



# STUDIES

IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

FRANCIS'S CHURCH REFORM FOCUSED  
ON THE PROCLAMATION OF MERCY:  
THE IGNATIAN INFLUENCE

SUSAN K. WOOD, SCL

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY RONALD A. MERCIER, SJ

55/3 AUTUMN 2023

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## *a word from Fr. Ron Mercier...*

Few topics have so captivated the imagination of Catholics as that of the most appropriate way to address a world in which the once dominant role of the church now seems a distant memory. The address given by then Fr. Josef Ratzinger in 1958, “The New Pagans and the Church,” certainly highlighted the need for a new mode of engaging culture—especially a nominally Christian culture—and pointed to the various modes of response already present in the French Church.<sup>1</sup> In his talk, the need for clarity of proclamation in the church’s engagement with the world comes through boldly, with a hint of the “small, pure church” motif that would later become more pronounced in papal writings.

In this approach, the mode of “engagement” often emphasized the need for clarity of moral teaching—a way of calling culture to fidelity to the law of God. For example, with the publication of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* by Pope Paul VI in 1968, the desire for absolute norms, brooking no exceptions, emerged as one way of clarifying the church’s challenge to an increasingly secular culture. As such, *Humanae Vitae* often became a touchstone for differentiating the paths chosen in shaping culture. Even more, the pope saw this encyclical as a service to culture, inviting scientists, medical professionals, public officials, and teachers to help build a more humane world.

That stance, of course, evoked debate in and outside of the church, not only about the content of the teaching but also about the possibility of invoking ethical norms with such absoluteness. The debate concerning proportionate reasoning in the 1980s highlighted that question and, with it, the related question of the proper way to

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), “The New Pagans and the Church” (1958), trans. Fr. Kenneth Baker, SJ, *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (January 30, 2017), <https://www.hprweb.com/2017/01/the-new-pagans-and-the-church/>.

engage culture, notably in the traditionally Christian areas of Europe and North America. Then, with the publication of *Veritatis Splendor* by Pope John Paul II in 1993, that debate was over, at least from the Vatican's perspective, and a wide variety of moral teachings was proclaimed as absolutely normative—a path that the pope reaffirmed in 1995 in *Evangelium Vitae*. The dramatic clash that we know as the “culture wars” would continue to echo in his writings in the language of “culture of life” versus “culture of death,” and Pope Benedict would continue on this path, especially in seeking to reinvigorate the traditional Christian culture of Europe.

It would, therefore, come as no surprise that a primary charge laid against Pope Francis and his teaching ministry took on such a deliberately ethical tone. On a variety of topics, from homosexuality to the ability to judge behavior, critics found his stances a kind of surrender to the prevailing culture, which marked a dramatic change from the approach of his predecessors.

And nowhere was the “crisis” more profound than regarding Chapter VIII of the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, notably sections 300 to 305, especially note 351. Seemingly, the suggestion of readmission to Communion of those who had divorced and remarried without a declaration of nullity flew in the face of established precedent, notably as articulated in *Veritatis Splendor*. And so, was the church then abandoning its duty to proclaim truth in the face of a relativist culture? The five *dubia* posed by Cardinals Brandmüller, Burke, Caffarra, and Meisner in September 2016 raised this question. The central issue here involved how the church would maintain clarity of truth in the face of error and doubt.

Yet an underlying debate continues regarding the best way of proclaiming the Gospel in our era. The author of the present issue of *STUDIES*, Dr. Susan K. Wood, SCL, points out a different approach in another, often overlooked work of Pope Paul VI, the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), which she notes that Pope Francis considers the greatest papal document. In this text, the word *witness* appears thirty-six times, nowhere as dramatically as where he speaks of the life of the community of faith: “The intimate life of this community—the life of listening to the Word and the apostles’ teaching,

charity lived in a fraternal way, the sharing of bread, this intimate life only acquires its full meaning when it becomes a witness.”<sup>2</sup>

In emphasizing this point, Dr. Wood implies no dichotomy between this document and *Humanae Vitae*, but notes how Pope Francis draws upon the complementary strand of thought from *Evangelii Nuntiandi* to engage culture today. She goes on to explain that Pope Francis develops this theme of witness throughout his ministry, stressing three elements in particular, all of which are in keeping with themes in the works of his predecessors. First, authentic witness requires personal encounter with the mercy of God revealed in Christ—an encounter that impels one to mission. Second, mercy shapes the “content” of witness. And third, the church’s entire being responds to that need to proclaim mercy, which entails a conversion not only of structural elements but also of ethos.

As she develops her theme, Dr. Wood highlights resonances in developments within the understanding of the mission of the Society of Jesus, notably since GC 32. This marks an important contribution, highlighting the Jesuit and Ignatian sources upon which Pope Francis draws. At the same time, she is very careful not simply to make the Pope’s ministry, as some suggest, a “Jesuit thing.” Rather, she emphasizes consistently the way in which the same Spirit has moved the church and the Society since the Second Vatican Council—an important historical and theological consideration. Even the emphasis on “mercy,” such a consistent theme with Pope Francis and his predecessors, emerges in GC 32 as a corollary to justice.

In addition, while others have noted the critical role of discernment—a very Ignatian theme—in Pope Francis’s teaching, Dr. Wood emphasizes how it underlies both “pastorality” and “synodality,” which emerge as keys to his approach.<sup>3</sup> Here, the dissonance between the two modes of engagement with culture becomes apparent. On this

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<sup>2</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975), §15, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html).

<sup>3</sup> On this point, see *Pope Francis: A Voice for Mercy, Justice, Love, and Care for the Earth*, ed. Barbara E. Wall and Massimo Faggioli (New York: Orbis Books, 2019).

note, she cites Aquinas's caveat about the limits of universal norms and the way in which discernment allows one to "recover an authentic meaning" and hereby to avoid a false clarity.

Still, although Dr. Wood carefully elucidates how the two paths need not conflict, the reader can certainly understand whence the critique noted above arises. From this perspective, while her essay in some ways treads paths previously seen, the novelty lies in two directions. First, she captures and extends the development of Pope Francis's thought as rooted in Vatican II, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and subsequent magisterial statements. Second, she uncovers the Ignatian and Jesuit roots of the pope's thought, highlighting the ways in which movements in Jesuit thinking respond to the work of the same Spirit operating in the Vatican call to witness. In so doing, she not only sketches the roots and novelty of this pastoral approach but also points to ways in which the development has only just begun.

This in turn holds promise for the church's work *ad intra* through the synodal life based in personal and communal encounter with the Lord and *ad extra* as a field hospital of mercy for a wounded world. The clarity of her writing and the way in which she draws on so many resources—magisterial, theological, and spiritual—thus makes this article an important seedbed for further reflection.

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# CONTENTS

I. PRE-CONDITION FOR PROCLAMATION: INTERIOR PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST.....	6
II. FROM ENCOUNTER TO PROCLAMATION .....	16
III. DOCTRINAL EXPRESSION AND CATECHESIS.....	22
A. Kerygmatic Theology of Pope Francis .....	22
B. Discernment.....	27
IV. STRUCTURAL REFORM .....	35
V. CONCLUSION.....	43

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# Francis's Church Reform Focused on the Proclamation of Mercy: The Ignatian Influence

Susan K. Wood, SCL

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*Pope Francis's reform of the church follows a trajectory from (1) developing a deep, preconditional relationship with Christ grounded in a personal encounter of the mercy of God to (2) proclaiming the Gospel of salvation through that mercy, (3) developing doctrine that serves the pastoral mission of the church, and (4) reforming church structures better to serve the proclamation of the Gospel. This essay describes the inherent unity of this reform and documents some of its Ignatian and Jesuit influences, including the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius and the Constitutions, Complementary Norms, and recent general congregations of the Society of Jesus.*

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From the moment that Pope Francis announced his name after the papal election, it became clear that the reform of the church would be central to his papal vision. Christ had told Francis of Assisi, "Repair my church," and Pope Francis would attempt to do just that. If this ecclesial vision of Pope Francis, who is a Jesuit, is taken from the example of Francis of Assisi, then his implementation of it is thoroughly Ignatian in methodology, theology, and practice.

For this repair, the envisioned reform of the church in a missionary key follows a trajectory that holds four components in a unity: (1) a deep relationship with Christ through a personal encounter of the mercy of God as a pre-condition of authentic proclamation of the

Gospel, (2) the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation through the healing mercy of God, (3) doctrine that serves the pastoral purpose of the church and this proclamation of salvation, and (4) the structural reform of the church required to support the pastoral mission of the church. Such a trajectory of ecclesial reform begins with the personal and ends with the institutional, with everything oriented to implementing the proclamation of healing mercy.

Pope Francis is not unique in focusing on the necessity of mercy today, but the proclamation of the Gospel of mercy provides the focal point of the logic and interrelationship of the sequence of these four components of a church in a missionary key.<sup>1</sup> The originality of his intent to “guide the whole Church in a new phase of evangelization” lies in the intrinsic connection he makes between the proclamation of this Gospel of mercy with the reform of the church, hence the interrelationship of the four components cited above.<sup>2</sup> This essay argues that the implementation of this “new phase of evangelization” is profoundly influenced by the mission of the Society of Jesus, the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), and the Ignatian practice of the discernment of spirits.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A contemporary turn to the theme of mercy includes Pope John Paul II’s establishment of Divine Mercy Sunday in 2000 and the second encyclical of his pontificate, *Dives in Misericordia* (November 30, 1980). A quotation from Pope John Paul II’s last book, *Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millennium* (New York: Rizzoli, 2005) stated that the boundary that has been set for evil “is ultimately divine mercy” (p. 55). Pope Benedict XVI continued the theme in *Deus Caritas Est* (December 25, 2005) and *Caritas in Veritate* (June 29, 2009). Walter Kasper’s book, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*, appeared in German in 2012, one year before the election of Pope Francis, and in English in 2014 (trans. William Madges [New York: Paulist Press]). Mercy is certainly a *leitmotif* of the twenty-first century.

<sup>2</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), §17, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html) (hereafter cited as *EG*). Christoph Theobald has observed the intrinsic connection between evangelization or mission and pastoral conversion or “reform” and between individual conversion and institutional reform in *Le courage de penser l’avenir: Études œcuméniques de théologie fondamentale et ecclésiologique* (Paris: Cerf, 2021), 160, 162, respectively. However, he speaks of evangelization as proclamation of the Gospel generally rather than focusing on its theme of mercy.

<sup>3</sup> The *Spiritual Exercises*, composed by St. Ignatius of Loyola 1522–1524, are comprised of Christian meditations, contemplations, and prayer divided into four thematic “weeks” of variable length. They are designed to help exercitants to discern the will of



Sometimes, there may be the temptation to think that Pope Francis is radically different from Pope John Paul II or Pope Benedict XVI. However, there is great continuity between Francis and his predecessors in his message of evangelization. For example, he has great admiration for Pope Paul VI and considers that pontiff's encyclical on evangelization, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), to be the greatest document written by a pope. Pope John Paul II took up the theme of evangelization in *Redemptoris missio* (1990), *Tertio millennio adveniente* (1994), and *Novo millennio ineunte* (2001). Then, in 2010, Pope Benedict XVI established the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization and convened the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith in 2012. Pope Francis wrote the apostolic constitution for that synod in his *Evangelii Gaudium*, "The Joy of the Gospel" (2013), which sets forth the agenda for his pontificate.

