrop that Francis criticizes those who equate unity with uniformity. Uniformity, he asserts, kills life. He indeed laments that, “the life of the Church is variety, and when we want to impose uniformity on everyone, we kill the gifts of the Holy Spirit.”³⁴

On a more personal level, the ecclesiology of communion according to Pope Francis gives birth to a spirituality of communion which is evident in his words and actions. That is why he decides to live, not alone in the traditional papal apartment, but in the “house of Saint Martha,” the most celebrated saint because of her hospitality. Francis remarked, “I was always looking for community. I did not see myself as a priest on my own. I need a community.”³⁵ It is from this perspective that Francis is calling for decentralization of the Church and of strengthening episcopal conferences (*EG*, 16, 32). It is important to note at this point that he is not in any way questioning the Petrine office because it still remains the visible center of the Church’s unity.³⁶ On our way to this destination of *communio*, Catholics and other Christians are summoned to make life in the Church an experience of communion where people accept and love one another. In other words the Holy Father is encouraging us to live as one family and not like islands. This call to communion according to Pope Francis must be reflected in the following dimensions of human life.

2.1.1.1 Ecumenism

One of the *raison detre* why John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council was to establish Christian unity for the entire *oikumene*. John invited the Council

³³ Cf. W. KASPER, *Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 48.

³⁴ R. RYAN, “Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis”, 83.

³⁵ R. RYAN, “Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis”, 83.

³⁶ Cf. W. KASPER, *Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 48.

Fathers in the 1960s to find a theological logic to break down the walls between Christian churches and to usher in a new era of dialogue and partnership that we now refer to as ecumenism.³⁷ It is from this background that Francis laments over the fact that we have not fully comprehend talk less of applying the teachings of Vatican II. He speaks of our tendency to create a “privatized” Church, a Church confined to our own group, our own race or tribe, our own country, or even our own friends. He sees this tendency as selfish and as an expression of individualism which is so prevalent in Western cultures and which is fast gaining roots in other continents around the globe. Reacting to this unhealthy tendency, he speaks with a great sense of urgency that:

There is need for the ecumenism of friendship. Here is where his, personal charisma lies. He is convinced that ecumenical friendship is necessary as the indispensable presupposition and accompaniment of theological ecumenism and that it will bear fruit for full unity, how and when Jesus Christ intends.³⁸

At this juncture the Holy Father situates the unity of Christians in its total context and at the same time in the service of the unity and peace of the entire humanity. During the Joint Declaration with the Ecumenical Patriarch, Francis unanimously expressed their common concern for the current situation of the entire Middle East and others parts of the world. In our contemporary society, he says many voices are being raised that we cannot be indifferent to. According to him these voices are inviting all the Churches to live deeply our identity as disciples of the Risen Lord.³⁹

It is from the above perspective that we can better appreciate the Holy Father’s modus operandi in relating to other Christians and people of good will. During one of his homilies Francis commented on the passage where Paul does not tell the Athenians: “this is the encyclopedia of truth. Study this and you have the truth, the truth”. The truth

³⁷ Cf. T. ROSICA, “Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations in the Mind and Heart of Pope Francis”, 418.

³⁸ W. KASPER, *Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 61.

³⁹ Cf. W. KASPER, *Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 55.

does not enter into encyclopedia he said. The truth is an encounter; it is a meeting with the Supreme Truth who is Jesus. He highlighted the fact that no one can own the truth but we receive it when we encounter the person. He then warns that Christians who are afraid to build bridges and prefer to build walls are Christians who are not sure of their faith, not sure of Jesus Christ. The Pope exhorted Christians to do as Paul did and begin to build bridges and to reach out to our Christian brothers and sisters.⁴⁰ It is not enough to meet once a year during the week for Christian unity and after that we fall back to our respective denominations and start criticizing one another. We are rather called to integrate the fruits of this week of Christian unity into our daily Christian lives by living in harmony with one another.

2.1.1.2 Interreligious dialogue

The Roman Pontiff's spirit filled ecclesiology and spirituality of communion is also evident in his well-known exhortations or better still invitation to foster a culture of encounter with our brothers and sisters of other religious traditions. Commenting on Francis's use of this phrase, James Fredericks highlights the fact that the Spanish word for "encounter" *encuentro* has a deeper meaning than its English equivalent. It connotes a meeting that is profoundly personal and transforming.⁴¹ The Holy Father emphasizes the fact that the Church should first take this initiative of materializing this culture of encounter. Francis then summons us to reach out to the outskirts, to take the risk of encountering those who are different from us, especially those who may have become alienated from the Church and above all those who profess different religious

⁴⁰ Cf. T. ROSICA, "Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations in the Mind and Heart of Pope Francis", 417.

⁴¹ Cf. R. RYAN, "Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis", 84.

traditions.⁴² This explains why he sees interreligious dialogue as an indispensable tool for peace in the world, and so it is not just an option but a duty for all Christians as well as other religious communities.

In fact during his visit to Kenya in the hall of the Apostolic Nunciature he highlighted the fact that interreligious dialogue is not a luxury nor is it an option but it is essential, something which our contemporary society, wounded by conflict and division, is increasingly in need of.⁴³ This dialogue as he simply puts it “is a conversation about human existence, or better still as the bishops of India has it, being open to them, sharing in their joys and sorrows” (*EG*, 250). He also reiterates the fact that interreligious dialogue is not about waiting for others to catch up with us but it is rather an invitation for all of us to walk together towards the Lord, supporting and learning from our brothers and sisters whom God places from the same path.⁴⁴

Francis sees Jesus as someone who was always in constant motion, reaching out to encounter others even when it was risky to do so. Flowing from this backdrop he calls Christians to imitate Jesus by leaving ourselves behind and going out to encounter others. He acknowledges that there is always risk involved in such bold outreach, but he says that he would prefer a thousand times over a bruised, hurting and dirty Church because it has been reaching out on the streets to a Church that is unhealthy from being confined to its own security.⁴⁵ This explains why the Universal Shepherd seems to see the most dangerous temptation in our contemporary world, both for individuals and the Church, as the enticement to self-absorption that is, to remain locked up within ourselves.

⁴² Cf. R. RYAN, “Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis”, 84.

⁴³ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, *Messages of Pope Francis during his Apostolic Journey to Africa*, 9.

⁴⁴ Cf. T. ROSICA, “Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations in the Mind and Heart of Pope Francis”, 416.

⁴⁵ Cf. R. RYAN, “Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis”, 84.

At a personal or communal level, Christians are called to break through that self-absorption and take the risk of encounter of reaching out to our brothers and sisters of other religions. This conviction is integral to the pope's vision of evangelization.⁴⁶ It is important to note that this *missio ad extra* which the Holy Father highlights is not limited only to Christians but rather to all believers. This is why during his meeting with other religious leaders he asserted that 'no one is coming home' you are journeying towards us and we are journeying towards you, and we will meet in the middle. And turning to Christians he warns those who behave as if the 'key is in their pocket, and the door is closed'. He reiterated the fact that without prayer, one is at the risk of abandoning the faith and descending into ideology and moralism.⁴⁷

It is also important to note at this juncture that Francis is living what he is preaching, in other words he walks the talk. During his maiden visit to the multi-religious Asia community and to be more specific Sri Lanka, he addressed a group of leaders of various religions: Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim in Colombo in these words

I wish to reaffirm the Church's sincere respect for you, your traditions and beliefs. It is in this spirit of respect that the Catholic Church desires to cooperate with you, and with all people of good will, in seeking the welfare of all Sri Lankans.... Certainly such dialogue will accentuate how varied our beliefs, traditions and practices are. But if we are honest in presenting our convictions, we will be able to see more clearly what we hold in common. New avenues will be opened for mutual esteem, cooperation and indeed friendship.⁴⁸

The Holy Father wants us to understand that in as much as our beliefs and practices are different there is something that holds us in common. That is what he calls us all to seek in all sincerity in order to bring peace in the world. It is from this backdrop that we can say with all certainty that in a polarized world torn asunder by conflicts and enmity the dialogical person Pope Francis is the need of the hour.

