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PILGRIMS AND WAYFARERS TO, AT AND FROM
ECUMENICAL GATHERINGS AND ENCOUNTERS
READING THE THEME OF THE JOURNEY
TO, AT AND FROM ECUMENICAL EVENTS
IN THE LIGHT OF *PORTA FIDEI* AND *LUMEN FIDEI*

Abstract. This article studies a topic which has not been treated previously. The physical experience of the journey—to the ecumenical encounter, the stay in a particular venue for prayer, dialogue or for joint initiatives, and the journey back home—becomes the epitome and the metaphor of the quest for the Divine and the searching self which seeks to build bridges and discover common ground. Moreover, it becomes a sign and a symbol of the on-going and forward-oriented ecumenical journey which all Christians have learned to undertake, particularly those committed to ecumenical dialogue and brotherhood.

Key words: journey, pilgrimage, ecumenist, ecumenical venue, ecumenical encounter, faith journey.

INTRODUCTION:
THE HUMAN JOURNEY—*HOMO VIATOR*

In his Apostolic Exhortation on the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis dedicates three paragraphs to ecumenical dialogue. He reiterates the Church's commitment to ecumenism and affirms that the credibility of the Christian message would be enhanced if Christians were united. The Bishop of Rome states that

We must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another. This means that we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all

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suspicion or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking: the radiant peace of God's face.¹

I was particularly struck by the words *we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another*, from this text of the Papal Magisterium. This study seeks to investigate the theme of the ecumenical journey. Many Christians participate in ecumenical gatherings and encounters of all kinds: they travel to the place where the meeting is organized, they take part in the event, and when this is over, they journey back home. This study reflects upon the physical journey *to* and *from* the ecumenical gathering, as well as the *duration* of the latter, taking these three aspects as *a metaphor of the ecumenical pilgrimage*, an experience characterized by maturation and conversion.

In September 2013, while travelling from Durham—where I had participated in a theology conference—to London Heathrow Airport, I paused for two days in the wonderful city of York. Needless to say, I paid a devout visit to the world-famous York Minster, and true to my ecumenical credentials, I participated in Evensong, a truly uplifting spiritual experience, beautifully and prayerfully animated by one of the resident choirs. During my stroll in the historic centre of the city, I literally bumped into St Helen's, a small, seemingly insignificant Anglican church which described itself as 'celebrating in the Celtic Tradition'. My curiosity was aroused and I paid a brief visit. There, on a rudimentary bookstall, I came across a booklet called *Celtic Reflections* by the Rt Rev Martin Wallace, Anglican Bishop of Selby (who was to retire some weeks later, on 30th November 2013). I was struck by the contents of the eighteen-page booklet containing extracts from talks given by Wallace at a different location from where I was standing, at a place called St Peter's Chapel, on the remote coast of Essex, near Bradwell-on-Sea. St Peter's Chapel was erected by St Cedd after he sailed down the coast of England from the holy island of Lindisfarne to convert the East Saxons to Christianity in 654 AD.

On two of the pages of the mentioned book which Providence permitted me to encounter, my eyes fell upon a reflection by Wallace on "The Pilgrimage of Life", parts of which I now quote as I introduce the theme of this academic study:

Pilgrimage is a sacrament; an outward and visible sign of an inner spiritual grace. [...] Life is a purposeful pilgrimage, not an aimless meandering trail. The journey

¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 244.

of life and faith will be different for each person and each community. [...] Jesus never said he was the destination; he said, 'I am the Way'. Jesus is Alpha and Omega—the beginning and the end of life of the Way. The destination is, in fact, the journey itself, and the journey is, in fact, the destination. Once we think we have arrived, our soul has died. [...] We are called to travel light, both to possessions and programmes. [...] Our life is a pilgrimage with and into the heart of God.²

The theme which is being proposed in this article is studied in relation to what Pope Benedict XVI expounds in his Apostolic Letter for the Year of the Faith (2012-2013), *Porta Fidei*, namely with regard to personal and ecclesial conversion, one's commitment to the faith and, consequently, the theme of Christian witness, so central to the members of all Churches and ecclesial communities. The first Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, too, sheds light upon the theme.