Despite this continuity, however, Pope Francis's distinctive imprint lies in his connection of the personal encounter of the evangelizer with Christ as a precondition for proclaiming the Gospel with his identification of proclamation with the tender mercy of God, his emphasis on discernment for applying doctrine to specific life circumstances, his orientation of church reform to that proclamation, and the Ignatian and Jesuit influence on his thought.<sup>4</sup>

Francis's emphasis on the Gospel message of mercy reflects a trajectory of development within Jesuit articulation of the mission of the Society of Jesus in the general congregations, especially since Vatican II. The original articulation found in the *Formula of the Institute* (1540) described the purpose of the Society as "to strive especially for the defense and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine."<sup>5</sup> The 31st General Congregation

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God in their lives leading to a commitment to follow Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the word "mercy" occurs eight times in Pope Paul VI's apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975), while it occurs thirty times in *EG*.

<sup>5</sup> The Apostolic Letters of Popes Paul III (1540) and Julius III (1550) recognized this mission of the Society of Jesus. For the texts of these documents, see *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms: A Complete English Translation of the Official Latin Texts*, ed. John W. Padberg, SJ (St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources [IJS], 1996), 1–14.

(1967) described the mission in general terms as being of assistance to the church while the church “is helping the world so that the kingdom of God may come and the salvation of the human race may be achieved.”<sup>6</sup> Decree four of GC 32 (1975) further specified the mission of the Society of Jesus as “the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement.”<sup>7</sup> “Service,” as contrasted with the “propagation” language of the *Formula of the Institute*, repositions the Society with respect to those who have not received the Christian faith or who may have another faith, and in so doing, this language eliminates any hint of imposing the faith.

This emphasis on justice moves the Society “not only to recognize and respect the rights of all, especially the poor and the powerless, but also to work actively to secure those rights.”<sup>8</sup> This emphasis on justice reflects the document of the 1971 Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World*, which famously stated, “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel.”<sup>9</sup>

Within this same paragraph of the GC 32 document lies a connection between justice and mercy, on the one hand, and themes of openness to others, on the other. This connection later will receive emphasis in GC 36 and be reflected in the pontificate of Pope Francis:

It [justice] demands an openness and generosity to anyone in need, even a stranger or an enemy. It demands toward those who have injured us, pardon; toward those with whom we are at odds, a spirit of reconciliation. We do not acquire this

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<sup>6</sup> GC 31, d. 1, no. 16; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees and Accompanying Documents of the 31st–35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John W. Padberg, SJ (St. Louis, MO: IJS, 2009), 50. The dates given for the general congregations are the date of the letters of promulgation from the fathers general.

<sup>7</sup> GC 32, d. 4, no. 48; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 298.

<sup>8</sup> GC 32, d. 4, no. 67; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 301.

<sup>9</sup> World Synod of Catholic Bishops, *Justice in the World* (November 30, 1971), [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_19711130\\_giustizia\\_po.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_19711130_giustizia_po.html). The quotation comes from §6 of the English-language translation available at <https://www.cctwincities.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Justicia-in-Mundo.pdf>.

attitude of mind by our own efforts alone. It is the fruit of the Spirit who transforms our hearts and fills them with the power of God's mercy, that mercy whereby he most fully shows forth His justice by drawing us, unjust through we are, to His friendship. It is by this that we know that the promotion of justice is an integral part of the priestly service of the faith.<sup>10</sup>

Here, mercy is the manifestation of justice. This passage illustrates the synergistic relationship of the teaching of the church, the Society of Jesus articulating its mission in service of the pope and the church, and Pope Francis's insistence on divine mercy being the core of the kerygma, his received Jesuit inheritance. While the promulgation of the documents of GC 36 occurred in 2017, during the pontificate of Pope Francis, and therefore can be expected to reflect the themes of his pontificate, Pope Francis's connection between justice and mercy clearly reflects the much earlier GC 32.<sup>11</sup>

General Congregations 34 and 35 continued to develop the themes of justice in terms of being more conformed to Christ because of the turn to justice (GC 34) and by developing the biblical notion of justice as right relationship (GC 35). General Congregation 36 (2017) reflects themes from *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) and the papal bull, *Misericordiae vultus*, "The Face of Mercy" (April 11, 2015), proclaiming an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy and developing the relationship between reconciliation and justice within a spirituality of mercy. On this point, GC 36 explains:

At the heart of Ignatian spirituality is the transforming encounter with the mercy of God in Christ that moves us to a generous personal response. The experience of the merciful gaze of God on our weakness and sinfulness humbles us and fills us with gratitude, helping us to become compassionate ministers to all. Filled with the fire of Christ's mercy, we can enflame those we meet. This

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<sup>10</sup> GC 32, d. 4, no. 67; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 301.

<sup>11</sup> Through circular letter 2014/08, "To the Whole Society" (Rome, May 20, 2014), Father General Adolfo Nicolás informed the Society that, towards the end of 2014, he would "convoke the 36th General Congregation, to be held during the final months of the year 2016."

foundational experience of God’s mercy has always been the source of the apostolic audacity that has marked the Society and which we must preserve.<sup>12</sup>

The document continues: “For us Jesuits, compassion is action, an action discerned together.”<sup>13</sup> The pre-condition of this compassion and action, however, is an encounter with Christ. After this encounter, the way forward is individual and communal discernment. As GC 36 expressed it, “Prayerful discernment ought to be our habitual way of drawing closer to reality when we want to transform it.”<sup>14</sup> While individual discernment identifies how doctrine can operate in an individual’s life, communal discernment enables a synodal church to identify how it will respond to the Spirit already at work in the world.

## I. Pre-Condition for Proclamation: Interior Personal Encounter with Christ

**F**or Pope Francis, a missionary church is one that proclaims the good news of salvation. The first and principal proclamation is: “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.”<sup>15</sup> On this point, Pope Francis says:

Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries,” but rather that we are always “missionary disciples.” If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: “We have found the Messiah!” (Jn 1:41). The first requisite,

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<sup>12</sup> GC 36, d. 1, no. 19; *Documents of General Congregation 36 of the Society of Jesus*, Society of Jesus, 2017, [https://jesuits.eu/images/docs/GC\\_36\\_Documents.pdf](https://jesuits.eu/images/docs/GC_36_Documents.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> GC 36, d. 1, no. 20; *Documents of General Congregation 36 of the Society of Jesus*.

<sup>14</sup> GC 36, d. 1, no. 37; *Documents of General Congregation 36 of the Society of Jesus*.

<sup>15</sup> *EG*, §164.

then, is “the missionary conversion—personal, communitarian, structural—of all the people of God and of all in the people of God.”<sup>16</sup>

For Pope Francis, the mandate for missionary disciples is thus to pray and proclaim the Gospel. As such, he identifies prayer as the primary job of an apostle and affirms that only secondly is the apostle mandated to proclaim the Gospel.<sup>17</sup> Surprisingly, Francis says, “pray and proclaim the Gospel,” when the more familiar sequence from *Dei Verbum* is “hearing the word of God with

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*Pope Francis identifies encounter with Jesus Christ as necessary for the proclamation to be convincing.*

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reverence and proclaiming it with faith.”<sup>18</sup> Why “praying” rather than “hearing”? What is this prayer of which Pope Francis speaks that must precede proclamation, and why is it a necessary precondition for the proclamation of the Gospel?

Pope Francis identifies encounter with Jesus Christ as necessary for the proclamation to be convincing. Similarly, the First Letter of John refers to “what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life” (1 Jn 1:1). In other words, for proclamation to ring true, it must bear the stamp of personal witness.

For Pope Francis, then, this prayer, whatever form it takes, is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. In the opening pages of *Evangelii*

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<sup>16</sup> Carolos María Galli, “The Missionary Reform of the Church According to Francis: The Ecclesiology of the Evangelizing People of God” in *For a Missionary Reform of the Church*, ed. Antonio Spadaro, SJ, and Carlos María Galli (New York: Paulist Press, 2017), 24–57 at 39. See also *EG*, §25.

<sup>17</sup> Francis, General Audience, October 16, 2013, “Sent to Bring the Gospel to All the World,” in Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy: A Vision for the Church* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2014), 36.

<sup>18</sup> Francis, General Audience, Saint Peter’s Square, Wednesday, December 25, 2019, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2019/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190925\\_udienza-generale.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20190925_udienza-generale.html); *Dei Verbum* (November 18, 1965), §1, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html) (hereafter cited as *DV*). On the necessity of also hearing the word of God, see *EG*, §174.

*Gaudium*, he writes, "I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this un-failingly each day."<sup>19</sup> In this, he echoes his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, who said, "Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, for Pope Francis, this encounter is characterized by the gaze of the Lord on him. Initially, this may seem surprising, since we are accustomed to being the ones who do the looking. For example, in the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius suggests that retreatants imagine a biblical scene and engage with it as a participator. However, the fact is that it is first Christ who gazes on us. On this point, Francis replied, in an interview with Antonio Spadaro in 2013, to the question "Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?" with the answer:

I do not know what might be the most fitting description . . . I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner. . . . I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon . . . a sinner on whom the Lord has turned his gaze. . . . I am one who is looked upon by the Lord.<sup>21</sup>

This statement echoes the statement of Decree 2 of the 32nd General congregation of the Society of Jesus: "What is it to be a Jesuit? It is to know that one is a sinner, yet called to be a companion of Jesus as Ignatius was."<sup>22</sup>

Two passages from the *Spiritual Exercises* ground Pope Francis's experience of being gazed upon by the Lord. The first occurs

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<sup>19</sup> *EG*, §3.

<sup>20</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (December 25, 2005), §1, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html); cited by Pope Francis in *EG*, §7.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Antonio Spadaro, SJ, "Interview with Pope Francis," (September 19, 2013), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130921\\_intervista-spadaro.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html).

<sup>22</sup> GC 31, d. 2, no. 11; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 291.

in the additional directives for Week I where Ignatius instructs the exercitant to begin every prayer period thus: "I will raise my mind and think how God our Lord is looking at me."<sup>23</sup> By putting that direction in Week I, Ignatius is effectively suggesting that every prayer period should be rooted in the Lord's loving look.<sup>24</sup> The second reference occurs in the first contemplation on the Incarnation in the *Spiritual Exercises*, where "the Three Divine Persons gazed on the whole surface or circuit of the world, full of people; and how, seeing that they were all going down into hell, they decided in their eternity that the Second Person would become a human being, in order to save the human race."<sup>25</sup>

The third prelude of this contemplation is "to ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for an interior knowledge of our Lord, who became human for me, that I may love him more intensely and follow him more closely."<sup>26</sup> This kind of knowledge goes beyond intellectual knowing but represents an intimacy communicated through the encounter of letting oneself be gazed upon and of being transparent to the Lord.

This idea of gazing figures significantly in the work of Pope Francis, as forms of the term occur ten times in eight different sections of *Evangelii Gaudium* and in many of his talks and homilies.<sup>27</sup> Sometimes, it is Jesus who gazes on us. At other times, we are doing the gazing at Jesus or looking compassionately on others. Furthermore, we may encounter the gaze of Jesus Christ in prayer, but we also may encounter it in a mediated fashion. On the latter point, Pope Francis says, "All of us in our lives have felt this gaze, and not just one time: many times! Perhaps the person of a priest, who taught us doctrine or forgave our

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<sup>23</sup> *Spiritual Exercises* 75, hereafter abbreviated *SpEx*; *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary*, trans. and ed. George E. Ganss, SJ (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1992), 48.

<sup>24</sup> Experiencing the gaze of God is not the only preparation for prayer. The most important is given in *SpEx* 46, which directs that in the preparatory prayer the retreatant ask God that all his/her "intentions, actions, and operations be directed purely to the praise and service of His Divine Majesty."

<sup>25</sup> *SpEx* 102; ed. Ganss, 56.

<sup>26</sup> *SpEx* 104; ed. Ganss, 56.

