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## THE ECUMENICAL ATTITUDES OF POPE FRANCIS

**Abstract.** This research article seeks to focus on three principal attitudes observable in the first five years of the mission of Pope Francis as Bishop of Rome. After setting the parameters and connecting this work with a previous research carried out by the author on the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Ecumenical Institute of Lublin in October 2013, this article then tackles the ‘culture of encounter,’ continuously promoted by Pope Francis, his profoundly prophetic gestures in ecumenical meetings, and finally, Bergoglio’s conviction that Christians from different Churches are co-pilgrims in their journey towards the Father’s house. As Christians journey together, they seek to grow closer to each other, while overcoming past differences and obstacles to unity.

**Key words:** ecumenism; ecumenical attitudes; pope Francis; encounter; journey; Bartholomew I; Tawadros II; Justin Welby.

### SETTING THE PARAMETERS

Part of my research undertaken in the recent past studied the ecumenical commitment of Pope Francis during first six months of his pontificate.<sup>1</sup> Since then, this remarkably eventful and unconventional pontificate has now passed its five-year mark. It is now high time to make a fresh evaluation and an update on Bergoglio’s commitment to the ecumenical mission of the Church. Although I consider my earlier works in 2013 and 2014 to be foundational to the topic, this article will not be revisiting their content.

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<sup>1</sup> Hector SCERRI, “The Ecumenical Commitment of Pope Francis,” *Roczniki Teologii Ekumenicznej* 5 (60) (2013): 25–42. See also my contribution, “Ekumeniczne zaangażowanie Papieża Franciszka”, in *O ekumenizmie w Roku Wiary*, ed. Przemysław Kantyka, Piotr Kopiec, and Marcin Składanowki (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2013), 71–84.

The aim of this research is an analysis of the ecumenical attitudes of Pope Francis. After five years of extraordinary gestures and striking words, we can talk of conspicuous trends in this important aspect of the mission of the bishop of Rome. This article will focus on three dimensions which, in my opinion, are clearly observable in the ecumenical attitudes of Francis. These dimensions are: (a) the ‘culture of encounter’, (b) his profoundly prophetic gestures, and (c) his profound conviction that Christians are on a common ecumenical journey together. This article will focus on the public ecumenical encounters of Pope Francis and his published speeches on these occasions.

#### THE CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER

It was in September 2013 that Pope Francis openly called for a ‘culture of encounter’ which overcomes the ‘culture of clashes.’ This affirmation was made in his meeting with His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Paulose II, Catholicos of Orthodox Syro-Malankara Church.<sup>2</sup> It is clearly evident that Pope Francis does not shy away from encountering the other. He is known to be insistent and courageous in going ahead with ecumenical encounters, despite the risk he faces of being misunderstood and even unjustly criticized by his detractors.

As he elaborates this culture of encounter, he continually shows exemplary respect and complete trust in his ecumenical partners. The latter are often moved by his whole-hearted generosity and authentic love. Francis treats his ecumenical partners as equals, with no sense of superiority whatsoever. Again, the humility he shows when he meets the leaders of other Churches and Christian Traditions is, to say the least, disarming.

An intelligent analysis of the culture of encounter can be carried out by focusing on two central concepts within *the experience of ‘experience’*, namely, *Erlebnis* (lived experience) and *Erfahrung* (in the sense of *to undergo* and *to know at first hand*). With *Erfahrung*, subjectivity is overcome and the interlocutors are drawn into an ‘event’ of meaning. Experience invites the ecumenical partners, in this case Pope Francis and the Church leader he is meeting, to reconsider and to rediscover their own experience of being-in-

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<sup>2</sup> POPE FRANCIS, “Address to His Holiness Moran Baselios Marthoma Paulose II, Catholicos of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (5 September 2013),” *L’Osservatore Romano*, English ed., 11 September 2013, 6.

the-world, and thus, to communicate their experiences to the members of their respective Churches.

The lived experience of the culture of encounter—which naturally includes both the personal encounter and interpersonal dialogue—entails being transported into an ‘event’ of significant meaning where the Church leader, in this case, ‘loses himself’ in the encounter. The two Church leaders, namely Pope Francis and the head of the other Church, are together, so as to speak, involved in the ‘writing of an icon.’ It can be said that both leaders are successful in capturing the hermeneutic truth of an *Erfahrung* already common to, and possibly already experienced by members of their respective Churches at a grassroots level.

