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## The Papal Visit and the Rhetoric of Conciliation: An Epideictic Perspective

Maximilian Dominic Ofori

**Abstract:** Using the epideictic as a hermeneutic entrance, this paper argues that Pope Francis' rhetoric of conciliation during his visit to the United States in September 2015 resonated with a majority of Americans because he identified and consubstantiated with American society, American values, and American people in both word and deed. Casting himself as a brother and friend with profound knowledge of American history and cultural realities, the Holy Father refrained from pontificating and criticizing; rather, he chose the path of fearless dialogue amplified with performative rhetoric.

**Keywords:** *Conciliation, epideictic, Pope Francis, Catholic Church, United States*

### Introduction

This essay examines the religious communication of Pope Francis during his visit to the United States in September 2015. It takes the position that the Holy Father's rhetoric during his visit was one of conciliation as he sought to establish friendship, identification, and goodwill with and among the multiple publics he communicatively engaged, whether they were members of the clergy, lay Catholic Americans, members of Congress, members of the United Nations, immigrants, the homeless, prison inmates, victims of clergy sexual abuse, or ordinary American citizens. As he himself noted consistently during his visit, Pope Francis came to the United States not to judge but to dialogue fearlessly with his own brothers and sisters, immigrants like himself from the same continent, sharing the same hopes and aspirations (Pope Francis, 2015, September 23, "Welcoming Ceremony: Address by the Holy Father"). Judging from surveyed views after the visit, the rhetorical approach adopted by the Pope, a religious leader of a church struggling to reclaim its moral voice in a country where its credibility had been dented following the sexual abuse of minors by its clergy, undoubtedly found resonance with many Americans. Gallup (McCarthy, 2015, October 7), for instance, found that following his visit to the United States, the Pope's favorability rose by 11 percentage points, that is, from 59 per cent in July to 70 per cent in October 2015. This high approval rating of the Holy Father translated into how the Catholic Church was viewed in the country. According to a Pew (2015, October 7) survey, after the Pope's visit to the country, more people (28 per cent) had a much more positive view of the Catholic Church than those (6 per cent) who had a negative view. The question one might, therefore, ask is this: How was Pope Francis able to persuade his American audience with his rhetoric of conciliation?

To answer this question, the paper begins with the presupposition that in the Judeo-Christian imagination words are powerful. As Fr. Timothy Radcliffe succinctly puts it, "At the heart of Catholicism and indeed of the Jewish and Christian tradition, is a belief in the immense power of words" (as cited in Allen, 2004, p. 76). This dynamism

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in words is manifested in the economy of salvation, including in creation, the Incarnation, and the sacraments of the Church. "So it follows that one cannot bandy words around irresponsibly" (Radcliffe, as cited in Allen, 2004, p. 76). Therefore, the rhetoric of the head of the Roman Catholic Church at any point in time, but especially on his apostolic journeys, is never a mere public relations stunt; rather, it is invested with the specific intentionality and vision, both of the communicator and the ecclesial community he represents. Such a perspective was certainly true of Pope Francis' rhetoric during his visit to the United States of America from September 23 to 27, 2015.

The present essay argues that the Pope's discursive success makes sense if looked at through the prism of epideictic rhetoric, a rhetoric that appealed to American values, American hopes, and American aspirations. What is left of the paper begins with a look at the background and context of Pope Francis' visit. It then examines the constructs of conciliation and the genre of epideictic rhetoric. Further, the paper demonstrates how through the themes of identification and consubstantiation in his epideictic rhetorical dance at several public events in the United States, the Pope successfully sold his message of conciliation. The essay concludes by highlighting the key points of Pope Francis' rhetoric of conciliation and its implications for religious communication.

### **Background and Context of the Pope's Visit**

Since his election in 2013, Pope Francis has sought to give a new image and direction to the world's largest Christian denomination through his example of humility, simplicity, and preferential option for the poor, the marginalized, and social outcasts, be they prisoners, divorcees, or gays and lesbians (Francis, 2015, *Laudato si'*; 2016; Formicola, 2015). As the head of the Catholic Church, he has advocated for a compassionate ecclesial community, one that is non-judgmental, welcoming, and open to dialogue. For Pope Francis, dialogic engagement with the Other is critical for the Catholic Church's pastoral ministry. In a co-authored work, he conceptualizes dialogue as a communicative encounter between two equals, the exchange of perspectives, and the open embrace of the self and the Other (Francis & Skorka, 2013, p. xiv). In dialogue, we suspend judgment of our communicative partner in order to listen and learn. Yet to dialogue is to make oneself vulnerable to the Other, as it involves lowering one's defenses; it is being open to whatever a communicative encounter will throw in one's way, knowing that the self will come out better and richer (Francis & Skorka, 2013, p. xiv). This perspective re-echoes John Paul II's (1995) view that "Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some ways, it is always an 'exchange of gifts'" (#28). Conceptualized as a gift, dialogue then becomes a process by which participants seek to realize their authentic selves in the act of self-giving (John Paul, 1995, #28).

Besides his dialogic perspective, Pope Francis' criticism of capitalist culture provided further context to his visit to the United States. Specifically, since his election, the Holy Father has persistently denounced capitalism as an oppressive economic system. Just before his visit to the United States, for example, Pope Francis showed his low regard for unfettered capitalism when he referred to it in Bolivia as "the dung of the devil" (Agencies, 2015, July 10). Such agonistic rhetoric toward capitalism and wealth drew the ire of business owners and the conservative league of the Catholic Church in America, groups that accused the Pope of aligning himself with liberals or the political left (Sorantino, 2016, November 1). This conservative, cooperate frustration reached a

new crescendo following the publication of the papal encyclical *Laudato Si'* (*On the Care of our Common Home*), in which Pope Francis (2015) acknowledged the existential reality of global warming and accordingly argued for the need to use the earth's resources judiciously. Though well received by many Americans, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, *Laudato Si'* was nevertheless read by right-wing groups as a clear attempt by the Holy Father to dabble in partisan politics (see Sorantino, 2016, November 1).

Also, the Holy Father came to the United States at a time when the world was witnessing unprecedented migration crisis in Europe and North America. In the wake of such a crisis, the Pope had strongly urged host countries to treat migrants humanely, pointing out that these outsiders ultimately enriched the cultural realities of those who welcomed them.

