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Evangelii Gaudium:
Pope Francis' Magna Carta For Church Reform

Pope Francis expresses his vision and dream of evangelization in *Evangelii Gaudium* published on 24 November 2013 to mark the conclusion of the *Year of Faith* proclaimed by Pope emeritus Benedict XVI. Pope Francis' ideas about evangelization are seen not only in *Evangelii Gaudium* but also in many of his homilies and messages one can get glimpses of his vision. In this paper only two aspects are treated: a) his life witness as the quintessence of evangelization and b) the vision of evangelization as narrated in *Evangelii Gaudium*. However a few pages of this thesis cannot comprehend the whole vision described in *EG*.

Personal Life: An Invitation to Reform and An Epitome of Evangelization

A glance at the life of Pope Francis, after his election to the Holy See, demonstrates that his own personal life is the quintessence of evangelization. Many Church documents and well known theologians describe personal life and witness as the first instance of evangelization. Upholding this view, an outline is drawn to show how the personal life of Pope Francis is the embodiment of evangelization. The Pope, right from the day of his election on 13 March 2013,^a has been in the headlines of newspapers and news channels

for being a Pope with a difference. At his very first appearance on the balcony of St Peter's Basilica he won the hearts of the thousands of people gathered there on that cold breezy evening, and of the millions of people watching the event live on the electronic media, by requesting their prayers before blessing them. Bowing deeply before the people he asked them to pray not only for him but also for his Predecessor, Pope emeritus Benedict XVI.^b His decision to take the name of Francis, after St Francis of Assisi known as the Second Christ, communicated to the Church and to the world what would be the new Pope's lifestyle. He made it even clearer on 16 March 2013, when he addressed the journalists who were in Rome to cover the Papal election.^c The image of St Francis of Assisi embracing a leper came to mind on seeing the Pope hug a terribly disfigured man as an expression of the healing power of God through touch. His daily mass and homilies are broadcast within minutes of happening. All these and many more instances of the Pope Francis' life can be cited as proof that he is proclaiming Christ by word and deed. He is proving to the world that the administration of the Church is not just a matter of changing the rules and laws but it is concerned with changing attitudes and interaction. He has set a standard of living as an example for them to emulate. His decision to wear an iron pectoral cross, change the residence from the Apostolic Palace to *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, a guest house, and his decision to use a five-year-old Ford Focus have created a

stir in the higher echelons of the Church. He has instructed Catholic priests around the world to choose a simple vehicle, imploring them to think about the poor rather than of their own comfort. Followed by the clarion call to priests and bishops to change their lifestyle and mode of interacting. He wants them to be Shepherds after God's heart and thereby warns priests not to act as wolves but as shepherds.^v He is very emphatic when he asks priests and bishops to be on their guard against careerism, money and power. He has expressed his benevolence to the sinner but not to sin on various occasions. He has repeatedly asked priests not to turn the confessional into a torture chamber but into a place of mercy and asked them to represent the forgiving merciful Father in the confessional. This is all the more clear when he says that he would come to baptize the children of unwed mothers if priests do not heed their pleas. But we also find him strongly criticizing structures of sin like capitalism which perpetuate inequality, social injustice, etc., as well as severely condemning personal sin like abortion, waste of food, etc. His personal life-witness which is different from that of others has been acclaimed in various quarters both Christian and non-Christian.

EG: A Dream with a Vision

Pope Francis has brought fresh air into the Church's missionary work through his First Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, translated as 'The Joy of the Gospel'. *EG* is addressed to all Christians and it clearly indicates that it is not confined to Catholics alone. The Pope invites Christians to embark on the mission of evangelization with the joy of the Gospel.^{vi}

This Exhortation is completely different in style and language from all the previous documents of the Church. This is like a face to face and heart to heart conversation. It is easy to read and can be understood by ordinary people. *EG* is completely different from the other documents on the Church's missionary work like *Ad Gentes* of the Second Vatican Council,^{vii} *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI,^{viii} *Redemptoris Missio* of Pope John Paul II.^{ix} *Evangelii Gaudium* is centred more on social and pastoral relevance. This is a remarkable and radical Exhortation which deals broadly with issues concerning the Church and the World. The thoughts and ideas stem from a pastoral reflection on 'the signs of times'.

