

REVISITING POPE FRANCIS' *EVANGELII GAUDIUM* AND THE CALL FOR CHURCH RENEWAL

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*This paper revisits Pope Francis' 2013 Apostolic Exhortation titled *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) or the Joy of the Gospel. It explores particularly Pope Francis' ecclesiological vision of a missionary church and unpacks the corresponding ecclesial structures and processes of renewal, necessary for this vision to come to life. The underlying assumption of the paper is that the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis can provide the Philippine Church with a good framework for conceptualizing ministry and leadership as it moves forward in the future, beyond the 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines.*

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I will revisit Pope Francis' ecclesial vision as found in *Evangelii Gaudium* and look at the corresponding ecclesial renewal it requires for becoming a missionary church. My paper will proceed as follows: (a) some preliminary remarks will be given to provide the context of discussion; (b) then, the Pope's ecclesiological vision will be examined, and finally, (c) its consequences for church renewal will be explored. The underlying goal of this sharing, however, is to provide a solid point of reference for reflection as we, the Filipino people of God, rethink leadership and ministry for the future in light of the 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines.

**SOME PRELIMINARY REMARKS:
SOME METHODOLOGICAL SHIFTS**

THE MESSENGER IS AS GOOD AS THE MESSAGE

Eight years ago, on November 24, 2013, Pope Francis published his first papal writing called *Evangelii Gaudium*, or the Joy of the Gospel.¹ Considered an apostolic exhortation, it deals with the issues and concerns raised in the 2012 Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization. It contains the Pope's resolve to bring to life a church vision that is "more missionary, more merciful, and with the courage to change."² The positive reception to it has to do with the man behind the document. While some would not consider him progressive at all, many, however believe that "his deep-seated pastoral instincts and spirituality have changed the tone and emphasis of papal pronouncements, generating a very different impression and thereby creating a more receptive audience."³ It is

¹ Pope Francis published an encyclical letter titled *Lumen Fidei* in July 5, 2013. The said encyclical, however is based largely on the ideas of Pope Benedict XVI. Hence, the latter may be considered the real author of it. Note that this article does not deal with the succeeding writings of Pope Francis such as *Amoris Laetitia* (2013), *Laudato Si* (2015) and *Fratelli Tutti* (2020). While this is the case, the writer recognizes the fact that some of the major themes the Pope develops in these documents are already present in EG. For example, in Chapter II, he deals with what he calls the crisis of commitment and touch on societal issues caused by the capitalist driven economy resulting to the exclusion and marginalization of the poor, i.e., the materially poor and the environment. In Chapter 4, he deals with the social dimension of evangelization and talks about fraternity, the common good and promoting the integral development of the poor. Note also that this paper, synthesizes the initial views and reactions generated by EG from leading commentators/ecclesiologists when it was released to the public.

² John Allen, "'Evangelii Gaudium' Amounts to Francis' 'I have a Dream Speech'," *National Catholic Reporter* (November 26, 2013), <https://www.ncronline.org/news/theology/evangelii-gaudium-amounts-francis-i-have-dream-speech>.

³ Duncan Dormor and Alana Harris, "Evangelii Gaudium and the Renewal of the Church," *Ecclesiology* 12 (2016): 4. See also Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Reflections on Pope Francis: Is He a Reformer, Traditionalist, or Both?," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 42, nos. 1&2 (2014), <http://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/articles/winterspring2014/reflections-on-pope-francis>.

in this sense that the messenger is as important as the message when looking at the document.

FROM COMMUNIO TO PEOPLE OF GOD

Evangelii Gaudium shows Pope Francis' appropriation of Vatican II's teaching on ecclesiology as filtered through his Latin American roots, his active involvement in CELAM,⁴ and his Jesuit formation.⁵ "At the center of Pope Francis's understanding of the church, 'stands the image of the church as the people of God'..."⁶ Pope Francis, therefore, recovers the People of God ecclesiology, marking an end to *communio* as the exclusive theological articulation of the council teaching from Pope John Paul II to Pope Benedict XVI.

