

# ECUMENICAL TRENDS

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*A Ministry of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement*

## Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Remembrance 2012 “We will all be Changed by the Victory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:51-58)

By Angelique Walker-Smith

### 1 Corinthians 15:51-58

Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (New Revised Standard Version)

### Sermon Focus

*Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain*

On April 16, 1963 the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King found himself sitting in a Birmingham jail in Alabama after having obtained a doctorate degree from Boston University, growing up in Atlanta, GA at Ebenezer Baptist Church and pastoring at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. Sitting in a jail cell had to come as quite a surprise for the young Dr. King. After all, Dr. King was one of the few African-Americans at that time who would have had the kind of spiritual, educational and social opportunities that should have commended him to a settled African American middle class existence of teaching and pastoring in the north or in the south, perhaps at in an African American school or church setting. While sitting in a class at Boston University it may

have been hard for him to imagine he would find himself sitting in a racist and segregated jail cell in an urban center of Alabama.

Still in April of 1963 there Dr. King sat in the Birmingham Jail after having joined people like the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, who was the pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, in speaking out for a theological vision that included all of God’s people in a community of shalom. It was Rev. Shuttlesworth who insisted that Dr. King and his colleagues should come to Birmingham. Recently Rev. Shuttlesworth passed away but he is still remembered as one who inspired Dr. King to be bold in his witness. In a recent *Huffington Post* article the following was stated: “But without him, King might not have sent his forces to Birmingham when he did. “Fred didn’t invite us to come to Birmingham,” said Andrew Young, the former Atlanta mayor and U.N. ambassador who served as an aide to King. “He told us we had to come.”

Rev. Shuttlesworth, like Dr. King, suffered at the hands of the racist segregationists in the south where this ideology was based on their interpretation of Christianity. More specifically, their version of Christian unity in and with their churches did not include people like Rev. Shuttlesworth or Dr. King. It was exclusive. They also had little use for embracing any model of interreligious tolerance and community in spite of the constitutional claim, even at that time, of a multi-religious presence in the USA.

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Rather the Christianity of the racist segregationists chose people like Dr. King and Rev. Shuttlesworth as the targets for their attacks of violence that included bombings and beatings of such persons and many others. For example, in 1963 Rev. Shuttlesworth was attacked by fire hoses that left him with chest injuries. On Christmas night 1956, 16 sticks of dynamite were detonated outside his bedroom as he slept at the Bethel Baptist parsonage, eleven months after a similar attack at King's home in Montgomery, Alabama. No one was injured in either bombing, although shards of glass and wood pierced Shuttlesworth's coat that was left hanging on a hook. The next day, Shuttlesworth led 250 people in a protest of segregation on buses. In 1957, he was beaten by a mob when he tried to enroll two of his children in an all-white school.

Dr. King and Rev. Shuttlesworth, as well as many others who proclaimed their Christian faith as their motivation to stand against the injustices of that time and to advance a mission of Christian unity and interreligious engagement, had to ask the following question. Is this suffering exemplary of what it really means to be steadfast, immovable and seeking to excel in the work of the Lord? While such leaders and their peers had sought to do the things that were acceptable by conventional standards at that time i.e. be a good student, marry, have a nice family, pastor a church and write, they felt the time had come for them to take a Christian stand that would seek a more just community. Indeed many of those engaged in speaking out against the racist injustices were Christian and supported Pastor King's theological vision of shalom rooted in the Bible.

But in the spring of 1963 Dr. King discovered that his understanding of his ecumenical vision and interreligious partnerships had gone against the wishes of not only the racist segregationists of the south but even the recommendations of his own ecumenical and interreligious colleagues and at times, some of his more conservative brothers and sisters within his own wider African-American church family. Because of his decision to act non-violently in direct-action campaigns for justice, his ecumenical and interreligious colleagues had become critical of Dr. King. They were of the opinion that Dr. King and others in the leadership team should wait and see if things would change for justice in the south.

It is ironic, however, that in 1963 Dr. King states in his letter that he, Rev. Shuttlesworth, and others in the movement had actually waited for just change in their campaign for a more just community. At this point in their movement, they had waited since the previous year for merchants to remove racist signs in the store, for the Commissioner of Public Safety, Eugene "Bull" Connor to be unsuccessful in his bid for the Mayoral race, but this did not happen.

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These dynamics convinced Dr. King and Rev. Shuttlesworth that waiting for things to change was not wise. Rather his direct actions of engagement were needed to claim a vision of Christian unity and interreligious cooperation before he was arrested.

Dr. King writes the following in his *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*:

While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities "unwise and untimely." Seldom do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. If I sought to answer all the criticisms that cross my desk, my secretaries would have little time for anything other than such correspondence in the course of the day, and I would have no time for constructive work. But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.

In sum Dr. King was quite distressed that some of his closest colleagues could not understand why the time was now for him so he draws upon Christian history as a resource for the decision to act when others felt he should have waited.

Dr. King states:

I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.

Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds.

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### **Ecumenical Trends**

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Dr. King appropriately referred to St. Paul while in the Birmingham Jail. He understood that to be a Minister of the gospel meant deep sacrifice. He, like St. Paul, was faced with imprisonment by the State government that saw his message of unity, peace and reconciliation as a threat to the unjust laws of the state in which he lived. Both Dr. King and St. Paul knew their allegiance to their faith, indeed their sense of call to serve Jesus Christ the Lord versus the leadership and policies of the State, was contradictory to the priorities of the State.

In the assigned scripture for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2012 we are told that there is the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is important to point out, however, that this statement is made after a lengthy discussion about our mortality and the sting of death and sin. St. Paul's recognition of our humanity and our sinfulness indicates that Christians are called to a faith that will involve struggle at the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of our very being and passing existence on this earth. Struggle is a human consequence of our mortality. The passion and ultimate crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ points to this as well as the many other examples of suffering of the prophets and others in the Bible. Such struggle can include our own members of our church fellowship even where Christian unity is central to the theological orientation of the *koinonia*. Dr. King experienced this when sitting in the Birmingham Jail in 1963 as his letter points out.

In the specific case of Dr. King's ecumenical and interreligious partnering in his struggle to live out the implications of the gospel message as he understood it still took root during a tumultuous period of change in the USA. Indeed imprisonment became part of his mortal struggle. Yet, at the same time, it became an opportunity for a powerful witness of Dr. King's steadfast and immovable Christian work against the status quo not only of the State but to the consternation of his own "Fellow Clergyman." Such a sense of alienation with his closest colleagues and ecumenical and interreligious brothers and sisters had to be painful for Dr. King. Division of any kind in the church family is painful and lessens our opportunity to stand together as a witness for Jesus the Christ. This is at the heart of the Christian unity movement.

