

HOLINESS IN POPE FRANCIS' APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE* AS KEY TO CHRISTIAN UNITY

Markus Schmidt, S.J.*

In spring 2018, Pope Francis promulgated his apostolic exhortation Gaudete et Exsultate. Its theme is holiness. This article explores holiness as key in the endeavour of making Christian unity more visible. Holiness is considered a fundamental attitude which supports sanctification as dynamic growth in holiness. Growth in holiness means that people strengthen their focus in life on Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, people are united with God and with one another. Holiness, therefore, is key to Christian unity.

'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy' (Lev. 19:2).¹ The congregation of Israel received this demand on their journey with God. It summarises God's will for the people of Israel. God invited the Israelites to a covenant with him and gave them instructions on how to fulfil it. The covenant is about relationship. Therefore, it is not enough to merely obey certain rules. God calls God's people to more: to become holy because God is holy.

This call becomes more apparent if we remember that the covenant with Israel is a covenant of love. In love, both the lover and the beloved, usually, are longing for unity with each other; becoming like the other is an expression of this unity. It, therefore, makes sense that God calls the people of Israel to become holy, too. Holiness unites us with God

* Markus Schmidt, S.J., is Assistant Professor in Ecumenical Theology at Leopold-Franzens-University, Innsbruck, Austria, and has been serving as Director of the Licentiate in Sacred Theology (STL) programme since 2012. Before his appointment as lecturer, he served as university chaplain at the University of Graz, Austria.

¹ If not otherwise stated, all quotations of the Bible are taken from *The New Revised Standard Version* (Washington DC: Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 1989).

and with each other. People who strive after holiness are united with each other in God. All who are united with God are at the same time united with each other. In this perspective, holiness appears to be a key to Christian unity.

In spring 2018, Pope Francis promulgated his apostolic exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate*. Its theme is holiness, and it suggests itself, therefore, as an appropriate text for reflection on holiness as key to Christian unity. I shall present the main points of the apostolic exhortation first. Afterwards, I will explore holiness as the key to Christian unity.

The apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*

On 19 March 2018, the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Pope Francis signed his third apostolic exhortation entitled *Gaudete et Exsultate*². The exhortation deals with the call to holiness in today's world. It has five chapters which are not meant to present definitions and discussions about the subject but to deal with the topic in a more practical way. Francis states: 'My modest goal is to re-propose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities.'³ This call is grounded in God's call to holiness. God 'chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love' (Eph. 1:4).

The first chapter is dedicated to God's call to holiness. Francis refers to Hebrew 12 to show that there is a great number of saints. Their testimony encourages us and makes us realise that we are surrounded by 'so great a cloud of witnesses' (Heb. 12:1). It is not that the saints have always been perfect.⁴ It is true, however, as Francis emphasises, that 'yet even amid their faults and failings they kept moving forward and proved pleasing to the Lord.'⁵

² Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (Roma: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2018), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/pa-pa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exsultate.pdf.

³ Ibid., 2.

⁴ See *ibid.*, 22: 'Not everything a saint says is completely faithful to the Gospel; not everything he or she does is authentic or perfect. What we need to contemplate is the totality of their life, their entire journey of growth in holiness, the reflection of Jesus Christ that emerges when we grasp their overall meaning as a person.'

⁵ Ibid., 3.

The saints about whom Francis is talking are the saints next door, not only the beatified and canonised people. The beatified and canonised persons are put before the faithful as ‘an exemplary imitation of Christ, one worthy of admiration of the faithful.’⁶ In his apostolic exhortation, however, the Pope focuses on the holiness very often found ‘in our next-door neighbours, those who, living in our midst, reflect God’s presence.’⁷

Francis emphasises that holiness gives the Church its most attractive face. This is true for all Christian Churches. Pope Francis refers to John Paul II who stated that ‘[t]he witness to Christ borne even to the shedding of blood has become a common inheritance of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants’⁸. The common inheritance of the shedding of blood as witness to Christ is now known as ‘Ecumenism of martyrdom’.

