

**Christian Reform and Our Baptismal Mission
As Disciples and Evangelists**

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Abstract

As we celebrate this year's five hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, the Catholic Church has recently completed fifty years of Vatican II Reformation. This paper explores some key ecumenical themes and formational or reformational insights of Vatican II through a discussion of the mission and ministry of Pope Francis, who has been the Catholic bishop of Rome for less than five years. Pope Francis is a remarkable product of the South American church and particularly of the seminal theological reflection and ecclesiastical reformation undertaken by the Catholic Bishops of South America and the Caribbean since Vatican II. Like Saint Francis, Pope Francis never forgets the poor. At the peripheries, he calls all Christians to be missionary disciples and evangelists by virtue of Baptism.

We know that a person is justified not by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not be doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by works of the law. . . . For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Child of God, who loved me and gave up life for me.
(Galatians 2:16, 19-20)²

I have been asked to be with you today on the occasion of Calvin Theological Seminary's fall preaching conference, in part because of my working friendship with Scott Hoezee and the Calvin Center for Excellence in Preaching, with whom my school participates in a Lilly Endowment Initiative to Strengthen the Quality of Preaching, and in part because of my working friendship with Tim Brown and Western Theological Seminary, from whom I hold a doctor of ministry in preaching. When I lived in Grand Rapids and did ministry at Dominican Center at Marywood, the Christian Reformed owner of my neighborhood Grand Rapids grocery store at Fulton and Benjamin would greet me as *Domini*. This same respect was shown to me at Western, where as the only Catholic in my cohort I joined in collegial reflection about what it means to be Christian in our respective denominations and in our world today.

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These remarks are to be given as a keynote address at the Calvin Theological Seminary Fall Preaching Conference in Grand Rapids on October 26th 2017 in commemoration of 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation.

² *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

This week we celebrate five hundred years of Reformation—five hundred years of renewed engagement with the Word of God in Scripture as a priesthood of all believers. As a Roman Catholic seeking understanding of these five hundred years I have been reading about Martin Luther, and I have learned much by reading Oxford historian Lyndal Roper’s expansive 2017 volume on *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet*,³ and I have appreciated a concise summary of the Lutheran Reformation in the commemorative document jointly published in 2013 by the Lutheran World Foundation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, entitled *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*.⁴ In the course of these studies, I have become aware that as a Catholic and as a friar of the Order of Preachers I bring two interpretive lenses to the story of the Reformation. The most immediate is the story of Catholic reformation beginning some fifty years ago with the Second Vatican Council. And there also is a story of Catholic reformation beginning five hundred years ago with a sermon on human rights preached by the friars of the Dominican community on the Island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean on December 21st 1511: this story, too, it seems, has implications for a proper understanding of Vatican II and for our collegial reflection on reformation here today.

These past fifty years since Vatican II have marked a Catholic reformation which has been summarized succinctly as follows in a paragraph of the 2013 commemorative document *From Conflict to Communion*:

The Second Vatican Council, responding to the scriptural, liturgical, and patristic revival of the preceding decades, dealt with such themes as esteem and reverence for the Holy Scripture in the life of the church, the rediscovery of the common priesthood of all the baptized, the need for continual purification and reform of the church, the understanding of church office as service, and the importance of the freedom and responsibility of human beings, including the recognition of religious freedom. (par. 26)

Today, I would like to unpack some key ecumenical themes and formational or reformational insights of Vatican II through a discussion of the mission and ministry of Pope Francis, who has been the Catholic bishop of Rome for less than five years. As we will see, Pope Francis is a remarkable product of the South American church and particularly of the seminal theological reflection and ecclesiastical reformation undertaken by the Catholic Bishops of South America and the Caribbean since Vatican II. In this story—which can be heard profitably by both Catholics and Protestants—all Christians can hear themselves called to be missionary disciples and evangelists by virtue of Baptism.

My Name is Francis

In the Sistine Chapel on March 13th 2013 when Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Buenos Aires was elected bishop of Rome, his friend Cardinal Claudio Hummes—a Franciscan friar from

³ Lynda Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* (New York: Random House, 2017).