FROM NEW EVANGELIZATION TO NEW PATHS OF EVANGELIZATION

In EG, Pope Francis recovers also a more comprehensive understanding of mission and evangelization as seen in Vatican II. He prefers to use terms like "new phase," "new chapter," "new paths" or "new processes" of evangelization⁷ rather than use Pope Benedict XVI's preferred term which is *new evangelization*.⁸ When

⁴ CELAM is the Latin American Episcopal Council. It was created in 1955. According to the ecclesologist Richard Gaillardetz, "Francis' reception of the Council is quite distinctive, because it is marked by three characteristic features in his biography namely that he is a Latin American, an active member of CELAM and a member of the Jesuit order. See Richard Gaillardetz, *Francis: Pope of the Council*, http://elephantsinthelivingroom.org/forums/Richard_Gaillardetz_Talk_Francis_Pope_ofthe_Council_20131206.pdf.

⁵ Gaillardetz further notes that Pope Francis "has read the Council's teachings through the lens of a Jesuit's commitment to mission, and a Jesuit commitment to the Christo-Centrism of the Gospel, a Jesuit commitment to discernment, a spirituality of discernment." See *ibid*.

⁶ See Walter Kasper, "'How Pope Francis sees the Church'" *Commonweal* (March 13, 2015), <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/open-house>.

⁷ See for example EG nos., 1, 11, 17, 31, 287.

⁸ See Stephen Bevans, *New Evangelization or Missionary Church? Evangelii Gaudium and the Call for Missionary Discipleship*, <http://vd.pcn.net/en/images/pdf/>

Pope Benedict XVI speaks of the new evangelization, he has in mind the secularized West in need of being saved “from the ravages of post-modernism and unbelief... .”⁹ Pope Francis’ nuanced usage retrieves an understanding of the church that in the words of Vatican II, is ‘missionary by its very nature.’¹⁰ This envisions a world church characterized by diversity and plurality of contexts rather than the narrower context of the new evangelization.

FROM CENTRALIZATION TO COLLEGIALITY

Evangelii Gaudium departs from a top-down approach in the production of papal documents to a process of collaborative endeavor. It “... may be one of the most collegial post-synodal apostolic exhortations to emerge from the papal magisterium.”¹¹ First, Pope Francis tried to integrate as much as possible the contributions from the Synod members by drawing “explicitly from the *propositiones* of the synod no less than thirty times.”¹² Second, the Pope promote catholicity and collegiality among his bishops by inter weaving documents “issued by nine different regional bodies of bishops from a wide variety of contexts including those of Latin America (CELAM), Brazil, the Philippines, India, Italy, France, the Congo, the United States, and Europe...”¹³ in the exhortation.

NEW_EVANGELIZATION_OR_MISSIONARY_CHURCH_Verbum_SVD_2014. pdf, 8.

⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁰ Ibid., 18.

¹¹ Catherine Clifford, “Pope Francis’ Call for the Conversion of the Church in our Time”, *Australian eJournal of Theology* 21, no. 1 (April, 2015): 34; 35.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 35.

HIS ECCLESIAL VISION: PEOPLE OF GOD AS MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

MISSIONARY OUTREACH AS PARADIGMATIC

The hermeneutical key to Pope Francis' ecclesial vision in EG is found in his call for a missionary church.¹⁴ He finds "missionary activity ... the greatest challenge and the missionary task... foremost"¹⁵ in today's church. He believes that "the church needs to be 'permanently in a state of mission.'"¹⁶ Thus, he argues that a "missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church's activity."¹⁷

MISSIONARY DISCIPLES AND A PERSONALIST UNDERSTANDING

The whole people of God are summoned to become *missionary disciples* by virtue of their baptism.¹⁸ The missionary mandate comes from God himself.¹⁹

¹⁴ This idea reflects Vatican II's Decree on the Missionary Life of the Church. *Ad Gentes* no. 2 states: "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father." See *Decree Ad Gentes on the Mission Activity of the Church* accessed from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html.

¹⁵ See EG no. 15.