Thus, undoubtedly, before Pope Francis set foot to the United States in September 2015, expectations of his rhetoric were both high and mixed. The question that many people were asking in anticipation of the papal visit was this: What kind of rhetoric would the Pope bring to America? Some were particularly apprehensive about the prospect of the Holy Father's speech to Congress. The Rev. Thomas Reese, for example, reflected this apprehension when he said, "I think Boehner was out of his mind to invite the Pope to speak to Congress.... Can you imagine what the Republicans will do when he says, 'You've got to do something about global warming?'" (Davenport & Goodstein, 2015, July 6).

Furthermore, the Pope came to the country at a time when the Catholic Church continued to be perceived negatively as a result of its clergy sexual abuse of minors and its official cover-up. Many Americans were disgusted by the fact that bishops had not been held accountable for their failure to protect innocent children and vulnerable members of the Church from predatory priests. For activist groups like Survivors Network for Those Abused by Priests (SNAP) (2013), the Church was a criminal organization that preyed on innocent children with impunity. Therefore, the challenge the Pope faced on his first visit to the United States was how to cast a positive image of himself and the Church he heads.

### Rhetoric of Conciliation and the Epideictic Perspective

What does the word "conciliation" in the phrase "rhetoric of conciliation" mean? This essay conceptualizes conciliation as a synonym of "goodwill," which translates the Greek *eunoia*, an important construct in Aristotelian rhetorical theory. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle (353 BCE/2004) defines goodwill as a speaker's expression of good disposition toward his or her audience (1.15). As he points out, "rhetorical persuasion is effected not only by demonstrative but by ethical argument; it helps a speaker to convince us, if we believe that he has certain qualities himself, namely, goodness, or goodwill towards us, or both together" (Aristotle, 353 BCE/2004, 1.10). Put differently, to have goodwill as a speaker is to share with one's audience the same emotional response to something. For instance, to incite an audience toward an enemy, "the speaker will have to speak so as to bring his hearers into a frame of mind that will dispose them to anger...." (Aristotle, 353 BCE/2004, 2.40). Aristotle (353 BCE/2004) further states that when audience members "feel friendly to the man who comes before them for judgment, they regard him as having done little wrong, if any; when they feel hostile, they take the opposite view" (2.5). Similarly, Isocrates (353 BCE/2000) in his *Antidosis* imagines goodwill as a speaker's expression of grace and benevolence toward his or her audience. The audience

in turn reciprocates by judging the speaker considerately. As he puts it, "If you gratify people, they judge everything you do not according to how things actually are but in whatever way helps your case; they will overlook your mistakes..." (Isocrates, 353 BCE/2000, 15.134).

Therefore, rhetoric of conciliation as used in this essay refers to a discursive enterprise that seeks to mend broken relationships, that offers friendship, and/or that seeks to resolve differences between disputing parties. Significantly, then, the goal of the rhetoric of conciliation is to establish peaceful co-existence among groups in society and, thus, ultimately to ensure social integration. Applied to the papal visit in 2015, one can argue that Pope Francis's communication was essentially about extending a hand of friendship to his multiple audiences: it was about identifying with them; it was about placating them; and it was about reconciling various groups within American society.

Aristotle (353 BCE/2004), in his *Rhetoric*, categorizes the epideictic as one of the three genres of rhetoric. Also known as ceremonial oratory, epideictic rhetoric, in an Aristotelian sense, is purposed either to praise or blame in the present moment "since all men praise or blame in view of the state of things existing at the time, though they often find it useful also to recall the past and to make guesses at the future" (Aristotle, 353 BCE/2004, 13558b20). In other words, although epideictic situates what is praiseworthy or blameworthy in the present, it nevertheless refers to the past even as it points to the future (see Zeytinoglou, 2008). As display rhetoric, the epideictic requires an audience to observe (*theoria*) a speaker's discursive performance. Still, the epideictic involves some kind evaluative judgment or critical analysis on the part of "the onlookers" or *theoroi* (Aristotle, 353 BCE/2004, 1391b17-18; see also Zeytinglou, 2008; Villadsen, 2008). Walker (1996) understands this kind of evaluative judgment not as "rulings but [a] form of opinions about and in response to the discourse presented" (p. 254; see also Walker, 2000; 1996; Villadsen, 2008).

Moreover, recent scholars have expanded the original understanding of the epideictic as mere display to include a socio-cultural function. Expounding on such a function by the epideictic, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) teach us that it is meant to secure audience adherence to communal values. As they put it,

...the argumentation in epideictic discourse sets out to increase the intensity of adherence to certain values, which might not be contested when considered on their own but may nevertheless not prevail against other values that might come into conflict with them. The speaker tries to establish a sense of communion centered around particular values recognized by the audience, and to this end he uses the whole range of means available to the rhetorician for purposes of amplification and enhancement. (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, p. 51; see also Schandorf, 2015, p. 20)

Thus, the goal of the epideictic goes beyond mere praise or blame. To secure audience adherence to common values, a speaker must employ persuasive arguments, ones that require the active communicative engagement of listeners. Audience members are likely to buy into a speaker's epideictic arguments if they are grounded in values listeners share with him or her. Such a reading means that for Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969), the *theoroi* or audience of the epideictic are not passive onlookers. Rather, they are active communicative partners, who must be persuaded (see Graff & Winn, 2006, pp. 49-50;

see also Condit, 1985; Jost, 2004, p. 318).). By securing audience adherence to communal values, epideictic rhetoric “maintain[s] normative ideological structures” of society, even as it “comprises the process of ‘social construction,’ including the continual dynamic recreation of shared values and beliefs, and the active relational co-construction of ‘speaker’ and ‘audience’” (Schandorf, 2015, p. 15). Epideictic rhetoric thus serves as the fulcrum around which society and its values revolve. Through this genre of rhetoric, community members obtain a clear sense of their identity and build a solid worldview that guides their moral choices (Walker, 1996).