The ‘culture of encounter’ necessarily entails dialogue. For Pope Francis, dialogue is not a diplomatic formality. His style is so far distant from simple niceties and rehearsed etiquette. In his message for World Communications Day 2014, he stated that “to dialogue means to believe that the ‘other’ has something worthwhile to say, and to entertain his or her point of view and perspective. Engaging in dialogue does not mean renouncing our own ideas and traditions, but the claim that they alone are valid or absolute”.<sup>3</sup> The valued esteem he gives to what his ecumenical partners have to say, coupled with his empathy and capacity to listen attentively, have made these encounters defining moments in the experience of other Church leaders. The collective feedback of the latter has served to raise the profile of ecumenical dialogue to new heights. In other words, Pope Francis has continued to build upon the perseverant efforts of his predecessors since Pope John XXIII, in their ecumenical milestones.

Pope Francis prefers to underline those aspects which already bring us together. There are many things which different Churches already share in common. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, he writes:

How many important things unite us! If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> POPE FRANCIS, “Message for the 48<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, Communications at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter” (1 June 2014), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140124\\_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20140124_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html) (accessed 8.5.2018).

<sup>4</sup> POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 246.

Although never expressly mentioned in his speeches and documents, Pope Francis has consistently and, certainly, implicitly exercised the concept of ‘receptive ecumenism.’ This is not simply the now decades-old gesture and concept of the ‘exchange of gifts’ between Churches, already a positive element in the ecumenical mission of the Churches. Receptive ecumenism entails a *meta*-leap, in that by appreciating and, where this is possible, embracing the positive aspects of another Tradition, one progressively becomes a better member of his/her Church. This will not lead the individual to renounce anything from what it means to belong to one’s Church and remaining faithful to it.

Taking into account the centrality of the ‘culture of encounter’, one concludes that Pope Francis leads by the example he gives all the time. I will elaborate on physical and other gestures in the next section of this article. Although these, too, are part of the ‘culture of encounter’, it is important to underline the common commitment embraced by Pope Francis and other Church leaders to promote common social and spiritual initiatives.

Catherine E. Clifford recalls that “in March 2014, Pope Francis and Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury concluded a joint agreement to support the work of the Global Freedom Network, a ground-breaking initiative in the fight against modern-day slavery and human trafficking.”<sup>5</sup>

In an unprecedented gesture in the context of the Papal Magisterium, Francis acknowledges his indebtedness to Patriarch Bartholomew I with regard to the care of our common home. In his ‘green’ encyclical *Laudato Si’*, he writes:

Outside the Catholic Church, other Churches and Christian communities—and other religions as well—have expressed deep concern and offered valuable reflections on issues which all of us find disturbing. To give just one striking example, I would mention the statements made by the beloved Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, with whom we share the hope of full ecclesial communion. Patriarch Bartholomew has spoken in particular of the need for each of us to repent of the ways we have harmed the planet.<sup>6</sup>

It is indeed remarkable that Pope Francis quotes from the speeches by Bartholomew on ecology. This is, what I would call, *the orthopraxis of the ‘culture of encounter’*. The latter is thus put into practice in an outstanding

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<sup>5</sup> Catherine E. CLIFFORD, “A Dialogic Church,” in *Go into the Street! The Welcoming Church of Pope Francis*, ed. Thomas P. Rausch and Richard R. Gaillardetz (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2016), 103.

<sup>6</sup> POPE FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’* (24 May 2015), par. 7-8.

manner. Francis quotes directly from Bartholomew's lecture at the Monastery of Utstein in Norway on 23 June 2003, as well as from his closing remarks at the First Halki Summit in Istanbul, on 20 June 2012.<sup>7</sup> This would not have been possible had there not been the gradual and progressive nurturing of the friendship between the two Church leaders. The 'culture of encounter', thus, bears lasting fruit, and is conducive to a positive ripple-effect in the field of ecumenism.