⁴⁶ Cf. R. RYAN, "Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis", 84.

⁴⁷ Cf. T. ROSICA, "Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations in the Mind and Heart of Pope Francis", 416.

⁴⁸ M. AMALADOSS, "Pope Francis and Dialogue" 178.

2.1.1.3 Social Dialogue in the Context of Religious Freedom

Religious freedom is one of the salient issues which have been spoken of by both the civil and religious proponents around the globe. According to the Synod Fathers, religious freedom is considered to be a fundamental human right that is, ones freedom to choose the religion which one judges to be true, and to manifest one's belief in public (Cf. *EG*, 255). Pope Francis takes it on board when he emphasizes the fact that a healthy pluralistic society is one which seeks to genuinely respect the differences and values of each religion in such a fashion that it does not entail privatizing the religion in an attempt to reduce them to the quiet obscurity of the individual's conscience or better still relegate it to the enclosed space or defined limits of churches, synagogues, temples or mosques (Cf. *EG*, 255). In as much as the Holy Father calls for due respect to be given to agnostics and non-believing minority he goes a step further to say that it should not be done at the detriment of the convictions of the believing majority because this will lead to resentment rather than tolerance and peace (Cf. *EG*, 255). He then beautifully applies the analogy of the Areopagi which he quotes from *Propositio* which states that: "believers and non-believers alike are able to engage in dialogue about fundamental issues of ethics, art and science and above all about the search for transcendence" (*EG*, 257). This according to Francis is the pathway to peace in this our troubled world.

Flowing from this, the Holy Father laments over the fact that we have neglected the dialogue of life and action which is supposed to be the backbone of our broken society. We live together with followers of other religions in schools and market places, but religions practices and dialogue are normally kept out of these areas in the name of

secularism. As a consequent we tend to live in what he calls ‘religious ghettos’.⁴⁹ It is in this context that he calls for ‘social dialogue’, whereby we can effectively make our religious values relevant in projects of building up vibrant, just, peaceful and harmonious communities. In doing this we need to pay special attention to the voices of the poor in our communities.⁵⁰ This is what Francis calls true witnesses of the Gospel or better still a holistic approach to life. In some dioceses in Malaysia I witnessed this social dialogue among adherents of different religious beliefs. Beyond their religious practices they find time to socialize together as people who share something in common.

2.1.2 *The Church in Solidarity*

The vision of the Supreme Pontiff’s ecclesiology and spirituality of *Communio* further shapes the other dimensions of his vision of the Church. He strongly holds and believes that a Church that is in communion must be a Church that is in close solidarity (my emphasis) with the rest of the world, especially the poor and those relegated to the background by the society. His concrete life experience is a living testimony to what he considers to be in solidarity.⁵¹ It is also important to note that during his visit in Kenya one of the places he visited was the Kangemi slum where he spent the entire day reaching out to the inhabitants of this slum whom society considers third class citizens. These are some of the significant moments, symbolic actions that seems to catch the attention of the press. This indeed points to his vision for the evangelizing mission of the Church.⁵² Quoting Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* number 169, A. Orobator, SJ, asserts that “the art of accompaniment” is and should be the pastoral approach that

⁴⁹ Cf. M. AMALADOSS, “Pope Francis and Dialogue”, 179.

⁵⁰ Cf. M. AMALADOSS, “Pope Francis and Dialogue,” 180.

⁵¹ Cf. R. RYAN, “Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis”, 85.

⁵² Cf. R. RYAN, “Ecclesiological Themes in the Teachings of Pope Francis”, 85.

brings us closer to one another in solidarity that heals divisions, ethnocentrism and nepotism within and without the Church.⁵³ This noble invitation is indeed integral and indispensable to the evangelizing mission of the Church. We all are invited to take it on board as part and parcel of Christian life.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, Francis regrets the fact that the term “solidarity” is poorly understood by many. It goes beyond a few sporadic acts of generosity he said. Solidarity for him therefore entails “the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few” (EG, 188). In his persistent call for the Church to become a Church in solidarity, the Holy Father is exhorting Christians throughout the globe, rich and poor alike, to recognize that no human being is disposable.⁵⁴ During his return flight from Rio de Janeiro he said if a homosexual person is of good will and is in search of God, he is not worthy to judge the person. By insinuating this the Holy Father was in accordance with the teachings of the Catechism of the Catholic Church which says that religion has the right to express its opinion at the service of the people, but God with his creation has set us free. It is indeed bad to interfere spiritually in the life of a person.⁵⁵ It is from this perspective that he calls for the conversion of both human hearts and economic structures in ways that will generate and effect global solidarity. We need to feel, to sympathise, and to empathise with those around our neighborhood.

⁵³ Cf. O. AGBONKHIANMEGHE, *The Church we want: Foundation, Theology and Mission of the Church in Africa*, 41.

⁵⁴ Cf. R. “RYAN, Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis”, 86.

⁵⁵ Cf. A. SPARADO, *My Door is always Open*, 56.

2.1.2.1 *The Church in Solidarity with the Poor*

One of the most frequent challenges posed by Francis to Christians everywhere, and to their pastors, is to be sensitive to the cry of the poor. He likes to make frequent reference to the poverty of Christ. He cites the famous verse of Paul from 2Corinthians 8:9, in which Paul is encouraging the Christian community of Corinth to be generous in helping the Christians of Jerusalem who are in great need. Paul writes: for you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake he became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich.⁵⁶ It is from this background that Francis asserts that the Church is the Church of the poor and for the poor. She ought to be close to her people, a shepherd that can smell like his sheep. In his mind this Church should be able to accommodate or embrace the poor, migrants, prisoners, marginalized and the uneducated. It is from this backdrop that Francis reasserts that theology is not merely faith seeking understanding or faith concerned with its intelligibility in a rational *sensus* as highlighted by Saint Anselm but theology is indeed an active quest for and concrete practice of love and mercy, faith and compassion, and liberation and justice.⁵⁷

In his 2014 Lenten campaign message, Francis says the poverty of Christ is the greatest treasure of all that is the incarnation. He persistently call on Christians to emulate Christ by confronting the poverty of our brothers and sisters by touching it, or to make it our own and to take practical steps to alleviate them from that state or better still to improve their living condition.⁵⁸ It is in the same vein that he expects the Church or Christian communities to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully part of the society (Cf. *EG*, 187). It is

⁵⁶ Cf. R. RYAN, "Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis", 85.

⁵⁷ Cf. O. AGBONKHIANMEGHE, *The Church we want: Foundations, Theology and Mission of the Church in Africa*, 76-77.

⁵⁸ Cf. R. RYAN, "Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis", 85.

important to note here that it is in putting all this into practice, that is, in reaching out to those in need that we participate in God's mission. If I may borrow the words of Etienne Grieu at this material point "churches really begin to be meaningful when they accept to be disturbed by, and learn from the poor. It is only by being transformed by this encounter that they can begin to proclaim the gospel."⁵⁹

It is from this background that Francis laments that it is indeed regrettable that Rome represents the heart of everything that he believes the Church should not be: luxury, ostentation, hypocrisy, bureaucracy and everything that is self-referential.⁶⁰ He goes a step further to show how Catholicism was a fleshly business; it was how God saved humanity by becoming close, and embracing reality as it was. But today it is rather unfortunate that the Church is tempted to flee from that reality, taking refuge in bureaucracy, ideology or rationality. This explains why he emphasizes the fact that unless love was incarnated, it was not love; meanwhile, the poor could be lifted from poverty if they were treated and loved as individual human beings.⁶¹ We are therefore called to find Christ in the poor, to lend our voice to their causes, and above all to be their genuine friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.⁶²

2.1.2.2 *The Church in Solidarity with Creation*

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis insists that human ecology and environmental ecology coexist or better still are like two sides of the same coin. The Holy Father believes that "God joined us so closely to the world around us

⁵⁹ D. PILARIO-L. CAHILL eds., "Globalization and the Church of the Poor", 11.