Still, we are called to remember that although there may be disagreement over various doctrinal orientations and confessional identities but that Christians must be steadfast and immovable about maintaining a spirit of unity that promotes love and understanding that can heal divisions. Dr. King's vision of beloved community, grounded in scripture, sought to lift this up. His *Letter from the Birmingham Jail* is an invitation from him to his ecumenical and interreligious colleagues and served as a reminder of this. He was reminding them that in spite of their differences, they were still called to a spirit of unity even in their disagreements! I would suspect that Dr. King's disappointment in his colleagues was not so much the ideological orientation of what the direct action would be or when but rather that there was separation within the fellowship of his colleagues and that at the very least, it warranted a letter of both critique and invitation to them.

Dr. King was quite critical of this divided fellowship. This is evident when he further recalled the early days of the Church and St. Paul in his letter. He goes further with a critique not only of the individuals in the fellowship but of their association with their

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churches so as to suggest that they are not being "steadfast and immovable." He states the following:

There was a time when the church was very powerful – in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Whenever the early Christians entered a town, the people in power became disturbed and immediately sought to convict the Christians for being "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators." But the Christians pressed on, in the conviction that they were "a colony of heaven," called to obey God rather than man. Small in number, they were big in commitment. They were too God-intoxicated to be "astronomically intimidated." By their effort and example they brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contests. Things are different now. So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an arch-defender of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent – and often even vocal – sanction of things as they are.

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This section of the writing of Dr. King reminds us that Dr. King's identity is often mis-named. So often Dr. King is most often referred to as a Civil Rights Leader and rarely as a Pastor, Ecumenical Leader and one who knew the power of the witness of the Church in difficult times of struggle. This letter is one more example of this. He suggests in this letter, as cited in the assigned scripture, that Christians should even "rejoice at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believe." He hearkens back to Christian history to make his case. At the same time, he refers to "a colony of heaven" as a graphic depiction of him striving for a fuller visible unity of the Church and for the transformation of humankind to be conformed to the likeness of Christ. In so doing,

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he envisioned signs and wonders on earth of this mystery. He was not content to concede leaving signs and wonders of transformation to an unknown postponed date. At the same time he understood that the ultimate victory for humankind was to be found through spiritual transformation and conversion. It is instructive here to remember that the African-American church community that Dr. King was a son of has been a long legacy of spiritual traditions that has been engaged since the days of slavery. It is a legacy inviting spiritual transformation and conversion not only of their African-American communities but of their enemies such as the racist brothers and sisters that they served.

Perhaps the most recent and popular film, *The Help*, which depicts the history of African-American women who served as domestics in white homes during the same time when Dr. King was in the Birmingham Jail, is helpful in showing this. In the film, these women, who were most often Christian women, were raising white children as their own. They prayed with them, passed on strong Christian values through the ways in which they taught them life skills. There are precious scenes in the film where the lead characters insist that the white children that they care for are God's children. Indeed the film is written by a white woman who benefited from the spiritual guidance of the African-American woman domestic who cared for her. In the film she even suggests that the African-American woman who served as her domestic help in her life was more of a mother figure than her own biological mother who was there spiritually as well as otherwise in some of her greatest time of need.

Dr. King's imprisonment, like these domestics at that same time, lived a daily and long life of spiritual engagement even within the imprisonment of a racist plight of servitude. In so doing they gave evidence of their steadfast work that was sacrificial and immovable. In spite of their circumstances of great struggle, their faithful witness has endured. This was most recently celebrated again with the dedication of the King Memorial in Washington, D.C. for example.

We are asked today to what extent are we steadfast, sacrificial and immovable in our work of the Lord. How is our commitment to the full visible unity of the church transforming and conforming to the likeness of Christ? Are we content to wait or to act?

Today the Church is still being called to be steadfast and immovable as we await the great victory in and through our Lord Jesus Christ. The case of the African-American domestics shows that imprisonment is not limited to those who are bound by their physical incarceration for criminal violations or righteous indignation for human rights abuses for example. Imprisonment can be a state of mind or limitations of social and spiritual movement. This was the case of the segregationists in Birmingham, Alabama. They were limited by their closed view of God's beauty of creation of diverse groups and people. Their spiritual reality was limited by their own limited creeds of their churches that hated those who they viewed as not like them. While I do believe they did profess the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ and actually believed this because of the Biblical authority which many touted, they did not seem to understand how this gift of being victorious in Jesus the Christ was a gift for and to all and not just them.

*Today young people are restless and are acting on their faith and building new relationships of change much like Dr. King did when he was a young man writing from a Birmingham Jail.*

Today young people are restless and are acting on their faith and building new relationships of change much like Dr. King did when he was a young man writing from a Birmingham Jail. The Occupy Wall Street movement has decried the way in which capitalism is implemented in a globalized world that has fallen on difficult economic times. Recently they were caught lifting up a paper mache golden calf suggesting that money had become our idolatrous god in New York City near Wall Street. They continued with the chanting of the Beatitudes. They reminded those present that the construct of the global financial world is negatively affecting financial institutions not only in places like the USA, France and Greece but throughout the world. *Sojourners* reports the following: The protesters have started a national conversation about our country's priorities and values, one that many of us have been having for months: a conversation about jobs, budgets, wars, and corporate greed.

This movement has struck a cord with leaders of faith in New York and throughout the USA with the recently formed Circle of Protection campaign. This campaign is being mobilized around a petition that seeks to protect the programs that serve poor and vulnerable people at home and around the world. The campaign document states: "Budgets are moral documents, and how we reduce future deficits are historic and defining moral choices. As Christian leaders, we urge Congress and the administration to give moral priority to programs that protect the life and dignity of poor and vulnerable people in these difficult times, our broken economy, and our wounded world. It is the vocation and obligation of the church to speak and act on behalf of those Jesus called "the least of these." This is our calling, and we will strive to be faithful in carrying out this mission. This campaign includes such groups as the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops, the Salvation Army, National Association of Evangelicals, the National Council of Churches of Christ, the American Baptist Society, *Sojourners* and many other Christian groups.

Today we also see where the interreligious reality of our world is increasingly the constant back drop of our steadfast and immovable Christian witness for a theological vision of unity. A recent example of this was in the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to two Christian women from Liberia. One of the Christian women was Ms. Leymah Gbowee who worked with grassroots Christian women in Liberia to stand against the horrid violence of her country at war during the 2000s. These Christian women invited women who were Muslim and of traditional religions to mobilize together, which eventually led to the peace treaty among

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the leaders of the country and the first democratically elected woman president in Africa, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. The story can be viewed in the movie, "Pray the Devil Back to Hell" by Fork Productions.

North African countries and Arab countries have been experiencing a spring of change of government leadership and policies that have been led by Muslims and Christians alike. During my visit and conversations with Christians in Egypt I had an opportunity to talk with some of these leaders during the Spring of 2011. I gained a greater appreciation of the roots of faith that motivated their vision of a country more unified across faith and ethnic lines. It is a vision that defies the historic divide of Muslims and Christians in Egypt as they seek a more unified nation in their future. Ms. Robin Wright in her recently critically acclaimed book, *Rock the Casbah* states the following:

Even as the outside world tried to segregate Muslims as "others," particularly after 9/11, most Muslims were increasingly trying to integrate into, if not imitate, a globalizing world. The Islamic world also no longer has identifiable borders.