¹⁶ Ibid. no. 25.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The concept of missionary disciple comes from the *Aporecida* document of the 5th General Conference of CELEM in 2007. Pope Francis who was still then Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio is one of the main authors of the said document. Missionary discipleship is a mandate to announce the gospel with Joy and to become agents of personal and societal transformation in the establishment of the reign of God. See *Aporecida* document, <http://www.aecrc.org/documents/Aporecida-Concluding%20Document.pdf>.

¹⁹ Ibid. See also Steven Bevans, "Mission as the Nature of the Church: Developments in Catholic Ecclesiology," *Australian eJournal of Theology* 21, no.3

More than the personal qualities of a missionary, the real source of missionary joy and vitality is found in a renewed encounter with God in Jesus Christ. "From this personal encounter alone flows our deepest identity as persons and communion we share with one another in Christ's ecclesial body, the church."²⁰ Hence, EG articulates a *personalist* understanding of the foundation of missionary work.²¹ This transformative encounter with the person of Jesus (1) enriches friendship with God; (2) liberates the missionary from selfishness and self-absorption; (3) leads him/her to his/her authentic self; (4) inspires missionary efforts and meaning; and (5) motivates loving communion for others.²²

ENVISIONING THE MISSIONARY PASTORAL MINISTRY OF THE EVANGELIZING COMMUNITY

Pope Francis' ecclesial mindset necessitates a different way of being a church. It demands "the fundamentally centrifugal thrust of the church's activity and the need for Christians to enter into deeper and more profound solidarity with the world."²³ This vision involves a movement away "from a pastoral ministry of mere

(December 2014):184-196. See also Bevans, "Evangelii Gaudium and Prophetic Dialogue," *Australian Journal of Theology* 22, no.1 (April 2015): 11-18.

²⁰ Clifford, "Pope Francis' Call," 37. The Pope describes this encounter as "contemplating with love" in EG no. 264. Furthermore, this encounter makes missionary disciples as "spirit filled evangelizers" (EG no. 261). This is the impulse and spirituality that must be nourished (EG no. 262). Speaking of the joy of evangelization, the pope says that an "evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!" (EG 10) rather this new phase of evangelization must be marked by enthusiasm and vitality (EG no. 17).

²¹ See EG. nos. 7 and 8. See also Clifford, "Pope Francis' Call...", 38.

²² In *Ibid.*, no. 7, Pope Francis quotes the Encyclical Letter of Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* to describe this personalist understanding as a result of the renewed encounter with God's love. He writes: "I never tire of repeating those words of which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: 'Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.'"

²³Richard Gaillardetz. *The 'Francis Moment': A New Kairos for Catholic Ecclesiology*, accessed June 2, 2017, <https://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/ctsa/article/viewFile/5509/4988>, 67.

conversion to a decided missionary pastoral ministry.”²⁴ What does this missionary pastoral ministry entail?

A MISSION OF MERCY: A REVOLUTION OF TENDERNESS

The “Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel.”²⁵ It reaches out to the “peripheries”²⁶ to seek “those who have fallen away... and welcome the outcast.”²⁷ It inserts herself into the reality of peoples’ lives in order “to touch human misery, to touch the suffering flesh of others.”²⁸ The Pope summons every Christian to a “loving attentiveness”²⁹ of others so that a “revolution of tenderness”³⁰ can take place in the church.

A MISSION OF SOLIDARITY: A MYSTICISM OF OPEN EYES AND OF HELPING HANDS

A missionary church has a profound and deep solidarity³¹ with others especially with the poor. Solidarity entails taking on the

²⁴ Traditionally, mission work is understood as “winning souls to Christ” and “*plantatio ecclesiae*,” planting of new church in uncharted countries.” See Gaillardetz, *Francis Pope of the Council*.

²⁵ EG no. 114.

²⁶ Ibid., no. 20, “‘all of us are called to take part in this new missionary ‘going forth’...to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel.” Yves Congar considers the periphery as the site of ecclesial initiative and creativity. It might be for this reason that the Pope calls missionary disciples to exercise their vocation in the peripheries. See Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 240, quoted in Gaillardetz, “Francis Moment,” 69.

²⁷ EG no. 24.

²⁸ Ibid., no. 270.

²⁹ Ibid., no. 199.

³⁰ Ibid., no. 88: “True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others. The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness.”