When we talk of contemporary waves of migration and the plight of migrants, today, perilously crossing the sea from North Africa to the southern shores of Europe, many often fail to realize that this phenomenon has been taking place since the dawn of humanity. Peoples have always been in search of better pastures, better climates, and more prosperous regions. Archaeological excavations bear unmistakable evidence to migratory routes from what those early travellers left behind them when they left a particular site, what they dropped or disposed of in the soil and the terrain while they journeyed, and what they eventually left in the place where they settled which would, obviously, include burial sites. Just as man has been aptly described as *homo sapiens* or *homo religiosus* or *homo sociologicus*, we are also right in describing him as *homo viator*—man the traveller, man on the move. As a member of the pilgrim people of God, the Christian is a traveller or wayfarer towards the Father's house. Convinced Christian ecumenists of all sorts are travellers and wayfarers in a very special way, as we shall see.

The concept of *the journey* is a characteristic of the mythologies belonging to all known civilizations, from Egypt to Polynesia, from Greece to China, and from the Aztecs and Incas to India. In mythologies, one encounters the collective unconscious of different peoples. I restrict myself to one example: the myth of Jason and the Argonauts, one of the most popular stories from Greek mythology. It tells about the long journey and the adventures of Jason to the mythical land of the Golden Fleece. In search of the

² Martin Wallace, *Celtic Reflections* (Bristol: Tim Tiley Ltd, 2006), 5-6.

latter, Jason gathered a team of fifty people and embarked upon a long journey on a vessel called the 'Argo'. The strenuous and adventurous voyage proceeded further, the team increased to about a hundred people, and included the famous hero, Hercules. This journey is an epitome of *the searching quest of humanity*, an aspect which has marked the lives of explorers, scientists and pioneers of all kinds. Both the professional ecumenist as well as the ordinary member among Christ's faithful who in all simplicity prays and strives for Christian unity, are on a journey which has its own joys and difficulties, its own progress and setbacks.

I will now enter more deeply into the first aspect of this paper, namely *the spiritual dimension of the human journey*. The Jews, too, like their Phoenician neighbours, travelled far and wide across the Mediterranean Sea and its shores. Groups of Jews from around the Mediterranean were known to travel to the land of their forefathers for the three important religious festivities in the Jewish calendar: the feast of the Unleavened Bread (*mazzot*), Pentecost ("the fiftieth day", corresponding to the wheat harvest), and the feast of Tents (*sukkot*), "commemorating the tents of the wilderness period."³ The Book of Deuteronomy stipulates participation in the pilgrimage feasts: "Three times a year all your menfolk must appear before the Lord your God in the place chosen by him: at the feast of Unleavened Bread, at the feast of Weeks, at the feast of Shelters" (16:16).

A number of Psalms (120-134), often referred to as the *Graduals* or the *Songs of Ascent*, offer us a precise testimony of that deep spiritual, emotional experience which the Jews felt on seeing their beloved city of Jerusalem from afar, and, above all, the Temple gleaming in the sunlight. Some particularly emotive verses serve to illustrate the point: "I rejoiced that they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord'. At last our feet are standing at your gates, Jerusalem!" (Ps 122:1-2).

It was not too long after the birth of the Church that Christians began journeying. That remarkable inspired book—the *Acts of the Apostles*—provides us with the narratives of the wayfaring and the seafaring of the first followers of Jesus Christ who, in the first place—in contrast to the sedentary Jewish rabbis—was an *itinerant preacher* in Galilee, Samaria and Judaea. *Acts* describes the spread of the Christians after they were forced to leave

³ Richard Clifford, "Exodus," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* [NJBC], ed. Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Roland Murphy (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990), 3:43. With regard to the three feasts, see John J. Castelot and Aelred Cody, "Religious Institutions of Israel," in *NJBC* 76:122-140.

Jerusalem on account of a violent persecution, raging against them. Furthermore, we read about the important city of Antioch, then the third most important city in the Roman Empire, which became a centre from which Christian missionaries departed to evangelize Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and other places, such as the island of Cyprus. The intensive missionary journeys undertaken by Paul of Tarsus are described in detail in *Acts*, as well as in his *Letters* to the various early Christian communities of the second half of the first century. Moreover, Christian discipleship is described as *the Way* in the *Acts of the Apostles*.