<sup>27</sup> *EG*, §§71, 120, 125, 169, 244, 264, 268, 282.



sins. . . . Perhaps in the help of friends.”<sup>28</sup> In this way, missionary disciples are called upon to experience this gaze personally but also to mediate this gaze to others. As Pope Francis says:

Far from being suspicious, negative and despairing, it is a spiritual gaze born of deep faith which acknowledges what God is doing in the lives of others. At the same time, it is the gratitude which flows from a heart attentive to others. When evangelizers rise from prayer, their hearts are more open; freed of self-absorption, they are desirous of doing good and sharing their lives with others.<sup>29</sup>

In this way, the gaze of Jesus is life changing.

Furthermore, in commenting on Jesus’s gaze on Matthew the tax collector, Pope Francis remarks:

That gaze overtook him completely, it changed his life. We say he was converted. He changed his life. “As soon as he felt that gaze in his heart, he got up and followed him.” This is true: Jesus’ gaze always lifts us up. It is a look that always lifts us up, and never leaves you in your place, never lets us down, never humiliates. It invites you to get up—a look that brings you to grow, to move forward, that encourages you, because [the One who looks upon you] loves you. The gaze makes you feel that He loves you. This gives the courage to follow Him: “And he got up and followed him.”<sup>30</sup>

Pope Francis goes on to describe this gaze as “a breath on embers . . . the embers of desire for God.”<sup>31</sup> From this perspective, the gaze of Jesus then reignites the embers that renew the fire in the belly and in this way kindles anew God’s image in a person.

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<sup>28</sup> Pope Francis, *Encountering Truth: Meeting God in the Everyday*, ed. Antonio Spadaro, trans. Matthew Sherry (New York: Image, 2015), 189.

<sup>29</sup> *EG*, §282.

<sup>30</sup> Pope Francis, “Pope Francis at Mass: The Merciful Gaze of Jesus,” Vatican Radio, September 21, 2013, [http://www.archivioradiovaticana.va/storico/2013/09/21/pope\\_francois\\_at\\_mass\\_the\\_merciful\\_gaze\\_of\\_jesus/en1-730529](http://www.archivioradiovaticana.va/storico/2013/09/21/pope_francois_at_mass_the_merciful_gaze_of_jesus/en1-730529).

<sup>31</sup> “Pope Francis at Mass.”



The call of Matthew and the Lord's merciful gaze on him holds a special personal meaning for Francis, evident in his choice of his episcopal motto. He chose the motto *Miserando atque eligendo*—a phrase from a homily by the Venerable Saint Bede describing Jesus's call of Saint Matthew that occurs in the church's daily prayer readings for Saint Matthew's feast day, September 21. The whole Latin phrase and its translation connects the themes of gaze, mercy, and vocation:

*"Vidit ergo Jesus publicanum, et quia miserando atque eligendo vidit, ait illi, 'Sequere me.'" might be translated as "Jesus therefore sees the tax collector, and since he sees by having mercy (or by looking at him with the eyes of mercy) (or by "mercy-ing" him, as the Holy Father has translated it) (miserando) and (atque) by choosing (eligendo), he says to him, 'Follow me.'"<sup>32</sup>*

The reference to the call of Matthew also resonates with Pope Francis's experience of knowing he was called to be a priest. He recounts that, when at the age of seventeen, on the feast of St. Matthew, September 21, 1953, he felt compelled to enter the Basilica of St. Joseph in Flores, he felt like someone had grabbed him from inside and took him to the confessional. After confessing, he was totally certain that he had to be a priest.<sup>33</sup> A communiqué explaining the papal coat of arms narrates the event in these words: "Following confession, his heart was touched [by] the descent of the mercy of God, who with tender love called him to the religious life, following the example of Saint Ignatius of Loyola."<sup>34</sup>

In the interview with Antonio Spadaro, Pope Francis told of his visit to the Church of St. Louis of France in Rome to contemplate there the painting of *The Calling of St. Matthew* by Caravaggio:

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<sup>32</sup> Deacon Tom Bello, OFS, "Miserando atque Eligendo," Secular Franciscan Order—USA, April 10, 2020, <https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/2020/04/10/miserando-atque-eligendo/>.

<sup>33</sup> Austen Ivereigh, *Wounded Shepherd: Pope Francis and His Struggle to Convert the Catholic Church* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2019), 21–22 and in *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2014), 35–36.

<sup>34</sup> "Pope's Motto: 'Miserando Atque Eligendo,'" Zenit, March 18, 2013, <https://zenit.org/2013/03/18/pope-s-motto-miserando-atque-eligendo/>.

That finger of Jesus, pointing at Matthew. That's me. I feel like him. Like Matthew. . . . It is the gesture of Matthew that strikes me: he holds on to his money as if to say, "No, not me! No, this money is mine." Here, this is me, a sinner on whom the Lord has turned his gaze.<sup>35</sup>

This gaze of Jesus on Matthew is autobiographical for Pope Francis. Prior to his ordination in 1969, he wrote of "God's loving gaze on him [Matthew] doing battle with 'the stinginess of my soul, which seeks to take without giving.'"<sup>36</sup> Likewise, in a homily in 2015, he described Saint Matthew's conversion as a call to missionary service:

After the Lord looked upon him with mercy, he said to Matthew: "Follow me." Matthew got up and followed him. After the look, a word; after love, the mission. Matthew is no longer the same; he is changed inside. The encounter with Jesus and his loving mercy has transformed him. His table, his money, his remaining outside—all these were left behind. Before, he had sat waiting to collect his taxes, to take from others; now, with Jesus, he must get up and give, give himself to others. Jesus looks at him and Matthew encounters the joy of service. For Matthew and for all who have felt the gaze of Jesus, other people are no longer to be "lived off," used and abused. The

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<sup>35</sup> Fr. Antonio Spadaro, "Interview with Pope Francis," August 19, 2013, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130921\\_intervista-spadaro.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html).

<sup>36</sup> Ivireigh, *Wounded Shepherd*, 47. While we do not know why Bergoglio referred to himself as "stingy," he speaks elsewhere about what Saint Ignatius calls "acquired fortune" and refers to those things that feed the ego: "power, influence, freedom, security, status, money, property, or some combination of these" (Pope Francis in conversation with Austen Ivireigh, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020], 147n14; 70). In the Ignatian exercise known as "Three Classes of Persons," to which Pope Francis is alluding here, Saint Ignatius imagines "three persons, each typical of a class. Each of them has acquired ten thousand ducats, but not purely or properly for the love of God. Each desires to save his or her soul and to find God our Lord in peace, by discarding the burden and obstacle to this purpose which this attachment to the acquired money is found to be" (*SpEx* 150; ed. Ganss, 68). According to Pope Francis, the object of the exercise is to help people "to recognize unconscious mechanisms of self-justification that restrict spiritual freedom" (Pope Francis and Austen Ivireigh, *Let Us Dream*, 147n14).

gaze of Jesus gives rise to missionary activity, service, self-giving. Other people are those whom Jesus serves.<sup>37</sup>

As illustrated in these reflections on the call of Matthew, both the gaze and the theme of mercy have become structuring leitmotifs in the papacy of Pope Francis and in a proclamation that invites sinners to the mercy of God and salvation.

The story of Jesus and Zacchaeus represents yet another example of the gaze dynamic in the Gospels. In the preface to a book by Giacomo Tantardini on Augustine, the then Cardinal Bergoglio comments on Augustine's description of the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus, quoting Augustine: "*Et vidit Dominus ipsum Zacchaeum. Visus est, et vidit.*" 'And the Lord looked at Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was seen, and then he saw.'<sup>38</sup> Here, Bergoglio notes the triple pattern of Zacchaeus seeing Jesus, Jesus gazing on Zacchaeus, and Zacchaeus seeing Jesus again after being seen by the Lord. Note, however, that the encounter only occurred after the Lord had looked at Zacchaeus. Without that look, as Tantardini points out, Zacchaeus may have seen Jesus pass but would not have experienced an encounter.<sup>39</sup>

Again, what is important here is that Jesus initiates the encounter with Zacchaeus. On this point, Bergoglio comments:

Some believe that faith and salvation come with our effort to see, to seek the Lord. Instead it is the opposite: you are saved when the Lord looks for you, when he looks at you and you allow yourself to look and to seek. The Lord looks for you first.

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<sup>37</sup> Francis, "Address for the Meeting with the World of Labour," Piazzetta Reale, Turin, June 21, 2015, cited in Ivereigh, *Wounded Shepherd*, 47.

<sup>38</sup> Jorge Mario Bergoglio, preface to Giacomo Tantardini, *Il tempo della Chiesa secondo Agostino* (Rome: Città Nuovo, 2010), 7–8; cited in Massimo Borghesi, *The Mind of Pope Francis: Jorge Mario Bergoglio's Intellectual Journey* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017), 287. During a Sunday Angelus at the Vatican, Pope Francis also commented on the gaze of Jesus on Zacchaeus; see Christopher Wells, "Pope at Angelus: The Merciful Gaze of Jesus Leads to Conversion," Vatican News, November 3, 2019, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-11/pope-at-angelus-the-merciful-gaze-of-jesus-leads-to-conversion.html>. See also Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, "My Friend Don Giacomo," *30 Days* 5 (2012): 36–39, [https://www.30giorni.it/articoli\\_id\\_78469\\_l3.htm](https://www.30giorni.it/articoli_id_78469_l3.htm).

<sup>39</sup> Tantardini, *Il tempo della Chiesa secondo Agostino*, 281.

And when you find him, you understand that he was looking for you, he was waiting for you first.

Here is salvation: He loves you *first*. And you let yourself love. Salvation is just this encounter where he works first. If this encounter doesn't happen, we are not saved.<sup>40</sup>

These comments underscore that the encounter through a shared gaze involves more than physically seeing. First, the seeing constitutes the medium for communion between Jesus and an individual. Second, Jesus initiates the relationship and seeks us out first. In other words, his love precedes any attempt on our part to seek or love him. And finally, the essence of salvation lies in this encounter.

Other biblical texts on this theme include the scene where Jesus gazes on Peter after Peter's three denials. At this gaze, Peter responds by weeping bitterly in his anguished realization that he has betrayed the one he loves before all else (Lk 22:54–62). Likewise, the rich young man responds to the loving gaze of Jesus by grieving deeply because the man cannot sell his riches and follow Jesus (Mk 10:17–22). A counter witness to this gaze occurs in Genesis, where Adam and Eve evade the gaze of God once they have eaten of the tree of good and evil and realize that they are naked (Gn 3:8–11).

How poignant to desire healing and yet to evade it, yet such is the obstinacy, born of pride, of the human condition. How deep the anguish of betrayal and of turning away from the love of Jesus. The deep emotion elicited by the gaze of Jesus is a testimony to the strength of the deepest desire within the human heart: the desire for this loving encounter with God in Jesus Christ. Here, the gaze of Jesus Christ initiates an encounter and a communion between the individual and Christ that communicates self-knowledge, healing, acceptance, unconditional love, and an invitation to follow Jesus. In short, it establishes a relationship between an individual and Jesus.

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<sup>40</sup> Borghesi, *The Mind of Pope Francis*, 288.

Finally, it is an act of intimate communion that represents being known profoundly by Christ and loved and accepted in that transparency. As Pope Francis preached:

All of us find ourselves before that gaze, that marvelous gaze, and we go forward in life, in the certainty that He looks upon us. He too, however, awaits us, in order to look on us definitively—and that final gaze of Jesus upon our lives will be forever, it will be eternal. I ask all the saints upon whom Jesus has looked, to prepare us to let ourselves be looked upon in life, and that they prepare us also for that final—and first!—gaze of Jesus!”<sup>41</sup>

On this same theme, Michael Buckley, in a chapter on the First Principle and Foundation of the *Spiritual Exercises*, identifies the gaze of Jesus as “the first and fundamental invitation to discipleship.”<sup>42</sup> He writes that “the depth of the question [Jesus] will place before them can only be ascertained within this gaze.”<sup>43</sup> This gaze thus makes divine revelation to individuals possible—their human response and intersubjective communion with Jesus. To pose this question in all its simplicity and depth: “What do you seek?”