³¹ Ibid., no. 188: The word “solidarity” is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few.

“smell of the sheep” and patiently journeying with people “at every step of the way.”³² It may even demand lay[ing] down of own’s life for the people...³³ In this vein, the Pope prefers “a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.”³⁴ The centrifugal thrust of a missionary church requires a “mysticism of open eyes that leads to a mysticism of helping hands.”³⁵

**A MISSION OF PATIENT ACCOMPANIMENT:
A COMPASSIONATE GAZE**

A missionary church accompanies closely the People of God in their pilgrim journey. The art of accompaniment presupposes respectful and compassionate listening.³⁶ This entails being perceptive of societal forces that shape the lives of people and discerning the good in their individual life stories. Pope Francis urges each one to be “...supportive, standing...at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be.”³⁷ The missionary disciple is to patiently walk with his/her people in a “steady and reassuring” way “reflecting... closeness and ... compassionate gaze which ... heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life.”³⁸ It is in this reassuring and calm presence of the missionary, that Christ is encountered by people.

³² See *Ibid.*, no. 24. Pope Francis uses another metaphor to show the Church’s proximity to people. He uses the metaphor of the church as a field hospital. In this metaphor the word “field” is more important than the word hospital.

³³ See *Ibid.*, no. 24.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 49.

³⁵ See Kasper, “How Pope Francis sees the Church.”

³⁶ See EG, no. 171.

³⁷ The Pope speaks about patient expectation and apostolic endurance in the missionary work. The missionary disciple is involved “by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others.” See *Ibid.*, no. 24 and also no. 169.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 169 speaks of the need to initiate priest, religious and laity into what the Pope calls the art of accompaniment.

**A MISSION OF FAITHFUL WITNESSING: THE COMFORTING
JOY OF EVANGELIZING**

A missionary church witnesses the merciful love of God and the joy that this love brings. For this reason, all evangelizing activity must bear witness to the self-giving love of God and the transformative power of God's word. Pope Francis "sees the Christian life as being based on knowing and experiencing God's love, mercy and salvation offered to all through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ."³⁹ Consequently, the missionary church draws "joy and strength in the Scriptures, prayer, liturgy and sacraments as well as in the service of the poor."⁴⁰ When a missionary worker loses his or her proper anchorage on Christ then *pastoral acedia*⁴¹ sips in. This condition brings a lack of missionary dynamism and enthusiasm to the missionary disciple leading to frustration and dissatisfaction, as well as "unbearable fatigue."

**AN ECCLESIAL RENEWAL: THE NEED FOR PASTORAL
AND MISSIONARY CONVERSION**

The ecclesial commitment of Pope Francis has "programmatic significance and important consequences"⁴²

³⁹ Cindy Wooden, "A Summary of the Key Issues Raised by Pope in *Evangelii Gaudium*," November 2013, <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2013/11/26/evangelii-gaudium-a-summary-of-the-key-issues-raised-by-pope/>.

⁴⁰ Clifford, "Pope Francis' Call," 37. See also EG no. 272.

⁴¹ See Ibid., nos. 81-82. "This pastoral acedia can be caused by a number of things. Some fall into it because they throw themselves into unrealistic projects and are not satisfied simply to do what they reasonably can. Others, because they lack the patience to allow processes to mature; they want everything to fall from heaven. Others, because they are attached to a few projects or vain dreams of success. Others, because they have lost real contact with people and so depersonalize their work that they are more concerned with the road map than with the journey itself. Others fall into acedia because they are unable to wait; they want to dominate the rhythm of life. Today's obsession with immediate results makes it hard for pastoral workers to tolerate anything that smacks of disagreement, possible failure, criticism, the cross.

⁴² Ibid., no. 25.

for the church. His dream of a missionary church necessitates a pastoral and missionary conversion.

Not only are the Church structures and processes to be transformed but more importantly, the personal orientation/conviction/attitude⁴³ reconfigured to align with the missionary vision. In other broader perspective, this call for continuous ecclesial words, this conversion is required of individuals and the entire church.