Later on, Christians undertook long journeys not only for missionary purposes of evangelization but with the precise aim of visiting holy places: the important experience of *pilgrimage* is principally a spiritual one. In their book *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), Victor Turner and Edith Turner “focus on a sense of pilgrimage as a journey to a place that is somehow geographically or at least spiritually distant from the everyday lives of the traveller.”⁴ From early times, pilgrims undertook long and challenging journeys to places such as Jerusalem (Calvary and the Holy Sepulchre), Rome (the tomb of the Apostle Peter on Vatican Hill, and the tomb of the Apostle Paul on the road to Ostia), and the shrines of the martyrs,⁵ where these great witnesses of the faith shed their blood or where they were buried, and later on, to places such as Santiago de Compostela, the site of a very important shrine dedicated to St James.

TRAVEL-PARADIGMS TAKEN FROM THE SACRED TEXTS
OF THE JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION, AND THEIR APPLICATION
TO A REFLECTION ON THE “ECUMENICAL JOURNEY”

This section of the study will focus upon some examples from texts belonging to the Judaeo-Christian Tradition, that is, the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. In the former, there are several detailed narratives

⁴ Simon Coleman, “Pilgrimage as Field: Space, Time and Text”, in *Pilgrimage of Life. Studies in Honour of Professor René Gothoni*, ed. Riku Hämäläinen et al. (Helsinki: The Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters and the Dept of the Study of Religions, University of Helsinki, 2010), 117.

⁵ See Hector Scerri, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria. Interrelated Themes in Patristic Sacramental Theology as Expounded by Adalbert-G. Hamman* (Malta: Foundation for Theological Studies, 1999), 226-227, 278-280.

which focus upon particular journeys. I restrict myself to mentioning the various journeys of Abraham from Ur of the Chaldeans to the land promised to him by God (in *Genesis*); the great milestone in the history of the People of God which narrates their delivery from Egyptian bondage and their subsequent entry into the land “flowing with milk and honey” (Ex 3:8.17; 13,5); the journeys of the prophets Elijah and Elisha in the *Books of the Kings*; the journeys of Tobias in the Book of *Tobit*. There are, of course, many others. With regard to the New Testament, some examples have already been mentioned, in particular the journeys associated with the initial missionary activity of the Church. Brother John of Taizé affirms that

the image of the journey as a key to the Bible has one great advantage: its dynamic, open-ended character. In addition to corresponding well to the mentality of our time, it enables us to grasp the progressive quality of God’s self-revelation, and the dimension of risk, adventure, which is so fundamental to the life of faith. Pilgrimage as understood here is not the movement *toward* faith, conceived of as a static mentality, but on the contrary an aspect of believing itself – as for Abraham, the journey and the risk only begin when one says yes to God’s call and sets out on the road of the promise.⁶

For the purposes of this section, the focus will be on a particular Gospel pericope, that of the disciples of Emmaus⁷ who are encountered only once in Luke’s Gospel *while they were travelling*. The narrative is found in the 24th chapter of this Gospel – the Gospel characterized by an emphasis on the mercy of God, the *quotidienneté*⁸ of God’s invitation to salvation to all and the diffusion of the Good News starting from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. I have chosen this particular narrative—one of many in the New Testament—because it can be considered to be an epitome of all spiritual journeys, and indeed, of the ecumenical journey. It is a journey marked by a radical transformation after the encounter of two discouraged disciples with the Risen Christ.

The narrative will not be read from the point of view of the scriptural science of exegesis, but chiefly from the angle of *the spirituality of the jour-*

⁶ Brother John of Taizé, *The Pilgrim God. A Biblical Journey* (Portland, OR: Pastoral Press, 1985), 3-4.

⁷ See Jacques Dupuis, *Who Do You Say I am? Introduction to Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 53-55.

⁸ Hector Scerri, “Quotidienneté in the Writings of Adalbert-G. Hamman (1910-2000): The Existential Concern of a Twentieth-century Patristic Scholar,” in *Studia Patristica 40, Papers presented at the Fourteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2003*, ed. Frances Margaret Young, Mark J. Edwards, Paul M. Parvis (Leuven, Paris and Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2006), 331-336.

ney. The two disciples were overwhelmed by a sinking feeling of sadness. Everything seemed to be collapsing around them. The violent death of their beloved Master was to them the sudden end of the hope he had so powerfully instilled in their thirsting hearts. Their Master's death was a great humiliation. Everything around them came crashing down on that terrible Friday afternoon. It had indeed been a shattering experience, especially for that small circle of intimate friends who shared his life and vision. Thus, with sadness inundating their minds and enveloping their hearts, they decided to leave the Holy City. Why not return to the countryside where they belonged? This is what they decided to do. They trudged on and on. The road to Emmaus was not short. It was something like 12 km long. The two men grumbled about the terrible fate of their Master. Although they knew the road to their home village so well, the journey seemed never-ending. It was as if they had shackles on their aching feet. This painful feeling can indeed be part of the ecumenical journey. The disciples hardly realized that someone was following them closely.

