

Pope Francis' Ecumenism: The Effort to Build an Integral Ecumenism

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Abstract

Pope Francis conceptualizes and instills an integral ecumenism that integrates spiritual, social, martyrdom, and reconciliation dimensions. Previous studies discussing ecumenism have only addressed ecumenism at the spiritual level. This analysis uses a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach and interviews with several informants consisting of Catholic and Christian (Protestant) religious leaders, as well as Catholic and Christian (Protestant) community leaders. The four aspects of ecumenism are the foundation of the "bridge" that Pope Francis is building. He wants to realize his ministry to build not walls but bridges, to fight evil with good, resistance with forgiveness, to live in peace with everyone. This study concludes that the four-dimensional integral model of ecumenism provides a comprehensive and practical framework for ecumenical engagement that moves beyond mere doctrinal dialogue and directly addresses the pressing needs of the contemporary world.

Keywords: Ecumenism, integral, spirituality, social, reconciliation

Introduction

On January 25, 2014, as the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity drew to a close, Pope Francis delivered a compelling message in his homily:

"We have experienced so much suffering because of the differences among us. None of us expects these divisions to cause scandal. Despite our differences, we are all on a pilgrimage, full of brotherhood, on the journey toward unity, carrying the spirit of unity that comes from the Holy Spirit and leads us to something unique -something only the Holy Spirit can accomplish-: reconciliation. The Lord awaits us, uniting us on the journey toward unity" (Pope Francis, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140125-vespri-conversione-san-paolo.html, 2024).

The Pope urged everyone not to dwell on existing differences but to move beyond them to a form of real dialogue and collaboration with other Churches and ecclesial communities. He unequivocally stated that division is a shameful scandal within the Church. Scandals arise because people neglect encounter and dialogue (Cahyadi, 2014). With a spirit of brotherhood and unity in the Holy Spirit, the Church is called to engage in the problems of today's world. Furthermore, the Church is called not only to engage in dialogue with other Churches to simply gain information or get to know each other, but also to "reap what the Holy Spirit has planted in them, which is also intended as a gift for us (Paus Fransiskus, 2014)."

The Church's missionary vision, therefore, is not to erect walls, but to tear them down so that Christians can be ready to welcome and serve rejected strangers, refugees from conflict, the poor,

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and anyone experiencing suffering. Pope Francis describes the face of the Church as a peacemaker and a bridge (Pope Francis, Celebration of Vespers on the Solemnity of the Conversion of Saint Paul the Apostle, 2024). The Church needs to be increasingly present as a companion on the journey, as a means of reconciliation, so that we can return to unity and find our wholeness. Why is this? In today's society, there are so many dividing lines based on ethnicity, race, nation, and religion, exacerbating divisions and giving rise to various conflicts (Wijanarka & Sari, 2023).

When he was Bishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, Pope Francis practiced ecumenism. Even after his election as Pope, Francis continues to practice ecumenism to this day. His ecumenical actions were evident in meetings with various non-Catholic church groups such as Lutheran, Orthodox, Anglican, Reformed, Pentecostal, and Evangelical.

In his work, *Pope Francis and Ecumenism*, Martin Bräuer notes that Pope Francis has made numerous visits and meetings with non-Catholic Christian groups (other denominations). These visits demonstrate Pope Francis' deep focus on ecumenism. Bräuer describes these visits and meetings as a form of reconciled diversity. In ecumenical relationships, it is important not only to get to know each other better but also to recognize what the Spirit has sown in others as a gift for us. Bräuer emphasizes that with these meetings and visits, Pope Francis wants to demonstrate that we must walk united despite our differences: there is no other way to be one, and this is the way of Jesus (Brauer, 2017).

Susan K. Wood in her writing *Pope Francis and Ecumenism* explains some of Pope Francis' writings on ecumenism in the document *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) published in 2013 and Pope Francis' ecumenical actions. Wood says that Pope Francis, in his document *Evangelii Gaudium*, highlights the importance of people coming together as witnesses for peace around the world. He warns that the starting point should not be focusing on differences, but on the shared faith that everyone has. At the same time, he reminds us to respect the hierarchy of truth, because not all teachings and actions within faith are equally important (Wood, 2018).

In 2020, the Vatican, through the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, issued a document, *The Bishop and Christian Unity: An Ecumenical Vandemcum* (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 2020). This document calls on bishops to participate in ecumenical activities in their respective locations. It encourages and guides bishops to engage in a variety of ecumenical activities appropriate to the context of each local Church while maintaining communion with the Universal Church.

The ecumenical work will always be shaped by the different situations where bishops live and serve. In some areas, Catholics are the main group; in others, they are a smaller part of non-Catholic Christian groups or other communities; and in some places, Catholics themselves are in the minority. The challenges faced in pastoral work are also different. Bishops need to keep looking at the challenges and chances in their own areas and figure out how to use the ideas of Catholic ecumenism in their dioceses.

So far, until mid-2024, the author has only found research by Bräuer and Wood that explicitly explains Pope Francis' ecumenism. The document, *The Bishop and Christian Unity: An Ecumenical Vandemcum*, is an encouragement and invitation for bishops to practice ecumenism according to the context in which they find themselves. Meanwhile, other writings the author found do not explicitly discuss Pope Francis' ecumenism but the idea of ecumenism is implied in them, such as Janusz Bujak's research, *The Teaching of Pope Francis about Synodality in the Context of Contemporary Theological and Ecumenical Reflection*, which discusses Francis' teachings in the context of contemporary theological reflection by referring to the 2018 International Theological Commission document entitled *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* and documents of Catholic and Orthodox theological dialogue (Bujak, 2021).