This question, which is the first words of Jesus in the Gospel of John (Jn 1:38), invites self-knowledge and awareness as individuals learn what they love as they become conscious of what they most deeply desire.<sup>44</sup> The gaze of Jesus thus may elicit desire for mercy and forgiveness; for closer intimate union with him, as to be his companion in mission; or it may evoke love, hope, intensified longing, joy, or profound sorrow for sin. Regardless, this gaze is a call to radical integrity, purity of heart, and freedom, where in every instance, Jesus first gazes on us and invites us into that gaze. In this way, the experience of awe and amazement, in the First Week of the Exercises, of knowing that one is a sinner and yet unconditionally loved by God, awakens the desire to follow Christ.

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<sup>41</sup> “Pope Francis at Mass.”

<sup>42</sup> Michael Buckley, SJ, *What Do You Seek? The Questions of Jesus as Challenge and Promise* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 15.

<sup>43</sup> Buckley, *What Do You Seek?*, 18.

<sup>44</sup> Buckley, *What Do You Seek?*, 18.

Pope Francis connects this gaze with evangelization in his apostolic exhortation on holiness, *Gaudete et Exultate*, “*Rejoice and be Glad: On the Call to Holiness in Today’s World*”:

Are there moments when you place yourself quietly in the Lord’s presence, when you calmly spend time with him, when you bask in his gaze? Do you let his fire inflame your heart? Unless you let him warm you more and more with his love and tenderness, you will not catch fire. How will you then be able to set the hearts of others on fire by your words and witness?<sup>45</sup>

The idea here is that, once a person has experienced this gaze and has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus, that person is ready to follow Jesus in his proclamation of the message of God’s mercy just as the first disciples “who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: ‘We have found the Messiah!’”<sup>46</sup>

## II. From Encounter to Proclamation

Shifting from encounter to proclamation, the content of proclamation, for Pope Francis, is the Good News of the Gospel—the message that “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen, and free you.”<sup>47</sup> The paradigm of this proclamation is the Parable of the Good Samaritan, which Francis calls “pure Gospel.”<sup>48</sup> As with all parables, the reader or listener is to identify with every character in the story. And in this parable, individuals and the entire church are called to minister to the wounds of the traveler lying on the side of the road. Yet, we ourselves are also that traveler, wounded and in need of the healing touch of others and of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>45</sup> Francis, *Gaudete et Exultate* (March 19, 2018), §151, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20180319\\_gaudete-et-exsultate.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exsultate.html) (hereafter cited as *GE*).

<sup>46</sup> *EG*, §120.

<sup>47</sup> *EG*, §164.

<sup>48</sup> Francis devotes chapter 2 of *Fratelli Tutti* to this parable; see Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (October 3, 2020), §§56–86, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html) (hereafter cited as *FT*).

As recent financial and sexual scandals have revealed, so too is the church itself wounded and humiliated, in need of healing. That being so, it is appropriate that Pope Francis calls the church “a field hospital after battle,” explaining that “the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity.”<sup>49</sup> Consequently, the ministers of the church must be above all ministers of mercy, accompanying people and healing their wounds. He elaborates, “Only if we experience this healing power first-hand in our own wounds, as individual persons and as a body, will we lose the fear of letting ourselves be moved by the immensity of our brothers’ and sisters’ suffering.”<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, this mercy is to be extended with tenderness rather than with judgment. Here, Pope Francis identifies the theological reference to tender mercy to be the wounds of Christ, for Christ’s mercy is extended to a wounded humanity. In this, he sets up a resonance between wounded persons in need of healing and the wounds of Christ that heal, icons of his mercy. On this point, he exhorts, in *Gaudete et Exultate*, “If gazing on the face of Christ, you feel unable to let yourself be healed and transformed, then enter into the Lord’s heart, into his wounds, for that is the abode of divine mercy.”<sup>51</sup>

Here, divine tenderness emanates from the wounds of Christ, which are windows that open onto His invisible love. As such, Christ’s wounds heal our wounds, so that it is wound on wound—the wounds of the healer healing the wounds of others. And if this is true of Christ, it is also true of his missionary disciples. For this reason, the personal interior experience of being healed by Christ—of being gazed upon by Christ—is the precondition for the proclamation of the Gospel, which is the proclamation of Christ’s healing salvation.

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<sup>49</sup> Spadaro, “Interview with Pope Francis.”

<sup>50</sup> Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus,” General Curia of the Society of Jesus, October 24, 2016, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20161024\\_visita-compagnia-gesu.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/october/documents/papa-francesco_20161024_visita-compagnia-gesu.html).

<sup>51</sup> *GE*, §151.



This reference to the healing wounds of Christ has strong resonances in Jesuit spirituality, as in the prayer Soul of Christ (*Anima Christi*) situated at the beginning of the *Spiritual Exercises*:

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.  
Body of Christ, save me.  
Blood of Christ, inebriate me.  
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.  
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.  
O Good Jesus, hear me.  
Within your wounds hide me.  
Do not allow me to be separated from you.  
From the malevolent enemy defend me.  
In the hour of my death call me,  
and bid me come to you,  
that with your saints I may praise you  
forever and ever. Amen.<sup>52</sup>

Significantly, the reference to the wounds of Christ occurs exactly at midpoint in the prayer, at the end of the first section's enumeration of references to the body of Christ in his passion and immediately following a plea to be heard. This positioning gives it emphasis and makes it the center of the prayer.

The message here is that the proclamation of the joy of the Gospel and the saving mercy of God does not bypass the Cross, for the wounds of Christ are the enduring evidence of his suffering and death and, as we saw, icons of divine mercy. The contemplation of Christ's passion and death in the *Exercises* invites an identification with the Crucified.

Erich Przywara's meditative interpretation of the *Spiritual Exercises* develops this identification by integrating the meditation on the passion with the third degree of Humility.<sup>53</sup> His text describes the Divine Majesty becoming the Majesty of free pardon and mercy shining in the

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<sup>52</sup> *SpEx* 1; ed. Ganss, 20. An unknown Jesuit added this medieval prayer, which Saint Ignatius did not write, to a new edition of the *Spiritual Exercises* in 1576, twenty years after Ignatius's death.

<sup>53</sup> Erich Przywara, SJ, *The Divine Majesty*, trans. Thomas Corbishley, SJ (Cork, Ireland: The Mercier Press Limited, 1951), 52–55, referencing *SpEx* 167.



face of the crucified Jesus Christ. The essence of fallen humanity's service of the Divine Majesty is to be crucified with Christ and to follow him in order to love him more deeply and follow him more closely.

This service also entails being chosen, God willing, to imitate him in poverty, shame, and persecution—not for love of these, but out of a love of the everlasting mercy apparent in the face of Christ. Absorption into the God of mercy thus means to be absorbed in Christ crucified and assimilated to him who chose poverty rather than riches and insults rather than honor, and to be accounted a fool for Christ's sake.

The *Spiritual Exercises* presents these meditations on the passion in the Third Week, associating them closely with the meditations on the Resurrection in the Fourth Week, the link being the wounds of Christ. Two of these latter meditations connect the post-resurrection recognition of Christ with his manifestation of his wounds. In the first, Jesus shows his wounds to the disciples who are gathered in a locked room (Jn 20:19–20). He appears to the disciples and hands on to them his own ministry of reconciliation and mercy saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you forgive are forgiven them,” thus making them the embodiment of his ministry of reconciliation and mercy.<sup>54</sup> In this way, their ministry extends the saving work and mission of the Cross, which continues to be present in the suffering in the world for which Christ died.<sup>55</sup>

Significantly, the disciples recognize Christ manifest in their midst and in the midst of the Christian community precisely through reconciliation and the reception of his mercy. Simply put, Christ is revealed—is made known—in mercy, and his wounds manifest that mercy. Thus, we can say that the connection between proclamation and mercy grounds the care of wounds as the essence of evangelization in the theology of Pope Francis. And it is precisely for this reason that he can refer to the parable of the Good Samaritan as “pure Gospel.”

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<sup>54</sup> *SpEx* 304; ed. Ganss, 118.

<sup>55</sup> GC 34, d. 2, no. 26.

In the second meditation, Christ invites doubting Thomas to put his hands in his wounds (Jn 20:27).<sup>56</sup> Traditionally, this showing of wounds after the Resurrection has been interpreted as evidence that the resurrected Christ who appears to the disciples is one and the same as the Jesus who had been crucified. This, however, does not go far enough. For not only does Thomas recognize *that* this is the Jesus who was crucified, but also he recognizes the deeper identity of *who* Jesus is in his merciful sacrificial love that offers salvation. From this perspective, the wounds paradoxically reveal divinity in wounded humanity. This in turn elicits Thomas's faith-filled response, "My Lord and my God," which is the subject of the meditation of the third point on the seventh apparition in the *Spiritual Exercises*.<sup>57</sup>

This connection between the proclamation of mercy and its reception in faith touches us in our affectivity in several ways. First, through the affections as moved by the Spirit of Christ, we experience the consolation of Christ's healing and saving presence. Second, the affections help us detect the movement of the Spirit in processes of discernment. Third, we love God and neighbor through our affectivity. Finally, affectivity is essential for the proclamation of the Gospel. While there is a place for rational reasoning, the Gospel will be received when hearts are touched. As Francis has said, "the greatest illness of today is 'cardiosclerosis,'" a hardening of the heart that the proclamation of mercy will soften.<sup>58</sup>

Here a critique can arise that Francis's emphasis on personal encounter and conversion and mercy eclipses the need to address systemic social injustices. In response, it should be noted that he develops his thoughts on economic structures, politics, and other social issues in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), the encyclicals *Laudato Si'* (2015) and *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), and his interview book *Let Us Dream*.<sup>59</sup> Even though he states that "a concrete act of

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<sup>56</sup> *SpEx* 305; ed. Ganss, 118.

<sup>57</sup> *SpEx* 305; ed. Ganss, 118.

<sup>58</sup> Massimo Borghesi, *Neoconservatism vs. the Field Hospital Church of Pope Francis*, trans. Barry Hudock (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021), 240.

<sup>59</sup> Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream*.

mercy is always an act of justice," he goes beyond this to connect the personal, the economic, and the political:

There are approaches that we make only when someone asks us for help, when we hear the cry of the other: this causes us to turn our gaze and discover what was hidden, what could not be seen. This attentiveness is opposed to the globalization of indifference. This gaze demands attention and indicates responsibility, attention that must be translated into political and economic decisions rather than mere rhetoric, and into a precise responsibility, because the good tends to become real.<sup>60</sup>

Likewise, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, he also links personal conversion and the kingdom of God present in society saying that "the Gospel is about *the kingdom of God* (cf. Lk 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world. To the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace, and dignity. Both Christian preaching and life, then, are meant to have an impact on society."<sup>61</sup>

Concern for the individual thus leads to attending to systemic issues, because in his words, "The problem is not feeding the poor, or clothing the naked, or visiting the sick, but rather recognizing that the poor, the naked, the sick, prisoners, and the homeless have the dignity to sit at our table, to feel 'at home' among us, to feel part of a family. This is the sign that the Kingdom of Heaven is in our midst."<sup>62</sup> Finally, with reference to the bishops of Canada, he explains that "the biblical understanding of the jubilee year was about more than simply performing good works," but that "it also meant seeking social change": "For later generations to be released, clearly the goal

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<sup>60</sup> Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream*, 79; Miguel Angel Fiorito, SJ, and Diego Fares, SJ, "Notes for a Theology of the 'Spiritual Exercises,'" *La Civiltà Cattolica*, January 2, 2013, <https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/notes-for-a-theology-of-the-spiritual-exercises/>.