Specific parts of the text are being referred to enable the reader to enter into the sandals of Cleopas and the other disciple. The Lucan text is an incisive one. The vivid colours in the details of the text serve to induce the listener or the reader to empathize with the two disciples, and to experience the same feelings which had wrecked their former enthusiasm. The ecumenical journey is often marked with many different emotions, most of which resemble those experienced by the two disciples on their journey to Emmaus.

Heads down, their hearts swimming in a sea of gloom, they failed to notice the man walking in their shadow. They did not recognize the man... What took place as they marched on was an outpouring of grief. They expressed their previous expectations about the Messiah. The compassionate stranger, a man of benevolent empathy, was indeed a real companion to them. The unending journey to Emmaus seemed to lapse into timelessness. They hardly realized that they had reached their destination. The stranger's mysterious and enlightening presence shook their predicament to its very foundations. Time had flown ... or had they experienced the timelessness of the Eternal Word who had just spoken to them?

We can understand the type of spiritual journey those two men had undergone. In a crisis situation, they opted out of the Jerusalem community. They left their brothers behind. Overcome by delusion, they thought it would be better to forget their former positive experiences with Jesus of Nazareth. Their journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus was marked by pessimism, self-

centredness and self-pity. One is struck by the radical transformation which they soon were to experience. Stopping to rest for the night, the two men instinctively invited the stranger to share their frugal meal. Their hearts had already experienced an initial transformation. They felt they had to be welcoming. Their hearts of stone were already becoming hearts of flesh. Their hearts began beating fast when they saw him take the bread, break it and bless it. Their hearts beat even faster, as they unsuccessfully tried to embrace him, but he had already vanished. *He was now within them*. The journey to and from Emmaus, as well as the experience when the two disciples sat at table with the Risen Christ, mirrors the ecumenical journey. The latter, too, possesses its moments of pessimism and discouragement. Fortunately, it is also marked by moments of Paschal optimism and joy.

Reflecting on the Emmaus experience, the English theologian and author Nicholas Lash, of the University of Cambridge, writes that

at the end of the road, the context is one of hospitality: they invite the stranger in. He is the guest; they are his hosts. At least, this would have been so, in the old language. What they discover, when they are at table, is that it is they, in fact, who are the guests, recipients of hospitality, and that it is he who is the host.⁹

As Lash provocatively affirms, the two disciples have learnt *to speak a new language*. As soon as they recognise their Risen Master, they begin to grasp a new reality, his new presence which transcends space and time. Again here, we may identify this experience of *encounter* and *speaking a new language* as part of the ecumenical challenge and mission of the various Churches and ecclesial communities. Ecumenical gestures often become *transformative and transforming experiences*.

The contrast between the emotional-spiritual experiences of the two journeys in Luke 24 has been highlighted, thus inviting the reader of the Lucan text to re-live the essentials of this gospel pericope. Overwhelmed by joy, the two disciples rushed out of the humble abode and ran to the road, while they shouted: “Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?” (Lk 24:32).” Brother John of Taizé introduces an innovative concept or divine title, that of *the pilgrim God*. In the text by Luke, we see the Risen Christ who could have done things in a differently, and yet who decides *to be a travelling companion* to the two disciples. In other words, borrowing Brother John’s words, we are faced

⁹ Nicholas Lash, *Theology for Pilgrims* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2008), 166.

with *an itinerant God* who encounters human beings, opening for them, and others through them, a future full of promise.¹⁰ Is this not part and parcel of the ecumenical mission of all Christians?