From a conversion response to Vatican II's *Unitates Redintegratio* which states that "authentic reform will always consist in an increased fidelity to what the Church is."⁴⁴ In light of EG, the missionary nature of the church becomes the criterion of authentic ecclesial conversion. Therefore, "all reform has got to be concerned with one thing: how we do mission better? How do we go out and meet people where they are?"⁴⁵ At issue then is not administrative efficiency, but rather facilitating the missionary character of the church.⁴⁶ How do we go about this:

BECOMING A LISTENING CHURCH

A missionary church must become a listening church. Listening gives her a basic awareness and understanding of people's issues and concerns. This respectful presence in the lives of the faithful make her relevant and less rigid in her approaches. It nourishes "environments of living communion and

⁴³ See Ibid., no. 189.

⁴⁴ See the *Decree on Ecumenism: Unitates Redintegratio*, no.6
http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat_ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html.

⁴⁵ Gaillardetz, "Francis: Pope of the Council"; EG no. 26 states, "The Second Vatican Council presented ecclesial conversion as openness to a constant self-renewal born of fidelity to Jesus Christ: 'Every renewal of the Church essentially consists in an increase of fidelity to her own calling... Christ summons the Church as she goes her pilgrim way... to that continual reformation of which she always has need, in so far as she is a human institution here on earth.'"

⁴⁶ EG no. 31. For the Pope, conversion is not an issue of organizational flow chart but it's a great demand flowing from the missionary identity of the church.

participation.”⁴⁷ In this attentive listening, the Pope accords a special place to listening to the poor.⁴⁸ Among the poor, the marginalized women must be given special attention. According to him, “women’s dignity must be respected”⁴⁹ and “broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church”⁵⁰ must be promoted. Thus, this rootedness in faith communities and identification with their plight prevent the church from becoming “a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few.”⁵¹

CREATING PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES AND MECHANISMS IN THE CHURCH

A merciful and compassionate missionary church must create mechanisms, processes, and procedures that allow real

⁴⁷ The Pope recommends creating this active presence of the church even down to the parish level. In this way, it becomes truly a sanctuary for those in need and a place where growth in the Christian life is possible. The parish then become really mission-oriented. See *Ibid.*, no. 28.

⁴⁸ This attentive listening to the poor is not only meant to address their needs but also for the church to learn from them and grow with them.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, no.104. While there is a call to recognize the legitimate rights of women in the church, priesthood, however is still reserved only for men. See also Phyllis Zagano’s critique of this position in “Ordain Catholic Women as Deacons,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 43, nos. 3-4 (2015) <http://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/articles/winterspring2014/reflections-on-pope-francis><http://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/articles/winterspring2014/reflections-on-pope-francis>.

⁵⁰ EG no. 103: “The Church acknowledges the indispensable contribution which women make to society through the sensitivity, intuition and other distinctive skill sets which they, more than men, tend to possess... But we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church. Because ‘the feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society, the presence of women must also be guaranteed in the workplace’... and in the various other settings where important decisions.”

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, no. 27: “While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be ‘the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters’... This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few.”

participation of the faithful on all levels whether local, national, or universal church. The Pope holds local Bishops accountable for implementing the provisions of the Canon law regarding the creation of local Synods.⁵²

The Synod, parish, or diocesan level, becomes a venue for genuine interaction and dialogue to happen. It is a site of exchange of ideas among priests, religious, and laity for the common good. More than ecclesial efficiency, avenues of participation will make the church more missionary because it will (a) revitalize consultative and collegial structures; (b) make faith communities critical stakeholders in their local churches and; (c) serve ecclesial communities better.

“DEVOLVING” POWER AND AUTHORITY THRU SUBSIDIARITY AND GENUINE COLLABORATION

The Pope argues that the “papacy and the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion.”⁵³ To be truly missionary, the church needs to practice collegiality and ecclesial subsidiarity.⁵⁴ Along this vein, the Pope then recommends giving (a) a juridical status to episcopal conferences in the spirit of collegiality;⁵⁵ (b) advocates a sound

⁵² It is important to note that this approach is quite different from the one taken by John Paul II in *Apostolos Suos*. In the said document, the exercise of collegiality and teaching authority of episcopal conferences is limited and quite restrictive. For a discussion on this topic, see Jake Yap, “*Apostolos Suos* and the Continuing Debate on the Theological and Juridical Status of Episcopal Conferences,” *Landas* 13, no. 1 (1999): 95-112; Francis Sullivan, “The Teaching Authority of Episcopal Conferences,” *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 472-493.