Francis points out that it is the Lord who calls to holiness. God invites his people to become holy because God is holy (see Lev. 11:44.). He goes on to make clear that each person has to find his or her own way to become holy. Holiness is not about copying someone else. It is about finding holiness in one's own life and growing in it.

Holiness, therefore, is not only for others but also for each one of us, as Francis remarks. In particular, small gestures in daily life will support personal growth in holiness. The Pope encourages the faithful to let the grace of baptism bear fruit in their lives – in other words encourages them to grow in holiness. The mission, in Christ, the believer has received in baptism, accompanies the growth. Francis is clear that the mission cannot be thought of apart from the path of holiness. ‘At its core, holiness is experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life.’⁹

Francis also encourages the believers to let themselves be renewed by the Holy Spirit and to see their whole life as a mission. ‘The Lord will bring it to fulfilment despite your mistakes and missteps, provided that

⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁸ John Paul II, *Tertio Millenio Adveniente* (Roma: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19941110_tertio-millennio-adveniente.pdf, 37.

⁹ Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* 20.

you do not abandon the path of love but remain ever open to his supernatural grace, which purifies and enlightens.’¹⁰

Activity is something that is important for Francis but not solely. He argues that both activity and silence are necessary to walk on the path of holiness, or in Ignatian terms, to be *in actione contemplativus*¹¹. A good balance of both will support growth in holiness: ‘We need a spirit of holiness capable of filling both our solitude and our service, our personal life and our evangelizing efforts, so that every moment can be an expression of self-sacrificing love in the Lord’s eyes. In this way, every minute of our lives can be a step along the path to growth in holiness.’¹²

The second chapter is dedicated to the two subtle enemies of holiness. Francis describes them as false forms of holiness. The first enemy is Gnosticism. The Pope defines it as ‘a purely subjective faith whose only interest is a certain experience or a set of ideas and bits of information which are meant to console and enlighten, but which ultimately keep one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings.’¹³ Francis stresses against the gnostics that the measure for a person’s perfection is not the information or knowledge he or she possesses but the depth of charity the person is living and giving.

The second enemy of holiness is, according to Francis, contemporary Pelagianism. It focuses the efforts on the human will. Francis summarises: ‘Now it was not intelligence that took the place of mystery and grace, but our human will.’¹⁴ The tragedy is that a person who

¹⁰ Ibid., 24.

¹¹ P. Hieronymus Nadal SJ (1507–1580) introduced the phrase in his commentary on the ‘Examen generalis’ of the Constitution of the Society of Jesus: Hieronymus Nadal, ‘In Examen Annotationes (1557)’, in *P. Hieronymi Nadal Commentarii de Instituto Societatis Iesu*, ed. Michael Nicolau, Epistolae et Monumenta P. Hieronymi Nadal, V (Roma: Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, 1962), 131–206, here 162. See Anton Witwer, ‘Contemplativo En La Acción’, in *Diccionario de Espiritualidad Ignaciana*, ed. Grupo de Espiritualidad Ignaciana (GEI), Colección Manresa 37 (Bilbao: Ediciones Mensajero, 2007), 457–65.

¹² Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* 31.

¹³ Ibid., 36, quoting Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Roma: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013),

https://m.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documenti/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.pdf, 94.

¹⁴ Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* 48.

counts only on his or her own will and who does not acknowledge his or her own limitations, hinders God's grace to work effectively. Francis refers here to *Evangelii Gaudium* to make it clear: 'Ultimately, the lack of a heartfelt and prayerful acknowledgement of our limitations, prevents grace from working more effectively within us, for no room is left for bringing about the potential good that is part of a sincere and genuine journey of growth.'¹⁵ Moreover, the Pope stresses that growth happens as 'historical and progressive reality'¹⁶ and that love is the centre.¹⁷

Francis continues his apostolic exhortation in chapter three with the theme: 'In the light of the Master'. In this part of *Gaudete et Exsultate*, the Pope encourages the faithful to go 'against the flow'. Francis explains this attitude with the Beatitudes (see Matt. 5:3-12; Luke 6:20-23). 'The Beatitudes are like a Christian's identity card. [...] In the Beatitudes, we find a portrait of the Master, which we are called to reflect in our daily lives.'¹⁸