Roberto Catalano's study, *Pope Francis' Culture of Dialogue as a Pathway to Interfaith Encounter: A Special Focus on Islam*, talks about how Pope Francis is working to build good,

open conversations with Muslims. This helps make the teachings of the Council more real in practice and also creates a path for what is called interreligious synodality. John A. Radano's book, *Solidarity and Ecumenism* (2023), looks at how the modern ecumenical movement brings together churches that used to be divided through shared discussions. This movement was started by the World Council of Churches (WCC), and its activities include things like ecumenical dialogue. The paper uses examples of two international talks and renewed relationships: one between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, and another between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church (Catalano, 2022).

Based on previous research, the focus of this study is to emphasize the integral or comprehensive ecumenism established by Pope Francis. The author formulates the research question (*status quaestionis*): How does Pope Francis conceptualize and practice integral ecumenism that integrates the spiritual, social, martyrdom, and reconciliation dimensions? Previous studies discussing ecumenism have only addressed it partially, only discussing ecumenism at the spiritual level, such as praying together. This research adds three new interrelated elements, namely social ecumenism, blood ecumenism, and ecumenical reconciliation. This study aims to demonstrate that the ecumenism built by Pope Francis is integral or comprehensive and fruitful for many people.

The author demonstrates this in the following parts: (a) spiritual ecumenism, which speaks of the spiritual action of praying together between Pope Francis and other Christians; (b) social ecumenism, which speaks of dialogue and action within ecumenism: the issues of migrants, refugees due to conflict or war, addressing widespread poverty, religious freedom, and concern for nature (ecology); (c) blood ecumenism, which speaks of Pope Francis' attention to events in Central Africa during his visit there; and finally, (d) reconciliatory ecumenism as an effort at reconciliation so that the bridge-building efforts envisioned by Pope Francis can be realized. With this part, this paper has a novel element regarding the ecumenism built by Pope Francis.

Research Method

In the research process, the author used a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach and interviews with several key informants (Creswell, 2018). The author read articles related to the topic of the article. The author analyzed these articles to obtain various information and organize the sections of the article that will be presented. Afterward, the author conducted interviews with several informants to further explore the topic.

The author read and analyzed articles from the papal website (vatican.va) that feature Pope Francis' activities and statements, various scientific journals reviewing Pope Francis' life, books related to Pope Francis, and articles on various websites discussing Pope Francis. Pope Francis has never written in his own name (e.g., Pope Benedict XVI wrote three books about Jesus Christ under the personal name: "Jesus of Nazareth") and official Catholic Church documents that are doctrinal and binding on all Catholics, such as encyclicals, dogmatic constitutions, decrees, declarations, appeals, and others that discuss ecumenism. Research examining Pope Francis' ecumenism is also scarce. The author relies heavily on long-published Catholic Church documents that still reference its dogmas and teachings related to ecumenism, the papal website (vatican.va), which contains numerous statements and activities by Pope Francis related to ecumenism, and various other websites (such as catholicnewsagency.com and others) that cover Pope Francis' ecumenical work.

Drawing on various writings, including research, Church documents, online media, and interviews with informants, the author describes Pope Francis as committed to fostering various ecumenical encounters, dialogues, and cooperation. From these writings, the author analyzes intertextuality, namely how external texts relate to other texts, to gain a picture of Pope Francis' ecumenical vision (Haryatmoko, 2022). Through these interviews, the author deepens Pope Francis'

ecumenical vision.

To sharpen the ecumenical vision developed by Pope Francis, the author conducted interviews with several key informants. These informants included priests from the Catholic Church, the reverends from the Christian (Protestant) Church, and community figure from both the Catholic and Christian (Protestant) Churches. The informants included two pastors, three Christian (Protestant) reverends, one Catholic lay leader, and one Christian (Protestant) community leader. The informants' roles included one pastor, a lecturer at a Catholic university and an advisor on interfaith relations and served on the Commission for Interfaith Relations; and another pastor worked at a humanitarian organization with the mission of accompanying, serving, and defending the rights of refugees. The Protestant informants included two reverends involved in the Inter-Church Consultative Council and one reverend from the Protestant Church (*Huria Kristen Batak Protestan/HKBP*) (Lutheran). The Catholic lay leader worked in government in the religious sector, and the Protestant figure was involved in ecumenical work.

The authors selected these informants because of their experience in ecumenical work. They are involved in ecumenical activities: dialogue, social and community action, and ecological action. The author used thematic analysis to analyze the interview data. The author compiled a list of questions based on the key themes of the article: Pope Francis' ecclesiological work, understanding Pope Francis, spiritual ecumenism, social issues, blood, and reconciliation. Interview data was analyzed to identify these six key themes. The author conducted interviews with informants based on their involvement in ecumenical activities and their placement within the predetermined themes. The interviews with these informants strengthened Pope Francis' ecumenical vision. They responded to the ideas and actions taken by Pope Francis in building ecumenism.

This research will be divided into several parts: First, a brief profile of Pope Francis as the shepherd of the Roman Catholic Church and the characteristics of his pastoral care will be presented. Second, to further understand the approach and model of ecumenical dialogue being pursued, a description of Pope Francis' ecclesiology will be presented. Third, this paper will discuss the ecumenical vision brought by Pope Francis, which has given birth to various ecumenical movements firmly rooted in the spirit of reconciliation and peace. This section will also present several illustrations and the main points of Pope Francis' meetings with other Church leaders or existing ecclesial communities regarding certain themes. The author will also show the responses of several key informants regarding Pope Francis' ecumenical vision. Finally, the author will draw conclusions and overall responses regarding Pope Francis' efforts to "build bridges" through ecumenical dialogue so far; the joys and also the challenges of ecumenism faced by the Church today.