⁴ The Lutheran World Foundation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt and Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2013), at <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-conflict-communion-basis-lutheran-catholic-commemoration-reformation-2017>.

Brazil—turned to the new pope to say, “Don’t forget the poor.”⁵ Moments later, Bergoglio chose as his papal name and inspiration Saint Francis of Assisi.

Six months later, Pope Francis made a pilgrimage north from Rome to Assisi, a city on a hill (Monte Subiaso) from which for centuries pilgrims have gazed upon the breathtaking panorama of the Umbrian countryside. There, on October 4th 2013, on the Feast of Saint Francis, the pope preached:

Today, I too have come, like countless other pilgrims, to give thanks to the Father for all that he wished to reveal to one of the “little ones” mentioned in today’s Gospel: Francis, the son of a wealthy merchant of Assisi. His encounter with Jesus led him to strip himself of an easy and carefree life in order to espouse “Lady Poverty” and to live as a true son of our heavenly Father. This decision of Saint Francis was a radical way of imitating Christ: he clothed himself anew, putting on Christ, who, though he was rich, became poor in order to make us rich by his poverty (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9). In all of Francis’ life, love for the poor and the imitation of Christ in his poverty were inseparably united, like the two sides of the same coin.⁶

The Franciscan story began almost eight hundred years ago in the early years of the thirteenth century when Francis (perhaps in his early twenties) would climb up from Assisi to pray before a crucifix in the ruins of the small stone church of San Damiano. In the course of his conversion, he absconded with some cloth and a horse belonging to his stern father to support the needs of San Damiano and its priest, and then when he was confronted about this Francis literally stripped off all his clothing in a city square in front of his father and the bishop, making a public renunciation of worldly privilege in favor of putting on Christ and espousing Lady Poverty. Soon thereafter, again in prayer at San Damiano, Francis received a life-changing commission from the Lord which he interpreted initially as a literal command to rebuild the San Damiano church.⁷

Not only can we imagine that the natural beauty of Umbria stimulated the romantic sensibilities of Francis, but it appears that the biblical and theological poetic influences of the French Troubadours spoke loudly to Francis’s youthful spirituality, as well.⁸ To put this point theologically, authors such as C. S. Lewis, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and René Girard all remark that the romantic poetry of the Troubadours of that period was inherently Trinitarian and Christological and that cultural manifestations of romantic love and chivalric devotion to the Lady found their wellsprings in Scripture and Christian theology. Girardian author Gil Bailie in *God’s Gamble: the Gravitational Power of Crucified Love* points to the verse which says “it is not good that man should be alone” (Gn. 2:18) and makes the following Christological observation:

⁵ Cindy Wooden, “Pope Francis explains why he chose St. Francis of Assisi’s name” (Catholic News Service, 17 March 2013), at www.catholicnews.com.

⁶ Homily of Pope Francis, Mass in Saint Francis Square, Assisi, 4 October 2013. At www.vatican.va.

⁷ “Francis, seest thou not that my house is in ruins? Go and restore it for me” (G. K. Chesterton, *Saint Francis of Assisi* [New York: Image, 2013, originally published 1924], 46). The original San Damiano cross now is preserved at the Basilica of Santa Chiara (Saint Clare) in Assisi.

⁸ Chesterton, 29.

The Christ, who is for mankind what the woman was for the man in Genesis, is precisely the crucified Christ, whose pierced heart corresponds to Adam's opened side. The former no less than the latter suggest the ontological coexistence discernible in Adam's "This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" (Gn 2:23) and in Saint Paul's "I love, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).⁹

And Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar writes in *The Glory of the Lord*:

The true lover "actually sees something, perceives with his eyes something other than that which other men do not see": he sees the ideality this is the true reality; in an inchoate way he sees the beloved person as God sees him, which is indeed the only way God wills to see him. And to let this ideality be true, to make it true, is "the beginning of the visible restoration of God's image in the material world."¹⁰

The point of Francis's discipleship is not so much that he chose a life of material poverty, as his ragged and patched tunic on display at the Basilica of Saint Francis so visibly makes plain. The point, rather, is that Francis recognized the image and likeness of Christ in God's creation and in each person—and most particularly in the faces of the poor. More than anything, Saint Francis made of his life a fundamental option for relationship with the poor. Never did Saint Francis forget the poor.