One observes a remarkable turning-point in the narrative. After their eyes—*the eyes of faith*—were opened when they encountered their Risen Master, they became changed persons. They re-embark on a journey—a journey which is physically similar to the previous one, though in an opposite direction, as well as spiritually very diverse. They felt it was their duty not to lose any precious time, and to return once more to the Jerusalem fold. Off they set, back to Jerusalem! It was a journey towards a unity which would soon be re-established and re-experienced. Forgetting they had just made that painful outbound journey from Jerusalem, the two disciples, while putting aside all their previous fear and although it was dark and dangerous to travel, ran with amazing speed. From the passive meandering of pessimism they now rushed forth with surging torrents of optimism. The narrative described in Luke 24 is considered to be one of the best paradigms of all spiritual journeys, as well as of the ecumenical task and mission which is the duty of all Christians. We have tried to identify the different emotional states the disciples were in. Those two physical journeys are an icon of that internal journey of the individual who is thirsting for Christian unity, and striving to overcome the hurdles encountered on the way. It is within this context that we can look at wayfaring and seafaring as a metaphor of the ecumenical journey. What we have seen, in a way, mirrors the experience of the journey from the place where the ecumenical encounter has taken place, when the individual returns to his normal life routine. It is hoped that the participants leave the venue spiritually refreshed and committed to proceed on the ecumenical journey. They are transformed individuals, often full of Christian joy, and abundant in the zeal to serve the Lord and to promote the cause for Christian unity.

The Mediterranean journey of John Henry Newman is indeed a remarkable narrative. On his return journey, somewhere at sea, off the coast of Sardinia, probably when becalmed in the Straights of Bonifacio, on 16th June 1833, Newman expressed his interior state in three brief stanzas. In this poem, *The Pillar of the Cloud*, one is struck, yet again, by the theme of the journey. Newman's long journey, far from home, is a metaphor of that deep interior spiritual struggle he was experiencing. The renowned Newman expert Roderick Strange affirms that the poem "captured poignantly his ex-

¹⁰ See Brother John of Taizé, *The Pilgrim God*, 14-15.

perience of the kindly light which had guided him through darkness when he was far from home: one step was enough; it acknowledged the wilfulness which once had loved to see and choose its own path, but now no longer; it professed hope in the power that would continue to guide him over rough countryside of every kind—moor and fen, crag and torrent – till the night was gone.”¹¹ This is the complete text of the poem which in various ways we can apply to the theme of the journey to, at and from the ecumenical encounter:

Lead, Kindly Light, amidst th' encircling gloom
 Lead Thou me on!
 The night is dark, and I am far from home –
 Lead Thou me on!
 Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
 The distant scene – one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that Thou
 Shouldst lead me on.
 I loved to choose and see my path, but now
 Lead Thou me on!
 I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
 Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
 Will lead me on,
 O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
 The night is gone;
 And with the morn those angel faces smile
 Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.¹²

THE JOURNEY-THEME IN THE APOSTOLIC LETTER *PORTA FIDEI*

One of the recurring themes in the Apostolic Letter which in October 2011 announced the Year of Faith, *Porta Fidei*, is the journey-dimension of the faith experience which is part and parcel of the ecumenical encounter. This is an experience which, when embraced by the individual, is far from

¹¹ Roderick Strange, *John Henry Newman. A Mind Alive* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2010), 114.

¹² John Henry Newman, *Verses on Various Occasions* (London, New York, Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1903, revised 2002), 156-157.

static. Benedict XVI adopts several images to highlight this. In the opening words of the first paragraph of the Apostolic Letter, he affirms:

The ‘door of faith’ (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church. It is possible to cross that threshold when the word of God is proclaimed and the heart allows itself to be shaped by transforming grace. To enter through that door is to set out on a journey that lasts a lifetime.¹³

Pope Benedict invites Christians to undertake a spiritual journey, and he refers to the pivotal image of the Exodus journey, while echoing the homily pronounced during the Mass for the inauguration of his pontificate. He writes: “The Church as a whole and all her Pastors, like Christ, must set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance”.¹⁴ The desert in the Judaeo-Christian tradition is not only the place of aridity and death, but it is, on this account, the place and the experience of dependence upon God who provides protection, nourishment and guidance. Moreover, the desert is the place where one listens unhindered to the word of God. The word for desert in Hebrew, *midbar*, is etymologically related to the word *dabar* which signifies God’s word. Listening to the word of God leads the believer to experience the need of purification, a process to be embraced wholeheartedly and with single-mindedness. We can look at the venue of the ecumenical encounter as *a very special locus*. While seeking to move closer to each other in prayer, in theological dialogue or in common efforts addressed to human promotion, ecumenical partners are treading on holy ground. Furthermore, it is hoped that the desert-experience during the journey to the ecumenical encounter be an interior journey of purification, wherein believers commit themselves or renew their commitment to God and the cause for Christian unity.