⁶⁰ Cf. A. IVEREIGH, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, 265.

⁶¹ Cf. A. IVEREIGH, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, 220.

⁶² Cf. D. DORR, "In the Light of *Evangelii Gaudium*: Pope Francis and Catholic Social Teaching", 10.

that we may feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of species as a painful disfigurement” (EG, 215). This is why during his apostolic visit to Kenya he said:

The grave environmental crisis facing our world demands an ever greater sensitivity to the relationship between human beings and nature. We have the responsibility to pass on the beauty of nature in its integrity to future generations, and an obligation to exercise a just stewardship of the gifts we have received. These values are deeply rooted in the African soil.⁶³

This explains why we rational beings are called to live in solidarity with these creatures, and not just as beneficiaries but to be stewards to them, as the Holy Father puts it above. He points to the fact that we are failing in our task of stewardship. So often we are driven by greed and the arrogance of dominion, manipulation and exploitation. Sometimes we also fail to preserve nature, nor do we respect it or even consider it a special gift which we must care for and set at the service of our brothers and sisters, including future generations.⁶⁴ It is from this backdrop that he reminds us in *Laudato Si* that the fact that we are born in the image and likeness of God should not make us overlook the fact that each creature has its own purpose. None of the above is superfluous, he recounted. Francis continues to assert that the entire material universe speaks of God’s love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains among others is as it is a caress of God (Cf. *LS*, 84).

It is from this background that Francis makes reference to the famous French Philosopher Paul Ricoeur who also attempts to show the intimate relationship between man and the cosmos when he says: “I express myself in expressing the world; in my effort to decipher the sacredness of the world, I explore my own” (*LS*, 85). All these points to the fact that man is called to live in harmony with nature. It is unfortunate that

⁶³ POPE FRANCIS, *Messages of Pope Francis during his Apostolic Journey to Africa*, 7.

⁶⁴ Cf. D. DORR, “In the Light of *Evangelii Gaudium*: Pope Francis and Catholic Social Teaching”, 14.

the contrary of what Francis demands from us is true. There is rampant air pollution, water pollution and deforestation just to name a few. All this projects the degree to which we disregard God's creation which in turn reacts negatively on humanity.

2.1.2.3 The Church in Solidarity with the Refugees

The Holy Father addresses another contemporary key problem which the world at large seems indifferent to it. That is, the world's reaction towards the refugees. Hospitality towards strangers, the needy, and the persecuted is a fundamental obligation which was already lived and practiced both in the Old and New Testaments (Gen 18:1-15, Rom 12:13). In the same vein Pope Pius XII described the reception of refugees as our basic human right. Despite the above plea, there has been gross inhuman treatment of refugees around the world especially in Europe of recent times. This has led Pope Francis to use a biblical language to ask a very basic question which cuts across the world: who is your brother? (Cf. *EG*, 210-211)

It is important to note that the first apostolic visit of Francis was in Lampedusa, where the drama and misery of refugees and the failure of the European was public. During this visit, he laments over the lack of solidarity and globalized indifference towards the many refugees who seek asylum into Europe. In September 2013 the Holy Father also visited the Roman center for refugees and highlighted the fact that the word "solidarity" is a threat to many developed countries. According to them solidarity is a very bad word which should be avoided by all means. On the contrary the Pope stressed the fact that we should strive to savor the sweetness of solidarity. In this context he was emphasizing the fact that refugees are not simply a problem, but that they have a lot to contribute to our culture. The Church according to the Holy Father belongs on the side of the weak. It is from this backdrop that he reiterates the fact that the reception of the

poor and the promotion of justice is entrusted not only to specialists, but must catch the attention of our total pastoral ministry.⁶⁵ Francis is in other words reminding both the Church and the world at large that responding to the needs of the refugees by accommodating them is not just an option but an obligation. It is through this response that both the Church and the world can say with certainty that they are in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are seeking asylum.

2.1.3 A Servant Church

The aspect of service stands both at the center and at the forefront of the Holy Father's ecclesiological vision of what it means to be a Church today. That is the universal call to humble service to the Church and to the entire world at large means. Flowing from the above deliberations on his vision of a Church as communion and solidarity, it is explicitly clear that Francis wants a Church that walks on the foot prints of Jesus in reaching out to those who are most in need throughout the world.⁶⁶ This call to service according to him must be **expressed in concrete actions that respond to the needs of real people** (my emphasis). This explains why the Servant of servants summons those who minister within the Church to see their role as one of offering generous service to those entrusted under their care. By this he repeatedly challenges the motivations, attitude and actions of those who lead God's people especially pastors of souls.⁶⁷ It is from this backdrop that he reaffirms the fact that the Church as it is lives for the people and not for itself. It is indeed worth noting that his words and deeds

⁶⁵ Cf. W. KASPER, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 80.

⁶⁶ Cf. R. RYAN, "Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis", 87.

⁶⁷ Cf. R. RYAN, "Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis", 87.

symbolize power as service.⁶⁸ His life in other words is a living testimony to what he holds and proclaims.

During one of his talks to the priests of Rome, he publicly admits the fact that some priests had written or even phoned him, complaining that he has a tendency to “banish” priests. But the Holy Father insisted that he is not in any way there to banish his priests but to help them be fruitful servants in the vineyard of God. In the same vein he strongly laments and discourages careerism within the Church and labels it a form of leprosy.⁶⁹ And in 2014, during his Christmas message to the Roman Curia, Francis enlisted a litany of spiritual “maladies” expressed by Church leaders who approach their ministry of service in a self-serving manner.⁷⁰ This explains why in *Evangelii Gaudium* he constantly reminds the Church of the need to reach out to the entire humanity in season and out of season with the intention to serve. This in fact reminds of the motto of the Mill Hill Missionaries: *Amare et Servire*. As members of this Apostolic Society we are expected not just to serve but to serve with love wherever we find ourselves on mission.

2.1.3.1 Pastors to be Mediators

According to the Cambridge dictionary a mediator is one who negotiates between parties with the aim of seeking mutual agreement. From this background it is evident that for one to be a *mediatrix* he or she has to be close to the people involved or better still to use the words of Pope Francis the mediator has to smell like his or her sheep (Cf. *EG*, 24). Such approach into mission will transform the Church’s life. In

⁶⁸ Cf. A. IVEREIGH, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, 268.

⁶⁹ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, “Speech to the Priest of Rome on Mercy”, 43.

⁷⁰ Cf. R. RYAN, “Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis”, 87.

order to better foster this cordial relationship in mission among pastors and the people of God entrusted under their care, Francis stipulates that a pastor:

will sometimes go before his people, pointing the way and keeping their hope vibrant. At other times, he will simply be in their midst with his unassuming and merciful presence. At yet other times, he will have to walk after them, helping those who lag behind and – above all – allowing the flock to strike out on new paths (*EG*, 31).

He is in fact a living example of what he refers to as “pastors should be mediators” within their flock. This is evident when we look at his relationship with the clergy and the people of God entrusted under his care as the Archbishop of Buenos Aires. Padre Pepe reports how as a young priest he had some crisis, and the then Archbishop Bergoglio visited him a couple of times in the parish. He recounted “Bergoglio wasn’t preaching a particular message (...) he just listened and gave me the space to make my own decision”.⁷¹ This is what it means to journey with someone as a mediator as opposed to being passive to the plight of the people around us, or dictating. He then calls on pastors of souls to be close to their flock, to seek them out and to sympathize with their daily struggles and problems.⁷² A pastor must be “merciful, take responsibility for the people and accompany them like the Good Samaritan, who washes, cleans and raises up his neighbor. This is what the people of God are in need of, and not bureaucrats, or clergy acting like government officials”.⁷³ They need shepherds with whom they can confide with and genuinely walk with amidst the difficulties and challenges of their life.