All this was implicit when in the Sistine Chapel Claudio Hummes—a Franciscan—said to his friend Jorge Bergoglio, "Do not forget the poor," and expressly so when the newly elected pope took the name Francisco.

To the Peripheries

When Jorge Bergoglio entered the Society of Jesus in 1958, the Jesuit superior in Rome was the Spaniard Pedro Arrupe who in 1945 had been present on the outskirts of Hiroshima to witness the casualties and destruction of nuclear warfare. In a letter to the Jesuits of Latin America in 1968, Arrupe first coined what would become the favored Catholic expression "option for the poor."

In 1971, a World Synod of Catholic Bishops convened by Pope Paul VI issued a letter "Justice in the World" which 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, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation."¹¹ The Catholic Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean picked up on these themes of an option for the poor and action on behalf of justice, first at their 1968 general conference in Medellín, Columbia, and later more specifically at their 1979 general conference in Puebla, Mexico. As reported by Dominican theologian Edward Cleary: "Puebla reaffirmed the direction taken at Medellín. There would be no turning

⁹ Gil Bailie, *God's Gamble: the Power of Crucified Love* (Kettering OH: Angelico Press, 2016), 65.

¹⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar citing Vladimir Solovyov, in Balthasar's *The Glory of the Lord: a Theological Aesthetics, Vol III*, ed. John Riches (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1986), 348-349—as cited in turn by Bailie, 61.

¹¹ "Justice in the World," par. 6, at <https://www1.villanova.edu/content/dam/villanova/mission/JusticeIntheWorld1971.pdf>.

back. Indeed, the bishops at Puebla went further. They more clearly and fully committed the church to the service of the poor and spoke of its preferential option for the poor and oppressed. They also took a more explicit and stronger stand for human rights.”¹²

By the time he became auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires in 1992, Jorge Bergoglio wholeheartedly had embraced the Church’s preferential option of the poor, and as he became pope in 2013, he was prepared by experience to be consistently on message about action for justice and the Gospel option for the poor—to which he often speaks by way of the counter-cultural expression of “going to the peripheries.”

By the example of his life, Pope Francis puts new meaning to the expression “friends in low places.” In one of his letters from prison, it was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who wrote: “We have for once learnt to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled—in short, from the perspective of those who suffer.”¹³ As Italian political philosopher Rocco D’Ambrosio observes: “Much of Francis’s thinking can be interpreted through words from Bonhoeffer. The pope’s activities, comments, and teaching are all marked by a *perspective from below*. This perspective is the heart of Francis’s reform: one either understands this or does not understand the reform.”¹⁴ Thanks to Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Pope Francis, Christians have been and now are invited by virtue of discipleship to have friends in low places, and to realize that the poetry of their lived Gospel in our top down world reads from the bottom up. Christians go to the peripheries.

For example, two weeks into his papacy Francis celebrated the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday at the Prison for Minors *Casal del Marmo* in Rome. Each year at this first of the Easter Triduum liturgies, the Gospel reading is first proclaimed and then enacted in a foot-washing ceremony, and in 2013 Francis performed this liturgical action from the bottom up—moving it from Saint Peter’s Basilica to a youth prison and washing the feet of teenagers (some in shorts and with tattoos), and notably washing the feet of girls as well as boys and most notably washing the feet of a Muslim teenage girl. At other Holy Thursday liturgies, first in Buenos Aires and now in Rome, Francis has performed this liturgical action at drug rehabilitation centers, prisons, and refugee camps. This pope of the slums of Buenos Aires¹⁵ repeatedly speaks of encountering the other at the peripheries. Francis’s liturgical action at the peripheries opts for the poor and preaches the image and likeness of God to be found as Good News to the poor in such encounters.

After the washing of feet at *Casal del Marmo*, the pope began his characteristically short homily by saying:

This is moving. Jesus, washing the feet of his disciples. Peter didn’t understand it at all, he refused. But Jesus explained it for him. Jesus—God—did this! He himself explains to his disciples: “Do you know what I have done to you? You

¹² Edward L. Cleary, O.P., *Crisis and Change: the Church in Latin America Today* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1985). At <http://opccentral.org/resources/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2014/09/crisis02.pdf>, p. 20.

¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethke (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 17, cited in Rocco D’Ambrosio, *Will Pope Francis Pull It Off? The Challenge of Church Reform*. Translated by Barry Huddock (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2017), 12.

¹⁴ D’Ambrosio, 78.

¹⁵ For an understanding of Bergoglio’s transformative encounter with the poor in Buenos Aires, see Paul Vallely, *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). The Netflix original series *LLámame Francisco* (with English subtitles, *Call Me Francis*) also gives an accurate portrayal.

call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13:12-15).¹⁶

Here, the Gospel of God in Christ is proclaimed from the bottom up, in word and sacramental action, at the peripheries—at the very center of the lives of the poor.

The New Evangelization

On December 8th 1975, on the tenth anniversary of the closing of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI issued an apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*), in which he observed that the Second Vatican Council had one objective: “to make the Church of the twentieth century ever better fitted for proclaiming the Gospel to the people of the twentieth century” (par. 2).¹⁷ Giving a distinctively social-gospel valence to a Catholic understanding of evangelization Paul VI then coined the particularly Catholic expression *evangelization of culture*, and he observed: “The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel” (par. 20).

Then, throughout both his unprecedented world travels and extensive literature as Paul VI’s successor, Pope John Paul II in turn made repeated references to what he called the *new evangelization*. He first used the term in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in 1983, anticipating a half-millennium of evangelization in the Americas in 1992.

On this same Haitian and Dominican island of Hispaniola, on the fourth Sunday of Advent on December 21st 1511, Dominican friar Antonio de Montesinos had preached against the enslavement of the indigenous Taino people under the colonial Spanish encomienda system, preaching to the slave owners, “Are they not human, too?” Furthermore, the Dominican missionaries of Hispaniola entered into a consequential dialogue with Dominican theologians at the University of Salamanca in Spain. This discourse about human rights led to the birth of international law. A statue of Montesinos preaching his human rights sermon stands today in the members’ courtyard of the United Nations in New York—a tribute to five hundred years of international law in defense of human rights.

Looking back over those same five hundred years, Pope John Paul II in his 1983 sermon in Port-au-Prince called for an evangelization “new in ardor, methods and expression”—not the universal truths and violent methods of the conquistadors, but new truths and new methods such as those of Dominican friar Antonio de Montesinos and other missionaries who, though contemporaries of Martin Luther, in a very different corner of the world confronted the powers and principalities of Spain by evangelizing the Taino people and accompanying them at the foot of the cross.

And now most recently, using words from Paul VI’s *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Francis also has taken up the theme as he invites Christians to speak contextually from the heart of their own encounter with the God. In his 2013 book-length apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*

¹⁶ Homily of Pope Francis, Mass of the Lord’s Supper, Prison for Minors Casal del Marmo, Rome, Holy Thursday, 28 March 2013, at www.vatican.va.

¹⁷ Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*), December 8, 1975, at www.vatican.va.

(*The Joy of the Gospel*), he writes: “People prefer to listen to witnesses: they ‘thirst for authenticity’ and ‘call for evangelizers to speak of a God whom they themselves know and are familiar with, is if they were seeing him’” (150).

In a chapter on “The Proclamation of the Gospel” in a section titled “We all are missionary disciples” Pope Francis goes to the heart of today’s Catholic understanding of evangelization. He writes:

120. In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. *Mt* 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. 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”. . . . So what are we waiting for?

121. Of course, all of us are called to mature in our work as evangelizers. We want to have better training, a deepening love and a clearer witness to the Gospel. In this sense, we ought to let others be constantly evangelizing us. But this does not mean that we should postpone the evangelizing mission; rather, each of us should find ways to communicate Jesus wherever we are. All of us are called to offer others an explicit witness to the saving love of the Lord, who despite our imperfections offers us his closeness, his word and his strength, and gives meaning to our lives. In your heart you know that it is not the same to live without him; what you have come to realize, what has helped you to live and given you hope, is what you also need to communicate to others. Our falling short of perfection should be no excuse; on the contrary, mission is a constant stimulus not to remain mired in mediocrity but to continue growing. The witness of faith that each Christian is called to offer leads us to say with Saint Paul: “Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own” (Phil. 3:12-13).¹⁸