Following the historic meeting, in Havana Airport, between Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, it is worth appreciating the words expressed by the Holy Father during his meeting with the journalists aboard the papal flight *en route* to Mexico. His words implicitly convey the importance he affords to the 'culture of encounter'. Francis stated with great conviction:

It was a conversation between brothers. We discussed clear points that concerned us both, in all honesty. I felt like I was standing before a brother, and he said the same to me. We were two bishops speaking about the state of their Churches, in the first place; and in the second, about the state of the world [...]. We also spoke about the state of Orthodoxy, of the up-coming pan-Orthodox Synod [...] I tell you, truly, I felt an inner joy that was really of the Lord. He spoke freely and I spoke freely. You could feel the joy. [...] It was a conversation of six: Patriarch Kirill, myself, Metropolitan Hilarion and Cardinal Koch, as well as two translators. But all conducted freely. The two of us spoke, and the others if they had questions.<sup>8</sup>

It is not difficult, either, to understand and appreciate the joint visit to the refugees on the Greek island of Lesbos, by Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople in April 2016. The former affirmed:

I have come here with my brothers, Patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop Ieronymos, simply to be with you and to hear your stories. We have come to call the attention of the world to this grave humanitarian crisis and to plead for its resolution. As people of faith, we wish to join our voices to speak out on your behalf. We hope that the world will heed these scenes of tragic and indeed desperate need, and respond in a way worthy of our common humanity.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., par.9.

<sup>8</sup> POPE FRANCIS, "Address to Journalists on the Flight from Cuba to Mexico," (12 February 2016), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/february/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160212\\_cuba-messico-saluto-giornalisti.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/february/documents/papa-francesco_20160212_cuba-messico-saluto-giornalisti.html) (accessed 10.5.2018).

<sup>9</sup> POPE FRANCIS, "Address on the Greek island of Lesbos" (16 April 2016), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/april/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160416\\_lesvos-rifugiati.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/april/documents/papa-francesco_20160416_lesvos-rifugiati.html) (accessed 9.5.2018).

Again, it must be said that actions often speak louder than words. This is the reason why the next section of this research will focus on the striking impact of the profoundly prophetic gestures carried out by Pope Francis when meeting other Church leaders and their respective communities.

### PROPHETIC GESTURES

Departing from the strict rules of diplomatic and ecclesial formality, several ecumenical encounters in which Pope Francis was engaged have been undeniably marked by prophetic gestures. Although the impact conveyed by the social media was indeed breath-taking, it has to be said that the mentioned gestures are indeed genuine. Bergoglio himself speaks about “an ecumenism of gestures, words and commitment”.<sup>10</sup> It has to be said that these extraordinary aspects of the Pope’s body-language are not carried out in order for them to be gobbled up by the ever-hungry media with their aim of creating media scoops, sensationalism and hitting the headlines. When in May 2014, during their encounter in Jerusalem, Pope Francis asked Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople to bless him, the latter was taken by surprise and for a second or two seemed unsure what to do. Francis then bowed his head to receive Bartholomew’s blessing. I am convinced that this spiritual gesture was not carried out because of the journalists’ cameras, but because the Bishop of Rome truly means what he says when he refers to the Orthodox Churches as sister-churches.

The historic first encounter between a Pope and a Patriarch of Moscow took place in Havana Airport on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2016. This long-awaited meeting materialized after many unsuccessful attempts in the previous twenty-five years or so. The private conversation between Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill was two hours long. Afterwards, a Common Declaration was signed by the two leaders. The brief statements made to the media by both Kirill and Francis are indicative of their attitudes to each other. Bergoglio stated:

We speak clearly, without ambiguity, and I must say I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in our conversation. I give thanks for Your Holiness’ humility, your fraternal humility, and your real desire for unity. We have taken up a series of initiatives which I believe are viable and can be realized. Thus I wish to thank

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<sup>10</sup> POPE FRANCIS, “Address at the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate,” (Cairo, Egypt, 28 April 2017), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/april/documents/papa-francesco\\_20170428\\_egitto-tawadros-ii.html#Speech\\_of\\_the\\_Holy\\_Father](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/april/documents/papa-francesco_20170428_egitto-tawadros-ii.html#Speech_of_the_Holy_Father) (accessed 10.5.2018).