Furthermore, epideictic rhetoric “defines [communal] values [themselves] and thus defines community” (Carter, 1992, p. 306). This definitional role of the epideictic, in the view of Carter (1992), emerges from its essence as discursive display. As he writes, “The root of *to display* means to unfold, to spread out, to reveal. Epideictic, when it is shifted from its individual to its communal connotations, is a discourse that community uses to reveal itself to itself” (Carter, 1992, p. 306). Carter (1992) goes on to say that because identity as a construct is constantly undergoing changes, the epideictic as a genre is usually employed to reveal communal identity (p. 307). Therefore, epideictic discourse “establishes, shapes, and reinforces *theoria*, a communal way of seeing, which channels social identification and consubstantiality into a way of behaving and acting” (Schandorf, 2015, p. 20). As a genre that seeks to build identification and consubstantiality among communal members, the epideictic “is a rhetoric of being and becoming, shaping the possibilities of the future, based on a rhetorically remembered past, which generated and justified by the present, affectively enacted and propagated way of seeing and acting together—a way of being” (Schandorf, 2015, p. 20).

Besides, scholars note that beyond arguments purposed to secure audience adherence to communal values, epideictic rhetoric works well when a speaker establishes goodwill with audience (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; Sullivan, 1993, p. 126). Indeed, to be able to achieve his or her aim of sharing communal values, a speaker, must enjoy the goodwill of audience members and as well have a good reputation because “In the epideictic, more than in any other kind of oratory, the speaker must have qualifications for speaking on his [or her] subject and must also be skillful in its presentation, if he [or she] is not to appear ridiculous” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 52). In other words, character and qualifications are critical to the successful performance of epideictic rhetoric.

Yet, for Burke (1969), the notion that epideictic rhetoric constructs communal identification and consubstantiation simultaneously foregrounds division. As he remarked, “to begin with ‘identification’ is, by the same token...to confront the implication of *division*” (Burke, 1969, p. 22). Sharing a similar perspective, Perelman posits that communion is “compensatory” to “intractable separation” (as cited in Graff & Winn, 2006, p. 65). What this reality means is that “the positive, combinatory, consubstantiating, and synthetic function [of epideictic rhetoric] allows for the analytic ‘craving of reality at its proper joints’ and the establishment of conceptual and ideological boundaries in the mutually constitutive dynamics of orthodoxies and heresies” (Sullivan, 1991, as cited by Schandorf, 2015, p. 27). Schandorf (2015) restates this point clearly in this way: “As epideictic enacts the affirmative centripetal forces of inclusive, normative constitution and discipline, it also and simultaneously enacts the subversive centrifugal forces that separates orthodoxy and heresy in identification-building through exclusion, blame, condemnation, and invective” (p. 28; see also Condit, 1985; Sullivan, 1993b;

Engels, 2009). In other words, even as the epideictic unifies groups sharing common values, it simultaneously drives a wedge between groups with different worldviews; epideictic rhetoric, therefore, embraces the dialectic of inclusivity and exclusivity.

Thus, the epideictic perspective, that will serve as the hermeneutic entrance for understanding the rhetorical dance of Pope Francis during his visit to the United States of America in September 2015, has the following distinguishing characteristics: (1) It is ceremonial oratory situated within present circumstances and yet appeals to a community's past and looks into the future; (2) It praises and blames on the basis of communal standards; (3) It secures adherence to communal values, using persuasive arguments that have communal resonance; (4) It defines communal values and communal identity; (5) It foregrounds the dialectic of identification/consubstantiation and division, or inclusion and exclusion; and (6) It is persuasive when employed by a rhetor with sound moral values and appropriate qualifications.

### **Pope Francis' Rhetoric of Conciliation through the Optics of Epideictic Rhetoric**

This section uses epideictic rhetoric as a hermeneutic entrance into the Holy Father's rhetoric of conciliation during his visit to the United States in September 2015. It posits that the overarching theme or metaphor of the papal rhetoric under consideration was that of "being with" and its varied synonyms, including "identifying with," "sharing with," "close to," and "dialoging with." The paper argues that the Holy Father's rhetoric of conciliation resonated with many Americans because he identified with his American hosts, upon whom he called as fellow communal members to respect and embrace the values that define "the land of the free and the home of the brave," as well as the values of our common humanity (as cited in Pope Francis, 2015, September 23, "Welcoming Ceremony: Address by the Holy Father"). The section is made up of two subsections, with the first part examining representative ceremonial speeches and the second focusing on events that brought out the performative dimension of the Pope's conciliatory rhetoric.

### **Papal Speeches during Visit to the United States**

#### *Welcoming Ceremony at the White House*

Pope Francis set the tone of his rhetoric of conciliation in his very first public communication upon arriving in the United States on September 23, 2015. Responding to President Obama's welcome address, Pope Francis began by thanking the American people and identifying with their immigrant roots. As he said, "As the son of an immigrant family, I am happy to be a guest in this country, which was largely built by such families" (Pope Francis, 2015, September 23, "Welcoming Ceremony: Address of the Holy Father"). Precisely because he had come to his own, the Holy Father promised not to pontificate over doctrinal and social issues, but rather to dialogue: "I look forward to these days of encounter and dialogue, in which I hope to listen to, and share, many of the hopes and dreams of the American people" (2015, September 23, "Welcoming Ceremony: Address of the Holy Father"). With these words, the Pope signaled his preparedness to be with the American people as equals in the communication arena where he would not only talk to his fellow immigrants, but also listen to them and share in their hopes and dreams. To deepen the bond that he shared with his hosts further, the Holy Father also referred to himself as a brother of the American people: "During my visit I will have the honor of addressing Congress, where I hope, as a brother of this

country, to offer words of encouragement to those called to guide the nation's political future in fidelity to its founding principles" (Pope Francis, 2015, September 23). By speaking in this way, the Roman Pontiff, who, before his arrival in the United States, had been critical of American capitalism, appeared to extend a hand of friendship to his hosts and commit to aligning himself with Congress in order to encourage it to continue to guide the nation based on *The U. S. Constitution*. Thus, the Pope at the very beginning of his visit sought to allay the fears expressed in the media that he was coming to the country to criticize and condemn.