Results and Discussion

Getting to Know Pope Francis

On February 28, 2013, at 8:00 PM Rome time, the Vatican throne became vacant (*sede vacante*). Pope Benedict XVI resigned, and a conclave was held to elect a new pope. Finally, on the second day of voting on Wednesday, March 13, 2013, at approximately 7:00 PM local time, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected and became the 266th Pope, succeeding Pope Benedict XVI, taking the name Francis. He was previously Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, from 1998 to 2012. Pope John Paul II appointed him a cardinal on February 21, 2001 (Watu, 2023).

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was born on December 17, 1936, to an Italian family in Buenos Aires, Argentina. His father, Mario, was an accountant who worked for the railways, while his mother, Regina Sivori, was a housewife and cared for their five children. Jorge was a chemical engineering graduate who eventually responded to God's call by entering the Diocesan Seminary of Villa Devoto in Buenos Aires. On March 11, 1958, Jorge entered the Society of Jesus novitiate and moved to Chile to study humanities. He returned to Argentina in 1963 after completing his

licentiate in philosophy from the Colegio de San José in San Miguel de Tucumán. From 1964 to 1966, he actively taught literature and psychology at the Colegio de la Inmaculada in Santa Fé and the Colegio de San José. From 1967 to 1970, he continued his theology studies and earned a degree at the Colegio de San José (Dicastero per la Comunicazione, 2024).

Jorge was ordained a priest of the Society of Jesus by Bishop Ramón José Castellano at the age of 33 on December 13, 1969. He moved to Spain to continue his formation at the University of Alcalá de Henares, and on April 22, 1973, Jorge professed his final vows in the Society of Jesus. He then returned to Argentina and served as magister (chief) of novices at Villa Barilari in San Miguel; professor at the Faculty of Theology of San Miguel; provincial consultor of the Society of Jesus; and rector of the Colegio Máximo of the Faculty of Philosophy and Theology.

On July 31, 1973, he became the provincial leader of the Society of Jesus in Argentina, a position he held for six years. After that, he worked at the university from 1980 to 1986 as the rector of Colegio de San José and also served as the parish priest of San Miguel. In March 1986, he went to Germany to complete his doctoral studies and was then sent to the Colegio del Salvador in Buenos Aires. He then served as a spiritual director and confessor in Córdoba. On June 27, 1992, Father Jorge received episcopal ordination and adopted the motto: *Miserando atque eligendo*, which means by having mercy on him and choosing him.

As Bishop of Buenos Aires -with a population of approximately 13.5 million- he developed a missionary project emphasizing communion and evangelization. He had four main visions for his pastoral ministry: building an open and fraternal community, involving the active role of lay people as leaders, carrying out evangelization services for the people, and accompanying the poor and sick. Bishop Bergoglio tried to develop cooperation between priests and laity (Dicastero per la Comunicazione, 2024). In December 1993, he was also appointed Vicar General of the Archbishop. Finally, on February 21, 2001, he was appointed Cardinal (Saint Robertus Bellarmine) by Pope John Paul II. He was also elected President of the Argentine Bishops' Conference from 2005 to 2011. Cardinal Bergoglio was very active in promoting evangelization and helped draft a document on the renewal of faith in Latin America which later became the forerunner of the Aparecida Conference in 2007. On March 13, 2013, Cardinal Bergoglio was elected Pope at the age of 76 during a Conclave session attended by 115 Cardinals (Catholic News Agency, 2024).

Pope Francis is the first Jesuit to be elected pope. He began his papacy by taking the name Francis. This patronal name is derived from Saint Francis of Assisi (12th and 13th centuries), known for his efforts to spread the faith and revitalize the Church, particularly through his concern for the poor. This name also represents Pope Francis' remarkably humble and simple manner and lifestyle. Prior to his papal election, he chose to live in a small apartment rather than the bishop's residence; used public transportation rather than a limousine; and cooked his own meals. His attention-grabbing personality was later chosen by TIME magazine as Person of the Year in December 2013, Pope Francis, The People's Pope.

One of Pope Francis' expressions, also representative of his ecumenical commitment, is "building a bridge." In his X (twitter) tweet (Pope Francis, <https://x.com/Pontifex/status/843077028656136193?lang=en>, 2024), Pope Francis wrote, "I invite you all to build not walls but bridges, to fight evil with good, resistance with forgiveness, to live in peace with everyone."

Pope Francis: a Person of Dialogue

One of the titles attached to a Pope is *Pontifex Maximus* (greatest priest). The title of Archpriest, Bishop of Rome, attached to the highest leader in the Roman Catholic Church has long been rooted in Church tradition. Meanwhile, if we look at the root of the word, Pontifex itself consists of two Latin words: *pons-pontus*, which means bridge, and *-fex* from the word *facere*, which means to make. Therefore, it can be said that *pontifex* means bridge maker. In another sense, the word *Pontifex* attached to the Pope already contains within itself the meaning of a bridge builder, like

Christ himself, between the divine and human, a successor to the movement of the Apostles, as Christ' representative in the world. (Le Duc, 2024).

A brief biography and media coverage of Pope Francis' incredibly simple lifestyle demonstrate how he truly exemplifies a true dialogue between words and deeds. Amaladoss calls Pope Francis a person of dialogue (Amaladoss, 2015). There are at least two main points to explore regarding this theme: Pope Francis' own basic stance and background; and second, the forms of dialogue he has pursued during his time as Pope.

Several aspects of Pope Francis' fundamental attitude demonstrate his dialogical nature. First, Pope Francis has a deep respect for the dignity and freedom of the human person. Whether dealing with issues such as homosexuality, the good deeds of an atheist, or even divorce or remarriage due to specific marital circumstances, he consistently positions these issues in the light of God's mercy. Although the Pope seems to avoid providing theological explanations or solid dogmatic arguments in response to these issues during his audiences, he views them as individuals in distress and God's mercy (Fumagali, 2019).