She further states: "During Egypt's uprising, Muslims and Coptic Christians-who have had deadly confrontations in the past-mobilized together. Ten percent of Egyptians are Christian. Several banners at Liberation Square blended Islam's crescent moon with a Christian cross. "One nation, one people," the banners declared.

In the USA, Dr. Diana Eck, founder of The Pluralism Project at Harvard University, has conducted extensive research on the Religious Landscape in the USA and destroys any myths that somehow we are any less than a diverse country of many faiths and nationalities co-existing in many neighborhoods that are urban, suburban, exurbia and rural.

At the Pluralism Project at Harvard University, Dr. Eck makes the following observation: "In the past thirty years the religious landscape of the United States has changed radically. There are Islamic centers and mosques, Hindu and Buddhist temples and meditation centers in virtually every major American city. The encounter between people of very different religious traditions takes place in the proximity of our own cities and neighborhoods. The results of the 2000 census underscore the tremendous scope of ethnic change in our society, but tell us little about its religious dimensions or its religious significance. What does it mean to be steadfast, immovable, and always excelling in the work of the Lord in this present day of great diversity?"


St. Paul and Dr. King both understood that in the days in which they provided Christian leadership, this diversity was also present, and they spoke to this. Dr. King wrote many books, articles and sermons about this in his vision of "Beloved Community" rooted in scripture. The Letters to Corinth which we refer to in this message spoke to this as well. While both were physically imprisoned, they were not spiritually, mentally or socially imprisoned. They had an appreciation and commitment to a vision that encouraged unity within the gift of God given diversity. They understood the importance of all in their ministries.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity theme, *We Will All Be Changed by the Victory of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, gives us pause because the victory of Our Lord Jesus Christ suggests that the

victory belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ and is for All. In spite of the suffering of any person or group for Christ's sake, including both Dr. King and St. Paul, their steadfast and immovable work was offered as ambassadors of our Christ who gave glory not to them but to God who was working through them for God's glory and not their own. God's glory is greater than what we can see or do. God's glory is not limited by our particular group, church or racial-ethnic grouping. Rather God's glory is unlimited and has impact on all of us.

In so doing, we can be assured that: "...we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Indeed all of us must trust in the words of the Lord's Prayer, "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-13). These are not simplistic Biblical responses to the real human and spiritual pain of being immovable and steadfast in the temporary nature of our present lives. Rather they are further affirmations of the victory that is yet to come for all who "will be changed by the victory of Our Lord Jesus Christ."

*God's glory is greater than what we can see or do.*

The virtues of Christian courage, vulnerability, and humility in our temporary nature that Dr. King and St. Paul gave witness to are instructive to all of us in carrying out a faithful witness for Jesus the Christ and not ourselves. Such virtues can be touchstones that lead us to a spiritual transformation of conversion and to the promise of our being changed, transformed and conformed to the likeness of Christ. "As we pray for and strive towards the full visible unity of the church may we, and the traditions to which we belong" be blessed with concrete opportunities of the work of the Lord that is steadfast and immovable that leads others to know who Christ is. 

*The virtues of Christian courage, vulnerability, and humility in our temporary nature that Dr. King and St. Paul gave witness to are instructive to all of us in carrying out a faithful witness for Jesus the Christ and not ourselves.*

# How the Spirit of Clare and Francis Continues to Influence Peace in Our World

By Steven J. McMichael, OFM, Conv.

**T**wenty five years ago, on October 27, 1986, in the Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels just below Assisi, Pope John Paul II spoke to an audience gathered for the historic World Day of Prayer for Peace:

I have chosen this town of Assisi as the place for our Day of Prayer for Peace because of the particular significance of the holy man venerated here – Saint Francis – known and revered by so many throughout the world as a symbol of peace, reconciliation, and brotherhood. Inspired by his example, his meekness and humility let us dispose our hearts for prayer in true internal silence. Let us make this Day an anticipation of a peaceful world.<sup>1</sup>

Was the Pope correct in choosing Francis, who went in 1219 to the Sultan in Egypt, as the model of peace, reconciliation, and fraternity? Have many contemporary followers of Francis been right about him and the values celebrated in “The Peace Prayer” attributed to him? Was Francis a forerunner of modern day ecumenical and interfaith dialogue? Why does Francis appear in almost every discussion among members of non-Christian religions as the person they most admire from the Christian tradition? The answers to these important questions have serious consequences for our understanding of Francis and his legacy.

What everyone agrees on is that Francis crossed the line between the Muslim forces and the Crusaders in the fall of 1219 in Damietta. Aspiring to convert the Muslims in Egypt, he was able to preach, at least for a few days, to the Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil, and he returned to the crusader camp safe and unharmed.

Several crusade historians and other critics claim that an affirmative answer to these questions above is a product of revisionist history, anachronistic thinking, and/or a Modernist bias. They argue that Francis never explicitly condemned the Crusades in his writings and they actually believe that Francis supported them. Is this the case? If it is, what then how does the spirit of Francis and Clare continue to influence our own approaches to peace and social justice in our world?

## The Writings of Francis

Rather than focus on the early biographies of Francis, one should always begin with Francis’ own twenty-eight writings when discussing anything that has to do with the Poverello from Assisi. I firmly believe that when Franciscans go to the writings of Francis and Clare – as friars and others have done from time to time in history in every age of renewal – there takes place a renewal of the Spirit and a recommitment to a life of peace and justice. Since we draw upon the spirit of Francis and Clare for our inspiration to live Franciscan lives of peace and justice, it is always important for us to understand Francis’ own lived experience as reflected in these writings. As we will see, it is the Servant Christology of Francis and Clare in these writings that can still speak to us today.

## The Earlier Rule of 1221

The importance of the Earlier Rule (1221) cannot be underestimated in understanding the central elements of Francis’

approach to living the Gospel for us who are living today. Those engaged in discussions about the experience had with the Sultan of Egypt focus especially on Chapter 16, which addresses the friars’ mission to Muslims and other non-believers. This chapter though, should be seen in the context of the entire Rule, especially the early chapters leading up to it and also Chapter 16 on preaching.

The three scripture texts (Matthew 19:21, Matthew 16:24, and Luke 14:26) listed in Chapter 1 are the scriptural basis for the Franciscan embrace of the Gospel way of life. For Francis and the early friars this meant a commitment to live an itinerant poor life like Jesus and his disciples, to take up the cross of the Crucified Christ, and to preach by example (and if necessary, with words). This is called “Servant” Christology.

Chapters 2-12 speak of the inner life of the community and how the friars are to relate to one another, how they are to live in poverty and simplicity, and how they are to take care of each other, especially those who are sick.

Portions of these earlier chapters are important in light of what Chapter 16 indicates for the friars’ relationships with non-friars. Chapter 11 asks the brothers “not to slander or engage in disputes,” emphasizes silence, and directs that the brothers “not quarrel among themselves or with others but strive humbly, saying: *I am a useless servant* (Luke 17:10).” They are to love one another and express this love by their deeds. They are not to revile anyone, grumble or detract from others. They are to be gracious to and not judge or condemn others.