Moreover, as a brother and supporter of the American people, Pope Francis complimented President Obama on two key policies of his administration, namely, efforts to reduce air pollution and America's rapprochement with Cuba. Firstly, by praising the President on these two important policies, the Holy Father identified with the Obama administration. What was significant about the papal commendation was that before his visit the Holy Father had issued an encyclical on the need to take good care of the earth (see Francis, 2015, *Laudato Si'*). Therefore, singling out the administration's policy on environmental protection for commendation was the Pope's way of saying he was *with* the American people. Secondly, Pope Francis was claimed to have played a crucial role in restoring diplomatic ties between the United States and Cuba (Korte & Dorell, 2014, December 17; Squires, 2015, September 18; *Associated Press*, 2015, September 19). This rapprochement between the two countries, in the view of the Pope, would benefit not only their respective peoples but also the rest of the world. As he told Obama, "Mr. President, the efforts which was recently made to mend broken relationships and to open new doors to cooperation within our human family represent positive steps along the path of reconciliation, justice and freedom" (Pope Francis, 2015, September 23). If it can be argued that America needs friends and not enemies around the world, then the Holy Father's encouragement and praise of the Obama administration for pursuing the path of reconciliation with Cuba clearly showed how during his visit to the country he identified with America's interest. Moreover, the values (namely, reconciliation, justice, and freedom) engendered by goodwill among the nations of the world are certainly ones that have always resonated with the American people. Therefore, by identifying them as the payoff for mending the broken relationship between the United States and Cuba, Pope Francis was effectively aligning himself with the American people, his brothers and sisters, fellow immigrants.

Finally, as the universal head of the Catholic Church, the Pope in his remarks at the White House identified with American Catholics, applauding them for their tremendous social services in the country and exemplary citizenship. Like other Americans, American Catholics have always sought to promote a free democratic society, one "which is truly tolerant and inclusive, [committed] to safeguarding the rights of individuals and communities and to rejecting every form of unjust discrimination" (Pope Francis, 2015, September 23, "Welcoming Ceremony: Address of the Holy Father"). Considering the fact that the American Catholic Church was still perceived negatively by many Americans over a decade after the clergy sexual abuse crisis, the Holy Father's commendation of Catholics' role in sustaining the country's democratic culture was rhetorically strategic. It was an attempt to highlight the crucial role the Catholic Church had historically played in American society (see Carey, 2004). As patriotic and law-abiding American citizens, Catholics in the country have always embraced the quintessential American values of inclusivity, equal rights, and justice. Hence, by standing

with Catholics in the country, the Pope was essentially standing with Americans in general, even as he was inviting the people of the country, represented by the President, to reconsider their perception of the Catholic Church and its children.

*Homily*

In a homily at a Mass in New York, Pope Francis's rhetoric of conciliation came through his knowledge of both the redeeming qualities and challenging elements of urban life. Speaking of the beauty of urban life, the Pope noted,

...big cities are a reminder of the hidden riches present in our world: in the diversity of its cultures, traditions and historical experiences. In the variety of its languages, costumes and cuisine. Big cities bring together all the different ways which we human beings have discovered the meaning of life, wherever we may be. (Pope Francis, 2015, September 25, "Homily at Madison Square, New York")

Despite these beautiful qualities of the City of New York, though, one could not ignore the sufferings of so many of its residents. Like millions of other urban dwellers, many people in New York City have lost their uniqueness as human beings. As Francis (2015, September 25, "Homily at Madison Square, New York") put it, "big cities also conceal the faces of all those people who don't appear to belong, or are second-class citizens." These second-class citizens are mainly foreigners, children, the "forgotten elderly," and the homeless who go around the city unnoticed because they have no right to be there (Pope Francis, 2015, September 25, "Homily at Madison Square, New York"). Because they have no legitimate right to be in the city, the urban poor are denied the most basic necessities of life, namely housing, medical care, education, and insurance. Thus, instead of forming an integral part of the City of New York, "These people stand at the edges of our great avenues, in our streets, in deafening anonymity. They become part of an urban landscape which is more and more taken for granted, in our eyes, and especially in our hearts" (Francis, 2015, September 25, "Homily at Madison Square, New York"). Yet these nameless millions, walking the streets of New York, are not alone. The Triune God always reaches out to them and embraces them, bringing them home to Himself. The Church, the Bride of Christ, also stands at the side of these people living on the margins of society to announce "the marvels of the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Eternal Father, the Prince of Peace" (Francis, 2015, September 25, "Homily at Madison Square, New York").

Clearly, the key coordinates of the Pope's rhetoric of conciliation in the homily he gave at the Mass in the City of New York were the following: (1) recognition of the subjectivity and uniqueness of the nameless people living in all the cities of the country; and (2) a call on Americans, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, to embrace the ethic of care, especially, that of caring for the poor and needy in society. By recognizing the dignity of the marginalized and calling upon society to support them, the Pope was pursuing the path conciliation in society. Besides, looked at from an epideictic perspective, these coordinates are consistent with American cultural values and Catholic social doctrines (see Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005; Lakoff, 2006; Feulner, 2012; Murray, 2013). By validating such American cultural values and traditions and offering them to his audience to embrace, the Pope was calling upon his audience

to incarnate their own communal values as moral compasses that must guide them in the present historical moment and lead them into the future.

*Speech to Congress*

One of the highlights of the Pope's visit was his address to a joint session of the Congress on September 24, 2015, in Washington, DC. As was typical of the tone and tenor of all his speeches during his visit to the United States, this speech, characterized by sophisticated rhetorical moves, was memorable for its friendly overtures to members of the Congress as well as its promotion of conciliation among the different segments of society. Hence, the overarching themes of the speech included inclusivity, companionship, commonalty, and unity as the Holy Father addressed issues of liberty, equality, justice, and dialogue within American society. The Roman Pontiff both elevated these themes as quintessential American values and called upon his audience to embrace them.