Pope Francis tries to think of those experiencing hardship and "wearing the same shoes," not just offering straightforward answers: yes or no, right or wrong, as most people expect. Here in lies the tension between the flexibility of the Church's generous pastoral approach and the firmness of Catholic doctrine. Therefore, only through a culture of encounter and dialogue can Pope Francis reach out to many people, allowing them to experience acceptance, forgiveness, and love. Real encounter transcends superficial layers, judgments, and prejudices. This is what will ultimately influence his ecumenical movement. (Huda, Suhardi, Asyik , & Sugiarti, 2024). An interview with a priest serving on the Commission for Interfaith Relations stated, "Pope Francis' personality is extraordinary. He has an out-of-the-box style. The doctrine and teachings of the Catholic Church are firm, but his pastoral approach is gentle, full of love, and simplicity. Especially when dealing with non-Catholics, wow, he's extraordinary. This is what we're trying to use here. The Latin phrase is *suaviter in modo fortiter in re* (firm in principle [Church teaching], courteous in manner) (June 24, 2024)."

Second, as a person who prioritizes encounter and dialogue, the second fundamental attitude that radiates from Pope Francis is his commitment and concern to proclaim God's infinite mercy and love amidst the darkness of human sinfulness. God's love and compassion truly touch everyone. He emphasized that in encounter, God's forgiveness is truly greater than human judgment (Maulana, Putri, & Fahira, 2024). This fundamental attitude is evident in Pope Francis' special inspiration and devotion to St. Peter Faber, a friend of St. Ignatius, the founder of the Society of Jesus. For Francis, Peter Faber was truly open to dialogue with everyone, including Catholics, Protestants with whom he debated, and others. It is St. Peter Faber's ability to reflect deeply on discernment and his mystical experience that inspire Pope Francis (Amaladoss, 2015).

Third, Amaladoss noted that Pope Francis' emphasis on the joy of the Gospel, which must be lived and proclaimed, is crucial. Amidst a culture of death, division, and various barriers that have arisen in society, leading to conflict, war, and suffering, the joyful and liberating values of the Kingdom of God must be proclaimed. These three fundamental attitudes inform Pope Francis' pastoral approach and actions through encounter and dialogue (Latuconsina, Pelupessy, & Lating, 2023).

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis speaks of social dialogue as a concrete contribution to the realization of peace. The goal of evangelization through dialogue is none other than to bring the Kingdom of God into the world, therefore, it is necessary to foster "life in community and engagement with others" (Paus Fransiskus, 2014). The work of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the world has a communitarian dimension that also includes an attitude of compassion and love for all. Pope Francis' focus, clearly reflected in *Evangelii Gaudium*, is attention to the poor and the social dialogue essential to building peace. "Our faith in Christ, who became

poor and is always close to the poor and marginalized, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of those left behind in society” (Paus Fransiskus, 2014). The dialogue characteristically fostered by Pope Francis is none other than social dialogue, involving dialogue with nations, societies, cultures, science, and other believers, including Christians, Muslims, and those of other religions. All are oriented toward working together toward a just, responsive, and inclusive society, building the common good (Amaladoss, 2015).

Pope Francis’ Ecclesiological Overview

Pope Francis’ pastoral approach through encounter and dialogue is consistently demonstrated in his ecclesiology. Three characteristics are essential in fostering apostolic creativity: dialogue, discernment, and a spirit of entering the frontier. In reflecting on the meaning of the frontier, the Church must be present with society, not in a “laboratory.” The Church should not be like a laboratory of faith, but rather on a journey of faith -a historical faith, as God himself reveals himself in history. A laboratory, on the other hand, creates a barrier between us and social reality, isolating issues, leaving them out of context and powerless (Amaladoss, 2015).

To understand the dynamics of ecumenical encounter and dialogue, Pope Francis’ perspective on the Church itself deserves a deeper look. In one of the pope’s speeches delivered in Brazil (Pope Francis, Audience With Representatives of The Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of Different Religions, 2024) (Paus Fransiskus, 2013) soon after his election, he presented a vision and agenda of the Church as a Church that dares to enter into the darkest mysteries of humanity; capable of opening itself to encounters with those on the journey; entering into conversation and dialogue; being there and walking alongside those in difficulty. This vision of a church that is on pilgrimage and moving outward is inspired by the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-25) (Xavier, Culture of Encounter and Reconciled Diversity: Pope Francis’ Vision of Ecumenism, 2017).

Francis’ conception of the Church clearly follows the movement of the Second Vatican Council, which shifted from a static, juridical vision of the Church to a more open and dynamic one. From *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*, we obtain a distinctly different picture from the Church’s emphasis on hierarchy (Congar, 1085), and the *societas perfecta*, where the Church cannot be subordinated to other secular powers. The Catholic Church, as the sole hierarchical Church of Christ, thus leaves no room for a local theology of the Church. In other words, the term *societas perfecta* is inadequate because it lacks the social and visible aspects of the Church. Likewise, the image of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ (*Mystici Corporis Christi*), the Church as the body of Christ itself with its members, can only be understood if the Church is truly visible (Xavier, The Church of the People: Ecclesial Vision of Pope Francis, 2016).

Despite the long debate and discussion regarding the mystery and the people of God, ecclesiology after the Second Vatican Council has developed a greater emphasis on ecclesiological communion. Pope Francis has attempted to reintroduce the idea of the people of God into his ecclesiological image. Francis’ perspective is inextricably linked to the influence of the theology of the people, which considers the phrase “faithful people of God” as a source of its theological reflection (Scannone, 2016).

This theology of the people was developed by Rafael Tello and Lucio Gera in Argentina. Its style differs slightly from the well-known Latin American liberation theology. Two strong characteristics of this approach to the people are a preference for the poor and an inductive method (see-judge-act). This Argentine liberation theology does not engage in socio-political or economic analysis related to specific ideological categories, but rather draws on a historical analysis of the culture of society united by a shared ethos (Xavier, The Church of the People: Ecclesial Vision of Pope Francis, 2016).