It is from this perspective that the Holy Father sees the Church as a Mother and for her to be a mother she must be fruitful. During one of his interviews with Antonio Spadaro, he recounted that each time he hears of the reprehensible behavior of

⁷¹ P. VALLELY, *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots*, 103.

⁷² Cf. E. PIQUE, “We must Reach Out”, 18.

⁷³ A. SPARADO, *My Door is always Open*, 55.

consecrated men and women the first thing that comes to his mind is: “here is an unfruitful bachelor” or “here is a spinster”. They are neither fathers nor mothers. They have not been able to give spiritual life. In contrast when he reads the lives of some missionaries, he feels he is reading a story of life, of fruitfulness.⁷⁴ This is a truth of fact when we look into the life of some of our priests today. Some are very fruitful in their pastoral ministry while others are a burden to the Christian community whom they are called to serve. It is from this backdrop that the Holy Father calls on all pastors of souls to be true mediators, such that they can be fruitful and life-giving to the people entrusted under their care.

2.1.3.2 *Persuasive Evangelizers*

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Supreme Pontiff highlights a remarkable aspect in the Church’s life, that being in communion with Jesus and mission is intimately interconnected. And in order for the evangelizers to be fruitful in their mission they have to embrace Christ as an example by reaching out to all in season and out of season without fear of any contradiction. At this juncture Francis is calling us to be courageous in proclaiming the Joy of the Gospel just as the Angel told the shepherds “be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people” (Lk 2:10) (cf. *EG*, 23). It is important to note at this point that when Francis talks about the social dimension of evangelization, he points to the fact that evangelization implies “to make the Kingdom of God present in our world”. By this he is insinuating the fact that if our mission of evangelization does not take into consideration the social dimension then we run the “risk of constant distortion of the authentic and integral meaning of the mission of evangelization” (*EG*, 176). It is from

⁷⁴ Cf. A. SPARADO, *My Door is always Open*, 52.

this background that he re-echoes the fact that any prayers that does not lead to concrete action toward another person who is poor and sick is a sterile exercise which is not genuine.⁷⁵ Every evangelizing community must pray and work hard with a particular intention in mind and heart.

This explains why he believes that an evangelizing community is that which “gets involved actively by word and deed in people’s daily life experiences; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary and it embraces human life as it is by touching the suffering flesh in others”.⁷⁶ Every evangelizer should therefore take on the smell of the sheep and the sheep will be willing to hear their voice (Cf. *EG*, 24). This means that we have to move from ourselves in order to reach out to those who have not yet received the Good News, or to who have received it but because of the things of this world they backslided. A good example of persuasive evangelizers that comes to my mind immediately is the Christian community of Christ the King parish Bintangoh in Malaysia where I did my two years pastoral experience. Together with the parish priests they will organize on-going seminars and catechetical classes both in the parish and in the long houses. What I admired most was the enthusiasm that the Christians put into these pastoral activities.

2.4 Conclusion

We have successfully deliberated on Pope Francis vision of the Church. From the above analysis, it is evident that his ecclesiology is missionary-oriented as he persistently exhorts the entire Church to reach out to all, especially the poor and the marginalized. It is from this background that Cardinal W. Kasper asserts that Francis

⁷⁵ K. KRAMER-K. VELLGUTH ed., *Evangelii Gaudium: Voices of the Universal Church*, 248.

⁷⁶ Cf. K. KRAMER-K. VELLGUTH ed., *Evangelii Gaudium: Voices of the Universal Church*, 25.

imbues his ecclesiology with of the people of God with concrete life experience.⁷⁷ It is worth noting at this juncture that it will be interesting and at the same time transformative if we embrace the way in which the Holy Father's vision of the Church develops as he continues with his pontificate as the Vicar of Christ. This vision is greeted with a lot of challenges as we will see below.

⁷⁷ Cf. W. KASPER, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 37.

Chapter III

Obstacles towards Francis' Effective Missionary

Transformation of our Contemporary Society

3.0 Introduction

In our previous chapter we established the vision of Francis' ecclesiology in the light of mission. This vision of the Church which is aimed at transforming our contemporary society is faced with some challenges or obstacles. When we take a close look at the challenges highlighted by Francis, it is worth noting that he is seeking to promote a new missionary thrust that goes hand-in-glove with the social, or better still anthropological, dimension of evangelization and which overcomes the intra-focus of pre-Vatican II Church. The Holy Father has gone an extra mile to add fundamental social and business issues, explicitly questioning why central issues of justice, human rights and an option for and with the poor, should be such marginal questions when we are so concerned with finding contemporary approaches to evangelization.⁷⁸ In this chapter therefore we shall endeavor to examine some of the challenges or obstacles towards this holistic transformation of our society as highlighted by the Holy the Father.

⁷⁸ Cf. K. KRAMER-K. VELLGUTH eds., *Evangelii Gaudium: Voices of the Universal Church*, 71.

3.1 An Economy of Exclusion

The Holy Father in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, uses negative imagery to castigate the ills of our contemporary society especially the economy of exclusion. He also makes reference to one of the Decalogue which states that “thou shalt not kill”. Taking into consideration the situation in which we live today the Holy Father adds that there is urgent need to add “thou shalt not” (*EG*, 53) to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy he strongly believes kills (Cf. *EG*, 53). An economy that fails to recognize and appreciate the beauty of each and every human person irrespective of where his or her gender, color, race, rich or poor alike. With trembling hands he poses these questions that trigger the entire globe in these words:

How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is clearly a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality. Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence masses of people find themselves marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape (*EG*, 53).

This exclusion and marginalization according to the Holy Father is the worst scar on the poor he recounted. He sees this scar of exclusion as a scandal which demands not merely monetary compensation, but the social inclusion of the poor.⁷⁹ How do we expect those who stay in the Kibera slum in Nairobi not to fight for their own fair share of the national cake, when we look at their living conditions and those who live in affluence just next to them?

The Supreme Pontiff goes further to point to the fact that in order to sustain this corrupt system which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a ‘globalization of indifference’ has been set in place. As a result of this mechanism we

⁷⁹ Cf. K. KRAMER-K. VELLGUTH eds., *Evangelii Gaudium: Voices of the Universal Church*, 74.

fail to be sensitive to the needs and the plight of the poor and the marginalized around our vicinity (Cf. *EG*, 54). This mentality poses a serious challenge to Francis's missionary transformation scheme. In order to live in harmony with one another the Holy Father is therefore proposing that we need to bridge this gap between the rich and the poor or the socially marginalized. This indeed will lead to a holistic development of every human person irrespective of his or her origin.

3.2 The Idolatry of Money

The Holy Father in this section is out to castigate the social systems across the globe where money has become an end in itself and developed a life style of its own, without regard to any social responsibility. It is important to note at this juncture that the charismatic words of Francis demonstrated through his gestures, symbols, sermons, letters, and documents are a reflection of his lifestyle which stands against this oppressive economy. His very choice of name indeed sets the stage for his agenda. In fact, it was Francis of Assisi who showed the thirteenth century Church a path of renewal in conjunction with a radical life of poverty.⁸⁰ It is from the same perspective that Pope Francis in this twenty first century turns to shake off materialism and embrace simplicity of lifestyle. He proceeds to assert that the love for money has made us to denounce the primacy of the human person at the expense of wealth. Francis then reiterates the fact that we have consciously created new idols. The worship of the ancient golden calf by the Israelites in the book of Exodus has assumed a new form in our era that is the idolatry of money which lacks a truly human purpose (Cf. Ex 32:1-35). As a result of this devastating system the human person has been reduced to one of his/her needs alone that is consumption (Cf. *EG*, 55). This type of anthropological

⁸⁰ Cf. K. KRAMER-K. VELLGUTH eds., *Evangelii Gaudium: Voices of the Universal Church*, 78.

crisis, which neglects the dignity of the human person but gives preference to money has become the idol that determines everything.⁸¹ This explains why in some of our societies some people are ready to do anything as long as it gives them money. Life has been reduced to the search of money only. People trample on others in the streets of Nairobi under the pretext of searching for money as a means of survival.