Chapter 14 directs the friars to do as the apostles did in their preaching ministry, namely, to go about as poor persons (pilgrims and strangers) and to eat what is placed before them. First they are to say, “Peace to this house.” This greeting is important to Francis, who wrote in his Testament that the Lord himself revealed it to him: “The Lord give you peace.” They were not to resist evil, as Francis understood Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, much of the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount can be found in the writings of Francis. It is his interpretation that is significant in the early Franciscan approach to issues of going about the world in poverty and humility leading to peace. This is the basis for those who say that Francis and the early Franciscans were persons of peace and reconciliation and thus persons who rejected the use of violence.

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*A fuller presentation of this article is found in “Francis and the Encounter with the Sultan,” by Steven J. McMichael, The Cambridge Companion to Francis of Assisi, edited by Michael J. P. Robson, Copyright © 2012 Cambridge University Press. Portions of that article are reprinted with permission.*

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The message of peace and reconciliation was to be lived by the brothers in community and in the world. Did Francis expect this of people at large? There is no way to determine this based on his writings. But it is significant that the Third Order Rule of 1221 (the *Memoriale propositi*) had as a precept that the followers were not to take up arms against anyone. It extends a non-violent policy to others outside the First Order of friars. It is also noteworthy that, in Chapter 23 of the Earlier Rule, Francis admonishes all the orders of church and society, including kings and princes, to persevere in the true faith and in penance but never mentions soldiers or crusaders.

The opening paragraphs of Chapter 22 are especially significant. This chapter was written either just before Francis left for Damietta or is a synthesis of Franciscan discipleship/servanthood written after this event. Francis states:

All my brothers: Let us pay attention to what the Lord says: *Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you*, for our Lord Jesus Christ, Whose footprints we must follow, called His betrayer a friend and willingly offered Himself to His executioners. Our friends, therefore, are all those who unjustly inflict upon us distress and anguish, shame and injury, sorrow and punishment, martyrdom and death. We must love them greatly for we shall possess eternal life because of what they bring us.<sup>2</sup>

If Francis wrote this after visiting the Sultan in 1219, he would have been referring to his Muslim hosts as his enemies-turned-friends. Some contemporary authors see this experience of an enemy-turned-friend as already having been experienced by Francis in his encounter with the leper (“what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of body and soul”). If this was the case, it is questionable that Francis could have condoned using violence on the so-called enemies of the Christian faith. This would not conform to his vision of servant Christology and his divinely inspired Gospel way of life. It would have gone against everything he believed about the identity and mission of Jesus as the Servant of servants and his death on the cross as the self-sacrifice for all sinners.

Chapter 17 takes up the issue of preaching. What is significant here is that Francis directs the friar to preach the Gospel by their deeds, in humility, and to guard against the wisdom of the world and the flesh. There is no mention of preaching anything other than Christian truth. To preach, then, in a derogatory tone to others is contrary to the wishes of Francis.

The central text for our consideration is Chapter 16. It describes how the friars are to go among Saracens and other nonbelievers. This chapter is important because it presents two different ways of missionizing:

As for the brothers who go, they can live spiritually among the Saracens and nonbelievers in two ways. One way is not to en-

gage in arguments or disputes but to be subject to every human creature for God's sake (1 Pet 2:13) and to acknowledge that they are Christians. The other way is to announce the Word of God, when they see that it pleases the Lord, in order that [unbelievers] may believe in the all-powerful God, Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit, the Creator of all, the Son the Redeemer and Savior, and be baptized and become Christians because *no one can enter the kingdom of God without being reborn of water and the Holy Spirit* (John 3:5)

The first form of missionizing, given in one sentence, is significant because Francis directs the friars to live among unbelievers as they would among themselves in community (Chapter 11); and they are to do this in such a way that they are subject to all creatures. They are to witness by their lives and by their example as Francis emphasized continually in his writings. The second form is to preach the Gospel, if it pleased the Lord, in order to bring nonbelievers to the fullness of truth and salvation. Both forms have found a place in the Franciscan tradition.

A major portion of Chapter 16, then, is devoted to preaching the Gospel and admonishing the friars about the attitude they should have when they go among non-believers. These are directives for any mission work, not just among Muslims (as Anthony of Padua and other friars experienced in southern France among the Cathars). The texts are all Gospel passages that remind the friars of the cost of discipleship, which includes the possibility of suffering and death. This was the price of living out a life centered on Servant Christology.

### Greccio and La Verna in Light of 1219

In light of Francis' early life experiences of war, his rejection of violence, and his peaceful encounter with the Sultan, what he later experienced demonstrates the continuity of his approach to these issues. There is a theory that, when Francis went to Egypt in 1219, he also visited the holy places in Jerusalem. However, the only mention he makes of the holy places is in his *Letter to the Entire Order*, where he speaks of how Christians venerate the tomb of Christ. If the primary sources are accurate, Francis loved drama. Therefore both the Greccio and La Verna events can be seen as dramatic illustrations of Francis' appreciation for the Incarnation and Passion of Christ. Actors in medieval plays implicitly demonstrated that one need not go to the Terra Sancta to experience it. If this was true for Francis, he might have felt no need for crusades.

Greccio and La Verna also raise the issue of sacred space. Francis envisioned the true Gospel way of life as embraced by “pilgrims and strangers” in the world who have no need of fixed dwellings. He saw the sacredness of all created reality as evidenced in his *Canticle of the Creatures*. He saw all churches as sacred because they housed the Eucharist and were reminders of the cross of Christ. Sacred space was, therefore, determined primarily by a spiritual attitude toward space and toward what it contained. A friary became a sacred space because this was where the brothers gathered in community. Above all, Francis saw the human person as the locus of the Spirit. From the moment of creation this was the holy place of the encounter with God.