To underscore the epideictic nature of this speech, the Holy Father began by expressing common identity with the members of Congress, people he referred to as coming from "the land of the free and the home of the brave" (as cited in Francis, 2015, September 24, "Address to the Congress of the United States"). By referencing the "Star Spangled Banner," the Pope sought to focus his audience's attention on the values that define America, namely liberty and resilience (see Casanova, 1992; Prager, 2013; Roark *et al.*, 2016). Then, employing an inclusive language, Francis (2015, September 24) identified with his audience thus: "I would like to think that the reason for this is that I too am a son of this great continent, from which we have all received so much and toward which we share a common responsibility" ("Address to the Congress of the United States"). The common bond the Pope shared with members of the Congress emanated from his coming from the same continent as they did. Hence, as a brother, his responsibilities were no different from those of the members of the Congress. As the people's representatives, the members of the Congress were responsible for passing laws that would ensure national growth and for defending and protecting the basic rights and dignity of every American. The continued existence and legitimacy of the Congress, the Pope argued, was contingent on its ability to discharge these responsibilities. Accordingly, he reminded the Congress, "A political society endures when it seeks as a vocation, to satisfy common needs by stimulating the growth of all members, especially those in situations of greater vulnerability or risk. Legislative activity is always based on care for the people" (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Address to the Congress of the United States").

Because he had come to address the Congress as a brother, Pope Francis decided to ground his communication in dialogue, that is, a conversation among equals. This papal dialogic communication was to involve not only Congress but also "many thousands of men and women" across the country, the elderly, and the youth (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Address to the Congress of the United States"). Each of these discursive partners was important to American society as each embodied an aspect of American values. Active American workers, for example, are defined by a certain determination "to do an honest day's work, to bring home their daily bread, to save money and—one step at a time—to build a better life for their families" (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Address to the Congress of the United States"). In other words, the ordinary American contributes more to society than merely paying taxes. According to

Pope Francis (2015, September 24, "Address to the Congress of the United States), such Americans "generate solidarity by their actions, and they create organizations which offer a helping hand to those in need." Similarly, through their experience, wisdom, and generosity, the elderly enrich American society. Also, the Pope wanted to dialogue with American youth because of their high aspirations and ideals.

Consistent with his dialogic objective, the Pope avoided pontificating on the values of liberty, equality, justice, and dialogue; rather, he plumbed American historical memory to demonstrate how these four values are deeply rooted in American society. Specifically, Pope Francis recounted how four iconic American figures, namely, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., Thomas Merton, and Dorothy Day embodied respectively the values of liberty, equality, justice, and dialogue. The Holy Father argued that because Americans continue to honor the four figures, they should embrace the values by which the four lived.

Elaborating on liberty as an important American social value, for example, Pope Francis (2015, September 24) noted that the logic of individual freedom imposed on all Americans the value of "love of the common good and cooperation in a spirit of subsidiarity and solidarity" ("Address to the Congress of the United States"). Of course, in a world threatened by "violent conflict, hatred, and atrocities," there was always the natural tendency to reduce reality to the binary opposition between good and evil. This temptation was one that should be avoided at all costs. In the view of the Holy Father, the present challenge caused by conflict, hatred, and atrocities called for a delicate balance in any attempt to provide a fitting response. In other words, "A delicate balance is required to combat violence perpetrated in the name of a religion, an ideology or an economic system, while safeguarding religious freedom, and individual freedoms" (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Address to the Congress"). To protect the liberty that Lincoln promoted and for which he paid the ultimate price, American society must fight "every form of polarization" that sought to split the world into two camps. Such a fight required respect for the rule of law and high ethical standards to distinguish American society from its enemies. As the Pope put it, "To imitate the hatred and violence of tyrants and murderers is the best way to take their place. That is something which you, as a people, reject" (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Address to the Congress").

In the face of violence and hatred, America's response must be "one of hope and healing, of peace and justice" (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Address to the Congress of the United States). In other words, the challenges facing the United States of America invited a response that aimed "at restoring hope, righting wrongs, maintaining commitments, and thus promoting the well-being of individuals and of peoples" (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Address to the Congress"). Such an endeavor required the joint efforts of all Americans, who "must come forward, as one, in a renewed spirit of fraternity and solidarity, cooperating generously for the common good" (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Address to the Congress"). The Pope explained the rationale for calling for such a unified response to the challenges of hatred and violence in society this way:

The challenges facing us today call for a renewal of that spirit of cooperation, which has accomplished so much good throughout the history of the United States. The complexity, the gravity and the urgency of these challenges demand that we pool our resources and talents, and resolve to support one

another, with respect for our differences and our convictions of conscience. (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Address to the Congress"; see de Tocqueville, 1835 & 1840/2003)

Here, the Pope's argument seemed to be that cooperation in the face of challenges had always been an American value. Through cooperation, the United States as a country had achieved a lot, a point supported by history. Hence, faced with present existential challenges, Americans as a people must unite. Cooperation and unity are part of an American value system, and, hence, must be embraced by the Congress and the American people at large.

In the past, religious and political actors pulled their resources together to address existential challenges and make society stronger. Such a historical precedent justified the present call by a religious organization like the Catholic Church that slavery and all forms of injustices be eliminated from society. In the opinion of the Holy Father, the Church's call today, like that of the historical past, "is a voice of fraternity and love, which tries to bring out the best in each person and in each society" (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Address to the Congress"). Such an argument sought to persuade the Congress that the Pope's rhetoric of conciliation must not be perceived as an interference of the religious leader of the single most dominant Christian denomination, but as evidence of the Holy Father's profound commitment to the historical memory of the American people.

The call for individual liberty today, however, must not be left to religious organizations like the Catholic Church. In fact, the democratic culture of the United States imposes on members of the Congress the imperative to ensure that present-day slavery and injustices in different forms be all eliminated. To that end, Pope Francis (2015, September 24) argued that "All political activity must serve and promote the good of the human person and be based on respect for his or her dignity" ("Address to the United States Congress"). This reasoning has its backing in the opening lines of the document of *The Declaration of Independence* issued on July 4, 1776: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" (as cited in Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Address to the United States Congress"). These words underscore the reality that in a democratic society like the United States politics must serve and advance human needs. For that objective to be realized, all must work together. As the Pope clearly expressed it, because politics by its nature is ordered to meet the needs of the human person, it should not be subordinated to market forces. Rather, politics must be "an expression of our compelling need to live as one, in order to build as one the great common good," a reality that forecloses insularity and inequality but necessitates collective care and equality (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Address to the United States Congress"). Because Abraham Lincoln, considered America's greatest president, embraced this politics of compromise, of reaching across the aisle to get things done, the present Congress, a group with profound respect for the memory of Lincoln, if it was determined to improve the socio-economic conditions of the country, could not continue the culture of gridlock in Washington. Members must banish divisiveness and, instead, build coalition and consensus, values synonymous with Lincoln.