I like to think that Martin Luther, if he were here today, would love these paragraphs by Pope Francis. This five hundred year old Caribbean tradition of evangelization and accompaniment of the poor is itself another story of reformation that has proven foundational to a Catholic Vatican II vision that remembers the poor. We all, by virtue of our person to person transforming encounter with Jesus Christ, are called to cultural reformation in a testimony of faith in solidarity with the poor. As we are called by faith and baptism to be missionary

¹⁸ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World, also known after its opening words, “The Joy of the Gospel”), 24 November 2013, at www.vatican.va.

disciples and evangelists, we in turn are called to make a preferential option for the poor and to be evangelized by our person to person transforming encounters at the peripheries.

Pope Francis recognizes that our first preaching is a testimony of a faith lived in solidarity. Only when our lives show the authenticity of baptism as testimony from the peripheries to what we have heard and seen and touched in Christ, do we have a right as individuals and as Christian community and as preachers to speak—with a responsibility to call our listeners, in turn, to go likewise and to testify with their lives.¹⁹

The Joy of the Gospel

The Persian poet Hafiz, who lived a hundred years after Francis of Assisi and two hundred years before Martin Luther, wrote:

I am
a hole in a flute
that the Christ's breath moves through,
listen to this music.²⁰

When we as disciples are εν Χριστώ, the Holy Spirit reverberates Christ in us—our very lives becoming a play on God's Word, who from the beginning was with God and was God (John 1:1)—God in us. In lives of discipleship and in liturgical action of word and sacrament, we perform the living Word through whom, with whom, and in whom we are created. This performative character of the Word is sealed on our humanity by virtue of Christ's incarnation and imprinted upon our discipleship by virtue of baptism.

In some measure, all Christians are invited into this same dramatic performance of discipleship, and one need only follow for a time the frequent headlines about Pope Francis to learn from a master that this performative enactment of the Word can be messy work. Each of us is called by virtue of faith and baptism to “be a hole in the flute that Christ's breath moves through.” As Jesus said to his disciples, “I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15).

Sunday worship is the workshop or playground par excellence where Christians come to terms with the folly of the cross and learn the performative art of living into the Resurrected Word. Early in his 2013 apostolic letter *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), Pope Francis commented: “The Church evangelizes and is herself evangelized through the beauty of the liturgy, which is both a celebration of the task of evangelization and the source of her renewed self giving” (par. 25).

Evangelii Gaudium, Francis's vision statement for the next generation Church, is patterned upon the *Aparecida Document*—a vision promulgated in 2007 by the Latin American and Caribbean bishops in the city of Aparecida at the Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, Patroness of Brazil.²¹ Jorge Bergoglio as archbishop of Buenos Aires chaired the writing committee for the *Aparecida Document*, which was built upon a social vision first expressed in the Second Vatican Council's *Gaudium et Spes* (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the*

¹⁹ See 1 John 1:1-4, cited by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 264, in a section on *Personal encounter with the saving love of Jesus*.

²⁰ Shams-ud-din Muhammad Hafiz (c. 1320-1389), “The Christ's Breath,” in *Love Poems from God: Twelve Sacred Voices from the East and West*, ed. Daniel Ladinsky (New York: Penguin Compass, 2002), 153.

²¹ V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, *The Aparecida Document* (Aparecida, Brazil, 2007).

Modern World) in 1965 and which then had been elaborated in the Latin American and Caribbean context at Medellín, Columbia in 1968 and at Puebla, Mexico in 1979. Because Pope Francis chaired the writing committee in 2007, he was well positioned early in his papacy in 2013 to extend the forward thinking Vatican II vision of the *Aporecida Document* into a global Catholic vision by means of his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*). Thanks to the inspiration of the *Aporecida Document*, the ecclesiastical reform envisioned by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* “is following a precise and strategic plan, of which even the finest details are considered”²² and which takes Vatican II as its point of no return.²³

This ecclesiastical vision of reform centers on intentional discipleship by virtue of baptism. Declaring the Church to be “in *permanent mission*” (Opening Message), the *Aporecida Document* had unpacked the social context of Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of the Christian vocation to be “missionary disciples”:

When awareness of belonging to Christ grows by reason of the gratitude and joy that it produces, the eagerness to communicate the gift of this encounter to all also grows. The mission is not limited to a program or project, but it is sharing the experience of the event of the encounter with Christ, witnessing it and announcing it from person to person, from community to community, and from Church to the ends of the earth (cf. Acts 1:8).