Each Beatitude starts with the word 'Happy are those' or 'Blessed are those', depending on the English translation. The point is that Jesus calls those people 'happy' or 'blessed' who live according to the example of his own life. The attitude of his life is articulated in the Beatitudes. Happiness, therefore, becomes a synonym of holiness as Francis remarks.¹⁹ The Pope, however, is not unrealistic. He is aware that Jesus' words are unsettling, challenging, and 'demand a real change in the way we live'²⁰. If Christians do not change their way of life, in the view of the Pope, holiness will be nothing more than an empty word.

Francis, then, reflects on the beatitudes and goes on to search for the great criterion by which to recognise holiness which is pleasing to God. He finds it in the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew (Matt. 25:31-46). This chapter foretells the final judgement. It is here where Francis finds the great criterion: 'I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me

¹⁵ Ibid., 50. See also Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 44.

¹⁶ Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* 50.

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, 60.

¹⁸ Ibid., 63.

¹⁹ See *ibid.*, 64.

²⁰ Ibid., 66.

clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me' (Matt. 25:35–36).²¹

It is important for Francis that these verses are not talking just about charity but about Christology. He is in line here with John Paul II who writes in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*: '[I]t is a page of Christology which sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ.'²² This understanding is justified because Jesus identifies himself with the poor in Matthew 25:31–46. John Paul II uses telling words to explain Jesus' identification with the poor. Francis quotes him again: 'If we have truly started out anew from the contemplation of Christ, we must learn to see him especially in the faces of those with whom he himself wished to be identified'²³. It is clear that holiness cannot be lived apart from mercy because mercy is at the centre of Jesus' life which is the embodiment of holiness. The consequences Francis draws are that '[t]hose who really wish to give glory to God by their lives, who truly long to grow in holiness, are called to be single-minded and tenacious in their practice of the works of mercy.'²⁴

In the next chapter, which is chapter four, Francis reflects on signs of holiness in today's world within the framework of the Beatitudes. He does not give a sum of all possible models of holiness but focuses on five expressions of love for God and neighbours. The five signs are (1) perseverance, patience, and meekness, (2) joy and a sense of humour, (3) boldness and passion, (4) community, and (5) constant prayer.²⁵ Francis considers them 'of particular importance in the light of certain dangers and limitations present in today's culture.'²⁶

In chapter five, Francis deals with spiritual combat, vigilance, and discernment. He is clear that the Christian life is a constant battle and needs to be strengthened and encouraged. 'This battle is sweet, for it allows us to rejoice each time the Lord triumphs in our lives.'²⁷ The first

²¹ See *ibid.*, 95.

²² John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (Roma: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2001), https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte.pdf, 49. See Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* 96.

²³ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 49. See Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* 96.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁵ See *ibid.*, 112–157.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 158.

section of this chapter is dedicated to combat and vigilance. Francis is aware that the battle a Christian has to fight is not only against the world and its mentality but also against human weaknesses. Moreover, 'it is also a constant struggle against the devil, the prince of evil.'²⁸ The Pope also warns that 'spiritual corruption is worse than the fall of a sinner, for it is a comfortable and self-satisfied form of blindness.'²⁹ This many-fold battle does not sound encouraging so the Pope is quick to add that Jesus himself rejoices in our victories in this battle.³⁰

To win the battle it is important to be able to discern between good and evil, to know what is from the Holy Spirit and what stems from the spirit of the world or the devil.³¹ To succeed in discerning it is necessary, Francis continues, to refer not only to intelligence or common sense but also to prayer. The Pope emphasises that spiritual discernment is a supernatural gift. He makes clear: 'If we ask with confidence that the Holy Spirit grants us this gift, and then seek to develop it through prayer, reflection, reading and good counsel, then surely we will grow in this spiritual endowment.'³² The ability to discern spiritually is more needed today than ever, as Francis remarks. As a means of support for that ability, he asks all Christians to practise daily the 'examination of conscience'³³.