Greccio was sacred because this was where Francis gathered the friars and local community to celebrate the *kenosis* (self-

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emptying “he emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of human beings” (Philippians 2) of the Incarnation of Christ. In a way quite common to medieval liturgical drama (the Mystery Plays), Francis recreated in the Rieti Valley a sacred scene that had originally taken place in the Holy Land. He wanted to see with his own eyes the event of Bethlehem – the birth of Christ. This echoes the experience of St. Jerome’s friend, Paula:

“I swear to you,” she said to Jerome, kneeling beside her, “that with the eye of faith I see the Divine Infant, wrapped in His swaddling clothes. I hear my Lord crying in His cradle. I see the Magi adoring the star shining from above; the Virgin Mother; the careful nursing father; the shepherds coming by night to see the Word was made Flesh; the slaughtered children; raging Herod; Joseph and Mary fleeing into Egypt.” And with mingled tears and joy, she said: “Hail Bethlehem, House of Bread, where was born the true Bread, which came down from Heaven. Hail, Ephrata – the fertile – whose fruit is God.”<sup>3</sup>

Those who were present at Greccio in 1223 had such an experience. The fact that Francis’ vision of the Christ child was in a Eucharistic context is an important connection with pilgrims such as Paula. The continual sacramental “incarnation” of Christ happens, according to Francis, on the altar on a daily basis (Admonition 1). Francis is proclaiming implicitly that pilgrims do not need to go to the Holy Land for this experience. It can happen anywhere. Celano exclaims: “Out of Greccio is made a new Bethlehem.”<sup>4</sup>

About nine months later, Francis received the stigmata on Mount La Verna. In subsequent Franciscan spirituality, this place has been considered the Franciscan “Calvary.” As Greccio was to Bethlehem, so was Mount La Verna to Jerusalem. Pilgrims in Jerusalem retraced the steps of Christ on his way to the cross. Francis read the Gospel accounts of the passion of Christ and experienced a type of interior “Stations of the Cross” or Passion Play (popularized in the thirteenth century with the *Vita Christi* literature). He imaginatively placed himself into the drama. Since the passion took place in Jerusalem, La Verna now became the New Jerusalem and Francis became “the crucified servant of the crucified Lord”<sup>5</sup> Just as Christ appeared to Francis as a child at Greccio, so did he appear to Francis in a crucified form at La Verna. Here, however, the drama led to a unique outcome – the actor actually experienced the event and was marked with real wounds. What is also unique is that the space that became sacred was not just the mountain in Tuscany but the very body of Francis. The human person becomes the locus of the cross, which is the only thing, along with their infirmities, that human beings can glory in (Admonition 5). The holy sepulcher, honored by Christians

as a reminder of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection, loses importance when it is compared with the real place where these events are effective, namely, within the human being. Francis’ writings testify to his belief that the human being is the bearer of the divine. Therefore, greater attention should be placed on the human person – body, soul, and spirit – than on spatial things.

How can these two important experiences in Francis’ life help us interpret his attitudes toward the crusades? The crusades were primarily about the recovery of land and the churches on that land. Francis proclaimed that the events of both Bethlehem and Calvary can be celebrated anywhere at any time. Since this is so, there is no need for fighting and killing over real estate. Based on his own experiences of fighting over power, property, and prestige, Francis, later in life, rejected these motives (he embraced minoritas, poverty, humility) We can see how Francis’ earlier experiences connect with and are consistent with the experiences of his later years.

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#### Clare of Assisi

What about Clare of Assisi? How does she continue to inspire peace in our world? Once again, if we read the writings of Clare, we see that her focus is placed firmly on the Poor and Humble Christ of Servant Christology. It is this vision of the Servant Jesus that led her to claim for herself and her sisters the special privilege of absolute poverty. Let us listen to Clare in her Second Letter to Agnes of Prague:

But as a poor virgin embrace the poor Christ. Look upon Him Who became contemptible for you, and follow Him, making yourself contemptible in this world for Him. Most noble Queen, gaze, consider, contemplate desiring to imitate Your Spouse, [Who] though more beautiful than the children of men became, for your salvation, the lowest of men, was despised, struck, scourged untold times throughout His entire body, and then died amid the suffering of the Cross. If you suffer with Him, you will reign with Him, weeping with Him, you will rejoice with Him; dying on the cross of tribulation with Him, you will possess heavenly mansions with Him among the splendor of the saints and in the Book of Life your name will be called glorious among the peoples.

This vision of Clare of the Servant Jesus leads us to conclude that just as the Poor Christ did not choose violence as a means of resolving conflicts – in fact, quite the opposite in that he willingly chose to undergo a painful and humiliating death – so the followers of Christ must also surrender themselves especially when faced with suffering and death.

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Her own approach – of being a bearer of peace – is illustrated in the story of her response to the Saracen soldiers that had entered the confines of San Damiano. Most of the witnesses of this event testified that Clare simply prayed and the Saracens went away, while a few witnesses claimed that she presented a monstrence in order to ward them off. What is significant is that Clare did not resort to violence herself or ask anyone else to do so. She held firm to her life of the imitation of the Poor and Humble Christ and simply prayed for safety and peace.

### Conclusion

It is clear in Francis' own writings that he believed in Christian truth, that he was deeply concerned with the salvations of Muslims and other so-called non-believers, that he knew that martyrdom was a serious consequence of the friars' preaching mission, and he preached that truth to anyone or anything (the birds) who paid attention to him.

Even before Francis died, his own ideal of the Gospel way of life was being compromised by his followers. Without the ability to direct the Order personally as he had in the "Golden Age" (the first years of Franciscan community life, 1208-1210) and having lost the guiding power of the Earlier Rule, Francis' vision of universal reconciliation and peace was not passed on effectively to subsequent generations of friars. As the Order became clericalized, conventualized, urbanized, and strongly influenced by other religious groups around them, Francis' desire to observe the Gospel as a wandering group of mendicants living as pilgrims and strangers in the world was lost. His vision of missionizing in both forms as outlined in the Earlier Rule was also lost to a significant number of friars. Much was lost of the spirit of Francis between the transition from the Earlier Rule and the approved Rule of 1223. This loss resulted in many of the friars setting themselves up for martyrdom by deriding Muhammad and the Qur'an and they were becoming crusade preachers.

In 1219 Francis took advantage of the crusade in Egypt in order to preach to the Sultan al-Kamil about the truths of the Christian faith. He accepted that this preaching mission might possibly end in martyrdom. Having gone with an attitude of peace and reconciliation, he left the Sultan's court in peace. Based on his own writings and the Christology revealed in them, we can safely conclude that Pope John Paul II was correct in choosing Francis as a model of peace and reconciliation not only between Christianity and Islam but also between Christianity and all other world religions.


The Spirit of Clare and Francis continues to influence peace in the world by those who take the time to learn from their exemplary lives and read their writings and let these words influence their lives. Their exemplary lives and their writings challenge us to focus our attention on the Poor and Humble Christ who lived among us, suffered and died for us. In imitation of Him, we are to live our lives based on this model. The challenge is to, like Francis and Clare, live according to the "spirit" of Servant Christology. This "Spirit" is the Spirit of Peace which is gift to those who receive it, but a gift that must be shared with others. Servant Christology, as lived by Francis and Clare, means surrendering our need to possess "things" or each other. This means not possessing anything (*sine proprio*) that we would need to fight over. This includes especially

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property like Bethlehem and Jerusalem because Christmas and Easter can be celebrated anywhere.

The Spirit of Francis and Clare are present when there is a joint concern over the use of the Earth's resources. They are present when we proclaim and practice the basic principle of peace: No harm should be done to others in the name of religion. Francis and Clare call us to be moral activists, servants of justice and truth for all people. Their example and writings remind us of the prophetic call to be servants of all innocent victims, especially those outside the confines of the church community. They remind us that we must always be "proclaimers" of the Kingdom of God and to live out lives centered on being servants of the Kingdom. Biblically speaking, they remind us to take seriously Jesus' parable of the last judgment: "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you. ... For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink" (Matthew 25:34-35).