Your Holiness, once again, for your warm welcome, as well as those collaborating with us.<sup>11</sup>

It is also worth listening to Patriarch Kirill's words on the same day when history was in the making on Cuban soil:

For two hours we engaged in an open conversation, with full understanding of the responsibility we have to our Churches, our people of faith, the future of Christianity and the future of human civilization. It was a conversation rich in content, which provided us the opportunity to listen to and to understand each other's positions.<sup>12</sup>

Other examples may be mentioned. In a previous research<sup>13</sup> I focused on the first encounter between Pope Francis and Pope Tawadros II, the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2013. What television cameras, photographs and the social media conveyed to us on that memorable day struck the hearts of millions, and undoubtedly affected the collective consciousness of Christian communities, particularly Catholics and Copts. I now focus on the second encounter between the two leaders, in Cairo, Egypt, during the apostolic journey of Francis in April 2017.

Pope Francis visited Pope Tawadros II at the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate in Cairo on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2017. The very cordial meeting was followed by the signing of a Common Declaration which, among a number of aspects, affirmed the mutual recognition of each other's baptism. This was an enormous step forward. On the return flight to Italy, Francis spoke very highly of Tawadros II. In his meeting with journalists he stated:

I have a special friendship with Patriarch Tawadros: for me he is a great man of God. Tawadros is a Patriarch, a Pope who will take the Church forward, the name of Jesus forward... He has great apostolic zeal. He is one of the most, allow me to use the word but in inverted commas, "fanatical" in finding a fixed date for Easter. Me too but... we're trying to find a way. He says "we struggle on, we struggle on!" He is a man of God. He is a man who, as a bishop far away from Egypt, used to feed disabled persons; he is a man who was sent to a diocese with five churches and he left twenty-five, with I'm not sure with how many Christian families, and he did this with apostolic zeal.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> POPE FRANCIS, "Meeting with Patriarch Kirill," (Havana Airport, 12 February 2016), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/february/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160212\\_dichiarazione-comune-kirill.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/february/documents/papa-francesco_20160212_dichiarazione-comune-kirill.html) (accessed 10.5.2018).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> H. SCERRI, "The Ecumenical Commitment of Pope Francis," 31–33.

<sup>14</sup> POPE FRANCIS, "Return Flight Press Conference," (29 April 2017), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/april/documents/papa-francesco\\_20170429\\_egitto-volo.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/april/documents/papa-francesco_20170429_egitto-volo.html) (accessed 10.5.2018).

Pope Francis received the Archbishop of Canterbury for the first time on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2013. This encounter and its relevance have been described in a previous article in this academic journal.<sup>15</sup> Another meeting was held in Rome in October 2016 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the historic encounter between Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey. The exchange of gifts by the two Church leaders was profoundly symbolic. Archbishop Justin Welby presented Pope Francis with his own Coventry Cross of Nails, an outstanding symbol of the international peace-making ministry which germinated from the terrible destruction of Coventry Cathedral during World War II. Pope Francis wore this highly symbolic gift while presenting Welby with a replica of the pastoral staff of Pope Gregory the Great, the pope who sent Augustine and his fellow Benedictine monks to evangelize Britain in 597.

A fourth meeting between Francis and Welby took place on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2017. This was within the context of the Archbishop of Canterbury's journey to Rome to formally commission his new Personal Representative to the Holy See and Director of the Anglican Centre, Archbishop Bernard Ntahoturi. A particularly significant gesture was when Pope Francis invited Welby and Ntahoturi to lunch at the Santa Martha Residence where the Holy Father resides. Christopher Lamb writes that "it is not common for Francis to invite people he meets for official audiences to lunch, so the gesture can be read as a sign of the warmth and ease of the relationship that exists between the Pope and Welby."<sup>16</sup>

These profound gestures possess a 'sacramental value' in that they are visible signs of an invisible reality, namely the deep personal friendship nurtured by Pope Francis in relation to the leaders of other Churches, in imperfect communion with Rome. The prophetic gestures are conducive to conversion and reconciliation. Members of the respective Churches are not only moved when they witness their leaders embrace each other, while externally showing their mutual love and respect, but their attitudes to the members of the corresponding Church (on a universal or macrocosmic level) as well as neighbouring communities (on a local or microcosmic level) change to the better. Collaboration, particularly in grass-roots ecumenism is highly facilitated by the gestures of their leaders. This is conducive to an intensification of spiritual ecumenism, as well as to dialogue on other levels.

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<sup>15</sup> H. SCERRI, "The Ecumenical Commitment of Pope Francis," 33–36.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher LAMB, "Archbishop of Canterbury to lunch with Pope Francis today," *The Tablet online* (27 October 2017), <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/7986/archbishop-of-canterbury-to-lunch-with-pope-francis-today> (accessed 10.5.2018).