The Old Testament concept of evangelization meaning delivering news of a joyful event, and so joy is inherent in the proclamation and therefore the herald has to interiorize the joyful event.^x The Pope repeats this by quoting the Books of Isaiah,^{xi} Zechariah^{xii} and

Zephaniah.^{xiii} The joy of Jesus,^{xiv} of Mary^{xv} and of the Apostles^{xvi} is to be possessed by the heart of the preacher of the Gospel.^{xvii}

The present document 'is a fruit of the labour',^{xviii} of the Thirteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops which gathered from 7-28 October 2012 to discuss the theme: 'The New Evangelization for the Transmission of Faith'.^{xix} The Synod was attended by bishops from all over the world who expressed their opinions and suggestions at the Synod. The decisions and aspirations of the local bishops, voiced in their Conferences on different occasions, also find a place in the Exhortation. *EG* addresses their concerns and situations even though the Pope goes back to *Ecclesia in Asia*,^{xx} *Ecclesia in Africa*,^{xxi} *Ecclesia in Oceania*,^{xxii} *Ecclesia in America*,^{xxiii} *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*^{xxiv} to refer to their situations. The Bishops of Europe see their ideas expressed when the Pope stresses the need to overcome pessimism and false judgments and perceptions regarding the effects of proclamation. Living without hope is portrayed as "a self-destructive attitude".^{xxv} The Latin American situation is very clear to the Pope as he hails from there. So he refers extensively to their situation and statements throughout this Exhortation. The invitation to embrace the mission of proclamation, going beyond pastoral work, is taken from and inspired by the document of the Latin American Bishops which states: we 'cannot passively and calmly wait in our church buildings'.^{xxvi} Many quotations are taken from the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops.^{xxvii} On two occasions the Pope quotes the Third General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops.^{xxviii} The non-Christian religions in India are also mentioned in the document. The Final Declaration of the Thirtieth CBCI Assembly is quoted by the Pope to stress the need for interreligious dialogue.^{xxix}

Crux of Evangelization

The essence of evangelization does not change and it still is the proclamation of Christ. "The heart of its message will always be the same: the God who revealed his immense love in the crucified and Risen Christ".^{xxx} He has devoted very few pages to the dogmatic aspect of mission and evangelization because on many occasions he says that they have already been taught or written about by his Predecessors.^{xxxi} In fidelity to Christ's teaching, the baptized have the duty to go and proclaim Christ. "All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization".^{xxxii} The source and strength of evangelization is explained as letting God take one beyond oneself and sharing what a believer has received at baptism. It is this sharing that makes a person fully human.^{xxxiii} A dignified and fulfilled life is attained only by reaching out to others.^{xxxiv} This communication of the Gospel is not the transfer of European

culture. Any attempt to imitate the modes of expression developed by the European nations is decried by the Pope.^{xxxv}

Triple Mission of Evangelization

Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* spoke of three situations of evangelization. They are: a) bringing the Good News to people, groups and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ is not known, b) a pastoral care amidst healthy mature Christian communities and c) an intermediate situation where the baptized have lost the sense of faith and no longer live as Christians.^{xxxvi} Taking a cue from *RM*, Pope Francis narrates three settings of evangelization. They are: a) pastoral care of the baptized b) bringing back the strayed, people who have lost the spirit of baptism and c) preaching to those who do not know Christ.^{xxxvii} After affirming this triple mission of the Church he quotes the Latin American Bishops and states that we cannot remain passively in our church buildings but have to leap into the fore of evangelization.^{xxxviii}