Pope Francis also appealed to the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. as he urged the Congress to enact laws that would protect the rights of immigrants within the

United States. He reminded the legislators of how the civil rights icon led the march from Selma to Montgomery in his fight for equal rights for African Americans. In the view of the Holy Father, the dream that drove Martin Luther King to fight for justice and equality was still alive at the time of his speech. In his words, "That dream continues to inspire us all. I am happy that America continues to be, for [every human person], a land of 'dreams'" (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Address to the United States Congress"). Moreover, for the Pope, Martin Luther King's dream was not for only Americans; rather, it was a dream for all humanity, including himself. A dream like that of Martin Luther King's certainly finds resonance even today because it still drives every human person to act, to participate in, and to commit to justice and equality in society. Such a rhetorical move was critical in the Pope's discursive engagement with the Congress, as it legitimated his advocacy for immigrant rights in the country.

Immigrants, the Pope observed, were streaming to the United States in great numbers, causing major concerns among a majority of Americans, including the Congress. Yet Americans should not be afraid of these immigrants, knowing that they themselves descended from immigrants who came to the country in search of a better life. As he put it, "We, the people of this continent, are not fearful of foreigners, because most of us were once foreigners. I say this to you as the son of immigrants, knowing that so many of you are also descended from immigrants" (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Address to the United States Congress"). As people with an immigrant heritage, Americans must not be overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of immigrants coming to their country from especially South America. Instead, Americans must recognize the unique humanity of each immigrant and be willing to "view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation" (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Address to the United States Congress"). Such papal communication clearly sought to establish a friendly relationship between Americans and immigrants, as it exhorted the former to be present to, to be with, and to be attentive to the latter in ways only friends might do. Importantly, too, the inclusive language of the Pope suggested by his use of the pronoun "we" in "as best *we* can to their situation" (emphasis added) underscored his clear identification with the American people. In other words, he was asking them to do what he himself as their friend and brother would do.

For Pope Francis, viewing immigrants as persons, seeing their faces, and listening to their stories would be Americans' way of treating them humanely, justly, and like brothers and sisters. These three coordinates, in the view of the Roman Pontiff, were arguably the elements constituting the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Mt. 7:12, as cited in Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Address to the United States Congress"). Expounding on the Golden Rule, the Pope noted it was incumbent upon Americans to extend to others the same treatment they wished for themselves. Thus, "[I]f we want security, let us give security; if we want life, let us give life; if we want opportunities let us provide opportunities" (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Address to the United States Congress"). Americans should see immigrants through the eyes of Martin Luther King, who died fighting for justice, equity, and mutual respect. As a country that privileges equality of all persons, the United States could not treat immigrants any differently than its citizens.

Additionally, the Pope called on the Congress to protect the poor and marginalized in society. In making this case, he appealed to the memory of Dorothy Day,

an American Catholic who founded the Catholic Worker Movement in 1932. Day is considered an American icon because she used her faith to transform society. As the Pope reminded the Congress, “Her social activism, her passion for justice and for the cause of the oppressed, were inspired by the Gospel, her faith, and the example of the saints” (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, “Address to the United States Congress”). In spite of the progress made in the fight against poverty, however, the Pope believed much more still needed to be done, a view he claimed he shared with the Congress and many Americans. In the spirit of Dorothy Day, Americans must not abandon the poor in society; instead, they should extend a spirit of solidarity toward the poor. Such solidarity with the poor must consist in “courageous actions and strategies” that would lead to the realization of “a ‘culture of care’” and “an integrated approach to combatting poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature” (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, “Address to the United States Congress”; see also *Laudato Si'*, 231, 139).

Finally, Pope Francis addressed the issue of dialogue among cultures and religions. Here, the Holy Father appealed once more to yet another iconic figure in American historical memory. Thomas Merton, an American Trappist monk, offered the Roman Pontiff a way to make the argument for dialogue among cultures and religions. For the Pope, Thomas Merton “remains a source of spiritual inspiration and a guide for many people. He was also a man of dialogue, a promoter of peace between peoples and religions” (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, “Address to the United States Congress”). From the perspective of Merton, dialogue could be conceptualized as the process of resolving “historic differences” between nations, the Pope argued (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, “Address to the United States Congress”). Drawing on the meaning of his title “pontiff,” that is, “bridge,” he obliquely suggested the reason he supported the Obama administration’s efforts to restore diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba. As he said, “It is my duty to build bridges and to help all men and women in any way possible to do the same” (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, “Address to the United States Congress”; see also Welcoming Ceremony”). Dialogue between countries that had been historical enemies was commendable, as it opened the door to new opportunities. Such dialogue was also commendable because only the daring and courageous could pursue it. Hence political leaders who spearheaded dialogue between countries like the leaders of the United States and Cuba did must be lauded. For the Pope, “A good political leader is one who, with the interests of all in mind, seizes the moment in a spirit of openness and pragmatism. A good political leader always opts to initiate processes rather than possessing spaces” (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, “Address to the United States Congress”).

Clearly the Pope went to the Congress intent on exhorting members to embrace the quintessential American values of liberty, plurality and inclusivity, social justice, and dialogue. To achieve this objective, he epideictically appealed to Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day, and Thomas Merton, iconic American figures who embodied the values of liberty, plurality and inclusivity, social justice, and dialogue respectively. By incarnating these values, the four personalities transformed American society and made it great. Americans living in the twenty-first century could not therefore abandon the values of liberty, plurality, social justice, and dialogue. As the Pope forcefully argued,

A nation can be considered great when it defends liberty as Lincoln did, when it fosters a culture which enables people to 'dream' of full rights for all their brothers and sisters as Martin Luther King sought to do, when it strives for justice and the cause of the oppressed as Dorothy Day did by her tireless work, the fruit of a faith which becomes dialogue and sows peace in the contemplative style of Thomas Merton. (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Address to the United States Congress")

In this way, the Pope's rhetoric of conciliation to the Congress was one grounded in the historical memory of Americans. History provides enough evidence that America's exalted position among the community of nations resulted from values embodied by iconic American figures, personalities that the country's citizens identify with today. Francis' rhetoric thus sought to secure adherence to American values, values that constitute them into an exceptional community distinct from other communities (see de Tocqueville, 1835 & 1840/2003; Murray, 2013; see also Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; Hauser, 1999).