I conclude with the words of Pope John Paul, who spoke these words in the spirit of Francis and Clare:

In today's world where God is tragically forgotten, Christians and [members of world religions] are called in one spirit of love to defend and always promote human dignity, moral values and freedom. The common pilgrimage to eternity must be expressed in prayer, fasting and charity, but also in joint efforts for peace and justice, for human advancement and the protection of the environment. By walking together on the path of reconciliation and renouncing in humble submission to the divine will any form of violence as a means of resolving differences, [all world] religions will be able to offer a sign of hope, radiating in the world the wisdom and mercy of that one God who created and governs the human family.<sup>6</sup> 

### Notes:

1. This speech and other speeches John Paul II gave during this event can be found on the Vatican City web page [www.vatican.va/](http://www.vatican.va/).
2. *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Vol. I, ed. Regis Armstrong, Wayne Hellmann, William Short (New York: New City Press, 1999), 79.
3. Saint Jerome, *The Pilgrimage of Holy Paula*, ed. Edward Lewes Cutts, Fathers for English Readers (New York: E. and J. B. Young & Co, 1897), 125-126.
4. The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano, *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Vol. I, 255.
5. The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano, *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Vol. I, 264.
6. Pope John Paul II, "Muslims and Christians Adore the One God," (May 5, 1993).

# Paul Wattson Lecture — Halifax

## Holiness, Hospitality and Hope

By Archbishop Fred Hiltz

I have participated in liturgies and programs associated with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity since my days as a theological student some thirty-five years ago and every year I look forward with anticipation as to what the theme will be. In 2011, it was, “*One in the apostles teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer.*” (Acts 2:42)

Inspiration for that theme came from the Church in Jerusalem, the Mother of us all. The local ecumenical group described their own context by writing:

...Mindful of its own divisions and its own need to do more for the unity of the Body of Christ, the churches in Jerusalem call all Christians to rediscover the values that bound together the early Christian community in Jerusalem, when they devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. This is the challenge before us. The Christians of Jerusalem call upon their brothers and sisters to make this week of prayer an occasion for a renewed commitment to work for a genuine ecumenism, grounded in the experience of the early Church.

What is the substance of such a “genuine ecumenism?” I am more and more convinced that, if the unity we seek is to have “real substance,” it must be rooted in a deep holiness, reflect a radical hospitality, and represent a lively hope for the world.

### Holiness

The holiness to which Christ calls us is perhaps nowhere more vividly set before us than in the Farewell Discourse in the Gospel according to John, – that intimate conversation in which Jesus speaks to the disciples of their life and life’s calling in Him. It follows immediately on the foot washing and Jesus’ teaching about loving service. In and out of this conversation the Church must live and move and have its being.

As Jesus prays that God will sanctify them in truth, he calls his friends into a deeper understanding of this new commandment to love one another: abiding in Jesus, loving each other, trusting in the guidance that the Holy Spirit will bring, may they be truly one, as Jesus and the Father are One.

Biblical scholar Raymond Brown comments, “The prayer on behalf of his disciples is an extension of the prayer for his own glorification for it is in the perseverance and mission of the disciples that the name of God, given to Jesus, will be glorified on earth.”

In this mission they will encounter the world’s hostility, but they will endure through divine protection that will offset sadness and bring them to that joy that cannot be taken from them. (17:13). “Their consecration is directed toward their mission.” It is to be a consecration in truth. Because Jesus is both Word and Truth, their consecration in the truth “is simply another aspect of belonging to him.” Only in union with him, can they accomplish that for which he sends them.

This union has both horizontal and vertical dimensions. It “involves the relation of the believers to the Father and the Son

and the relation of the believers among themselves...for John, unity is not reducible to a mystical (and I would add solitary) relationship with God, nor is it simply human fellowship or harmonious interaction among Christians.” Our unity is a unity in the life of the Trinity. Our unity is imperative not only for our integrity and credibility but for our witness and mission.

This imperative at the heart of Jesus’ prayer is the imperative at the heart of the ecumenical movement: that we be one in Christ for the world. Historically, the growth towards full visible unity has worked itself out in stages, often beginning with cooperation in mission and growing mutual recognition of shared faith, and moving into some sharing of the Eucharist, then into full communion.

In North America, for example, the social gospel movement of one hundred years ago brought churches together as they reached out to the marginalized poor on the very doorsteps of the churches in cities, villages and rural areas.

United in faith and mission, Christians of different traditions found that, as they walked together sharing God’s love for the world, this very outward movement of Gospel love brought them to recognize the faith that they had in common. Such are the roots of the United Church of Canada.

At some points in our own Canadian history, Churches have so recognized and honored the call to oneness in Christ that we have been willing to discipline ourselves with the capacity to live with degrees of “bearable anomalies”, in faithfulness to the call to unity. This has meant that we have been willing to live with some differences – even some rather theologically tough differences – as we work towards agreement.

In the Canadian Lutheran-Anglican Dialogues, by the period of the 1980s, we began to realize that the episcopate was to be one of these big challenges. Anglicans honored and could rely on an unbroken historic episcopate by laying on of hands. For Lutherans with roots in many parts of the European Lutheran movement, there were no bishops who would lay hands on Reformation leaders. Other practices of the same Episcopal oversight developed. Anglicans in the dialogue began to learn and to recognize that the practice of the episcopate had been maintained in the Lutheran tradition, but that it was not always in the same form. But we came to discern, in faithful commitment to the imperative of Jesus’ prayer, that we could live with this anomaly for a time and each risk some new ways of recognizing the episcopate. Over time, then, we have grown into full communion as Anglicans and Lutherans by exploring our diversities, not shying away from our differences, and in all things keeping God’s call to holiness first in our sight.

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*Archbishop Fred Hiltz is the Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada.*

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Amongst themselves Anglicans are deeply conscious of the challenges of what it means to remain in communion one with another. As the Archbishop of Canterbury has said on numerous occasions, “We are called to celebrate, deepen, and restore communion where relations have been strained or broken.”

In retreat addresses before the Lambeth Conference, he held before the bishops of the Communion the image of The Gathering Christ, the one in whom all things are held together, on earth and in heaven.

He spoke of his own understanding of holiness as “having been taken hold of by Christ” (Philippians 3:12), as belonging to Him. “To live in His peace, his unity is to live constantly in the presence of His call to be converted.” (Sermon by Archbishop Rowan Williams, July 2003, York Minster)

“Holiness” writes Jean Vanier, “is not something we achieve; it is given... for all those who are poor enough to welcome Jesus” – to embrace his truth and love, his grace and glory, his passion and prayer for the Church and for the world.

The unity we seek is as Williams puts it, “not just a quantitative unity of people gathered for the sake of being together, but about a quality of unity in Christ in which each person is diminished by the pain of another and each person is enriched by the holiness of another.”