A Communitarian Involvement

Evangelization is not to be seen as isolated individual work, but rather as a communitarian activity. The mission is accepted by every single baptized Christian, but the mission is accomplished in a community. Therefore communion and mission are interconnected. This communitarian aspect forces people to get involved in the lives of people by word and deed. Therefore an evangelizing community is willing to stoop to touch human life, especially the suffering flesh of Christ. An evangelizing community is supportive and stands by people at every step of the way, no matter how lengthy or difficult it may be. Pope Francis rightly uses the term 'evangelizers smell the sheep' to express the involvement of evangelizers in the daily lives of people.^{xxxix} It is an invitation to imitate Christ who 'knows his sheep'.^{xi}

A Dream for Transformation

Pope Francis expresses his "dream of a missionary option" where the missionary impulse would first transform the Church, and channel her customs and structures to evangelize the world.^{xii} He recommends "the unified and complete sense of human life that the Gospel proposes as the best remedy for the ills of our cities". At the same time, 'a uniform and rigid programme of evangelization is not suited to the complex reality" of our cities. Therefore one must face the challenges of the culture of the city with the leaven of the Gospel.^{xiii} The practical, revolutionary and radical suggestions in the Document may be considered the Magna Carta of Pope Francis for the reform of the Church. Through this

Apostolic Exhortation the Pope has only written down on paper what he has been preaching throughout his life.