⁵³ See EG no. 32.

⁵⁴ Conversion of papacy entails being open to (a) suggestions; (b) new situations; (c) pastoral conversion; (d) spirit of collegiality. See *ibid.* “The pope’s desire for humble, listening, discerning church has led him to make regular pleas for the recovery and reform of consultative and collegial structures (e.g., episcopal synods).” See Gaillardetz, “The ‘Francis Moment,’” 73.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* “The Second Vatican Council stated that, like the ancient patriarchal Churches, episcopal conferences are in a position ‘to contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realization of the collegial spirit’”. One may say that at this point in time there is a limited recognition of the genuine doctrinal authority of episcopal conferences

decentralization over excessive centralization⁵⁶ so that subsidiarity can be exercised. “It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory,”⁵⁷ he maintains. The Pope sees it best to devolve powers, when necessary, to local bishops and their communities so that they take control of the decision-making processes related to pastoral issues affecting their local churches. According to Pope Francis, “[e]xcessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church’s life and her missionary outreach.”⁵⁸

PROMOTING A CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER AND THE VIBRANT EXPRESSIONS OF FAITH

“For Pope Francis, the church’s mission begins not with strident condemnation but with an openness to a ‘respectful and multifaceted culture of encounter.’”⁵⁹ Part of this growth in discernment and appropriate judgment of truth is achieved by (a) valuing the *sensus fidei* or instinct of faith⁶⁰ (b) listening to

⁵⁶ See *ibid.* Refer also to EG. no. 16 which states the following: “It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound ‘decentralization’.” Catherine Clifford recommends that if indeed there is a devolution of discernment and decision-making to the local bishops and their ecclesial communities then, they should already strengthen national structures and begin pooling resources so that they are prepared for the challenge. See Clifford, “Pope Francis’ Call...,” 49.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ EG no. 32.

⁵⁹ Gaillardetz, “Francis Moment...,” 68.

⁶⁰ In EG no. 119, the Pope contends that the “People of God is holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible in *credendo*. This means that it does not err in faith...God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith-*sensus fidei* – which helps them to discern what is truly of God.” According to Richard Gaillardetz, in EG, “we come to an end of a *de facto* fifty-year papal moratorium on consideration of the Council’s teaching on the sense of the faithful.” See Gaillardetz, “Francis Moment...,” 72.

⁶¹ In EG no. 40, the Pope recognizes the role of theologians and exegetes in helping the church mature in its judgment of truth and deepening understanding of the word of God. *Ibid.*, no.133 states further: “The Church, in her commitment to evangelization, appreciates and encourages the charism of theologians and their

theologians and exegetes⁶¹; (c) respecting the interdisciplinarity of knowledge.”⁶²

Growth in discernment process brings innovation in the church. The Pope challenges missionary workers to “be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities”.⁶³ The Pope advocates for renewing and developing “not only new expressions of faith but variety of ways of expressing things.”⁶⁴ Thus, he endorses the inculturation of faith.⁶⁵ The missionary heart “never closes itself off, never retreats into its own security, never opts for rigidity and defensiveness...it realizes that growth in faith and understanding comes in the discernment process even if this entails failing in THE PROCESS.”⁶⁶

scholarly efforts to advance dialogue with the world of cultures and sciences. I call on theologians to carry out this service as part of the Church’s saving mission. In doing so, however, they must always remember that the Church and theology exist to evangelize, and not be content with a desk-bound theology.”

⁶² The importance of interdisciplinarity is shown in *Ibid.*, no. 40: “Differing currents of thought in philosophy, theology and pastoral practice, if open to being reconciled by the Spirit in respect and love, can enable the Church to grow, since all of them help to express more clearly the immense riches of God’s word.” The universities are “outstanding environments for articulating and developing this evangelizing commitment in an interdisciplinary and integrated way.” See *Ibid.*, no. 134.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, no. 33.