### **Performative Dimension of Pope Francis' Rhetoric of Conciliation**

Pope Francis' rhetoric of conciliation was not all verbal communication; rather, it had a performative dimension to it. Here performativity is used, not strictly in a Butlerian sense (see Butler, 1990), but to imply how Francis acted out his rhetoric of friendship. Through his communicative performativity consisting in his visiting and interacting with such specific groups as prison inmates, immigrants, personnel of the United Nations, and victims of the clergy sexual abuse, the Pope gave concrete symbolic expression to his rhetoric of goodwill and friendship. Moreover, Francis's visit to the 9/11 Memorial in New York powerfully communicated his respect for victims and their families, as well as expressed his solidarity with the American people. The significance of each visit could be located not so much in what he said as what he did.

To give concrete expression to his rhetoric of conciliation, Pope Francis not only called on American society to care for its homeless (see 2015, September 25, "Homily at Madison Square, New York"; 2015, September 24, "Address to the United States Congress"), but he also actually *visited with* a group of homeless people at the Charitable Center of St. Patrick's Parish, New York. Expressing his appreciation for the opportunity given him to interact with them, the Holy Father thanked the homeless and the staff of the facility for the efforts they put into making the meeting possible and the warm welcome accorded him. In return for their generosity, the Pope offered the homeless words of encouragement and support. He noted that while homelessness was unacceptable and unjust, his hosts must face the challenges of life like Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, did. Referencing the Infancy Narrative of Luke, the Evangelist (see Luke 2), the Holy Father noted how Joseph and his wife, Mary, had "no shelter, no home, no place to stay" at the time Jesus was born (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Visit to the Charitable Center of St. Patrick Parish and Meeting with the Homeless: Greeting of the Holy Father"). Faced with such a difficult situation, Joseph relied on God for support. His faith in God gave him a positive outlook on life. "Faith sustained him amid the troubles of life. Thanks to faith, Joseph was able to press forward when everything seemed to be to be holding him back" (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, "Visit to the

Charitable Center of St. Patrick Parish and Meeting with the Homeless: Greeting of the Holy Father”).

The story of Joseph teaches us that God never abandons us in our hour of need, the Pope went on to say, noting, “God is present in every one of you, in each one of us” (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, “Visit to the Charitable Center of St. Patrick Parish and Meeting with the Homeless: Greeting of the Holy Father”). But more than just being with us, God in his son Jesus Christ identified with humanity, especially, the suffering, the Holy Father told the audience of homeless people. Therefore, the homeless must understand that God could not abandon them in their plight. By positing that the homeless audience were consubstantial with the Divine, the Holy Father rhetorically dismissed any suggestion that homelessness was divine punishment. In his view, “There is no social or moral justification, no justification whatsoever, for lack of housing” (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, “Visit to the Charitable Center of St. Patrick Parish and Meeting with the Homeless: Greeting of the Holy Father”).

Having exhorted the audience of homeless people, whom he referred to “Dear friends” to have faith in God, the Pope suggested that they pray for and with one another as they sought to overcome their problem. In his words, “one of the most effective ways we have to help is that of prayer. Prayer unites us; it makes us brothers and sisters” (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, “Visit to the Charitable Center of St. Patrick Parish and Meeting with the Homeless: Greeting of the Holy Father”). The reason prayer is the greatest leveler, the Roman Pontiff argued, is that it is addressed to God who is the Father of all humanity. For the Pope, prayer is an indispensable resource for human existence. Accordingly, he concluded his remarks with the following emotional appeal:

How good it is for us to pray together. How good it is to encounter one another in this place where we see one another as brothers and sisters, where we realize that we need one another. Today I want to pray with you, I want to join with you, because I need your support, your closeness. I would like to invite you to pray together, for one another, with one another. That way we can keep helping one another to experience with joy that Jesus is in our midst, and that Jesus helps us into finding solutions to the injustices which he himself already experienced. Not having a home. (Pope Francis, 2015, September 24, “Visit to the Charitable Center of St. Patrick Parish and Meeting with the Homeless: Greeting of the Holy Father”)

Following these remarks, the Pope ended his visit to the facility by praying with the homeless. Undoubtedly the significance of this papal performative rhetoric could not be underestimated. By being physically present at the homeless center and communicatively engaging the people there, Pope Francis gave concrete specificity to his rhetoric of conciliation. He demonstrated by that singular act that he cared for the homeless. In this way, not only did he endorse the social ministry of the Church in the United States, but more importantly he offered hope to the homeless at the Charitable Center. The Pope rhetorically justified his call for perseverance, optimism, and mutual care by appealing to the religiosity of his audience. Epideicticity thus ballasted the Pontiff’s conciliatory communicative dance at the Charitable Center.

Another instance of performative rhetorical dance by the Pope consisted in his interaction with immigrant groups to show concrete support for them. In New York, for example, the Roman Pontiff visited immigrant children and their families at a school. In his communicative engagement with the children, Pope Francis showed empathy, friendliness, and fellow-feeling, commending them for their work. Aware of the daunting task of integrating into a new social reality, the Holy Father offered the children and their families hope by encouraging them to take advantage of the opportunities America offered them. America, the Pope insisted to the children and their parents, was their new home, where they would meet people who would offer them their support, friendship, and facilitate their social integration (Pope Francis, 2015, September 25, "Meeting with Children and Immigrant Families"). These words of encouragement and support underscored the reason for the Pope's visit to the school: he was there as a friend to help them fully integrate into American society, a society made up of good, friendly, helpful, and hardworking people. Referencing Martin Luther's "I Have a Dream," the Pontiff went on to tell the children "to have dreams and to be able to fight for [their] dreams" (Pope Francis, 2015, September 25, "Meeting with Children and Immigrant Families"). Significantly, by highlighting the virtues of their new society, the Pope sought to elicit immigrants' goodwill toward America. He wanted them to show appreciation and gratitude for America's generosity, kindness, and hospitality. Immigrants must realize that America is their home and therefore they must begin to defend and promote its values—the values of individual liberty, self-expression, life, and the pursuit of happiness.