<sup>61</sup> *EG*, §180.

<sup>62</sup> Pope Francis, "Meeting with Priests, Consecrated Men and Women, and Seminarians," Santiago Cathedral, January 16, 2018, quoted in Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream*, 113, 149n26.

had to be the restoration of just social and economic systems, so there could no longer be exclusion.”<sup>63</sup>

### III. Doctrinal Expression and Catechesis

#### A. Kerygmatic Theology of Pope Francis

As presented earlier, the four components encompassing Pope Francis’s reform are: (1) a personal encounter between the evangelizer and Christ as the precondition for proclamation of the Gospel, (2) the proclamation of the Gospel in terms of God’s saving mercy, (3) catechesis of essential doctrine and moral application of this doctrine, and (4) reform of church structures to serve proclamation and mission. This sequence contrasts with a more traditional, deductive approach that draws from the texts of an authoritative source a complete teaching to apply in concrete circumstances. In his address to General Congregation 36, Pope Francis, referring to the *Formula of the Institute*, said, “The *Formula* contains Ignatius’ insight, and its essence is what accounts for the Constitution’s insistence on always keeping in mind the priority of ‘places, times, and persons,’ and the fact that all the rules are intended to help us in concrete situations.”<sup>64</sup>

This proclamation is what is known as *kerygmatic theology*. Kerygmatic theology consists in the proclamation, addressed directly to a hearer as a call to conversion, of the saving life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is meant to elicit an existential encounter with Jesus Christ and a response in faith.<sup>65</sup> Kerygmatic theology stands in contrast to catechesis or a more academic or speculative study of religious truths, which is properly undertaken only after the proclamation has

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<sup>63</sup> *GE*, §99. The latter material, quoted in *GE*, is from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, “The Common Good or Exclusion: A Choice for Canadians,” February 2, 2001, §9, <https://www.cccb.ca/document/the-common-good-or-exclusion-a-choice-for-canadians/>; see also *FT*, §§67, 69.

<sup>64</sup> Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus.”

<sup>65</sup> The eight instances of the kerygma in the Acts of the Apostles appear at 2:14–36; 3:12–26; 4:8–12; 5:29–32; 10:34–43; 13:16–41; 14:15–17; 17:22–31.

been issued and received in faith. At that point, doctrine can serve the church's mission of proclamation by explicating the faith of the church in the light of the Gospel and by interpreting the various truths that the church teaches in relation to their Christological center.<sup>66</sup>

This connects with the Ignatian tradition in that kerygmatic theology represents the theological reflection developed in the *Spiritual Exercises* and that St. Ignatius called *positive theology*. It is practical in its orientation—a lived theology in which the various themes of the *Exercises* are ordered and expressed in such a way that their truth can be lived rather than serve as matter for speculation.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, this theology privileges discernment as the method by which the exercitant makes an election or choice for reform of life. As such, the main features of Ignatian kerygmatic theology, as identified by Miguel Angel Fiorito and Diego Fares, can be described as follows:

1. It is a theology in which the *selection* of theological truths obeys a criterion which is not speculative, but practical; that is, not merely to teach or discuss them, but to live them.
2. It is a theology in which the particular order in the presentation of the aforementioned truths takes place in such a way that they constitute a doctrinal, vital and organic unity, which finds justification, not in logical or conceptual reasons, but in spiritual experience.
3. Finally, and as a consequence of the two previous characteristics, it is a theology that has a special efficacy in order to move the hearer to accept those truths wholeheartedly, and to live them “being not hearers who forget but doers who act” (Jas 1:25).<sup>68</sup>

The resonance of this Ignatian approach with the emphases in Pope Francis's *Evangelii Gaudium* appear in Francis's insistence on pastoral and missionary conversion; the prioritizing of the essentials of church teaching over a “disjointed transmission of a multitude of

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<sup>66</sup> EG, §§34–39.

<sup>67</sup> Fiorito and Fares, “Notes for a Theology of the ‘Spiritual Exercises.’”

<sup>68</sup> Fiorito and Fares, “Notes for a Theology of the ‘Spiritual Exercises.’”

doctrines"; a hierarchy of truths wherein the more important of them give direct expression to the heart of the Gospel, "the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead"; and Francis's instance that the invitation to respond "to the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others" not be obscured by "certain doctrinal or moral points based on specific ideological options."<sup>69</sup>

Note here that Pope Francis does not dismiss the moral teaching of the church. On the contrary, he fears that this teaching would be reduced to "a house of cards" if the invitation to a response of love "does not radiate forcefully and attractively."<sup>70</sup> For this reason, subsequent doctrinal and moral instruction requires as a prior condition a personal response to the kerygmatic proclamation. For this reason, Pope Francis thinks that the church and all theology "exist to evangelize," and he calls on theologians not to be content with "a desk-bound theology."<sup>71</sup>

From this perspective, we see how kerygmatic theology carries over to a pastoral approach to doctrine. On this point, Christoph Theobald develops what he identifies as the principle of *pastorality*.<sup>72</sup> Theobald identifies the "grammar" of the principle of pastorality as consisting of three practices: (1) the reading of the Scriptures, (2) the discernment of the signs of the times, and (3) the access to one's interiority and to the "colloquium" with God in solitude and in the liturgy.<sup>73</sup> These practices in turn correspond to Pope Francis's emphases on the personal encounter with God, the centrality of the proclamation of God's saving mercy as revealed in the Scriptures, the practice of

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<sup>69</sup> EG, §§25, 35, 36, 39.

<sup>70</sup> EG, §39.

<sup>71</sup> EG, §133.

<sup>72</sup> Christoph Theobald, SJ, "The Principle of Pastorality at Vatican II: Challenges of a Prospective Interpretation of the Council," in *The Legacy of Vatican II*, ed. Massimo Faggioli and Andrea Vicini, SJ (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), 26–37; Richard R. Gaillardetz, "The Pastoral Orientation of Doctrine," in *Go Into the Streets!: The Welcoming Church of Pope Francis*, ed. Thomas P. Rausch, SJ, and Richard R. Gaillardetz (New York: Paulist Press, 2016), 125–40; Richard R. Gaillardetz, "The Francis Moment': A New *Kairos* for Ecclesiology," *CTSA Proceedings* 69 (2014): 63–80 at 75–80.

<sup>73</sup> Theobald, "The Principle of Pastorality at Vatican II," 32.

discernment within concrete and particular contexts, and a reform of church structures better to meet the needs of particular contexts in service of the proclamation of the Gospel.

In this context, a “pastoral” magisterium and the pastorality of doctrine thus have as their starting point concrete experience rather than abstract doctrine, which distinguishes Pope Francis from his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI. The idea is that, where Pope Benedict begins with the faith of the church, seeking to make it understandable both intellectually and spiritually to implement doctrine in practice, Pope Francis begins with the concrete situation, attempting to evaluate circumstances according to the rule for discernment of spirits and to arrive at concrete, practical solutions.<sup>74</sup>

From this perspective, the pastoral situation of the church is not simply the arena in which doctrines are applied, but, in the words of John O'Brien, “the very context from which doctrines emerge, the very condition of the possibility of doctrine, the touchstone for the validity of doctrine and the prior and posterior praxis which doctrine, at most, attempts to sum up, safeguard, and transmit.”<sup>75</sup> In this approach, then, doctrines, those inherited from the past as well as new doctrines that may be formulated, arise from the existential experience of the faith in response to questions posed and to engagements with disputes over interpretation in particular historical contexts.

In this sense, doctrinal formulations are always partial and thus can never exhaust the fundamental Christian message. As such, they represent the accumulated wisdom of the community under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in receiving the inherited faith of the church and responding to new questions. Here, then, doctrine is not simply didactic, informational, and regulative—something to be imposed—but doxological, mystagogical, and transformative—something to be lived when connected with its roots in the faith experience of the

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<sup>74</sup> EG, 50–51; Walter Kasper, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love* (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), 10.

<sup>75</sup> John O'Brien, “Ecclesiology as Narrative,” *Ecclesiology* 4 (2008): 148–65 at 150.



community.<sup>76</sup> For this reason, we can say that the Christian community receives both the biblical text and doctrinal formulations as autobiographical accounts of its own faith. In this sense, doctrines are lived before they are written, and reception of doctrine occurs when it passes into the teaching, life, and worship of the community in contexts that inevitably reflect cultural and historical diversity.<sup>77</sup>

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*As such, doctrines are not disembodied ideas but serve the core Christian proclamation of the Gospel within the pastoral life of the church.*

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For this reason, Pope Francis sees church teaching as mediated though a relationship with Christ,

the fullness of revelation, and encountered in history. As such, doctrines are not disembodied ideas but serve the core Christian proclamation of the Gospel within the pastoral life of the church. Thus, Pope Francis enunciates the principle that “realities are more important than ideas.”<sup>78</sup> He says that “ideas are debated, but realities are *discerned*.”<sup>79</sup> This puts Pope Francis’s pastoral focus in continuity with Pope John XXIII, who in his opening speech at Vatican II invited the council’s fathers to measure everything “by the forms and proportions of a teaching authority primarily pastoral in character.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> See Juan Louis Segundo, *The Liberation of Dogma: Faith, Revelation, and Dogmatic Teaching Authority*, trans. Philip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 108.

<sup>77</sup> DV, §4.

<sup>78</sup> EG, §§231–33.

<sup>79</sup> Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream*, 54; italics in the original. It is important not to simply identify “ideas” with “truth.” According to Pope Francis, truth is not simply an idea, but something that lies “outside us, always beyond us, but beckoning to us through our consciences.” Quoting John Henry Newman, Pope Francis says that truth is reached not normally through reason but “through the imagination, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of facts and events, by history, by description.” Here, Pope Francis is convinced that “in embracing what often appear at first sight to be contradictory truths and trusting in the kindly light to lead us, we will eventually come to see the greater truth that lies beyond us. I like to think that we do not possess the truth so much as the truth possesses us, constantly attracting us by means of beauty and goodness.” See Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream*, 56.

<sup>80</sup> John XXIII, “Solenne apertura del Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II: Discorso del Santo Padre Giovanni XXIII,” October 11, 1962, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/it/speeches/1962/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_spe\\_19621011\\_opening-council.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/it/speeches/1962/documents/hf_j-xxiii_spe_19621011_opening-council.html); trans. Joseph A. Komonchak, “Gaudet Mater Ecclesia: Pope John’s Opening Speech to the Council,”



This pastorality of doctrine in turn requires a pastoral magisterium, meaning one that is synodal or listening, relies on symbolic gestures more than juridical act, is committed to the decentralization of authority, embodies appropriate doctrinal humility that acknowledges the limits of theological knowledge, serves the practice of discernment and the formation of conscience, and is reluctant to pronounce prematurely on controversial issues.<sup>81</sup>

## B. Discernment

To elaborate, the application of doctrine to concrete situations requires discernment, which for Pope Francis occurs within a dialectic. The epitome of this dialectic is the paradoxical epitaph on the tombstone of St. Ignatius, *non coerceri a maximo, contineri tamen a minimo, divinum est*, “not to be limited by the greatest and yet to be contained in the tiniest—this is the divine.” This dialectic expresses the mystery of the Incarnation by which tenderness arises from the Lord, who renounces strength and power and makes himself small.