Pope Francis is so clear on the discernment of spirits because it liberates Christians from rigidity. Rigidity 'has no place before the perennial "today" of the risen Lord. The Spirit alone can penetrate what is obscure and hidden in every situation, and grasp its every nuance, so that the newness of the Gospel can emerge in another light.'³⁴

Finally, Francis highlights the fundamental condition which is necessary to make progress in discernment. It is 'a growing understanding of God's patience and his timetable, which are never our own.'³⁵ Discernment is about finding ways to carry out, more truly and faithfully, the mission Christians received in their baptism. The mission can demand sacrifices, and sometimes even the sacrifice of everything

²⁸ Ibid., 159.

²⁹ Ibid., 165.

³⁰ See *ibid.*, 159.

³¹ See *ibid.*, 166.

³² Ibid., 166.

³³ Ibid., 169.

³⁴ Ibid., 173.

³⁵ Ibid., 174.

a Christian has and is. However, it does not diminish happiness, for true happiness does not follow the logic of the world but a mysterious logic, as Francis states.³⁶ To accept this logic opens the Christian to discernment. Francis concludes: 'Discernment, then, is not a solipsistic self-analysis or a form of egotistical introspection, but an authentic process of leaving ourselves behind in order to approach the mystery of God, who helps us to carry out the mission to which he has called us, for the good of our brothers and sisters.'³⁷

Having presented the main points of *Gaudete et Exsultate*, I will now turn to the reflection on how holiness is key to Christian unity. Two perspectives seem fundamental to me: first, holiness as a basic attitude, and second, sanctification as dynamic growth in holiness. These two perspectives are supported by *Gaudete et Exsultate* and will lead to understanding holiness as key to Christian unity.

Holiness as fundamental attitude

The exhortation deals with the call to holiness in today's world. It is therefore not surprising that the first chapter reflects on the very call to holiness and the meaning of holiness. The following chapters of the exhortation deal with its practice. I will focus particularly on the first chapter because it supports the most our reflection on holiness and Christian unity.

The exhortation does not immediately begin with a reflection on holiness, but starts with a quotation of Matthew 5, verse 12: 'rejoice and be glad' (*'gaudete et exsultate'*). This is like the starting cord of a symphony which sets the tune of the music. The same is true here. The first three words of the exhortation set the tune of the whole text. They orient the reader to joy and happiness. It is not superficial happiness, but happiness that is 'true life' and 'happiness for which we were created'.³⁸ Francis explains this kind of happiness further: 'He [the Lord] wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence.'³⁹

The first paragraph of the exhortation communicates two messages. First, holiness is something joyful and creates fulfilling happiness. It does not mean that it cannot be difficult at certain times to be holy, but

³⁶ See *ibid.*, 174.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

it calls to mind that the fundamental effect of holiness is joy and true happiness. Second, holiness is about living with God and not being satisfied with a mediocre life. Living with God, then, is to participate in God's life which is love because God is love (see 1 John 4:8, 16).

Three terms are key: happiness, holiness, and love. They are interrelated and belong together. We could say that love puts holiness into practice the effects of which are happiness. Holiness, therefore, is nothing static but a process and needs to be understood dynamically. This dynamic understanding is called sanctification.

Sanctification as dynamic growth in holiness

God calls his people in various ways to be holy. This is without doubt true, but it is not the whole story. The call to holiness is the original call every human being receives from God when he or she is created. Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. 140–202) supports this view.⁴⁰ He interprets Adam and Eve (Gen. 1–3) not as adults but as children who have still to grow and mature into perfection and the likeness of God. Perfection, according to Irenaeus, is the intimate communion with God. This communion is immortality for human beings. God 'made the things of time for man, so that coming to maturity in them, he may produce the fruit of immortality' (*Adversus haereses* IV,5,1).⁴¹

The Irenaean view on the creation story, particularly on the beginnings of the human race, sounds unfamiliar today, but 'Irenaeus might have built his interpretation on a more or less common view of *Genesis*. At least, this would explain why he seems to see his view not outstanding.'⁴² Bechtel confirms this in his study which shows that there were interpretations with which Irenaeus' view is in tune.⁴³

Growing, thus, belongs very much to human beings. It is God's call and gift to God's human creatures from the very beginning of creation.