⁶⁴ EG no. 41: “Let us never forget that the expression of truth can take different forms. The renewal of these forms of expression becomes necessary for the sake of transmitting to the people of today the Gospel message in its unchanging meaning.”

⁶⁵ See EG nos.117-118 where the Pope maintains that: “We would not do justice to the logic of the incarnation if we thought of Christianity as monocultural and monotonous. While it is true that some cultures have been closely associated with the preaching of the Gospel and the development of Christian thought, the revealed message is not identified with any of them; its content is transcultural. Hence in the evangelization of new cultures, or cultures which have not received the Christian message, it is not essential to impose a specific cultural form, no matter how beautiful or ancient it may be, together with the Gospel. The message that we proclaim always has a certain cultural dress, but we in the Church can sometimes fall into a needless hallowing of our own culture, and thus show more fanaticism than true evangelizing zeal.”

⁶⁶ EG no. 45.

FOCUSING ON THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL IN PASTORAL INVOLVEMENT

The Pope concentrates on the essentials of faith in view of pastoral needs. "When we adopt a pastoral goal and a missionary style...the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary."⁶⁷ Rather than burdensome for people, church teachings should lead to a living encounter with the merciful and compassionate God. To help the church focus on the essentials, he provides three related Vatican II principles of pastoral praxis namely the (1) hierarchy of truths in doctrinal matters,⁶⁸ (2) the sense of proportion in preaching⁶⁹ and (3) the principle of moderation in rules and precepts.⁷⁰ Accordingly, a missionary pastoral worker should be able to discern different levels of truth in view of the Christian message. Each level of truth must then be

⁶⁷ Ibid., no. 35.

⁶⁸ Ibid., no. 36: "In this sense, the Second Vatican Council explained, "in Catholic doctrine there exists an order or a 'hierarchy' of truths, since they vary in their relation to the foundation of the Christian faith." This holds true as much for the dogmas of faith as for the whole corpus of the Church's teaching, including her moral teaching."

⁶⁹ Ibid., no. 38: "First, it needs to be said that in preaching the Gospel a fitting sense of proportion has to be maintained. This would be seen in the frequency with which certain themes are brought up and in the emphasis given to them in preaching. For example, if in the course of the liturgical year a parish priest speaks about temperance ten times but only mentions charity or justice two or three times, an imbalance results, and precisely those virtues which ought to be most present in preaching and catechesis are overlooked. The same thing happens when we speak more about law than about grace, more about the Church than about Christ, more about the Pope than about God's word."

⁷⁰ Ibid., no. 43: "In her ongoing discernment, the Church can also come to see that certain customs not directly connected to the heart of the Gospel, even some which have deep historical roots, are no longer properly understood and appreciated. Some of these customs may be beautiful, but they no longer serve as means of communicating the Gospel. We should not be afraid to re-examine them. At the same time, the Church has rules or precepts which may have been quite effective in their time, but no longer have the same usefulness for directing and shaping people's lives.... precepts subsequently enjoined by the church should be insisted upon with 'moderation' 'so as not to burden the lives of the faith' and make religion a form of servitude'..."

given the corresponding degree of importance and emphasis in relation to their proximity to the gospel truth.⁷¹ He sees the value of doctrines for growth in Christian identity yet they need to be re-contextualized in the light of the gospel truth and pastoral issues of the faithful. By providing these Vatican II principles of pastoral praxis, the Pope addresses (a) the issue of disjointed transmission of multitude of doctrines; (b) the concern on disproportionate emphasis on superfluous teachings (c) and ineffective teachings in relation to contemporary times. "Consequently, without detracting from the evangelical ideal, they [missionaries] need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth [of faith communities] as these progressively occur."⁷²

PREVENTING CLERICALISM AND SPIRITUAL WORLDLINESS

In the mind of the Pope, there should be "some interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to... individual and communal activity."⁷³ At the heart of the missionary commitment then is the personal encounter with Jesus who "walks with him, speaks to him, breathes with him, works with him."⁷⁴ He warns, therefore, the missionary disciples about spiritual worldliness which is concerned with the "quest for power, prestige, pleasure and economic security."⁷⁵ Moreover, that it is obsessed with observance of rules rather than dispensing mercy and "instead of evangelizing, one analyses and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying."⁷⁶ This stifling attitude leads to a

⁷¹ Ibid., no. 33: "The biggest problem is when the message we preach then seems identified with those secondary aspects which, important as they are, do not in fact and of themselves convey the heart of Christ's message."