This tendency, Francis reiterates, is fast creeping into some of our churches where some priests have specialized in using the pulpits as a place to extort money from the people of God even at the detriment of the word of God. Each time they mount the pulpit they make sure to talk about Christians' responsibility of providing money to the Church, as such neglecting the spiritual lives of the people. It is of course true that the Church is not run with the recitation of rosaries alone, but we need to strike a balance. Most of the pastoral letters written by bishops these days are centered on money.

It is in the midst of this insensitive and devastating society that Francis stands high as the voice of the voiceless denouncing the widespread corruption and self-serving tax evasion, materialism, which has eaten deep into the fabric of our societies across the globe (Cf. *EG*, 56). This stands as a threat to the Holy Father's missionary transformation scheme for our society, where as a result of misplaced priority man has become a slave to money.

3.3 Financial Systems which Rule rather than Serve

When the Supreme Pontiff in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, castigates financial systems which rule rather than serve, he is in other words re-echoing what his predecessors like Leo XIII in the nineteenth century had taught. In

⁸¹ Cf. W. KASPER, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 77.

Rerum Novarum Pope Leo XIII had condemned the enrichment of the few at the expense of the masses and the idolatry of markets that justified it, while calling for state intervention to protect its victims who were the masses. In 2007, Benedict XVI built on the same tradition in his sophisticated social encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*. In this encyclical the Pope repeatedly condemns financial systems that do not uphold the common good but are based on the interest of the minority.⁸²

When Francis laments bitterly over laws of unhealthy competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed on the powerless, the entire globe especially the capitalist societies feel uncomfortable. Accordingly, in reaction against Francis, Fox News's Stuart Varney raised a concern that he was mixing religion and politics, and that the Church is not competent enough to pronounce on economic matters and that in any case, the free market had delivered huge prosperity across the globe. On the other hand, many people are delighted, declaring and canonizing Francis as the new anticipated pinup.⁸³ This type of remark perfectly illustrates the mindset Francis has identified. Despite the negative reactions the Holy Father, with a clear conscience and a good intention continues to highlight the fact that money is meant to serve and not to rule. It is against this backdrop that he invites all financial experts and political leaders to ponder the words of one of the sages of antiquity: "not to share one's wealth with the poor is to steal from them and to take away their livelihood. It is not our own goods which we hold, but theirs" (*EG*, 58). Such oppressive systems set in place by governments are a gross sign of insensitivity. This is so because such systems do not take into account the common good of the entire country. As a result of this, the gap

⁸² Cf. A. IVEREIGH, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, 2013.

⁸³ Cf. A. IVEREIGH, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, 2013.

between the rich and the poor turns to increase on a daily basis, since the rich will continue stealing from the poor.

3.4 The Inequality which Spawns Violence

In many parts of the world we hear a general cry for the need of peace and harmony as a result of absurd mass killing of innocent souls. This genuine need can only come to fruition if exclusion and inequality in our society and among individuals comes to an end. If not it will be very difficult to eliminate violence. This is not simply because inequality provokes a violent reaction from those excluded from their own fair share of the national cake, but because the socioeconomic system is unjust right from its roots (Cf. *EG*, 59).

Pope Francis also highlights the fact that inequality can eventually lead to violence in which arms can and will never be a solution. Arms according to the Holy Father can only serve to offer false hopes to those clamoring for heightened security, since experience has made us to understand that weapons and violence can only create new avenues for serious conflicts rather than providing a peaceful and serene environment (Cf. *EG*, 60). He frowns on those who take pleasure in labeling blame on the poor and the poorer countries for being the cause of conflicts and violence. As a result of these hasty conclusions and naivety, he asserts that they claim that the solution is “education” that will help tranquilize them, making them tame and harmless (Cf. *EG*, 60). It is as a result of this that the Holy Father sees social inequality as the spring board of violence in our society.⁸⁴ It is from this background that the Pope is inviting us to go out with one voice and heart and stand against all systems that breed inequality in our societies.

⁸⁴ Cf. W. KASPER, *Pope Francis Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 77.

3.6 Ecclesial Challenges

The identity and mission of the laity who are in fact the majority that make up the people of God cannot be underestimated. By virtue of their baptism and confirmation they are called to actively participate in God's mission which is entrusted to the Church. The Holy Father notes that in some local Churches the lay people have been rightly given room to exercise their roles, but in other places due to excessive clericalism they are not allowed to participate actively especially in decision making. The formation of the laity towards active participation in mission according to Francis remains a significant pastoral challenge (Cf. *EG*, 102). In most cases they are left behind closed doors. This challenges the shift that was brought about by Vatican II which calls for active participation of the laity within the Church.

In as much as Pope Francis acknowledges and appreciates the indispensable contributions of women in the pastoral activities of the Church he still calls for the need to open more avenues and opportunities in such a fashion that their voices and presence may be heard and seen in the Church. This is because of his firm conviction that both men and women are equal in dignity. It is important to make it clear at this point that in as much as the Holy Father emphasizes dignity among men and women he does not shift from the traditional understanding of the priesthood which is believed to be reserved to men only. On this note the Holy Father has this to say as an explanation of this belief:

Priesthood is a sign of Christ the Spouse who gives himself in the Eucharist, is not a question open to discussion, but it can prove especially divisive if sacramental is too closely identified with power in general. It must be remembered that when we speak of sacramental power we are in the realm of function, not that of dignity or holiness (*EG*, 104).

It is from this backdrop that he sees the ministerial priesthood as one means employed by Jesus at the service of the people of God. Our Christian dignity is therefore rooted in the common priesthood which is accessible to all Christians through the sacrament of baptism. He goes ahead to highlight the fact that within the Church, functions do not serve to favor the superiority of some over others (Cf. *EG*, 104). Therefore, ministerial priesthood which is reserved for men only, according to Francis, is not a source of power or superiority over others but a call to service to the entire people of God. This explains why he strongly believes that “ministers of the Gospel must be people who can warm the hearts of the people, who walk through the dark night with them.”⁸⁵ Anything that falls short of this Francis considers to be a lopsided understanding of the ministerial priesthood which, according to him, has brought a lot of challenges among the people of God. In such a fashion some of the lay faithful are unable to exercise their Christian duties with freedom. They are put into boxes by their pastors. It is sad to note that in some parishes lay people are still not allowed to share the Eucharist under the pretext that it is reserved for clergy only. Where are we heading to?

3.5 Challenges towards Inculturating our Faith

Francis begins by acknowledging the seed of faith planted and nursed by the Holy Spirit in a variety of cultures across the globe. He also sees the need to evangelize some of our cultures in order to inculturate the Gospel. In countries that are predominantly Catholic, this means encouraging, fostering and reinforcing the faith which already exist among the members of that country. And in countries where the people profess different religious beliefs or profoundly secularized societies, it will demand igniting new avenues for evangelizing even though this will demand long-term

⁸⁵ D. DORR, “In the Light of *Evangelii Gaudium*: Pope Francis and Catholic Social Teaching”, 8.

planning. The Holy Father cautions us to bear in mind that we are constantly being called to grow. This is so because each culture and social group is in need of constant purification and growth. Francis therefore reiterates the fact that we need to allow the Gospel to purify some of the deficiencies that are found in some of our local cultural practices, and even within some of our Christian traditions, such as alcoholism, domestic violence, superstitious notions which lead to sorcery among others (Cf. *EG*, 69).