⁴⁰ See Markus Schmidt, *Called to Grow: Brokenness and Gradual Growth Towards Wholeness* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2012), 40–45.

⁴¹ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, second reprinting, 10 vols (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), 1:466. Irénée de Lyon, *Contre Les Hérésies*, Sources Chrétiennes (Paris: Cerf, 1965–1982), 100:424: 'qui temporalia fecit propter hominem, uti maturescens in eis fructificet immortalitatem'.

⁴² Schmidt, *Called to Grow*, 42 (emphasis in original).

⁴³ See Lyn M. Bechtel, 'Genesis 2:4b–3.24: A Myth About Human Maturation', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 20, no. 67 (1995): 3–26, here 14–26.

If humans are called to grow in the likeness of God, and if the likeness of God is holiness, then we can conclude that humans are called to grow in holiness. The dynamic process of growing is called sanctification. Holiness and becoming holy, therefore, belongs to the dynamics of life and is key to human growth.

Holiness is key

Humans who grow in holiness impact, also, the institutions with which they work or to which they belong. The same applies with the Church. Holy people—and I do not allude here only to beatified or canonised people but to everyone striving after holiness in daily life—give the Church the most attractive face. This is true for the various Churches worldwide. One especially fruitful witness of holiness is the shedding of blood as a witness to Christ. John Paul II. calls to our mind that ‘the witness to Christ borne even to the shedding of blood has become a common inheritance of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants’⁴⁴.

The shedding of blood as a witness to Jesus Christ is not only a phenomenon of the Church during the period of the Roman Empire and afterwards but continues to be a powerful witness in modern times. Particularly in the twentieth century, more Christians than in the 2000 years before, had to shed their blood as a witness to Jesus Christ.⁴⁵ The tendency for Christians to be the most persecuted group of believers seems to continue into the twenty-first century. Christians are tortured and murdered because they are Christians, that is to say, independently of their denomination. They witness to Jesus Christ together. Their common witness, therefore, is unity in martyrdom, which is often called ‘ecumenism of blood’.

Pope Francis emphasises unity in martyrdom, too, and quotes John Paul II’s apostolic letter *Tertio Millenio Adveniente* 37 in his own apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* 9. Martyrdom as a witness to Christ is the consequence of the personal call from God to holiness. This call is fundamental to all unity. God calls repeatedly the people of

⁴⁴ John Paul II, *Tertio Millenio Adveniente* 37.

⁴⁵ See David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Trends Ad 33–Ad 2200: Interpreting the Annual Christian Megacensus* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2001), 229, Table 4–3: There are 45.400.000 Christian martyrs only in the twentieth century. The total number of Christian martyrs since AD 33 to 2000 is 69.420.000 martyrs.

Israel to holiness. We find this call, for instance, in Leviticus 11:44: ‘be holy, for I am holy’, or in Leviticus 19:2: ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.’ The people of Israel can only be holy if each person strives after holiness. It is not incorrect, therefore, to see in God’s call to Israel, also, the personal call for everyone within the people of Israel. The same is true for 1 Peter 1:15–16: ‘Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”’ The author of 1 Peter refers obviously to Leviticus 11:44 and Leviticus 19:2.

These verses make clear that striving after personal holiness is fundamental so that holiness can flourish in the people of God. God calls every man and woman to long for holiness. The answer to God’s call will impact the whole people of God, that is to say, the communion of Christians. One example, out of many, of a person, who accepted God’s call to holiness, is Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Her striving after holiness impacted many people worldwide, Christians and non-Christians alike. Admiration of her by many, illustrates the impact she had, and still has, on unity, on Christian unity and human unity. Many other Christians could be listed here.