This dynamic also expresses Pope Francis's theology of tenderness as he explains, “He is the great God who makes himself small and in his smallness does not stop being great. And in this great dialectic he is small: there is the tenderness of God. The great that makes himself small and the small that is great.”<sup>82</sup> Pope Francis says we could translate

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5n4, <https://jakomonchak.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/john-xxiii-opening-speech.pdf>.

<sup>81</sup> Symbolic gestures encompass a surplus of meaning and are evocative rather than prescriptive. In his apostolic letter *Desiderio desideravi* (June 29, 2022), Pope Francis comments, “Wonder is an essential part of the liturgical act because it is the way that those who know they are engaged in the particularity of symbolic gestures look at things. It is the marveling of those who experience the power of symbol, which does not consist in referring to some abstract concept but rather in containing and expressing in its very concreteness what it signifies” (§26, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_letters/documents/20220629-lettera-ap-desiderio-desideravi.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/20220629-lettera-ap-desiderio-desideravi.html)). See Richard R. Gaillardetz, *By What Authority: Foundations for Understanding Authority in the Church*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018), 130–32.

<sup>82</sup> Francis, morning homily, Domus Sanctae Marthae chapel, December 14, 2017, cited by Massimo Borghesi, “The Polarity Model: The Influences of Gaston Fessard and Romano Guardini on Jorge Mario Bergoglio,” trans. Pisetro Bartoli, in *Discovering Pope Francis: The Roots of Jorge Mario Bergoglio's Thinking*, ed. Brian Y. Lee and Thomas L.

it, “without turning away from that which is high, we must bend down to pick up what is apparently small in the service of God”; or, “while remaining attentive to what is further away, we must worry about what is closer.” He adds, “It is applied to religious discipline . . . and is useful for characterizing Ignatian spirituality dialectically.”<sup>83</sup>

Massimo Borghesi interprets this theology of tenderness in the light of the kenotic hymn in Philippians, where in becoming a servant, the Lord “becomes small in order to communicate with the small. Salvation comes thusly, not through force and power, which are also attributes of God, but through the weakness of the Son. God chooses tenderness as the method of salvation.”<sup>84</sup> When we compare this to the proclamation of salvation described in the previous section, the dialectic evokes the parable of the good Samaritan as an illustration of the paradoxical relationship between God and humanity governed by mercy.

Here, as in the thought of Romano Guardini, Gaston Fessard, and Henri de Lubac that influence this theology, the poles of the dialectic—oppositions (*Gegensatz*) rather than contradictions (*Widerspruch*)—are never annulled, as in the philosophy of Hegel or Marx.<sup>85</sup> There is no contradiction, no identity, and no synthesis between them; instead, the poles of the dialectic remain in a dynamic tension that provides space for discernment, decision, and resolution at a higher level while the tension remains, allowing for “a dynamic, polyform reality that need not fear the loss of its unity.”<sup>86</sup> This realization of unity and communion in a dialogical form will influence the practice

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Knoebel (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2019), 96.

<sup>83</sup> Pope Francis, *Nel Cuore di Ogni Padre: Alle Radici Della mia Spiritualità* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2016), 282n4, cited in Borghesi, “The Polarity Model,” 97.

<sup>84</sup> Ph 2:6–11; Borghesi, “The Polarity Model,” 99.

<sup>85</sup> Romano Guardini, *Der Gegensatz Versuche zu e. Philosophie des Lebendig-Konkreten* (Mainz, Wiesbaden: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag H. Rauch, 1925); Gaston Fessard, SJ, *La Dialectique des “Exercices spirituels” de saint Ignace de Loyola* (Paris: Aubier, 1956); Henri de Lubac, SJ, *Paradoxes of Faith*, trans. Paule Simon, Sadie Kreilkamp, and Ernest Beaumont (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987); *More Paradoxes*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002). See Susan K. Wood, “Pope Francis and the Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac,” in *Discovering Pope Francis*, 130–49 at 131–42.

<sup>86</sup> Borghesi, “The Polarity Model,” 107.

of synodality because in this model, peculiarities and differences can be maintained within a broader unity.

As an analogy, consider a musical symphony in which harmony arises from differences. Examples of dialectic in the life of the church include truth–mercy, pastoral practice–doctrine, realities–ideas, universal–particular, concrete–abstract, contemplation–action, immanence–transcendence, theology–pastoral care, globalization–localization, charism–institution, community–mission, reality–ideas, and time–space. In these apparent contradictions, each pole needs the other. Within these dialectics, the church is “a *coincidentia oppositorum*, a place of reconciled diversity in which the Holy Spirit forges a synthesis on a transcendent plane of coexisting elements that pull in opposite directions. Such dynamic polarities are intrinsic to creation and reflect a divine grammar.”<sup>87</sup>

An example of discernment within a dialectic occurred during a visit of Pope Francis of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Rome November 15, 2015. There, Anke de Bernadinis, the Lutheran wife of a Roman Catholic, expressing sorrow at “not being able to partake together in the Lord’s Supper,” asked, “What more can we do to reach communion on this point?” I cite here at length Pope Francis’s nuanced response, as it illustrates the dialectic created by the dilemma of whether the woman should be allowed to receive the Eucharist given competing values and principles and caused quite a stir in the ecumenical world:

I think the Lord gave us [the answer] when he gave us this command: “Do this in memory of me.” And when we share in, remember and emulate the Lord’s Supper, we do the same thing that the Lord Jesus did. . . . I ask myself: “Is sharing the Lord’s Supper the end of a journey or is it the viaticum for walking together? I leave the question to the theologians, to those who understand. It is true that in a certain sense sharing is saying that there are no differences between us, that we have the same doctrine . . . but I ask myself: don’t we have the same Baptism? And if we have the same Baptism, we have to

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<sup>87</sup> Austin Iverneigh, “New Book Looks at Intellectual History of Francis, and Why He Is Pope of Polarity,” *CruxNow*, November 18, 2017, <https://cruxnow.com/book-review/2017/11/new-book-looks-intellectual-history-francis-pope-polarity>.

walk together. You are a witness to an even [more] profound journey because it is a conjugal journey, truly a family journey, of human love and of shared faith. We have the same Baptism. When you feel you are a sinner—I too feel I am quite a sinner—when your husband feels he is a sinner, you go before the Lord and ask forgiveness; your husband does the same and goes to the priest and requests absolution. They are ways of keeping Baptism alive. When you pray together, that Baptism grows, it becomes strong; when you teach your children who Jesus is, why Jesus came, what Jesus did, you do the same, whether in Lutheran or Catholic terms, but it is the same. The question: and the Supper? There are questions to which only if one is honest with oneself and with the few theological “lights” that I have, one must respond the same, you see. “This is my Body, this is my Blood,” said the Lord, “do this in memory of me,” and this is a viaticum which helps us to journey. . . . I respond to your question only with a question: how can I participate with my husband, so that the Lord’s Supper may accompany me on my path? It is a problem to which each person must respond. A pastor friend of mine said to me: “We believe that the Lord is present there. He is present. You believe that the Lord is present. So what is the difference?” — “Well, there are explanations, interpretations. . . .” Life is greater than explanations and interpretations. Always refer to Baptism: “One faith, one baptism, one Lord,” as Paul tells us, and take the outcome from there. I would never dare give permission to do this because I do not have the authority. One Baptism, one Lord, one faith. Speak with the Lord and go forward. I do not dare say more.<sup>88</sup>

Several points here merit noting. First, Pope Francis emphasizes baptism as the foundation of Christian unity. Second, he builds an argument on the scriptural injunction of Jesus’s words, “Do this in memory of me,” posing the question of how the churches can remain faithful to this command if they do not share the Eucharist. Third, the

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<sup>88</sup> Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis,” Visit to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Rome, Christuskirche Parish, Sunday, 15 November 2015, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151115\\_chiesa-evangelica-luterana.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151115_chiesa-evangelica-luterana.html). The foregoing summary and commentary first appeared in Susan K. Wood, “Pope Francis and Ecumenism,” *One in Christ* 52, no. 1 (2018): 3–16 at 12–15.

church has always taught that the Eucharist is both a sign of unity and a means to unity, but it has generally insisted that unity must be achieved before the Eucharist is shared; however, Pope Francis picks up on the theme of viaticum (“walking together”)—that is, Eucharist as “food for a journey.” But while viaticum generally refers to the Eucharist received by a dying person as food for the journey back to God, Pope Francis uses the term here as food for the journey to Christian unity. As such, he applies it to the journey of the ecumenical couple; but we might ask whether it also can apply to the ecumenical journey of the churches on the way to unity.

Fourth, he notably does not supply an answer to the woman from his pastoral authority as pope, inviting her instead to prayerful discernment; in fact, he says that he does not have the authority to give an answer.<sup>89</sup> But neither does he give permission for the woman to receive communion with her husband. Here, in his appeal to personal, prayerful discernment, he is very Ignatian, not denying the theological explanations, doctrines, and interpretations, but in effect affirming that life is greater than these. And fifth, he refers to baptism and the Ephesians text, “One faith, one baptism, one Lord,” concluding the woman’s response must be based on that.

As this analysis makes clear, the world witnesses, in this spontaneous exchange between Pope Francis and the woman, theological reflection and discernment in action. Specifically, Pope Francis gives her some principles on which to base her decision. These include the importance of the Dominical command, the identification of the Eucharist as viaticum, and the relationship between a common baptism and the potential of receiving the Catholic Eucharist. In so doing, he lifts up elements of traditional eucharistic doctrine to balance the elements of the doctrine that control current church teaching. These former include documents indicating that, in cases of need, sharing is not just “tolerated” or “allowed,” but “commended.”<sup>90</sup> In any case, by

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<sup>89</sup> In his encounter with the woman, he does not explain why he would not have the authority to grant permission. Presumably, he would not impose authority in a situation requiring discernment.

<sup>90</sup> *Unitatis Redintegratio* (November 21, 1964), §8, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19641121\\_](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_)

giving her no clear answer, he indicated that the question is open-ended and consequently a matter for further discernment. In the end, by withholding definitive judgment, Pope Francis underscored the roles of conscience, discernment, and personal responsibility in the woman's decision-making process.<sup>91</sup>

What this illustrates is that discernment requires open-ended thinking.<sup>92</sup> In his interview with Spadaro, Pope Francis commented, "The mystical dimension of discernment never defines its edges and does not complete the thought. The Jesuit must be a person whose thought is incomplete, in the sense of being engaged in open-ended thinking." This means resisting the temptation "to find false relief in an immediate decision and, instead, being willing to humbly set different options before the Lord, waiting for that overflow."<sup>93</sup> From this perspective, if a thought is incomplete, then it allows for further development. On this point, Pope Francis says, "With Guardini I learned not to expect absolute certainties about everything, which is a symptom of an anxious spirit. His wisdom has allowed me to confront complex problems that cannot be resolved simply following norms, but using instead a kind of thinking that allows you to navigate conflicts without being trapped in them."<sup>94</sup>

In this vein, Diego Fares identifies the rush to an immediate decision as an example of "triumphalist thinking," subject to entrapment by ideological pitfalls, which contrasts with an open thought that always

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unitatis-redintegratio\_en.html (hereafter cited as UR).

<sup>91</sup> See Diego Fares, SJ, "Notes for an 'Incomplete Thought,'" *La Civiltà Cattolica* 6, no. 2 art. 10, 0222: 10.32009/22072446.0222.10, <https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/notes-for-an-incomplete-thought/>; see also Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream*, 55–56.