The Supreme Pontiff also laments that it is indeed regrettable that there is a massive exodus of Catholic faithful into other faith communities as a result of a breakdown in the way Catholics parents pass down the faith to their young ones. This breakdown according to Francis might also be as a result of lack of adequate dialogue within our family settings, the influence of social media, lack of proper pastoral care among the poor and an unwelcoming atmosphere in our parish set ups (Cf. *EG*, 70). These are some of the areas which the Holy Father is calling us to revisit in order to build a solid foundation of our Christian faith.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter we have brought to light the challenges posed by both the crisis of the civil society and the Church towards “the Francis effect.” It is clear that Pope Francis’ economic and ecclesial critique has led to an intensive debate and reactions both from believers and non-believers as to the fate of his pontificate. These two dimensions are not seen as diametrically opposed to each other, but intrinsically linked together since every Christian is also part of the world and very much involved in its

sinfulness just as the world has its home in the Church.⁸⁶ By pointing to these realities Francis does not intend to establish a concrete economic program but he is rather concerned with the anthropological crisis, in which money has become mammon and an idol. In other words he is demanding a new culture of life and a new lifestyle, which is defined not by having but by giving and sharing.⁸⁷ It is from this backdrop that the Holy Father calls on both his pastoral workers and the world at large to step out of their comfort zones and face these challenges with an open heart and a missionary zeal. A positive reception of this will lead us to what Francis envisions as a vibrant and accommodative Church.

⁸⁶ Cf. K. KRAMER-K. VELLGUTH eds., *Evangelii Gaudium: Voices of the Universal Church*, 83.

⁸⁷ Cf. W. KASPER, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 81.

Chapter IV

Pope Francis Vision of a Vibrant and Accommodative Church in the Light of his Ecclesiology

4.0 Introduction

In our precedent chapter we focused on the challenges that affect the missionary transformation of our society according to the “Francis effect”. These challenges as posited above are both from within and without the Church. In this chapter we will then attempt to present what Francis considers to be “a vibrant and accommodative Church” according to the vision of his ecclesiology as highlighted in chapter two. Flowing from the preceding exposition it is evident that he has a strong vision on which he wants to re-focus the Church that has been entrusted to his pontificate. Not only is he giving the Church “new wine” but he is also out to ensure that it has new wineskins, and so he feels equally compelled to take a close look at the Church’s structure.⁸⁸ By so doing the Holy Father intends to explore ‘the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties’ of men and women of our time particularly the new faces of the poor in different contexts, in this globalized era.⁸⁹ This he believes will lead to vibrant and accommodative Christian

⁸⁸ Cf. K. KRAMER-K. VELLGUTH eds., *Evangelii Gaudium: Voices of the Universal Church*, 24.

⁸⁹ Cf. A. CARNEIRO, “Globalization and the Church of the Poor”, 9.

communities where pastors together with the flock entrusted to their care will work together toward the salvation of all human beings.

4.1 A Church that is Open to Collegiality

Francis in his most celebrated Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* quotes the prophetic words of Paul VI's in *Octogesima Adveniens* where he pointed to the variety of different situations faced by the Church in different parts of the globe in the following words:

In the face of such widely varying situations, it is difficult for us to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution which has universal validity. This is not our ambition, nor is it our mission. It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country (*OA*, 4, quoted by Francis in *EG*, 184).

Pope Francis laments the fact that this commitment of Paul VI to exercise collegiality in practice had been largely ignored by his predecessors and the Vatican Curia over the years. Francis now takes it up as one of his main agenda during his pontificate to see into it that it is fully implemented and practiced.

The Holy Father observes that one of the most important ways in which the Church can implement seriously the emphasis of Vatican II on collegiality is by enabling the Synod of Bishops to play the major role envisaged by the Council Fathers. That is why during his dialogue with Fr. Antonio Spadaro he lays emphasis on the need for consultation in similar words: the synods and consistories are important places to make real and active this consultation. I am not referring to token consultations, but real consultations, Francis reiterated.⁹⁰ It is important to note here that between 2014 and 2015 Francis has already convened two extraordinary synods. In preparation for the synods he prepared a detailed questionnaire which circulated to the wider church. He

⁹⁰ Cf. D. DORR, "Pope Francis and Catholic Social Teaching", 3.

wants the exercise of collegiality not to stop at the level of bishops but to extend to the lay faithful.⁹¹ In fact I had an opportunity to go through some of the questionnaires while I was in Malaysia for two years mission experience. We sampled the opinions of some of the Christians regarding some marital issues in the diocese of Sibu-Sarawak.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* he is very conscious and particular for the need to promote a sound “decentralization” (Cf. *EG*, 16). In the same document Francis goes a step further to reiterate the fact that:

Since I am called to put into practice what I ask of others, I too must think about the conversion of the papacy (...). The papacy and the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion. (...) excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church’s life and her missionary outreach (*EG*, 32).

It is from this context that the Holy Father proposes and at the same time insists, that episcopal conferences must have a juridical status in such a fashion that they can have genuine doctrinal authority.⁹² This in effect will go a long way to settle a lot of issues at the level of the local Church especially sacramental irregularization which would have been forward to the tribunal in Rome. Handling such issues at the local Church is more appropriate since they have a better understanding of the situation at hand.

4.2 A Church that Opens her Doors

Bearing in mind Francis’ profound approach to pastoral care or better still his mission oriented approach, he undoubtedly desires that the Church doors should be left open for all who seek it with a sincere heart. Inasmuch as deliberations within the Catholic Church are not solely about introducing a sacramental second marriage after divorce, Francis major concern is rather how the Church can grant access to the

⁹¹ Cf. D. DORR, “Pope Francis and Catholic Social Teaching”, 4.

⁹² Cf. D. DORR, “Pope Francis and Catholic Social Teaching”, 4.

Sacraments, especially the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist to all who seek it with a sincere heart. According to the Holy Father, “the Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak” (EG, 47). His dream is to see the pastoral consequences flowing from this intrinsic link between the Eucharist and healing, healing of mind and body. Flowing from this the Pope then warns all those who act as central referees of grace rather than its facilitators.⁹³ He goes further to reiterate the fact that the Church is in no way a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems (Cf. EG, 47). In other words the Church is a place where everyone comes, as he or she is seeking for God’s will in his or her life.

The Holy Father strongly believes that it is not enough for the Church to simply open her doors for those who are willing to come in, but his intention is to drive across the importance and necessity of creating a jovial and welcoming atmosphere in our parishes. It is as a result of the unwelcoming atmosphere in some of our parishes that in *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Holy Father laments over the issue of some Catholics being attracted to the mushroom churches around our parishes (Cf. EG, 63). He associates this attraction with the lack of a sense of belonging, or better still lack of communion felt by many baptized Catholics. This might be as a result of the “unwelcoming structures and atmosphere of some of our parishes and communities, or to a bureaucratic way of dealing with problems” (EG, 63).⁹⁴ In the same document he asserts that in many places an administrative approach prevails over a pastoral approach which should not be the case. In his address to the newly appointed bishops on 19 September 2013, Francis urged them to welcome the people of God magnanimously in these words:

⁹³ Cf. K. KRAMER-K. VELLGUTH eds., *Evangelii Gaudium: Voices of the Universal Church*, 24.

⁹⁴ Cf. R. RYAN, “Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis”, 84.

May your hearts be large enough to welcome all the men and women you come across during the day and whom you go and seek out when you go about to your parishes and to every community . . . the Church is a good mother who always welcomes and loves.⁹⁵

Francis is fond of representing the Church with the image of a mother because they are always ready to receive their children no matter their situation. Like a warm-hearted mother, the Holy Father highlights the fact that “this Church with which we should be thinking and feeling is the home of all, not a small chapel that can only hold a small group of select people.”⁹⁶ According to him therefore, a Church that is open to all entails the concrete practice of fostering unity at the local parish and diocesan levels that is between the parishioners and the priests, and above all a good *rapore* with the local ordinary. This is the type of Church that Francis has in mind and he hopes to see it in reality.