- i FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, 24 November 2013, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican, 2013. Hereafter *EG*.
- ii Cf. "Electio Summi Pontificis", in AAS 105 (2013) 362.
- iii Cf. "Promulgatio", in AAS 105 (2013) 363.
- iv Pope Francis frankly stated that it was neither Francis de Sales nor Francis Xavier that was behind the choice of his name, but St Francis of Assisi. Immediately after the papal election, Cardinal Cardinal Hummes had asked the newly elected Pope not to forget the poor. The word "poor" re-echoed in his ears and then the idea of St Francis of Assisi, who loved the poor and lived a life of poverty, struck him and he decided to take the name of St Francis of Assisi. Cf. FRANCIS, "Allocutio S.P. ad Legatos Communicationis Socialis", 16 March 2013, in AAS 105 (2013) 381.
- v FRANCIS, Homily on 15 May 2013, "Clergy Must be Shepherds, Not Wolves, Says Pope", in <<www.ncregister.com/dailynews/clergy-must-be-shepherds-not-wolves-says-pope>> (Accessed on 1 December 2013)
- vi Cf. *EG*, nn. 1, 3.
- vii VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Ad Gentes*, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, 4 December 1964, in AAS 58 (1966) 947-990.
- viii PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World, 8 December 1975, in AAS 68 (1976) 5-76.
- ix JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate, 7 December 1990, in AAS 83 (1991) 249-341.
- x Cf. P. KALLUVEETTIL, "Evangelization: The OT Perspective", in *Bible Bhashyam*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2011, 308.
- xi Is 9: 3; 12: 6; 40: 9, 49: 13; Cf. *EG*, n. 4.
- xii Zech 9: 9; Cf. *EG*, n. 4.
- xiii Zeph 3:17; Cf. *EG*, n. 4.
- xiv Lk 10:21; Cf. *EG*, n. 5.
- xv Lk 1:28, 47; Cf. *EG*, n. 5.
- xvi Jn. 20:20; Acts 8:8; 13:52.
- xvii Cf. *EG*, n. 5.
- xviii "The Joy of the Gospel", in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, 29 November 2013, 1.
- xix Cf. BENEDICT XVI, "Homiliae" in AAS 104 (2012) 874. It was a Homily on the Occasion of the Inaugural Mass of the Thirteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.
- xx *Ecclesia in Asia* is quoted five times in *EG*. The first instance is the effects of media as explained by the Bishops of Asia are presented in *EG* n. 62. The second instance cites the primacy of the proclamation of Jesus as seen in *Ecclesia in Asia* and is taken to describe the essence of evangelization in *EG* n.110. The third time the Pope quotes *Ecclesia in Asia* is to establish the fact that in the proclamation of the faith and Jesus Christ, the transplantation of European culture cannot be done; rather the faith has to be encapsulated within the local culture. Cf. *EG*, n. 118. The fourth time is to quote that "the Holy Spirit is the principal agent" of evangelization in *EG* n.122. The fifth time the Pope quotes *Ecclesia in Asia* is to state that "a pedagogy which will introduce people step by step" to the faith is required, cf. *EG*, n. 171.
- xxi *Ecclesia in Africa* is quoted twice in *EG*. The first occasion is where it quotes that *Ecclesia in Africa* is against globalization which pushes poor countries and their respective cultures into the background. The Bishops of Africa had complained that they have been considered merely as "cogs in a gigantic wheel". This is also true in the context of social communications where priority has not been given to their problems (cf. *EG*, n. 62). The second instance of quoting *Ecclesia in Africa* is to make a very powerful statement regarding the inculturation of the Gospel: "Christianity does not have simply one cultural expression" ... "but it will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 40), instead it takes the culture of the place where it is preached (*Ecclesia in Oceania*, n. 16). The assimilation of different cultures is compared to the image of "the bride bedecked with her jewels" (Is 61:10); cf. *EG*, n. 116.
- xxii *Ecclesia in Oceania* is quoted thrice by the Pope in *EG*. The first quotation is in the context of a renewal needed in the Church. He dreams of a renewed and revived Church, indeed: "all renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion, (n. 19)", cf. *EG*, n. 27. The second occasion is to appreciate the role of culture which offers positive values and forms which can enrich the way the Gospel is preached, cf. *EG*, n. 116. The third time Pope Francis refers to *Ecclesia in Oceania* is to remind us that the Bishops of Oceania invited "all missionaries to work in harmony with indigenous Christians so as to ensure that the faith and the life of the Church be expressed in legitimate forms appropriate for each culture" for the acceptance of the Good News by local people, cf. *EG*, n. 118.
- xxiii *Ecclesia in America* is used to emphasize the view that the role of the Church cannot be neglected in public life. Christian conversion demands that it review "those areas and aspects of life related to the social order and the pursuit of the common good", cf. *EG*, n. 182. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is also quoted twice and they are very interesting to note. The first occasion speaks of moral relativism prevalent in the country and Pope very directly admonishes the Church by saying that on such occasions the Church "needs to provide an education which teaches critical thinking and encourages the development of mature moral norms" in people, cf. *EG*, n. 64. The second instance recalls the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops teaching: that "responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation", cf. *EG*, n. 220.
- xxiv *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* is quoted in the context of religious freedom. The Pope reaffirms the freedom of individual to choose and practice any religion what one considers to be true to his conscience and also the freedom to express his faith in public, cf. *EG*, n. 255.
- xxv Here the Pope is quoting the Second Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops to reiterate his stand, cf. *EG*, n. 275.
- xxvi Cf. *EG*, n. 15.
- xxvii Cf. *EG*, nn. 10, 14, 15, 25, 83, 123, 124, 181, 198.
- xxviii Cf. *EG*, nn. 115, 122.
- xxix This dialogue is qualified in the first place as a conversation about human existence. It is a simple dialogue open to the followers of non-Christian religions: "sharing their joys and sorrows", cf. *EG*, n. 250.
- xxx Cf. *EG*, n. 11.
- xxxi Cf. *EG*, 51, 163.
- xxxii Cf. *EG*, n. 120.
- xxxiii Cf. *EG*, n. 8.
- xxxiv Cf. *EG*, n. 9.

xxxv *Cf. EG*, n. 118.
xxxvi *Cf. RM*, n. 33.
xxxvii *Cf. EG*, n. 14.
xxxviii *Cf. EG*, n. 15.
xxxix *Cf. EG*, n. 24.
40 *Cf. Homily*, 15 May 2013
xli *Cf. EG*, n. 27.
xlii *Cf. EG*, n. 75.