The key here is that it is when Christians serve together, seeking to live in the holiness that is at the heart of Jesus’ prayer, we uncover the heart of faith that we all share. We recognize holiness in each other. We uncover the communion that God has given to us and intends for the whole world.

### Hospitality

A number of years ago, Father Thomas Ryan, one time Director of the Canadian Centre for Ecumenism wrote a book entitled, *A Survival Guide for Ecumenically Minded Christians*. In it he uses many images that help us appreciate our history, our diversity and the search for unity in Christ.

He wrote, “In the years ahead, we Christians must learn to be both hosts and guest. To be hosts, we must be firmly rooted in a particular tradition of response to the gospel and therefore have a home into which we can welcome another. ...To be guests, we must be ready to go where the other lives, to see and understand the way things are done in the other’s household, to develop an affection for that space and the things we find there.”

That image has served ecumenism well. For in our comings and goings we have learned how much we hold in common, and we have learned to embrace our differences in much more respectful ways. We have moved beyond ignorance and suspicion to genuine interest and support for one another.

We have learned that one of the keys to ecumenism is personal relationships, especially between Christian leaders as they meet in person to take counsel together. Robert Runcie, a former Archbishop of Canterbury once wrote, “May an affective familiarity lead us to be more effectively one family in Jesus Christ.”

Many watch for visits of popes and archbishops and moderators and listen for words spoken when church leaders meet. The most recent visit of Pope Benedict XVI to England is a wonderful example of mutual hospitality offered and received and a common witness to Christ given to the world. A commitment to strive for the highest degree of communion possible must show forth in Church leaders doing all that they can do to bring a united witness of God’s love to the world.

In such occasions of humility meeting humility, we uncover not only the gifts of the other, but sometimes even discover anew or for the first time the gifts that we ourselves have to offer. In cultivating ecumenical spiritual friendships, we can be deep gifts to each other.

A conviction has emerged that the variety of denominational heritages is legitimate and forms part of the richness of life in the universal Church. As Karl Rahner has said, “The treasure of all the churches together is not only quantitative but qualitatively greater than the actual treasure that can be found in any one of the churches.” We can each and all drink from each others’ wells, and, thus nourished, be stronger in our care for the world.

It has been said that if ecumenism is to take hold it will happen at the local level. At the local level we grow in God’s love when we celebrate together the mysteries of our Redemption in Christ. Examples:

*Advent and Lessons and Carols*

*Ecumenical Ways of the Cross*

*Easter Praises and Prayers*

*Celebrating Pentecost together, – A once and coming Spirit*

We grow in God’s love when we pray together, whether through ecumenical cycles of prayer or in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. We grow together when we stand together on Remembrance Day when we gather at times of local or national

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celebration or mourning.

We grow together when we bring neighbors of faith together in studying the scriptures, or clergy together in ecumenical ministerial associations; when laity gather in local church councils that address issues of concern to the safety, health and well-being of their communities. In many places the churches are working in wonderful ecumenical cooperation with other community agencies.

Increasingly, pastors and local church leaders are developing Covenants in Ministry and other statements of common witness as tangible signs of their commitment to live in common mission whilst striving for greater unity. Ecumenical shared ministries and joint congregations are leading the way in witness to common life, ministry, worship and mission.

Right here in Halifax we have the great gift in our midst of ecumenical theological education. Theological students are people on a mission, by nature – as we all ought to be. They are full of curiosity and wonder: they want to learn about Christ and the Christian tradition, they are caught up in wonder and awe at the works of God and of the Christian family as they learn.

These students grow together – and in ecumenical learning contexts their learning is a mutual growing into each others' traditions. These people are gifts to our churches. Do we listen to them? Do we ask about their ecumenical formation when they come to serve within our particular churches? Do we call forth the gifts of their curiosity and wonder? Do we bring them even into local ecumenical dialogues and have them counsel our leaders about the past, present and future of ecumenism?

And what is the present and future of ecumenism? What is the "state of the union" of Christian unity? Some have referred to this season as an "ecumenical winter", and see little positive movement and even some setbacks.

With unity within the churches themselves being a challenge as we discern faithful responses to real and difficult challenges and issues in society today, can we maintain the same levels of passion for ecumenical dialogue? Will our present challenges on matters ranging from sexuality issues to liturgical language get in the way of our ability to name and give thanks for what has been accomplished in both ecumenical dialogue and in ecumenical social justice work?

Notwithstanding these questions, we can celebrate that "previously imaginable barriers have come down" and that "ecumenical

friendships are real and treasured". We can give thanks for ten years of full communion between Anglicans and Lutherans. We can give thanks for forty years of dialogue between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. The 2007 Agreed Statement "*Growing Together in Unity and Mission*", calls for visible expressions of our shared faith, joint studies of our faith, cooperation in ministry and shared witness in the world. We can celebrate that dialogues – national and international – are in place and continuing.

The document *Justification by Faith* is the recent, official repudiation of the mutual condemnations aimed by Roman Catholics and Lutherans at each other since the time of the Reformation. It is a tremendous achievement, as has been the Apology offered to the Anabaptists by the Lutheran World Federation.

Very shortly we will come to the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of "BEM": the World Council of Churches, Faith and Order Statement on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches will be bringing forth the next generation of this work in an ecumenically agreed statement on the *Nature and Mission of the Church*.

It has been a rich and fruitful period and signs point to continued positive theological development and growth in common mission.

In a new phase of ecumenism I believe we are called to explore with much more intent the opportunities for Eucharistic hospitality. The subject has received serious treatment in ecumenical dialogues and agreements most notably, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM).

Anglican Lutheran dialogue and Anglican Methodist dialogue have each upheld the centrality of baptism – and eucharist together as the participatory signs and ways for Christ's church to grow in holiness for the sake of the reconciliation of all things in Christ.

The Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission's statement on eucharistic doctrine in 1971, in which there was deep convergence on the matter of the eucharist, places it in the heart of Christ's activity for God's world. The Commission put it this way: "As long as the Church does not live as the community of reconciliation God calls it to be, it cannot adequately preach this Gospel or credibly proclaim God's plan to gather his scattered people into unity under Christ as Lord and Saviour (cf. Jn.11.52). Only when all believers are united in the common celebration of the Eucharist... the God whose purpose it is to bring all things into unity in Christ (cf. Eph.1.10) be truly glorified by the people of God."

This very centrality of Eucharistic hospitality for the life and mission of Christ's Church is precisely the reason why our failures in this regard are so painful for us. I participate in an annual meeting of Canadian Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops. We pray together, we discuss our ministries as bishops, we work on common witness initiatives, and we have become dear friends in Christ. On each day of the meeting, the eucharist is celebrated. On one day, a Roman Catholic bishop will preach and an Anglican bishop will preside; on another, a Roman Catholic will preside and an Anglican preaches. Anglicans do not receive the consecrated

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*With unity within the churches themselves being a challenge as we discern faithful responses to real and difficult challenges and issues in society today, can we maintain the same levels of passion for ecumenical dialogue?*

bread and wine at the Roman Mass, and Roman Catholics do not receive the consecrated bread and wine at the Anglican Eucharist. We experience what is called “spiritual communion”. At this year’s meeting, the bishops took time out of their agenda following the second day’s experience of worship and shared their feelings of pain and thoughts about impaired communion. The feelings were deep and we know, viscerally, how much this injures our common witness.