. . . This is the essential task of evangelization, which includes the preferential option for the poor, integral human promotion, and authentic Christian liberation. (pars. 144, 146)

Evangelii Gaudium begins likewise: “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. . . . I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark on a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy. . . .” (par. 1). The five-chapter document then treats at length the following questions: “a) the reform of the Church in her missionary outreach; b) the temptations faced by pastoral workers; c) the Church, understood as the entire People of God who evangelizes; d) the homily and its preparation; e) the inclusion of the poor in society; f) peace and dialogue within society; g) the spiritual motivations for mission” (par.17).

While the central Chapter Three on The Proclamation of the Gospel is perhaps the best brief Catholic discussion ever on the subject of the homily and its preparation, the import of the entire message of *The Joy of the Gospel* is marked out by the bracketing sections on the evangelizing Church and on the inclusion of the poor in the society. Early in the chapter, Francis insists, “Evangelization is the task of the Church” (par. 111). He writes, “We all are missionary disciples. In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization” (par. 119). Liturgy and preaching are understood in this context, a context which provides the key to understanding Jorge Bergoglio—the man and the preacher—as he repeatedly sends us from pulpit and pew to the peripheries and the poor.

²² D’Ambrosio, 12.

²³ *Ibid.*, 16.

The Centripetal Force of Baptism

I find it fascinating that on Reformation Day 2016 at a Joint Commemoration of the Reformation in Lund, Sweden, the two preachers—Pope Francis and the Rev. Dr. Martin Junge, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation—both preached in Spanish. Jorge Bergoglio is from Argentina and Martin Junge is from Chile, and both were formed in the ecclesial context of the Latin American Church, a church formed in the same five hundred years since Martin Luther in a tradition of missionary discipleship and prophetic preaching in solidarity with the poor.

In his sermon at the magnificent Lutheran Cathedral in Lund, Martin Junge preached these fitting words by way of conclusion to these remarks to preachers on reformation and the call to missionary discipleship and evangelization:

Aware of all those centrifugal forces that always risk separating us, I would like to call us to rely trustfully on the centripetal force of Baptism. The liberating grace of baptism is a divine gift that calls us together and unites us! Baptism is the prophetic announcement of healing and unity in the midst of our wounded world, and thus becomes a gift of hope for humanity that longs to live in peace with justice and in reconciled diversity. What a profound mystery: the cry of peoples and individuals living under violence and oppression is consonant with what God continually whispers into our ears through Jesus Christ, the true vine to which we are united. Abiding in this vine we will bear the fruits of peace, justice and reconciliation, mercy and solidarity that the people cry for and that God brings forth.

Let us move forward then, answering faithfully God's call and, by doing so, responding to the cries for help, to the thirst and the hunger of a wounded and broken humanity.

And if tomorrow God would see us holding stones in our hands, like those we carried in former times, may they not be to be thrown at each other. Who could throw the first stone now that we know who we are in Christ? May they not be used either to build walls of separation and exclusion. How could we when Jesus Christ calls us to be ambassadors of reconciliation? Rather, may God find us building bridges so that we can come closer to each other, houses where we can meet together, and tables—yes, tables—where we can share bread and wine, the presence of Christ, who has never left us and who calls us to abide in him so that the world may believe.²⁴

²⁴ Rev. Dr. Martin Junge, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, Sermon on the Occasion of the Joint Commemoration of the Reformation, Lund Cathedral, Sweden (October 31, 2016), online at https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/joint_commemoration_mj_sermon_final_en.pdf. See also, Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, "Still Reckoning with Luther: Why the Reformation Is and Isn't Over," *Christian Century* (March 15, 2017): 25.