<sup>92</sup> Francis said that "being a Jesuit means being a person of incomplete thinking, of open thinking: because he always thinks, looking at the horizon that is the glory of God ever greater, who surprises us without ceasing." See Francis, "Homily of Pope Francis," Church of the Gesù, Rome, January 3, 2014, cited in Antonio Spadaro, SJ, "The Reform of the Church According to Pope Francis: The Ignatian Roots," in *For a Missionary Reform of the Church*, 3–23 at 6.

<sup>93</sup> Cited in Fares, "Notes for an 'Incomplete Thought.'"

<sup>94</sup> Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream*, 40–42.

represents love for the other and transcends the self.<sup>95</sup> Finally, Pope Francis's encounter with the Lutheran woman characterizes his pastoral magisterium by demonstrating his navigation of a complex issue and his refusal to come to closure on it prematurely.

In chapter eight of *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis develops formally his attitudes about discernment in pastoral situations.<sup>96</sup> There, while he affirms the objectivity and integrity of the church's moral teaching, he also counsels gradualness in pastoral care, acknowledging that since the concrete situations of individuals in irregular situations are varied" and "the degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases, "the consequences or effects of a rule need not necessarily be the same."<sup>97</sup> Following this teaching, discernment in these situations is dynamic, open to new stages of growth and to new decisions that help the ideal to be more fully realized even though discernment in practical circumstances cannot be elevated to a rule.<sup>98</sup> Discernment within a context of limits seeks ways of responding to God and encouraging growth, since "by thinking that everything is black and white, we sometimes close off the way of grace and growth, and discourage paths of sanctification, which give glory to God."<sup>99</sup> Above all, he explains, the pastoral activity of the church should be characterized by the tenderness of mercy, which is "the very foundation of the Church's life."<sup>100</sup>

Accordingly, discernment occurs always in the concrete circumstances of life and is particular to a specific context and situation. As such, it operates in the space of the dialectic between moral norms

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<sup>95</sup> Fares, "Notes for an 'Incomplete Thought.'"

<sup>96</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (March 19, 2016), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia.html) (hereafter cited as *AL*). See also Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream*, 40–43.

<sup>97</sup> *AL*, §300, n336: "This is also the case with regard to sacramental discipline, since discernment can recognize that in a particular situation no grave fault exists. In such cases, what is found in another document applies: cf. *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), 44 and 47."

<sup>98</sup> *AL*, §303–04.

<sup>99</sup> *AL*, §305.

<sup>100</sup> *AL*, §310.



and ideals, on the one side, and human limitations in achieving those norms and ideals, on the other. In this regard, it serves as a methodology for applying the principle of the pastorality of doctrine, since

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*Here, ecclesial structures are meant not to preserve themselves but to serve evangelization and to promote the church's fidelity to her calling.*

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the norm orients the direction of spiritual growth. Nevertheless, it does not constitute an automatic condemnation of an individual who cannot achieve its realization in the concrete circumstances of life. In fact, discernment functions as an essential condition of

the pastorality of doctrine.

To connect this with the Ignatian tradition, it is noteworthy that, in his address to the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, Pope Francis says that “Ignatius and his first companions use the word “*aprovechamiento*” or “benefit” (*ad profectum*, 7 cf. Phil 1:12, 25) to describe the practical criterion of discernment in Ignatian spirituality.”<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, the word *aprovechamiento*, which connotes “drawing profit” or “bearing fruit,” is communal insofar as the end of the Society is the salvation of the souls not only of its members, but also of their neighbors. He goes on to note that the *Formula* contains the dialectic—that is, the tension between one’s own salvation and that of others—and that “*aprovechamiento* pervades everything” in the thought of the early Jesuits.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, with reference to Peter Faber, Pope Francis notes that the harmonizing of these tensions occurs not abstractly but over time.<sup>103</sup>

Pope Francis expands on these themes in his book, *Let Us Dream*, where he comments that there are some people who “hear the word ‘discernment’ and worry that it’s a fancy way of ignoring the rules or

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<sup>101</sup> Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus.”

<sup>102</sup> Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus”; the reference is to *General Examen 2; Const. 3*.

<sup>103</sup> Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus.”



some clever modern ruse to downgrade the truth."<sup>104</sup> He says, though, that discernment is quite the opposite of this, and that there is "no contradiction between being solidly rooted in the truth and at the same time being open to a greater understanding," since the Spirit guides the church in its translation of "the Good News in different contexts."<sup>105</sup> In this regard, he finds helpful Aquinas's teaching "that no general rule could apply in every situation."<sup>106</sup>

From this perspective, while the law does not change, its application leaves room for circumstances that do not fit neatly into categories, such that, through discernment and "attending to the specifics of each case, attentive to God's grace operating in the nitty-gritty of people's lives," an alternative to "black-and-white moralism that risked closing off paths of grace and growth" can be found.<sup>107</sup> Note, then, that, in Pope Francis's mind, this discernment does not change law or doctrine but recovers an authentic meaning of both, enabling the church to help people "see where God's grace is operating in their lives and to help them embrace the fullness of Church teaching."<sup>108</sup> In so doing, he draws from the church's tradition a fresh understanding and synthesis of truth and mercy.

#### IV. Structural Reform

Just as God calls individuals to conversion to become evangelizers announcing the tender mercy of God, so too, does God call the church to ecclesial conversion and self-renewal in its relationship to Jesus Christ. Pope Francis comments:

Every renewal of the Church essentially consists in an increase of fidelity to her own calling . . . Christ summons the Church as she goes her pilgrim way. . . to that continual reformation of which she always has need, in so far as she is

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<sup>104</sup> Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream*, 57.

<sup>105</sup> Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream*, 57.

<sup>106</sup> Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream*, 88.

<sup>107</sup> Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream*, 88.

<sup>108</sup> Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream*, 88.

a human institution here on earth.<sup>109</sup>

Here, ecclesial structures are meant not to preserve themselves but to serve evangelization and to promote the church's fidelity to her calling. Thus, any renewal of structures that pastoral conversion demands must aim to make those structures more mission-oriented and to make pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open. In this vein, citing Pope John Paul II, Pope Francis asserts that "all renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion."<sup>110</sup>

This renewal in turn requires an evangelical discernment that not only recognizes and discerns spirits, but also chooses movements of the spirit of good and rejects the spirit of evil—a scrutiny of the signs of the times.<sup>111</sup> Here, discernment is directed both toward the church or the decisions of an individual and toward society and culture, reflecting the Contemplation to Attain the Love of God in the *Spiritual Exercises*, both in the reflection of how God dwells in creatures and how God works and labors in all creatures upon the face of the earth.<sup>112</sup> On this point, a missionary church discerns the presence of God already present and at work in the world for it is on this basis that the world can recognize and resonate with the message of the Gospel.

With respect, then, to the structures of the church serving its mission, Pope Francis says:

I dream of a 'missionary option,' that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitable channeled for the evangelization of

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<sup>109</sup> *EG*, §26, citing *UR*, §6.

<sup>110</sup> *EG*, §27, citing John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Oceania* (November 22, 2001), §19, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_20011122\\_ecclesia-in-oceania.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20011122_ecclesia-in-oceania.html) (hereafter cited as *EO*).

<sup>111</sup> Francis, *EG*, §51, with reference to Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam* (August 6, 1964), §6, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_06081964\\_ecclesiam.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html) (hereafter cited as *ES*).

<sup>112</sup> *SpEx* 235, 236; ed. Ganss, 95.

today's world rather than for her self-preservation.<sup>113</sup>

This requires, however, a reversal of the church conceived as a pyramid with the leadership on top. As such, in Pope Francis's church, the pyramid is inverted with the top located beneath the base, the people of God at the top and the church's ministers at the bottom. In this model, "those who exercise authority are called 'ministers,' because, in the original meaning of the word, they are the least of all."<sup>114</sup> In this spirit, each bishop is the vicar of "that Jesus who at the Last Supper bent down to wash the feet of the Apostles, the Successor of Peter is the *servus servorum Dei*, the servant of the servants of God, and the only authority is the authority of service (Mt 20:24–28; Lk 22:25–27; Jn 13:12–17).

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*In Pope Francis's church, the pyramid is inverted with the top located beneath the base, the people of God at the top and the church's ministers at the bottom.*

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This missionary church envisioned by Pope Francis is in turn achieved through a return to evangelical poverty, a renewed commitment to the poor, a conversion to the Word of God and its preaching, a supportive community life, identification with the excluded, and new institutional forms to create works of mercy. Such a church is thus open, characterized as a people on a journey—a pilgrim church that is missionary by her very nature.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, a missionary church de-centers itself to go out to the peripheries and proclaim the salvific love and mercy of God to all in need of the light of the Gospel.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> EG, §27.

<sup>114</sup> Francis, "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis," Paul VI Audience Hall, October 17, 2015, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151017\\_50-anniversario-sinodo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html).

<sup>115</sup> *Ad Gentes* (December 7, 1965), §2, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651207\\_ad-gentes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html).

<sup>116</sup> EG, §20; see also Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream*, 135. Jesuit General Arturo Sosa picks up this theme in his letter promulgating GC 36, when he writes, "The success of the Congregation lies in the fruit of our personal conversion, in the necessary changes in the life style of our communities, and in the willingness to be sent to the peripheries or frontiers of the contemporary world to share the joy of the gospel." See Arturo Sosa, "To the Whole Society," 2017/01, Rome, January 6, 2017, [https://jesuits.eu/images/docs/GC\\_36\\_Documents.pdf](https://jesuits.eu/images/docs/GC_36_Documents.pdf).

On this note, in his address to GC 36, Pope Francis returned to the theme of *Evangelii Gaudium*, connecting the themes of joy, justice, and mercy to service at the peripheries, saying, “This joy of an explicit proclamation of the Gospel—by means of the preaching of the faith and the practice of justice and mercy—is what drives the Society out to the margins of society.”<sup>117</sup> This comment resonates with what Yves Congar noted as early as 1950, that reform initiatives come from the peripheries.<sup>118</sup> Of course, these peripheries may be geographical, but they are also existential, inclusive of the social situation of people today; of sin as alienation from God, other people, and the church; of the absence of faith; of suffering of all kinds; and of injustice.

To make yet another Ignatian connection, this journey to the peripheries finds its roots in the missionary impulse from the earliest days of the Society of Jesus. In this spirit, Ignatius and his companions dedicated themselves to the service of Christ the King, who sent them into the entire world to spread his teachings among all degrees and conditions of men.<sup>119</sup> As such, the Jesuits saw and continue to see their charism “to be with Christ as servants of his mission, to be with people where they dwell and work and struggle, to bring the Gospel into their lives and labors.”<sup>120</sup> This missionary impetus, as General Congregation 32 observed, demands “a high level of availability and a real apostolic mobility in the service of the universal Church.”<sup>121</sup>

In addition, the apostolic character of the Society implies that Jesuits are sent “in every direction in accordance with the most authentic and genuine character of the Society,” into the whole world to spread

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<sup>117</sup> Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus.”

<sup>118</sup> Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. Paul Philibert (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 237–42.

<sup>119</sup> See *SpEx* 145; ed. Ganss, 66.

<sup>120</sup> GC 34, d. 1, no. 7; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 514–15.

<sup>121</sup> GC 32, d. 4, no. 118; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 314; see also *Const.*, 603–05; ed. Padberg, 276–78.