4.3 A Church that is Void of Clericalism

One of the things Pope Francis persistently frowns on since the beginning of his pontificate is clericalism. During the interview he granted with the atheist and Church skeptic, Eugenio Scalfari, the Holy Father poses this question to him: what do you find most irritating about the Roman Catholic Church? Scalfari in response said, “Clericalism” and Francis fully agreed with him. According to the Holy Father, clericalism is an abuse of the office and the “sacred authority” which is entrusted to a priest for the benefit of the people of God. He also strongly believes that clericalism is deeply rooted in careerism. It is as a result of this misunderstanding of the priesthood by

⁹⁵ R. RYAN, “Ecclesiological Themes in the Teaching of Pope Francis”, 84.

⁹⁶ Cf. A. SPADARO, *My Door is always Open*, 51.

some presbyters that he advises any career-seeking clergy to go and climb mountains instead.⁹⁷ In other words they are in the wrong place.

Furthermore, Francis also expects bishops to ensure that the voices of the laity should be clearly heard during synod meetings. The Holy Father continues to assert that there are many influential positions in the Church, with the Roman Curia inclusive, that do not necessarily require ordination. Women and other lay people could introduce their specific talents for the well-being of the Church and as a result breaking through the one-sided clerical atmosphere.⁹⁸ In his mission to foster a dynamic, open and missionary communion, the Holy Father wants to set up a missionary aspiration of reaching out to the people, and not ecclesiastical organization. It therefore follows that the laity must embark on a journey that can enable them to take the Gospel into the world so that, through their daily activities in all areas of life they can positively influence the world.⁹⁹ It is in this context that he reaffirms this position in his Apostolic Exhortation that:

An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the "smell of the sheep" and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. (*EG*, 24).

This approach to ministry will definitely transform bishops and their presbyters and as a consequence draws many souls to God. The Holy Father goes a step further to say that in order to encourage unity in mission the shepherd will sometimes go before his flock, pointing the way and keeping their hope vibrant. In other instances he will simply be in their midst with his unassuming and merciful presence. And when there is need he will have to walk after them, with the aim of helping those who are not strong enough and

⁹⁷ Cf. K. KRAMER-K. VELLGUTH eds., *Evangelii Gaudium: Voices of the Universal Church*, 25.

⁹⁸ Cf. W. KASPER, *Pope Francis Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 40.

⁹⁹ Cf. K. KRAMER-K. VELLGUTH eds., *Evangelii Gaudium: Voices of the Universal Church*, 25.

above all giving room to the flock to strike out on new paths (Cf. *EG*, 31). A Church that both the shepherd and the flock journey together without any barriers of clericalism is what Francis is advocating for, a place where by Christians feels free to interact with their pastor in a healthy and genuine one.

4.4 A Church with Accommodative Parishes

It is indeed true that some churches in Europe are running short of priests as a result of the vocation crisis. This has led to the merging of some parishes in order to match the limited number of priests that are available. Pope Francis sees this crisis as an opportunity for the Church to turn its attention to people's daily lives. A parish according to him:

Is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers (*EG*, 28).

It is from this perspective that he asserts that in order to achieve such goals; the parish must 'not become a useless structure' but must rather embrace bold and creative ongoing renewal activities. This will therefore imply that the parish is in real contact with the homes and lives of its people rather than just being a useless structure which is not in contact with the real situation of the people, or better still a self-absorbed clique made up of a chosen few.¹⁰⁰ The parish in other words is expected to be conscious, and responds to the needs of its parishioners especially the poor and the sick. This calls for frequent home visits by both the parishioners and their pastor.

In his homily delivered to the bishops of Brazil, Francis reminds the Christians that we cannot keep ourselves shut up in our parishes, in our communities, or diocesan

¹⁰⁰ Cf. K. KRAMER-K. VELLGUTH eds., *Evangelii Gaudium: Voices of the Universal Church*, 26-27.

institutions, when so many people are waiting for the good news in the streets. It is not enough simply to open the doors and welcome those who come, but we must go out through the door to seek and meet the people where they are.¹⁰¹ This further explains why he sees the parish as a home for all, not a small chapel that can only hold a small group of selected few.¹⁰² It is from this background that the Holy Father appreciates the role of small Christian communities within the parish but at the same time reminding them to be rooted in the local parish less they run the risk of becoming nomads without roots (Cf. *EG*, 29). The small Christian communities, which in fact represent the Church in the neighborhood should be deeply rooted in the parish. Through their activities they are able to be living witnesses of the Gospel in their neighborhood. It should strive to be accommodative and free from bias such that all the members feel at home and accepted. This indeed is the picture of what Francis visualizes as an accommodative Church in the neighborhood.

4.5 The Church as a Field Hospital

Antonio Spadaro SJ during an interview with the Holy Father asked: “what does the Church need most at this historic moment? Are reforms needed? What Church do you dream of?”¹⁰³ Francis in response to this question asserts that:

What the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful, together with closeness, and proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugar! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds...and you have to start from the ground up.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Cf. R. RYAN, “Ecclesiological Themes in the Teachings of Pope Francis”, 84.

¹⁰² Cf. A. SPADARO, *My Door is always Open*, 51.

¹⁰³ A. SPADARO, *My Door is always Open*, 53.

¹⁰⁴ A. SPADARO, *My Door is always Open*, 54.

The pope is insinuating the fact that pastors of souls must accompany the people of God and heal their wounds in season and out of season. The wounds that Francis is referring to here must not be understood as physical wounds only but spiritual wounds in particular. This vision of the Church according to Francis corresponds to the model of the Good Samaritan. In which the Samaritan descends into the dust and filthy street, touches and covers up the wounds of the victim of the robbers, and also pays for his care. At this juncture he speaks of mysticism of coexistence and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another, of participating in what he calls a “caravan of solidarity, in a sacred pilgrimage”.¹⁰⁵ In other words the Holy Father is talking of a mystical and contemplative fraternity, which knows how to see the sacred grandeur of our neighbor and of finding God in every person.¹⁰⁶

The Pope goes further to assert that the Church has for some time locked up herself in excessive minute details, norms and regulations at the detriment of the people entrusted under her care. The mission entrusted to the Church is to first and foremost proclaim Jesus Christ the Universal Savior. This explains why he expects all ministers of the Church to be ministers of mercy *par excellence*. On the contrary he regrets the fact that some confessors are always in danger of being either too rigorist or too lax in the confessional.¹⁰⁷ This is because in both situations the confessor fails to take responsibility of the person or better still the penitent. In such a context the temptation is always that the rigorist is liable to wash his hands and leaves it to the commandments, while the lenient minister is likely to also wash his hands by simply saying ‘this is not a sin.’ He castigates both approaches and calls on ministers to embrace the image of mothers, and shepherdesses, and above all to be like the Good

¹⁰⁵ W. KASPER, *Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 45.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. W. KASPER, *Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 45.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. A. SPADARO, *My Door is always Open*, 54.

Samaritan who washes, cleans and raises up his neighbor.¹⁰⁸ This explains why he frequently refers to the Church as the Samaritan Church, a Church that heals by direct personal contact.¹⁰⁹ As a follow up to this Francis declared this year 2015\2016 a year of God's mercy during which he sent out missionaries of mercy to forgive even the sins that were reserved for him alone.

It is from this backdrop that the Holy Father feels strongly that it is not enough for the Church to open her doors and welcome those who knock on her doors, but that we should also find new avenues by stepping outside ourselves and reaching out to those who do not come for mass, and to those who are indifferent to our faith.¹¹⁰ This approach of mission according to the Holy Father may lead many strayed sheep back to the flock if we genuinely listen to them and accept them for who they are. The message that Francis seeks to communicate here is that in every pastoral situation we should always consider the person. This is indeed a model of what he considers to be a Church in this deeply wounded world of ours, where many people are seeking for help.