In another expression, Kasper revealed that what Pope Francis built was a theology of the

people and of culture. On the one hand, there are radical liberation theologians who move from left-wing ideology, while on the other, the theology of the people can be found its source in culture, devotion, including spirituality and the existing sense of justice (Kasper, Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love: Theological & Pastoral Perspective, 2015). In the language of Pope Francis, this social reality is called popular religion. Pope Paul VI called it popular piety, in the meeting of bishops in Medellin (1968) did not have an influence, but began to be considered at the Conference in Puebla (1979), and finally enriched in the Aparecida document (2007), with the term popular spirituality. Pope Francis brought and reinterpreted it (Abadi & Wulandari, 2024). An interview with a Protestant reverend involved in the Inter-Church Consultative Council stated, "Pope Francis seems like an exemplary religious leader. Why? Because of the way he treats people differently. He doesn't discriminate, whether they're Catholic, Protestant like us, or even other religions; he's present and considers everyone brothers and sisters. It's truly extraordinary (August 20, 2024)."

With this framework of popular theology, one can imagine a theological pastoral approach that tends to tap into the cultural and ethical dimensions of society from the "bottom up": accompanying the common people (the poor) who are driven by popular spirituality, becoming inculturated within them, ultimately leading to a movement for liberation. Therefore, the people here are not simply a collection of individuals, but rather a unity formed from solidarity, united by shared social concerns, giving rise to the phrase often used by Pope Francis: the culture of encounter. It is through this encounter that social dialogue emerges, all forms of fragmentation are overcome, solidarity with the poor is born, and the pilgrimage of life is continued (Meszaros, 2020).

In his exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis explains that the Church, which is meant to spread the good news, is more than just a big organization with a hierarchy. It is mainly a group of people on a journey towards God. The Church is a mystery connected to the Trinity, but it is also clearly present in the world today as a traveling group that shares the message of God, going beyond any structures, even though those structures are important (Paus Fransiskus, 2014).

The Church is not a sociological identity but a theological reality whose foundation can be found in God's free and gracious initiative. In other words, the Church never exists for itself but rather reflects the Church's original *raison d'être*: to contribute to the salvation of the world, which also means continuing the mission of Christ in the world. Pope Francis emphasized the dimensions of mission, evangelization, and the vision of reconciliation by not building walls but welcoming and serving the suffering stranger with open doors, not the opposite, abandoning or withdrawing from the world (*fuga mundi*) (Sidabutar, 2024).

From the beginning, Francis reminded the Church that it must have the courage to go out, not remain silent and self-centered. It is better to see a Church bruised, wounded, and dirty from being on the streets and providing service, than a Church unhealthy from being confined and closed in on itself. A Church that is on the journey, constantly building bridges and witnessing (Kasper, Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love: Theological & Pastoral Perspective, 2015).

For Francis, the Church never remains silent, always on a pilgrimage, navigating the never-ending struggles of life, transcending boundaries or compartmentalization, and a sense of security that tends to diminish the concern for those in need. The Church's fundamental identity and characteristic is none other than missionary. For Francis, the Church is truly a field hospital: a Church with an open heart, close to those who have been wounded and suffered throughout history, engaged in service to the poorest. In short, the Church in Pope Francis' vision is the Church of the people, not primarily a Church for the people, which still contains an active role of hierarchy (a feudalistic elite form of orthodoxy) as the primary actor and reduces the faithful to mere recipients (Sihombing & Pinem, 2021). Meanwhile, a Church for the people means involving the laity and all those of good will in the Church's activities and making them subjects of its own

religious identity. Pope Francis has strongly condemned the dangers of clericalism in the Church (Xavier, *The Church of the People: Ecclesial Vision of Pope Francis*, 2016). “Pope Francis is changing the face of the Church. Previously, only the ordained were active in the Church’s affairs, but now everyone must be involved. The Pope seems to be breaking through the barriers that have existed. The point is, everyone must step out of their comfort zone (July 18, 2024),” said a Catholic lay figure who works in a government department dealing with religion.

Vision and Form of Ecumenical Dialogue

Ecclesiology based on the theology of the people reflects the face of Pope Francis’ Church. The various pastoral approaches pursued by the Catholic Church through encounter and dialogue embody a clear vision: the mission of reconciliation. During his visit to members of the Society of Jesus during the 36th General Congregation, Pope Francis also reaffirmed the apostolic vision in today’s world. The Church is sent as a servant of reconciliation in three inseparable dimensions: reconciliation with God, with others, and with creation. Reconciliation has implications and contributions for building bridges of rapprochement, fostering interreligious-cultural dialogue, and advancing efforts to overcome poverty and political and ideological violence.

With this vision, reconciliation thus becomes an intrinsic and central dimension in the pursuit of justice, the common good, and peace. The direction of restoration and reconciliation in these three dimensions is integrity within the Creator’s order. This was also expressed long ago in the Church’s official document on *Unitatis Redintegratio* 7, “There is no true ecumenism without interior conversion. For it is from the renewal of the heart, from self-denial, and from the abundance of truly sincere love that the longing for unity arises and matures” (Konsili Vatikan II, *Pemulihan Kesatuan (Unitatis Redintegratio)*, 1993).

Pope Francis sees the envisioned ecumenical dialogue as primarily an inner disposition that “we must never forget that we are pilgrims treading this journey together with others (Paus Fransiskus, 2014).” In the context of ecumenism, Pope Francis stated that pilgrimage with others means first considering unity in diversity (reconciled diversity), with a dimension of reconciliation within it; not primarily speaking about differences but rather with full trust and sincerity, respecting and accepting existing diversity (Ismail, 2021).