The Bavarian Pope continues to dwell on the theme of the journey of faith when he refers to the experience of the Samaritan woman in the fourth chapter of John’s Gospel. Again, one notices that important stimulus to move from stagnation to the life-giving water. One can read the ecumenical journey within this perspective. Benedict XVI affirms that “the people of today can still experience the need to go to the well, like the Samaritan

¹³ Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* (11 October 2011), 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

woman, in order to hear Jesus, who invites us to believe in him and to draw upon the source of living water welling up within him (cfr Jn 4:14)".¹⁵ On his part, Brother John of Taizé affirms that

the image of the journey as a key to the Bible has one great advantage: its dynamic, open-ended character. In addition to corresponding well to the mentality of our time, it enables us to grasp the progressive quality of God's self-revelation, and the dimension of risk, adventure, which is so fundamental to the life of faith. Pilgrimage as understood here is not the movement *toward* faith, conceived of as a static mentality, but on the contrary an aspect of believing itself—as for Abraham, the journey and the risk only begin when one says *yes* to God's call and sets out on the road of the promise.¹⁶

It is in this light that one can continue to unravel this important theme in *Porta Fidei* while applying it to the theme of this study. The dynamic character of the believer's experience in the encounter with Christ is highlighted. The love *of* Christ and *for* Christ propels Christians in a centrifugal experience which leads them to bear witness in society and to be persuasive agents of the New Evangelization. Imbued with love for Christ and for each other, Christians from different Churches and ecclesial communities can bear common witness. Their journey to and from the ecumenical venue is, in itself, part of the witness they are called to transmit in contemporary society.

In *Porta Fidei*, Pope Benedict, echoing the Apostle of the Gentiles, states: “‘*Caritas Christi urget nos*’ (2 Cor 5:14): it is the love of Christ that fills our hearts and impels us to evangelize. Today as in the past, he sends us through the highways of the world to proclaim his Gospel to all the peoples of the earth (cfr Mt 28:19)”.¹⁷ Within this active process, Christians are called to deepen their faith. Those engaged in ecumenical dialogue and fraternity are to be men and women of faith. In fact, the former Pope invites Christians to rediscover and to study afresh the content of the faith,¹⁸ as well as to retrace “the history of our faith, marked as it is by the unfathomable mystery of the interweaving of holiness and sin”.¹⁹ From our present standpoint it is not difficult to see how the history of Christianity has been marked by both holiness and sin. The unfortunate circumstances which led

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁶ Brother John of Taizé, *The Pilgrim God*, 3-4.

¹⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

to divisions among Christians are well known. Yet, despite these ruptures, we are happy to appreciate distinguished signs of holiness in the life of Christians from all quarters. Inspiring saintly figures have graced all Christian communities.

During this on-going encounter and experience of Christ, in the context of ecumenical gatherings, believers are called to proclaim the faith.²⁰ Participating in their encounter with the word of God and his presence in song and prayer, urges Christians to look beyond their personal problems and needs. Listening to the proclaimed word instils within them an irresistible desire to be prophets on the edge of society, truly attentive to the needs of the marginalized. Yet, this type of prophetic existence should not be sombre, since the dedicated Christian, according to St Augustine, ought never to renounce being a messenger of Easter joy:

Alleluia means “Praise the Lord”. So let us praise the Lord, brothers and sisters, with our lives and our tongues, with hearts and mouths, with our voices and our behaviour. That, surely, is how God wants *alleluia* to be sung to him, so that there is no discord in the singer. So first of all let there be harmony in our selves between tongues and lives, between mouths and consciences. Let our voices, I repeat, be in harmony with our behaviour.²¹

THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY IN THE ENCYCLICAL LETTER *LUMEN FIDEI*

The first encyclical by Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, dwells upon the theological virtue of faith and, consequently, upon the faith experience of the believer. The encyclical letter abounds in biblical themes and references to texts which throw light upon the response of the believer to God. Through a careful reading between the lines of this major Papal document, I was happy to discover the theme of the journey. It is very revealing and relevant that the words “journey” and “path” feature in twenty-three paragraphs out of the sixty which one finds in the encyclical.

In the introduction to his encyclical, Pope Francis affirms that “faith, received from God as a supernatural gift, becomes a light for our way,

²⁰ Cfr. *ibid.*, 13.