Christ's teaching "among the people of every state and condition."<sup>122</sup> This apostolic impetus and the Society's union with the Pope thus endows the Society with "truly Catholic and universal energy" and frees it from being "hemmed in by the narrow conditions of time and place."<sup>123</sup>

Structural reform for a missionary church also includes strengthening bonds of collegiality, reforming the Curia, increasing the diversity of voices heard in the church, implementing structures of consultation such as synods on all levels of church life, and practicing subsidiarity by supporting initiatives of local churches. In Pope Francis's efforts to orient church reform to the proclamation of the Gospel, it is noteworthy that in the reform of the curia, the dicastery for evangelization now has pride of place. Pope Francis lists it, in the apostolic constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, ahead of the dicastery for the doctrine of the faith.<sup>124</sup> And as for the reform itself, structures of collegiality are strengthened by improving the procedures of the synod of bishops, enriching the Roman dicasteries by a greater variety of voices through the appointment of more lay people, and creating broader opportunities for the presence of women in the church.<sup>125</sup>

In addition, to meet the needs of the proclamation of the Gospel in particular contexts, the missionary church encourages initiatives of local churches through episcopal conferences.<sup>126</sup> This implies the need for a sound decentralization, since the pope cannot "take the place of local Bishops on the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory."<sup>127</sup> Obstacles to be overcome include excessive centralization, ecclesiastical bureaucratization, distance between bishops and clergy and between clergy and people; reason divorced from the supernatural;

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<sup>122</sup> Paul VI, "Address of Pope Paul VI to the Members of the 32nd General Congregation," December 1, 1974, in *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 383.

<sup>123</sup> Paul VI, "Address of Pope Paul VI to the Members of the 32nd General Congregation," in *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 384.

<sup>124</sup> Francis, *Praedicate Evangelium* (March 19, 2022), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_constitutions/documents/20220319-costituzione-apraedicate-evangelium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/20220319-costituzione-apraedicate-evangelium.html) (hereafter cited as *PE*).

<sup>125</sup> *EG*, §103; *PE*, §7.

<sup>126</sup> *EG*, §§16, 32.

<sup>127</sup> *EG*, §16.

faith that has become ideologized and clericalized; and clericalism.

To bring these themes together, a key term in the development of a more participatory church as a vehicle for dialogue at all levels is *synodality*. If a synod is an assembly, then the church is itself a synod, such that a synod is both an event in the life of the church and a way of being church, apparent in attitudes and daily practices. As such, synodality entails a culture of encounter and a culture of dialogue.<sup>128</sup> In synodality, the process of discernment—the way forward—thus expands from the *I* to the *we*, as the discernment takes place in the context of community.<sup>129</sup> An essential tool for this apostolic communal discernment is spiritual conversation, which involves active and receptive listening, speaking of what touches a person most deeply, and taking account of spiritual movements of consolation and desolation, both individual and communal.<sup>130</sup>

Along with its communal context, this discernment occurs within a polarity of what Pope Francis calls “contrapositions”—that is, “opposites that nonetheless interact in a fruitful, creative tension.”<sup>131</sup> In this vein, he sees the goal of a synod:

not so much to forge agreement as to recognize, honor, and reconcile differences on a higher plane where the best of each can be retained. In the dynamic of a synod, differences are expressed and polished until you reach, if not a consensus, a harmony that holds on to the sharp notes of its differences.<sup>132</sup>

He goes on to compare this to music where the harmony “allows for the better articulation of the singularities of each note,” re-

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<sup>128</sup> *FT*, §§215–17; *EG*, §§238–58.

<sup>129</sup> For a description of a process of communal discernment, see Jesuits of Canada, *Communal Apostolic Discernment: A Toolkit*, [https://www.christianlifecommunity.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Comm\\_Discern\\_Toolkit\\_ENG\\_FINAL\\_web4\\_compressed-1-2.pdf](https://www.christianlifecommunity.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Comm_Discern_Toolkit_ENG_FINAL_web4_compressed-1-2.pdf).

<sup>130</sup> GC 36, d. 1, 12; *Documents of General Congregation 36 of the Society of Jesus*.

<sup>131</sup> Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream*, 79.

<sup>132</sup> Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream*, 81.

sulting in a “complex, rich, and unexpected” effect.<sup>133</sup> Note here that the differences themselves are creative, since “they create tension and in the resolution of tension lies humanity’s progress.”<sup>134</sup> Furthermore, the resolution of the dialectic is itself communal, since it represents the discernment of the movement of the Spirit as experienced in the consolations and desolations of the group.

To summarize, dialogue and spiritual conversation are the *modi operandi* of a synodal way of being church. As such, dialogue is all-inclusive: with God in prayer, with another individual in conversation, with other faith traditions, and with culture.<sup>135</sup> In *Querida Amazonia*, Pope Francis illustrates this point:

in a true spirit of dialogue, we grow in our ability to grasp the significance of what others say and do, even if we cannot accept it as our own conviction. In this way, it becomes possible to be frank and open about our beliefs, while continuing to discuss, to seek points of contact, and above all, to work and struggle together.<sup>136</sup>

As an added benefit, dialogue brings different perspectives and methodologies to bear on a situation, which in turn enables consensus that produces a dynamic reality transcending concrete situations. Not surprising, then, that the 34th General Congregation identified, and the 35th General Congregation reaffirmed, dialogue as an essential element of proceeding in mission for the Society of Jesus.<sup>137</sup>

On the point of transcendence, Pope Francis calls explicitly “for the growth of a culture of encounter capable of transcending our dif-

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<sup>133</sup> Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream*, 81.

<sup>134</sup> *FT*, §203.

<sup>135</sup> GC 34, d. 2, nos. 47–68; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 529.

<sup>136</sup> Francis, *Querida Amazonia* (February 2, 2020), §108, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20200202\\_querida-amazonia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20200202_querida-amazonia.html) (hereafter cited as *QA*), also cited in *FT*, §203.

<sup>137</sup> GC 34, d. 2, nos. 15–21; GC 35, d. 3, nos. 47–48; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 521–22, 744–45.



ferences and divisions.”<sup>138</sup> His vision, already articulated in *Evangelii Gaudium*, is the creation of a many-faceted polyhedron representing a society in which differences can co-exist, complement, and enrich one another despite disagreements and reservations among its members. But for this to yield a truly universal result, the society must include people who find themselves at the peripheries and who may see things invisible to the centers of power.

This model thus extends to society at large the synodal principles of meeting others, building bridges, making points of contact, and creating processes of encounter. Above all, synodality is a means for “thinking with the church.”<sup>139</sup> When asked in an interview by Antonio Spadaro what *sentire cum ecclesia*, “to think and to feel with the church,” meant to him, Pope Francis answered with the image of the church as the holy, faithful people of God, where “the people themselves are the subject. And the church is the people of God on the journey through history with joys and sorrows. *Sentire cum Ecclesia*, therefore, is my way of being a part of this people.”<sup>140</sup>

His “thinking with the church” thus involves a dialogue among the people, the bishops, and the pope. For him, “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.”<sup>141</sup> Thus, to feel with the church is to feel its pain as well as its joys, such that, for Pope Francis, structural and organizational aspects of the church and their reform are secondary to the primary work of showing mercy.

Finally, the practice of synodality serves a missionary church because the church is fundamentally a grass roots structure that begins with the people, emphasizes their equality and common dignity, involves discernment, and provides the medium for an encounter and dialogue that fosters the participation and collaboration of all its

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<sup>138</sup> *FT*, §215.

<sup>139</sup> *SpEx* 352–70; ed. Ganss, 133–37.

<sup>140</sup> Pope Francis with Antonio Spadaro, *My Door is Always Open*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 49.

<sup>141</sup> Pope Francis with Antonio Spadaro, *My Door is Always Open*, 51.



members. As Nathalie Bécquart puts it, “synodality means discovering the priority of the ecclesial ‘we’ in order to serve the common good by becoming aware that ‘Life is a communal journey where tasks and responsibilities are apportioned and shared on the basis of the common good’”<sup>142</sup> Since this ecclesial “we” is none other than the people of God, synodality taps into the *sensus fidei* or spiritual sense of that people for matters of faith and for living this out in the concrete circumstances of life.<sup>143</sup>

## V. Conclusion

This synthesis of the thought of Pope Francis has considered his model for a missionary church that proceeds from personal conversion and interiority to the evangelical proclamation of Christ’s saving mercy, to the pastorality of doctrine and a pastoral magisterium, and finally to structural church reform. This trajectory delineates a temporal order in which the proclamation of the Gospel must occur; in addition, it presents the various moments in order of importance, with Christ at the beginning, in his initiation of encounter; at the center, as the message of proclamation; and at the end, as the referent of any doctrine or church reform.

In many ways, then, this trajectory represents a realignment in the structures, practices, and theology of the church. And as with any major shift, it is paradoxically both sudden, in that it takes place within a comparatively short pontificate, and gradual, in that it unfolds over time, not without resistances and tentative steps as the pilgrim church gazes in a mirror dimly as it seeks to follow Christ (1 Cor 13:12).

Also, this study has shown, in the implementation of Pope Francis’s vision for the church, resonances with Ignatian/Jesuit spirituality and practice, particularly with the *Spiritual Exercises* and the practice of discernment. In the *Exercises*, the mysticism of the gaze of Christ appears in the very directions for prayer as well as in the contemplation

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<sup>142</sup> Nathalie Bécquart, “Synodality: A Path of Personal and Communal Conversion,” *The Way* 61 (July 2022): 63–70 at 67.

<sup>143</sup> *LG*, §12; *EG*, §§119, 139, 198.

on the Trinity gazing upon the sinfulness of the world, while discernment—the essence of the dynamic of the *Exercises*—informs the pastorality of doctrine that unfolds as the dialectic of the transcendent ideal and the concrete circumstances of life that limit that ideal.

In addition, both the mission of the church, as described by Pope Francis, and the methods of implementing his reform find strong resonances in *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*. There, the norms for part VII on the mission and ministries of the Society state the mission in terms of uniting justice and mercy—“the service of faith and the promotion in society of that justice of the Gospel that is the embodiment of God’s love and mercy.”<sup>144</sup>

The conditions for carrying out this mission thus imply personal conversion; dialogue born of respect for people—especially the poor—a desire to embody Christ’s ministry of healing and reconciliation; closer collaboration with others; a more profound spiritual experience through the *Spiritual Exercises*; solidarity; availability; openness to change; and an unconditional consecration to mission.<sup>145</sup> These themes from recent governance documents of the Society echo in the reform of Pope Francis, specifically in the personal encounter with Christ; the proclamation of the Gospel as the saving tender mercy of God made available in Christ; the role of missionary discipleship that extends the ministry of healing and reconciliation; the necessity to go to the peripheries; and collaboration and dialogue through synodality. This correspondence reveals Pope Francis to be a true son of Ignatius who has imbibed the charism and mission of his religious order.

In all of this, Pope Francis is issuing a clarion call to conversion to the people of God in general, including its leaders, and to the church as an institution. Insofar as *conversion* literally means a “turning around, transformation, change,” Pope Francis is calling for a radical reorientation of priorities and values with respect to the church and a return

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<sup>144</sup> *Complementary Norm* 245, 2; ed. Padberg, 271.

<sup>145</sup> *CN* 246.1–8; ed. Padberg, 272–73.

to the core message of the Gospel. In his reform, Pope Francis is thus attempting to reenkindle the embers of apostolic zeal, to reignite the love of Christ in the hearts of the people, and to re-center the church on Christ and on his saving message of mercy. Certainly, Ignatian spirituality aims to form Jesuits as disciple-companions of Christ prepared for mission.<sup>146</sup> And for his part, Pope Francis extends this call to all people.

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<sup>146</sup> Australian Jesuit provincial Quyen Vu explains that, because “Ignatius did not want the Society of Jesus to be named ‘Ignatian’ after himself,” he “chose to call members ‘Companions of Jesus,’ — directing the First Companions toward Christ Jesus rather than himself.” See Quyen Vu, “Companions of Jesus and Companions to One Another,” Australian Jesuits, accessed September 13, 2023, <https://jesuit.org.au/companions-of-jesus-and-companions-to-one-another/>.



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