The concept of unity in reconciled diversity emerged from Protestant theologian Oscar Cullman (1902-1999). The existence of charisma, the diversity of gifts within the Christian community, is reduced or even forced into a uniformity; the homogenization of the diverse gifts and movements of the Spirit (Brauer, 2017). Pope Francis believes that on the journey toward unity in the same Spirit, reconciled diversity allows for common prayer, shared work, and a shared discovery of unity in truth. Therefore, self-referentiality within the Church must be avoided (Monteiro & Widyawati, 2024).

Pope Francis’ ecumenical vision can be better understood when placed within the context of popular theology, which emphasizes a culture of personal encounter and an ecclesiological image that moves outward from and with the people. The model expressed in Francis’ apostolic exhortation is the polyhedron. This model reflects the convergence of all its parts, each maintaining its own differences. The goal of all efforts within this model is to bring together each part and bring out the best in each (Fransiskus, 2021). This is where the poor, their cultures, aspirations, and potential find a place to work together to achieve the common good.

To realize this ecumenical vision, Francis’ pontificate has undertaken various efforts to build bridges of dialogue and action. Below, we will describe four forms of ecumenical dialogue that have emerged on various occasions in various Churches and ecclesial communities: spiritual ecumenism, social ecumenism, blood ecumenism, and reconciliatory ecumenism.

a. Spiritual Ecumenism

For Francis, spiritual ecumenism, especially the spiritual presence of the various Church communities, is crucial. This theme of spiritual ecumenism was the focus of the 2003 Plenary Meeting of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. As President of the Council, Walter Kasper stated that prayer for unity is the gateway to ecumenism. Prayer provides positive energy for our daily efforts toward unity, concretely visible in cooperation in various areas of life (Hasibuan & Fangidae, 2022). Ecumenism is born primarily from spiritual unity, a tangible spirit of communion from all parties. The shared expression of faith is a sign that we are walking together on a pilgrimage, even though our paths may differ (Jehaut, 2022).

One moment that illustrates this spiritual nuance was the first ecumenical meeting, held on March 20, 2013, in the Clementine Hall, Vatican City. The meeting was attended by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios I and 33 representatives of the Church. Francis viewed this spiritual presence in prayer as a manifestation of unity of spirit and awareness of the shared pilgrimage of faith in Christ. This event demonstrated both great spiritual support and presence as a form of ecumenical cooperation in the continuation of Pope Francis' inauguration as Bishop of Rome (Bergoglio & Skorka, 2013).

Furthermore, ecumenical commitment through dialogue and shared (spiritual) prayer is also fostered, for example, through the events for world peace in Assisi, and most recently, on January 20-25, 2018, during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity at St. Paul's Basilica, which was expressed in a communal ecumenical service. On these occasions, the Pope consistently requested prayers from all parties through his speeches (Scerri, 2013). "Indeed, we have often practiced ecumenism in the form of prayers. That's all we can do as Catholics. Sometimes we're confused about what to do beyond spiritual ecumenism. Well, at least we've done this ecumenism, as the Pope requested. It's the Christmas season that's most visible, but Catholics are starting to think differently now (September 3, 2024)," said a Protestant figure involved in ecumenical activities in an interview.

One of the principles echoed in *Evangelii Gaudium* is unity prevails over conflict. *Communio* today is evident in interchurch dialogue. Debating about the structure or visible signs of the charism of Jesus Christ, Christians will never reach a single consensus or common agreement, let alone a unified church. However, dialogue that transcends polemic differences creates an atmosphere that leads to an exchange of gifts that enriches both parties (Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue*, 2009).

Communio, born of an expression of faith through shared ecumenical prayer (or worship), is truly powerful, specifically building an inner disposition for all parties to cooperate with one another. Jesus' prayer in John 17:21-23 defines the basis and measure of this unity: the communion of the Father and the Son. Commitment to ecumenism is inseparable from a response to Jesus' prayer that "they may all be one." According to Kasper, this era needs to think and reflect on what is the same in various areas of life, rather than what is different and debatable (what unites us is much greater than what divides us) in the spirit of communion (Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue*, 2009). Theologically, the basis of communion is fellowship in one baptism. Baptism is the sacrament of faith. The Church is connected to the source of communion itself, namely the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Konsili Vatikan II, *Konstitusi Dogmatis tentang Gereja (Lumen Gentium)*, 1993).

In this case, faith in Christ, despite its differing formulations, truly unites the parties involved. One example is the visit of the Bishop of Canterbury. On June 14, 2013, Pope Francis received His Grace Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Primate of the Anglican Communion. On this occasion, the Pope emphasized the importance of mutual prayer support. Pope Francis appreciated the richness of the Anglican tradition, particularly the spiritual treasures evident in the liturgical prayers, songs, and writings of the Anglican Church's spiritual masters.

Evangelii Gaudium also explicitly affirms that, first and foremost, ecumenical dialogue and

prayer are held not merely to gain better information from others, but rather to reap what the Holy Spirit has planted in others, which is also intended as a gift for us as well. Pope Francis directly stated that in dialogue with our Orthodox brothers and sisters, we Catholics have the opportunity to learn much about the meaning of episcopal collegiality and the experience of synodality. In other words, spiritual ecumenism is also essential for exchanging experiences of grace, as the Spirit can guide us more fully into truth and goodness (Paus Fransiskus, 2014). By discovering an increasingly visible communion, overcoming barriers of difference, Christians respond to God's will to realize a fuller Kingdom of God (Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue*, 2009). In this sense, building bridges is crucial. What is being bridged? All the differences, barriers, and boundaries that often prevent us from finding common ground (a common vision), namely, a pilgrimage toward God. Without openness, spiritual presence, encounter, and dialogue, ecumenism as a shared movement will not be realized (Singgih, 2022).

b. Social Ecumenism (Dialogue and Action)

In addition to the presence and form of ecumenical prayer, Pope Francis has consistently emphasized the importance of realizing peace and fostering shared concern in addressing global issues and problems plaguing the world today. Serving reconciliation and carrying out the mission of Dei cannot be done alone, in this sense, only by the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, the mission of reconciliation in the context of ecumenism needs to involve a growing number of individuals, groups, and organizations, including grassroots communities. Sometimes, when addressing sensitive global issues, for example in conflict areas, "building bridges" or "being a bridge" means standing on both sides of the conflict (Herescu, 2024).