I share this experience not to blast or blame, not to shock or alarm, but rather to state without hesitation or reserve that conversations centered on provisions for extension of Eucharistic hospitality would be interpreted as an encouraging sign, a new era in ecumenism, an expression that takes us much closer to a more visible expression of the unity of the Church.

*On one day, a Roman Catholic bishop will preach and an Anglican bishop will preside; on another, a Roman Catholic will preside and an Anglican preaches.*

I recognize that at the heart of this conversation is another complex issue – that is the recognition of ordained ministries. That alone will require of us all a deep commitment to dialogue and a profound resolve to the healing of old divisions.

I recognize that the embracing of one another’s vocations in ways not seen before and the grace of the Eucharistic hospitality for which so many of us long may not be seen for some years to come, perhaps not in our lifetime. In the meantime I pray earnestly with all who sing that great Eucharistic hymn, *Thou, Who at Thy First Eucharist*:

*Thou, who at thy first Eucharist didst pray  
That all thy church might be forever one,  
Grant us at every eucharist to say  
With long heart and should, “Thy will be done”.  
For all thy church, O Lord, we intercede:  
Make thou our sad divisions soon o cease;  
Draw us the nearer each to each, we plead,  
By drawing all to thee, O Prince of Peace.*

This hymn, this prayer, is born of the radical hospitality to which our Lord invites us. After all, in the eucharist he is host. The gathering is his. The love is his. The Table is his. The mystery is his. The food and drink is his. The grace is his. The blessing is his. The sending is his.

## Hope

From a global perspective the defining moments of the ecumenical movement are paced it seems at 30 to 40 years intervals.

We can see the beginnings of a true movement coalescing just over one hundred years ago. Efforts by Paul Couturier and Paul Wattson to encourage prayer for Christian unity found support

from Roman Catholic and Anglican hierarchies and the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity was born.

In 1911, the First World Conference on World Missions met in Edinburgh. Several years later, the first World Conference on Faith and Order was held.

Roughly thirty years later, the Canadian Council of Churches was formed, in 1946, and two years later in 1948, the World Council of Churches (WCC). “Conciliar Ecumenism” was born, bringing together the streams of justice and peace work along with theological dialogue.

From its beginning, ecumenical councils have endeavored “to call the churches to full visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in common worship and in common life in Christ and to advance that unity so that world may believe.”

One of the first major achievements of the WCC came just four years later when, meeting in Lund, Sweden, delegates developed principles for the practical working out of this vision. “The Lund Principle” states that “the churches should hence forth act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel us to act separately.”

“Lund” has continued to guide the work of ecumenical coalitions for social justice and advocacy. Thirty years later, in 1982, the document Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry laid the ground work for mutual recognition amongst churches of baptismal life and witness, ordained ministries and Eucharistic hospitality.

At the turn of the Millennium, the churches in Canada stood together in the spirit of Jubilee, calling for the Restoration of Right Relations among all people, the Reduction of International Debt, and the Renewal of the Earth.

KAIROS, the Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative is a classic and an extraordinary example of the commitment of the churches to work together in advancing and actualizing hope for the world.

So also is Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB) a partnership of Canadian churches working to address global hunger. For twenty-five years, CFGB has supplied 1 million metric tons of food to various parts of the world. It has supported over half a billion dollars on immediate aid, food security initiatives and nutrition programs.

Globally the churches have been on the front line of advancing the UN Millennium Development Goals, adopted by world leaders in 2000 with an objective of accomplishment by 2015.

“What is called for in these goals is not a singular, unified program to cure all the ills of the world but a movement of the people of the world for the sake of the world, a movement of shalom for the sake of the least. They serve as an invitation to get on with what God wants us to be about, to join with sisters and brothers in Christ, with people of other faiths, to be about the repair of the world. “It’s about building a movement... a movement of God’s People in response to The Missio Dei.”

*continued on page 14*


“Co-operation in mission between churches requires that theological foundations and matters of faith and order belong together with life and work” (para 81, Lambeth Indaba, 2008). “Our ecumenical vocation is not only to be a witness to the truth revealed in Christ, but also as empowerment in relation to the Church’s mission and its commitment to “justice and peace for all” (para 82, Lambeth Indaba). It is born of a holistic view of mission (para 43, Lambeth) “the restoration of right relations with God with one another, with all creation.”

In this call to serve the world, the diaconate has become a rich opportunity in advancing a common witness. The *diakonia* of which I speak is individual and institutional. It is pastoral and prophetic, compassionate service addressing the root causes of suffering and planting the beautiful seeds of transformation.

### Conclusion

The churches of present day Jerusalem call and challenge us this year to a renewed commitment to work for a genuine ecumenism for the sake of world that God so loves. Who we are in Christ, how we live together and what we do together as churches in the world gives hope to the world.

*The diakonia of which I speak is individual and institutional. It is pastoral and prophetic, compassionate service addressing the root causes of suffering and planting the beautiful seeds of transformation.*

It was in Jerusalem that the great fourth century bishop Cyril developed the liturgies of Christian initiation that we now share. His teaching to early catechumens illuminated for them as they do for us today, the core spiritual truths of the Christian faith: that in the waters of baptism, we are called into a journey of holiness in Christ; we are called to embrace and reflect the gift of divine hospitality; and that by our common life and witness, we are called to embody represent a lively hope for the world. 

*This paper was presented as the Paul Wattson Lecture on November 7, 2011 at St. Mary’s University in Halifax, Nova Scotia.*

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Manuscripts sent to the editor should be written in either  
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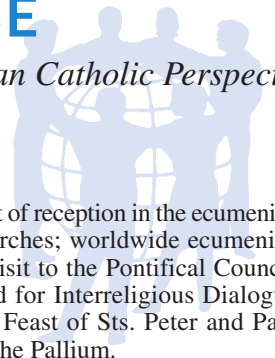
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# ANNUAL SUMMER COURSE

*Introduction to the Ecumenical & Interreligious Movements from a Roman Catholic Perspective*

25 June - 13 July 2012 • Centro Pro Unione



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This course is designed to introduce participants to the ecumenical and interreligious movements from a Roman Catholic perspective. It will offer a historical and theological overview of the issues that divide Christians as well as the bonds that unite them. The program will explore relations with other religious traditions. The course, which is in English, is for men and women who are in preparation for ministry or religious life, who are in the mission field, who are ecumenical officers or members of ecumenical commissions, or who are looking for a sabbatical experience led by qualified professors and ecumenists.

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The faculty includes, but is not limited to, staff members of the Centro Pro Unione (Rome) and the Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute (New York). The Course is "Recognized and Endorsed" by the Graduate Theological Foundation (USA) which can grant up to six graduate credits for qualified graduate students.

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