²¹ Augustine, *Sermon 256,1*, in Augustine, *Sermons 230-272B on the Liturgical Seasons*, ed. John E. Rotelle (New Rochelle: New City Press, 1993), 167.

guiding our journey through time”.²² This is, indeed, the experience of the wayfaring ecumenical pilgrim who, guided by God, travels to that special venue to undergo that special encounter with the Lord in the context of ecumenical prayer, discussion or other common initiatives. The physical experience is, I reiterate, a sign and a symbol of that interior spiritual journey undergone by the believer, or the searching individual ecumenist who is grappling with life’s existential questions. Dwelling upon Abraham’s experience, the Holy Father touches upon the theme of the journey. He talks of a departure from his native land which becomes “a summons to a new life, the beginning of an exodus [...]. Faith ‘sees’ to the extent that it journeys, to the extent that it chooses to enter into the horizons opened up by God’s word”.²³

Throughout this paper we have already seen how the experience at the ecumenical venue, after the journey to this sacred space and the experience undergone by the participants, leads to the new journey, the journey following the transformative experience which should characterize every ecumenical gathering. Again, we are called to read these journeys through the lens of the supernatural experience of grace. These return journeys, too, become interior personal journeys of on-going conversion. Pope Francis explains that faith “enables us to see the luminous path leading to the encounter of God and humanity: the history of salvation”.²⁴ Applying this to the spiritual experience of the journey to, at and from the ecumenical venue, we can say that the fraternal and caring presence of Jesus Christ, the common brother of all Christians, facilitates the fruits of the ecumenical encounter.

Reflecting on the experience of the Magi, as narrated in Matthew’s Gospel, Pope Francis affirms, in *Lumen Fidei*, that for the wise men from the East “God’s light appeared a journey to be undertaken, a star which led them on a path of discovery. [...] Religious man is a wayfarer, he must be ready to let himself be led, to come out of himself and to find the God of perpetual surprises”.²⁵ Isn’t this the experience of the pilgrim-ecumenist to the announced venue? How often we have seen this happen before our eyes! The pilgrim-ecumenist is led to the sacred place which is full of the Lord’s presence whom he encounters: moreover, the Lord never fails to surprise his sons and daughters by what he asks of them, while transforming them and endowing them with graces. This is part of the experience of the common

²² Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei* (29 June 2013), 4.

²³ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

ecumenical journey. *If only all committed ecumenists could see themselves as pilgrims to those special sacred loci where they encounter the Lord and each other in a truly profound way!* Together they are able to undergo this deep spiritual experience of discipleship, transformation and intimacy with the Lord who calls them to unity.

CONCLUSION:
WE ARE ECUMENICAL PILGRIMS JOURNEYING
ALONGSIDE ONE ANOTHER

All journeys have a point of departure and a destination. In this paper, journeys of various kinds have been referred to. In the course of this paper, I have referred to a different sort of journey, one necessitated by the summons to an ecumenical event. This physical journey, as we have seen, is a symbol of the ecumenical journey carried out by many members of the various Christian Churches and ecclesial communities. One is struck by the faith of these ecumenically-committed Christians and their quest for the Transcendent. The double concept of journey, adopted in this paper, leads us to give a new name to the journeys in question. *Each journey becomes a pilgrimage.* Nicholas Lash writes:

Many roads meet at places of pilgrimage. People come from different directions, with different agendas, different dreams, different histories. [...] Like all holy places, places of pilgrimage are microcosmic. What is to be found there is not less than everything: [our very self], our heart's rest, homecoming in God²⁶.

Journeys of all kinds—whether for profane reasons, whether for the sake of discovery, whether for interior or spiritual reasons—entail a passage, an exodus, a movement from a familiar place to, perhaps, an unfamiliar one; journeys entail leaving the safety and comfort of one's home and embarking on a path which may be tortuous, full of perils and uncertain. Yet, very often, there are untold benefits to be reaped. This multi-faceted description also fits the ecumenical journey. The latter asks of ecumenists to leave the cosy comfort and security of their respective Church, and to travel to what is, perhaps, uncharted territory in the area of ecumenical dialogue. This has its risks, as well as its pleasant satisfaction.

²⁶ Lash, *Theology for Pilgrims*, 167.