4.6 Homilies should be Heart-to-Heart Communication

In his most celebrated Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Holy Father affirms the importance of a homily within a liturgical context, and says it is an intense and happy experience of the spirit, a consoling encounter with God's word and above all a constant source of renewal and growth for the people of God (Cf. *EG*, 135). A homily therefore should be a touchstone to measure the pastor's proximity and ability to meet his Christian community, since those who preach must recognize the needs of

¹⁰⁸ Cf. A. SPADARO, *My Door is always Open*, 54-55.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. A. IVEREIGH, *The Great Reformer*, 212.

¹¹⁰ Cf. A. SPADARO, *My Door is always Open*, 55.

their community and must be able to see where the desire for God is alive and ardent.¹¹¹ In paragraph 138 of the same document Francis makes it explicitly clear that in no circumstance should a homily take the form of entertainment like those presented by the social media, yet it does need to be life giving, and should make meaning within the entire liturgical celebration. In very subtle words he cautions ministers of the Word that they may be able to hold the attention of their congregation for an hour, but in this case their words becomes more important than the celebration of faith (Cf. *EG*, 138). It is from this backdrop that he calls on pastors to keep the homily short and straight to the point, linking the liturgy of the word with the liturgy of the Eucharist.

It is in this context that the Holy Father goes on to draw an analogy from a family set up where a mother communicates to her children to show how pastors of souls should preach to the people entrusted to their care. This indeed reminds us of the fact that the Church is a mother, and that she preaches in the same way that a mother speaks to her children, bearing in mind that the children will always trust whatever thing the mother tells them. In the course of teaching the mother is also called to listen to the needs and concerns of her children such that she can better address them. This is precisely what is demanded from all pastors who proclaim the Word of God. Francis goes ahead to assert that just as all of us like to be spoken to in our mother tongue, so too do the people of God like to be ministered to in their native language and culture (Cf. *EG*, 139). It is in this way that the people of God better appreciate and make the Word of God part and parcel of their life, if we preach in their local languages using symbols that are not foreign to their customs and traditions.

¹¹¹ Cf. A SPADARO, *My Door is always Open*, 59.

This explains why Saint Paul, in his letter to the Romans affirms the fact that “faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ” (Rom.10:17). This emphasizes the importance and indispensable character of a homily in our Christian journey of faith. It is from this scenario that the Holy Father asserts that the homily provides a serene environment for God to speak in the silence hearts of his believers. However, Francis frowns bitterly at those whose preaching is purely moralistic, doctrinal or lecture on biblical exegesis. Such pastors deviate from the heart-to-heart communication during which God speaks to his people (Cf. *EG*, 142). It is indeed sad to note that some pastors of souls use the pulpit to campaign for fund-raising, or to talk about politics, rather than breaking the word for the people of God. This has led to a serious crisis in some parishes. The roots of this crisis are partly as a result of the materialist tendency of the priest or lack of adequate preparation.

4.6.1 Preparations for Preaching

Every Christian deserves an inspiring homily to rekindle or rejuvenate the faith within him or her. It is as a result of this increasing desire that Pope Francis has called on all pastors of souls to dedicate ample time for its preparation. It is so important a task that a prolonged time of study, prayer, reflection and pastoral creativity should be devoted to it, he said. Conscious of the fact that some pastors have other responsibilities to attend to which are very demanding, the Holy Father still insists on the need to create sufficient time for this precious ministry, even if it is at the detriment of those other responsibilities. He emphasizes this with very strong words: a preacher who does not prepare himself and who does not pray is “dishonest and irresponsible” (*EG*, 145), a “false prophet, a fraud, a shallow imposter” (*EG*, 151). He proposes the following guidelines to keep in mind while preparing for a homily.

He suggests that after invoking the Holy Spirit in prayer, the preacher needs to devote his entire attention to the biblical text, which should serve as the basis of his preaching. Francis further recommends that every homilist who seeks this profound dialogue with the word of God should have recourse to *lectio divina* that is reading, meditation and contemplation (Cf. *EG*, 152). Pope Benedict XVI, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* vividly describes the stages of *lectio divina* as follows:

It opens with the *lectio* of a text: what does the biblical text say in itself? Without this there is always a risk that the text will become a pretext for never moving beyond our own ideas. Next comes *meditatio*, which asks: what does the biblical text say to us? Here each individual must let his or herself be moved and challenged. Following this comes *oratio*, which asks the question: what do we say to the Lord in response to his word? Finally *lectio divina* concludes with contemplation, during which we take up, as a gift from God, his own way of seeing and judging reality, and ask ourselves what conversion of heart and life is the Lord asking of us? (...) (*VD*, 87).

It is important to note at this point that the process of *lectio divina* cannot terminate unless it arrives at action which moves both the preacher and the entire Christian community to make their own life a gift for others in charity. Paragraph 28 of the Directory for Homiletics also emphatically recommends *lectio divina* as an *instrumentum laboris* for all those whom the Church entrusts this ministry to. The practice of this will spare most of our Christians from butterflying from one church to another.

4.7 Conclusion

After carefully analyzing what the Holy Father hopes to be a vibrant and accommodative Church, one can say without an iota of doubt that the Church as a whole is taking a new dimension of moving out of itself to seek or encounter those who are still at the periphery. This is what it means to be accommodative, or better still acquiring a missionary key, as pope Francis puts it.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

There is a common slogan that states that “the Church will always be a Church not only of saints, but also of sinners, who time and again are in need of renewal”. Nothing is indeed worse than the rage of inquisitors, and merciless rigorists, who mourn the loss of a pure Church of the past, which in reality never existed; and nothing is worse than the zeal of enthusiastic, progressive-thinking utopian individuals for a pure and ideal Church of the future, which is mercilessly cruel and insensitive to the Church’s present condition.¹¹² Beyond this stands the missionary dimension of the vision of Pope Francis’ ecclesiology in the light of his most celebrated Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* which we have attempted to present.

We began by presenting a panoramic view of the preliminary considerations surrounding our subject matter, in which we focused on the biography of Pope Francis and clarification of some key terminology. This was intended to situate the reader in the context from which his vision of ecclesiology is deeply rooted, in other words how his way of life ties with his vision of the Church. After establishing the preliminary considerations we proceeded to chapter two where we highlighted his three-fold ecclesiology with special emphasis on mission. Here we found out that the universal Church is a communion of local churches which is a reflection or a sign that points to the communion with God and the rest of the world. We also established that this

¹¹² Cf. W. KASPER, *Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 92.

universal Church is expected to be in constant concrete solidarity with the men and women of our time especially those whom society neglects, such as the poor, the suffering, the marginalized and our common home. For the Church to properly express her communal solidarity she has to be a faithful, humble servant. We then examined some of the obstacles that challenge the Church's missionary transformation of our contemporary society. We found out that these obstacles cut across socio-economic and religious or ecclesial spheres. The final chapter of this thesis then sets the stage for the vision of a vibrant and accommodative Church according to his ecclesiology, in which he sees the Church as an open house with open doors, as a father's house, in which there is a place for everyone with their difficulties and joys (Cf. *EG*, 46-49).

From the above exposition it is evident that Francis' ecclesiology is mission-oriented. It is an ecclesiology that is permanently in a state of mission, reaching out to all. This he says does not mean proselytism. According to the Holy Father the Church does not grow by proselytizing but by attracting.¹¹³

The Holy Father concludes his Apostolic Exhortation with a strong affirmation of hope. God is at work in the world. And he turns to the rest of the world and says on our part we have to be faithful to our commitment to realize the kingdom of God on earth. We may not always see immediate results, he says that we believe and hope that God will make our commitment fruitful in ways and places known to him alone.¹¹⁴ The source of hope, he strongly believes, is two folds. On the one hand, "Christ's resurrection is not an event of the past; but rather it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force" (*EG*, 276). Correspondingly, "the Holy Spirit works

¹¹³ Cf. W. KASPER, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 44.

¹¹⁴ Cf. M. AMALADOSS, "Pope Francis and Dialogue", 175.

as he wills. It is in the same spirit that he raises his voice against the globalization of indifference and so invites both the clergy and the laity to a new stage of evangelization which is missionary oriented.

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