The ministry of reconciliation begins with a deep understanding of the world in which we live. The Church cannot be alone, claiming to work alone, let alone seeking to assert itself. Collaboration and cooperation through networking in this era can be considered our ecumenical way of acting (Kristiyanto, 2024). Various global issues became the topic of discussion, for example: the increasing number of migrants and refugees due to conflict or war; widespread poverty; religious freedom, peace in various parts of the country, ecology, etc. (Smit, 2019). The results of an interview with a Catholic priest who works at a humanitarian agency with a mission to accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees said, "So far, we are still carrying out our mission alone. Even though this issue can be collaborated with various parties, including work in the form of ecumenism. We must find the right model for cooperation. It is a bit difficult, but actually nothing is impossible. Human problems seem to be problems for everyone (September 15, 2024)."

An interesting illustration is when Agnes Abuom, the chief moderator of the World Council of Churches Central Committee, and Olav Fykse Tveit, the WCC's Secretary-General, held a meeting and discussion with Pope Francis on August 25, 2017 (Vatican Radio, 2024). During the meeting, awareness of Christian unity was emphasized as vital to bringing peace and justice to today's world. They also discussed climate change (ecology) and socio-economic issues as central concerns in the pilgrimage to build justice and peace (Manuain, Mila, & Takoi, 2024).

The ecumenical dialogue Pope Francis envisions is not a superficial or half-hearted dialogue, but rather a deeper understanding of the issues. Dialogue presupposes a deep knowledge and understanding of one another from different traditions, allowing for learning from each other. Therefore, the Pope urged people not to be afraid to engage in genuine ecumenical encounter and dialogue (Scerri, 2013).

On March 23, 2018, Pope Francis received a delegation from the Sudan Council of Churches at the Vatican. Bishop Odama reflected the Pope's support (including prayers for peace in South Sudan) as a significant gesture of solidarity, particularly in ending the war. As human beings, we

are one. If any part of a continent or country suffers, then our humanity suffers as well (Bordoni, 2024). The call for peace and cooperation in addressing global issues is truly a unifying element for the Church, as a people of faith in Christ. Pope Francis' commitment to being a bridge maker is strong and influential in dialogue. In short, attention to human dignity, freedom, and concern for the poor are both the agenda and the preferred focus of Francis' ecumenical dialogue (Novus Ordo Watch, 2024).

c. The Ecumenism of Blood

One of the expressions that also characterizes Pope Francis' ecumenical dialogue is the ecumenism of blood. In the 20th century, Pope John Paul II spoke of the ecumenism of martyrs, and now, Pope Francis refers to martyrs in the 21st century, using the term ecumenism of blood (Brauer, 2017). The Pope assured Christians to continue bearing witness and speaking with one voice on the great challenges facing humanity, such as solidarity, peace, the environment, and justice. Therefore, personal encounters are crucial in this regard (Muthoharoh, 2023).

During the Pope's meeting with the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria, Pope Tawadros II, on May 10, 2013, one of the themes raised was the ecumenism of suffering (Scerri, 2013). In the meeting, the Pope described this form of ecumenism as the blood of martyrs shed for faith in Christ. The blood of martyrs becomes the fertile seed of the Church, sharing suffering and a sense of solidarity with those who suffer becomes an effective instrument of unity (Ayatanoi, 2024).

Another important moment worth noting regarding this ecumenism of blood was Pope Francis' apostolic visit to Kenya, Uganda, and the Central African Republic on November 25-30, 2015. During a visit to a Protestant college in Bangui, Pope Francis expressed his closeness, sorrow, and solidarity with Father Nicholas, an evangelical pastor who was killed due to discrimination. It is through this shared suffering and mission, defending our faith in Christ, that we move forward toward unity. This means that even the recognition of the "martyrdom" of a non-Catholic can be interpreted as ecumenism of blood. Pope Francis described blood ecumenism as the persecution and killing of Christians because of their faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of their denominational affiliation and ecclesiastical differences, and they are united in their supreme sacrifice (Anthony, 2025).

Through the concept of "martyrdom," Pope Francis does not want to give recognition to non-Catholics as martyrs, but he wants to emphasize that the death of those who believe in Jesus Christ during persecution becomes a rallying point for Christian unity. This breaks down barriers of exclusivity and the recognition of piety within the Church itself. Those who violate human dignity and persecute people for their own interests, including through violence, will no longer ask: are you Christian or Catholic? This is what Pope Francis wants to illustrate: that we have one faith and baptism, in Christ. "I salute what Pope Francis has done. He cares about us non-Catholics. He even came to the scene. We hope it can happen here. This blood ecumenism is a serious matter. Yes, we are trying to make it happen here. Hopefully, we can do it (September 30, 2024)," said a reverend from a Protestant church in an interview.

Responding to a December 2013 media interview about the priority of ecumenism, Pope Francis stated:

"Ecumenism is a priority. Today, there is an ecumenism of blood. In some countries, they kill Christians for wearing a crucifix or possessing a Bible, and before killing them, they don't ask whether they are Anglican, Lutheran, Catholic, or Orthodox. Their blood is mixed. For those who kill, we are Christians [...] they don't ask for your identity to see which Church you were baptized in. We are united in blood, even though we have not yet succeeded in taking the necessary steps toward unity among us, and perhaps the time has come" (Tornielli, 2013).