The impact of prophetic gestures is not to be underestimated. Just as divisive actions in the past brought about animosity and bitterness, so also the opposite is true. Gestures marked by an authentic sense of friendship, respect and solidarity are *transforming* and *transformative* in nature. Pope Francis has reached out to Evangelical and Pentecostal communities, groups he had already encountered in his native Argentina. There have been moments when he asked them to pray over him. In July 2014, Francis travelled to Caserta to meet Evangelical and Pentecostal leaders. On that occasion he asked pardon for all the times the Catholic Church had failed to see in them brothers and sisters in Christ.<sup>17</sup>

#### JOURNEYING TOGETHER

In another earlier research, I studied the concept of *journey* within the context of the experience of the ecumenical encounter.<sup>18</sup> The cause of Christian unity is veritably a journey, indeed a common journey undertaken by members of different Churches. We are not only pilgrims, but truly *co-pilgrims*. This dimension was highlighted very early in Francis' pontificate. In his pastoral programme, *Evangelii Gaudium*, he writes with great conviction:

We must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another. This means that we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicion or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking: the radiant peace of God's face. Trusting others is an art, and peace is an art.<sup>19</sup>

What Pope Francis writes in *Evangelii Gaudium* is undoubtedly based on his earlier ecumenical experiences in his native Argentina. The relationships he nurtured with Christians from other Churches and Traditions have allowed him to express himself so persuasively about the *co-pilgrim* character of the ecumenical journey. This is what makes the ecumenical mission of the Churches, and in particular of individual ecumenically-committed Christians, an on-going and dynamic process. In an interview, Pope Francis

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<sup>17</sup> POPE FRANCIS, "Address, Pentecostal Church of Reconciliation," (Caserta, 28 July 2014), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140728\\_caserta-pastore-traettino.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/july/documents/papa-francesco_20140728_caserta-pastore-traettino.html) (accessed 7.5.2018).

<sup>18</sup> Hector SCERRI, "Pilgrims and Wayfarers to, at and from Ecumenical Gatherings and Encounters," *Roczniki Teologiczne* 61 (2014), fasc. 7: 43–60.

<sup>19</sup> POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), par. 244.

insists that the ecumenical endeavour is not “our” work, but God’s work, although we are called to collaborate.<sup>20</sup>

Pope Francis affirms that “in this exciting journey, which — like life itself — is not always easy and straightforward, but on which the Lord exhorts us to persevere, we are not alone”.<sup>21</sup> The common ecumenical journey is one marked by perseverance and fidelity to the mission entrusted by Jesus Christ “that all may be one” (Jn 17:21). Pope Francis is undaunted by setbacks caused by what appear to be insurmountable difficulties or bleak days in what some have called ‘the onset of an ecumenical winter’. In the light of Francis’ ecumenical attitudes, I would rather speak of ‘an ecumenical spring’.

Internationally acclaimed experts in the ecumenical field have, since the early 1990s, often spoken of an ecumenical winter. The enthusiasm marking ecumenism in the years after the Second Vatican Council may have waned, in a number of countries. This may be partly true for a host of reasons, and new, if not unexpected, difficulties. *On the other hand, as a convinced ecumenist, Pope Francis, a firm proponent of an ecumenical spring, teaches us the way forward by his example.*

Spring is the season marked by new hopes. What seemed to be dead and buried during the cold, inclement winter months now experiences rebirth. Ecumenical dialogue, too, has its seasons. *The ecumenical spring we now experience, through the efforts of Pope Francis, offers us the opportunity to commit ourselves once again to the ecumenical mission of the Churches and Christian Traditions.*

The Christian celebration of Easter always takes place in spring. The Resurrection of our Lord fills committed ecumenists with the spiritual energy they badly require to pursue the path leading to Christian unity. The Risen Christ accompanies Christians, though sometimes unaware of his presence, on the road to Emmaus, and back again to Jerusalem to share the Good News.

In December 2014, while meeting a delegation from the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Pope Francis’ words bear witness, yet again, to the ‘culture of encounter’ we have already reflected upon, earlier. In very realistic terms and with a profound sense of pragmatism, he talked about his attitude regarding the forthcoming fifth-centenary commemoration of the Reformation. He highlighted *the joy of journeying together on a shared ecumenical path*, and stated:

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<sup>20</sup> PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY, *L’ecumenismo di Papa Francesco*, Vatican City: Centro Televisivo Vaticano, 2017. DVD.