It was a living, vibrant faith which inspired individuals, over the ages, to embark upon missionary journeys and pilgrimages. Proverbially, we have often exclaimed that faith has moved mountains. If it has moved mountains, it has certainly also moved believers who inspired by their creed seek to embrace eternal values. Values are ideals which like stars we cannot reach with our hands, but which serve to guide us, as the stars, in particular the Northern Pole star, guided the Phoenician seafarers in the Mediterranean Sea, and beyond the Pillars of Hercules and further afield. Faith guides the believer. Faith guides the ecumenist, too. *The ecumenist journeys and prays. The ecumenist prays and experiences enthusiasm. Experiencing enthusiasm, the ecumenist undergoes personal transformation.* This on-going transformation makes the ecumenist a more authentic person. At the same time, far from remaining in stagnant waters, the ecumenist *remains on a journey.* The faith experience of the ecumenist is an on-going journey. An authentic faith experience is never stagnant. This is the profound faith experience which is inextricably joined to the journey to, at and from the ecumenical encounter.

I reiterate that faith possesses this core dimension—the “journey dimension”: *a journey of purification and maturation* from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and from Emmaus back to Jerusalem; *a journey of conversion* from Jerusalem to Damascus in the case of Paul of Tarsus. During a short visit to Rome in January 2013, I was able to visit one of the regular exhibitions organized by the Vatican City State in the Braccio di Carlo Magno of the Bernini Colonnade. It was an exhibition about religious traditions and religious artefacts from the Basilicata region of Italy, made to coincide with the St Peter’s Square Christmas crib which was made by Francesco Artese within a Basilicata setting. One of the captions in the exhibition gave this insightful reflection:

Making a pilgrimage is a true expression of religious sentiment. The sacred journey to a holy place is a penitential experience which implies a desire for purification and for freedom from bonds and possessions in order to discover essentials: answers to inner questions, responses to grief, the desire for love and sharing, and a belief in the intercession of the saints and the “one to whom God denies nothing,” Mary.²⁷

We acknowledge the faith of the humble pilgrim who, against all odds, trudges on, “O’er moor and fen, o’er crag and torrent” (as Newman wrote),

²⁷ Text of a caption in the Exhibition *Basilicata. Tradizioni, Arte e Fede*, Braccio di Carlo Magno, Vatican City, 20 December 2012—3 February 2013 (promossa dalla Regione Basilicata, dall’APT e dalla Soprintendenza per i Beni Storici Artistici ed Etnoantropologici della Basilicata, con il coordinamento della Direzione Regionale per i Beni Culturali e Paesaggistici della Basilicata).

while continuing to ask existential questions and seeking the Transcendent. It is the faith of the committed ecumenist who continues searching for answers, the faith which leads to personal purification and maturity. It is that contagious faith which enflames the hearts of others. *The journey—to the ecumenical encounter, the stay in that revered place, and the journey back home—becomes the epitome and the metaphor of the quest for the Divine and the searching self which seeks to build bridges and discover common ground.* Moreover, it becomes a sign and a symbol of the on-going and forward-oriented ecumenical journey which all Christians have learned to undertake, particularly those committed to ecumenical dialogue and brotherhood.

We must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another. This means that we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicion or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking: the radiant peace of God's face.²⁸

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²⁸ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 244.

PIELGRZYMI I WĘDROWCY DO, W CZASIE
I ZE SPOTKAŃ I ZEBRAŃ EKUMENICZNYCH
ODCZYTANIE TEMATU PODRÓŻY NA, W CZASIE I Z WYDARZEŃ EKUMENICZNYCH
W ŚWIETLE *PORTA FIDEI* I *LUMEN FIDEI*

Streszczenie

Artykuł omawia zagadnienie, które jeszcze nie zostało opracowane. Fizyczne doświadczenia podróży – podróży do spotkania ekumenicznego, zatrzymania się w szczególnych miejscach na modlitwę, dialog albo wspólne inicjatywy i podróż z powrotem do domu – stają się ucieleśnieniem i metaforą poszukiwania Boskiego i poszukiwania siebie, zmierzającego do budowy pomostu i odkrywania wspólnego fundamentu. Ponadto staje się ono znakiem i symbolem nadchodzącej i zorientowanej w przyszłość ekumenicznej podróży, która uczy wszystkich chrześcijan podejmować zobowiązania ekumenicznego dialogu i braterstwa.

Słowa kluczowe: podróż, pielgrzymka, ekumenista, ekumeniczne miejsce, ekumeniczne spotkanie, podróż wiary.