The question arises why holiness is capable of making an impact on the communion of Christians. God calls to holiness because God is holy.⁴⁶ This means that God is the one who defines holiness. In other words, God is the measure of holiness. It is obvious then that it is necessary to know God. This leads to the necessity of knowing the Word of God. Through it God reveals that God is love.

Experiences show that to know the Word of God does not suffice. A person can know the Word of God like any other literature, but it will hardly have an impact on his or her life if not taken seriously. The Word of God will have an impact on the lives of Christians if they focus their lives on the Word of God. This focus means that they put the Word of God into practice. To live according to the Word of God reveals that a person is aware that he or she is under the Word of God.

To put oneself under the Word of God is to take the Word of God seriously. This is supported by remembering that the Word of God is not just literature but a person. The Word of God, the *logos*, who was

⁴⁶ See Lev. 11:44; 19:2.

God,⁴⁷ became flesh and a human being.⁴⁸ This human being, who is the Son of God, is called Jesus Christ, the Messiah. To focus on the Word of God, then, means to centre one's life on Jesus Christ.

People who focus their lives on Jesus Christ have the same centre. Jesus says about himself that he is 'the way, and the truth, and the life' (John 14:6). Who focuses on Jesus, then, centres his/her self on 'the way, and the truth, and the life'. This focus gives life and directs oneself, together with the other faithful, to the truth. Christians who centre their lives on Jesus find themselves on the same way, that is to say, on the way with Jesus. To be on the same way enables Christians to recognise each other as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. When Christians become aware of each other as brothers and sisters, Christian unity is growing.

To recognise other Christians as brothers and sisters will have another impact. It will make it easier to see one's own strengths and limitations and those of others. In other words, it broadens one's own point of view. To see and acknowledge one's own strengths and limitations and those of others is sometimes difficult but necessary. What is necessary is an honest acknowledgement of them. Francis points out the consequence of the lack of such acknowledgement. He writes in *Gaudete et Exsultate*: 'Ultimately, the lack of a heartfelt and prayerful acknowledgement of our limitations prevents grace from working more effectively within us, for no room is left for bringing about the potential good that is part of a sincere and genuine journey of growth.'⁴⁹

The consequence, which Francis observes, is tragic because grace cannot be effective in one's life. The reason is that a genuine journey of growth cannot happen. The journey of growth is, however, necessary for the progress of Christian unity. To discover, at least the potential for good, in my own life and that of others, will support growth. Growth, however, needs grace. If something prevents grace from working effectively, one will not grow. To see the good in other Christians has a transformative effect because it builds trust between Christians. The same is true for listening carefully to one another and learning from other Christians. Trust among Christian believers lays the ground for strong bonds which will also cross denominational boundaries.

⁴⁷ See John 1:1.

⁴⁸ See John 1:14.

⁴⁹ Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* 50. See also Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 44.

Honesty with regard to one's own strengths and limitations is an integral part of the growth in holiness. Holiness is the noble call of God for human beings, the more for Christians who belong to God's family as sons and daughters. To accept and follow God's call to holiness enables the believer to set out on a journey of growth which ultimately transforms him or her more into the image of God. This God is love and communion, for God is a triune God. If holiness transforms a person to reflect better the image of God, holiness must be closely linked to love. For Francis, it is indeed the love presented in the great judgement (see Matt. 25:35–36) which is the criterion for holiness that is pleasing to God.⁵⁰ Love between Christians of different denominations will enact holiness and will strengthen trust between Christians of different traditions. Trust draws the faithful closer to each other and, finally, strengthens growing unity.

Unity among Christians encourages them to bear witness to the triune God. It will be an effective witness because the fundamental condition is fulfilled. Jesus articulates the fundamental condition for the world to believe in his prayer to the Father. He asks him that all may be one, 'so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (John 17:21). Unity as a pre-condition to witness effectively supports Christians to centre themselves on Jesus Christ and his mission. The focus on Jesus Christ and his mission, given to his followers,⁵¹ could strengthen efforts to take steps forward in the task of making Christian unity visible. Holiness is key to that aim.

⁵⁰ See Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* 95.

⁵¹ For a spirituality of mission see Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*.