Pope Francis affirmed that for those who kill, we are Christians. Their rage to inflict pain, their bloodlust, and their zeal to persecute and kill followers of Christ are based on deep-rooted

religious ignorance, a toxic socio-political environment, and a quest for domination and power. This acknowledges the contemporary hostility toward the Christian faith in various parts of the world, which results in ecumenism being imposed on Christians by the non-Christian entities that persecute them. The concept of blood symbolizes the shared vulnerability and sacredness of life, a universal bond between human beings. This highlights the sanctity of life, blood as life. Blood is depicted as the covenant, the seal of God's promise (Exodus 24:8), as sacrifice, the blood of Christ as the supreme sacrifice (Leviticus), and as redemption (Matthew 26:28). Thus, blood ecumenism is not simply about death, but about life-giving witness, a theology of resurrection through suffering (Anthony, 2025).

d. Ecumenism and Efforts for Reconciliation

A distinctive feature of the various encounters and dialogues pursued by Pope Francis is none other than the movement for reconciliation. During his visit to Turin, Italy in June 2015, Pope Francis held a historic meeting with the Waldensian Church. For the first time, the Pope visited the Waldensian congregation, which during the Middle Ages had a dark history of suffering at the hands of the Roman Catholic Church (Rahawarin, Selatang, & Refo, 2021). During his visit, Pope Francis said, "In the name of the Catholic Church, I ask for forgiveness. I apologize for the un-Christian and even inhumane attitudes and behavior we have shown toward you. For the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, forgive us" (Brauer, 2017). This is an explicit ecumenical signal that illustrates the process of reconciliation, healing from trauma and past memories within existing Church relationships. This reconciliatory ecumenical dialogue rebuilds bridges of fraternity, trust, and cooperation (Buttigieg, 2020).

Another event that also quite represents this dimension of reconciliation was the Pope's visit to Sweden, where he met with King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia of Sweden. In addition, Pope Francis also signed the Joint Declaration with Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan, President of the Lutheran World Federation in Lund. With a joint prayer, the 500th anniversary of Luther's Reformation and 50 years of fruitful ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and Lutherans, particularly on the theme of serving the suffering, were officially commemorated. This event marked the movement of the Spirit from conflict to unity (*communio*) (Belinski, 2023). An interview with a Lutheran Church pastor stated, "If we look at history, we do have a close historical relationship with Catholics. Luther was a pastor and founded the Church. We support the ecumenical efforts echoed by Pope Francis. His way of thinking and actions are truly extraordinary. We hope that the Pope's efforts at reconciliation will serve as an example for us between Catholics and Lutherans (October 7, 2024)." This path of reconciliation, which is being attempted, overcomes all existing differences and controversies. At the meeting, it was stated:

"As Catholics and Lutherans, we have been on a journey of reconciliation together. Now, in the context of the commemoration of the Reformation of 1517, we have a new opportunity to embrace a common path. We have a chance to mend this critical moment in our history by moving beyond the controversies and disagreements that often hinder our mutual understanding." (HolySee Press Office, 2024).

On the other hand, Pope Francis's effort of integral ecumenism poses challenges, as some more conservative Catholics consider his ecumenical ideas to downplay doctrinal differences between Catholics and Protestants. However, Pope Francis seeks to foster cooperation for the common good. Collectively, the interviewees confirmed that Pope Francis's ecumenical approach is perceived as groundbreaking, characterized by humility, focus on shared action, and its potential to inspire local ecumenism, despite acknowledging practical challenges in implementation.

Conclusion

The research question (*status quaestionis*) in this paper is how Pope Francis conceptualizes

and practices integral ecumenism that integrates spiritual, social, martyrdom, and reconciliation dimensions, answered by the integral ecumenism built by Pope Francis. Integral ecumenism unites all elements or aspects: spiritual ecumenism, social ecumenism (dialogue and action), ecumenism of the blood, and reconciliatory ecumenism. Spiritual ecumenism is ecumenism realized through joint prayer among various ecclesial communities (Catholic and Christian [Protestant]). Prayer provides positive energy for efforts toward unity. Social ecumenism seeks to realize peace and shared concern in addressing global issues and problems of our time. Ecumenism of the blood is depicted by the blood of martyrs shed for faith in Christ. Reconciliatory ecumenism seeks to heal past trauma and memories within existing Church relationships. It seeks to rebuild bridges of brotherhood, trust, and cooperation. The four aspects of ecumenism: spiritual ecumenism, social ecumenism, ecumenism of blood, and ecumenism of reconciliation, are the foundation of the “bridge” that Pope Francis is building. He wants to realize his call to build bridges, not walls, to fight evil with good, to resist with forgiveness, to live in peace with everyone. Pope Francis is able to touch many people, to experience acceptance, forgiveness, and love. A real encounter truly transcends the superficial layers of judgment and prejudice against others. He emphasized that in encounter, God’s forgiveness is truly greater than human judgment, and the joy of the Gospel must be lived and proclaimed.

Research on integral ecumenism, as promoted by Pope Francis, is still very limited, both in Indonesian and foreign languages. This research is still general in nature, so further research on integral ecumenism in the Indonesian context is needed, as each region in Indonesia has a significant number of Christian (Protestant) and Catholic churches. Research on ecumenism originating from various Christian (Protestant) denominations and Catholic will enrich the theological understanding of Indonesian ecumenism. Each denomination of the Indonesian Protestant Church has a distinct theological understanding, thus enriching the meaning of ecumenism. The more perspectives studied, the broader the understanding of Indonesian ecumenism will be. The meaning of integral ecumenism will be strengthened when Protestant churches, interconnected by culture, contribute their ecumenical ideas. With research based on the rich Indonesian context, efforts to build an integral ecumenical dialogue in Indonesia can be realized as emphasized by Pope Francis that he wants to build bridges not barriers.

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