⁷² Ibid., no. 44.

⁷³ Ibid no. 261.

⁷⁴ Ibid no. 266.

⁷⁵ Ibid no. 98. According to Richard Gaillardetz, the Pope takes the idea from Henri De Lubac which the latter uses to point to the preoccupation with honor, privilege and status. In other words, the issue is really a scathing critique of clericalism in the church. See Gaillardetz, "Francis: Pope of the Council."

⁷⁶ Ibid no. 94.

“narcissistic and authoritarian elitism”⁷⁷ in the church. This “insidious worldliness,” the Pope argues, is “a tremendous corruption disguised as good.”⁷⁸ Hence, ecclesial communities need “to avoid it by making the Church constantly go out from herself, keeping her mission focused on Jesus Christ, and her commitment to the poor.”⁷⁹

CONCLUSION: PHILIPPINE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE CHURCH OF THE POOR

As the Philippine Catholic church moves forward beyond the 500 hundred years of Christianity, will EG be a relevant reference point for change as it takes the gift of faith it has received to a new generation of believers? The answer to this question is in the affirmative. If the Catholic Church in the Philippines wants to continue being the Church of the poor or be more faithful to that “self-professed identity” then the ecclesial vision and praxis found in *Evangelii Gaudium* would be a beacon of light as “she” moves forward to the future. EG would not only provide a good reminder to her but presents her with clearly defined goals to help her attain that elusive dream of being truly a Church of the poor. Ideals like-listening, being participatory, working for genuine collaboration, promoting subsidiarity, option for the poor, etc., would be more convivial to a model of church that has the poor at the center of her life and self- understanding. In similar way, the vision of decentralization of “power and authority” to local leadership would give local bishops and its collective body, the CBCP more agency to move forward with a vision of church that is truly responsive to the poor. Hence, as the Philippine Church begins this reflection process about a relevant future and her being a church of the poor, EG is a good roadmap. In EG, there are also four interrelated principles that would be valuable in navigating change and the road to transformation. These are the following:

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid no. 97.

⁷⁹ Ibid. This sense of proximity and constant exposure with the poor is an antidote to clericalism.

1. First principle: *Time is greater than space*. In moving forward, it is more important to work for sustained processes that can generate change in time than possessing spaces of power and seeking spaces of self-assertion. In other words, the Philippine Church needs a proactive and sustained approach to the kind of change that she envisions, so that it becomes truly what she wants to be...a church of the poor;
2. Second principle: *Unity prevails over conflict*. In the process of change, conflict is inevitable. However, it is important to strive for synthesis or consensus which will help to advance the common good. When charting its course for the future, the Philippine Catholic Church should be intentional in considering itself as a People of God, moving together to determine and realize a church that is relevant and responsive to its various contexts.
3. Third principle: *Realities are more important than ideas*. Effective change is rooted in people's lives and impacts them positively. When envisioning a Church for the future, the Philippine Catholic church should not forget "the joys and hopes, the grief and anxieties" (Gaudium et Spes) of the suffering Filipinos who make up most of the Philippine Catholic Church.
4. Fourth Principle: *The whole is greater than the part*. In the process of self-clarification for the future, the global and the local contexts are crucial in articulating identity for the future. Solidarity, whether local or universal would be key to making the Philippine Catholic Church truly embrace her vocation to be catholic, that is, to be more inclusive, welcoming, and a listening missionary church.

To end, it bears repeating here, the oft-quoted words of Pope Francis to emphasize the point we have been belaboring in this paper: "I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own

security.”⁸⁰ It is time for the Philippine Church to have a hard look on itself and reflect how missionary it has become so far, in the 500 years of having nurtured the gift of faith.

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⁸⁰ Ibid., no. 49.