<sup>21</sup> POPE FRANCIS, “Address at the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate.”

On that occasion, Lutherans and Catholics around the world will, for the first time, have the opportunity to share the same ecumenical commemoration, not in the form of a triumphalistic celebration, but in the profession of our common faith in the Triune God. At the centre of this event, therefore, there will be common prayer and the plea that our Lord Jesus Christ pardon our mutual faults, along with the joy of journeying together on a shared ecumenical path.<sup>22</sup>

These are indeed striking words as they serve to encapsulate what the future of ecumenism should actually consist in. The fact that Christians from different Churches journey together already indicates that there is plenty of good will among them, and that the common journey is not on parallel lines, but on trajectories that will meet.

During the press conference on the return flight to Rome after his apostolic visit to Egypt, in April 2017, Pope Francis once more used the metaphor of the journey to describe the common ecumenical vocation and mission of all Christians. Replying to one of the journalists aboard the aircraft, the Holy Father stated:

Everything that contributes to ecumenism is in motion. Ecumenism is achieved by moving forward, with acts of charity, with the commitment to help, doing things together when things can be done together. . . There is no such thing as a static ecumenism. It is true that the theologians must study and agree amongst themselves, but this will never have a successful outcome unless we move forward. What can we do now? We must do what is possible: pray together, work together, exercise acts of charity together. . . But together!<sup>23</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This article is a modest attempt at identifying three principal attitudes in the ecumenical mission exercised by Pope Francis. The text has only sought to elaborate upon these observable aspects, while illustrating them by means of *some* excerpts from the Holy Father's speeches and by highlighting profound public gestures which have contributed to consolidate the efforts in favour of the cause for Christian unity. The path towards unity in the last fifty years or so has been marked by a Copernican Revolution from pole-

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<sup>22</sup> POPE FRANCIS, "Address to a Delegation from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany," (18 December 2014), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/december/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141218\\_chiesa-evangelica-luterana.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/december/documents/papa-francesco_20141218_chiesa-evangelica-luterana.html) (accessed 8.5.2018).

<sup>23</sup> POPE FRANCIS, "Return Flight Press Conference."

mical statements to dialogue, from diffidence to the ‘culture of encounter,’ and from words of accusation to sincere respect. The various bilateral dialogues between the Roman Catholic Church and other Churches have covered great strides and have been fruitful in many ways. But it has to be constantly reaffirmed that among the many milestones on the road towards unity, one is bound to affirm the centrality of prayer, humility, the healing of past memories, discernment, trust, joint social initiatives and the ecumenism of the martyrs.

Pope Francis, in many ways and on many different occasions, has been instrumental in promoting the ‘culture of encounter.’ The closest way to a person’s heart is through his countenance and his hands. This ‘culture’ has been enriched by many instances where profound bodily gestures greatly facilitated the on-going dialogue and collaboration between the Catholic Church and other Churches. This enables our common journey as co-pilgrims to be a joyful and spirit-filled experience. And where there is the Holy Spirit, and where there are open hearts, there will be unity!

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## EKUMENICZNE POSTAWY PAPIEŻA FRANCISZKA

### Streszczenie

Artykuł opisuje trzy główne postawy obserwowane w pierwszych pięciu latach pontyfikatu papieża Franciszka. Uwzględniając założenia i w nawiązaniu do wyników badań podjętych przez autora i zaprezentowanych przy okazji celebracji trzydziestolecia istnienia Instytutu Ekumenicznego KUL w październiku 2013 r., artykuł rozważa „kulturę spotkania”, coraz mocniej promowaną przez papieża Franciszka, Jego głęboko profetyczne gesty wyrażane podczas zgromadzeń ekumenicznych i wreszcie Jego przekonanie, że chrześcijanie różnych wyznań są współpielgrzymami w wędrówce do domu Ojca. Wspólnie idąc, chrześcijanie dążą do wspólnego wzrastania, przezwyciężając dawne różnice i przeszkody na drodze do jedności.

**Słowa kluczowe:** ekumenizm; postawy ekumeniczne; papież Franciszek; spotkanie; pielgrzymka; Bartłomiej I; Teodor II; Justin Welby.