Furthermore, the Pope's visit with victims of the clergy sexual abuse clearly evidenced his attempt to reconcile them with the Church in the United States. In other words, by making time to listen to the stories of a representative group of abuse victims, the Holy Father performatively enacted his remorse and regret for the criminal behavior of the Church's clergy expressed in his address to the clergy a few days earlier (Pope Francis, 2015, September 27, "Pope Francis' Remarks to Victims of Sexual Abuse"). This encounter with victims was significant because Pope Francis had received a backlash for his apparent sympathy for the U.S hierarchy over the scandal of the clergy abuse. Reporting on victims' reaction to the Pope's conciliatory tone during his meeting with American bishops, *The New York Times'* Yardley (2015, September 27, "Pope Acknowledges Cover-ups by Bishops"), for instance, wrote that "Many victims were infuriated after Francis praised and comforted American bishops in Washington for their handling of the crisis" (see also Goodstein, 2015, September 27, "After Criticism, Pope Francis Confronts Priestly Sexual Abuse"). Such criticisms threatened to undermine the Pope's concern for victims expressed in his public communication before and during his visit to the United States. Therefore, meeting the victims represented an effort on the part of the Roman Pontiff to not only correct any misconception his communicative engagement with the bishops had created, but also to demonstrate proactively both his sympathy to victims for their ordeal and his support for their search for justice. Hence his visit with victims constituted another performative rhetorical attempt during his time in the country to give concrete expression to his rhetoric of conciliation.

As a performative rhetorical act, the Pope's meeting with victims was characterized by his listening to their individual stories, speaking to them collectively and individually, and finally praying with them (Burke & Ramsay, 2015, September 27). Thus, three coordinates framed the Pope's performative rhetoric of conciliation when

he met the victims, namely, “listening,” “speaking,” and “praying.” Significantly, in listening to victims’ stories, the Holy Father validated their unique experiences and showed respect for their human dignity. This communicative posture of the head of the global Catholic Church thus contradicted and undermined the adversarial stance taken by some American bishops against victims (see National Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young People, 2004; Rosenblatt, 2004; Grimes, 2006; Formicola, 2007; 2011; 2015; see also Robertson, 2005). After listening to victims, Pope Francis spoke, expressing profound remorse for the abuse suffered at the hands of the clergy. In his view, as a crime and sin, the abuse of the children of the Church was a “betrayal” and a “terrible violation of human dignity” (Pope Francis, 2015, September 27, “Pope Francis’ remarks to victims of sexual abuse”). Identifying himself with the painful experiences of the victims, the Holy Father expressed this painful truth: “You are precious children of God who should always expect our protection, our care and our love. I am profoundly sorry that your innocence was violated by those who you trusted” (Pope Francis, 2015, September 27, “Pope Francis’ remarks to victims of sexual abuse”). By communicating in this fashion, the Pope exonerated the victims from any blame—they suffered the indignity of the abuse, not for any wrongdoing, but for trusting the Church’s lieutenants, people required to protect, to care, and to love Catholic children. Acknowledging the veracity of victims’ accounts of their experiences, the Pope went on to apologize for the efforts made by Church leaders to silence their voices. In this way, Pope Francis, in an attempt to repair the Church’s fractured image, took responsibility for the clergy abuse and episcopal failure to protect children from predators. Furthermore, victims were given the assurance that their voices would no longer be ignored nor their stories doubted. Above all, for the first time, victims were assured that bishops would be held accountable for their failure to protect them (Pope Francis, 2015, September 27, “Pope Francis’ remarks to victims of sexual abuse”). Such assurances and expressions of goodwill made the Pope’s prayers for victims genuine and not a mere public relations stunt. Significantly, too, they evidenced the Holy Father’s commitment to the American values of equality of persons and respect for the rule of law.

Finally, his visit to the 9/11 Memorial constituted a rhetorical performative act as it powerfully demonstrated the Pope’s love and respect for Americans, a point that emerged in his remarks during the visit. Here at Ground Zero, Pope Francis, together with leaders from other religious traditions, including Judaism and Islam, identified with Americans by condemning the attacks of 9/11 as “a senseless act of destruction” (2015, September 25, “Interreligious Meeting: Address of the Holy Father”). In the view of Francis, those who perished on that fateful day were victims of “a mindset which knows only violence, hatred and revenge” (Pope Francis, 2015 September 25, “Interreligious Meeting: Address of the Holy Father”). Violence is never abstract; rather, in the painful faces of family members of victims, violence assumed a definite form, a story, and a name. Nevertheless, in the face of extreme violence, one encountered “the power of love and remembrance,” the Pope noted. Commenting on the outpouring of love and support following 9/11, the Holy Father said, “In the depths of pain and suffering, you also witnessed the heights of generosity and service. Hands reached out, lives were given” (Pope Francis, 2015, September 25, “Interreligious Meeting: Address of the Holy Father”). The Pope then went on to commend Americans for their sense of solidarity and loyalty in the face of evil (see de Tocqueville, 1835 & 1840/2003). By their response, Americans showed that love is stronger than evil. Moreover, the 9/11 Memorial itself

constitutes a commitment on the part of Americans never to forget those who made the ultimate sacrifice. As he saw it, the 9/11 Memorial as a rhetorical act of remembrance “does not leave us empty and withdrawn. The name of so many loved ones are written around the towers’ footprints. We can see them, we can touch them, and we can never forget them” (Pope Francis, 2015, September 25, “Interreligious Meeting: Address of the Holy Father”).

Because the violence of 9/11 unleashed overwhelming expressions of love, solidarity, and support among New Yorkers, even as it led to the erection of a memorial that would immortalize those who perished, Pope Francis saw hope in the face of death. Importantly, Ground Zero provided the site where he conciliated with Americans in general even as it offered an opportunity to encounter different religious traditions, all of “which enrich the life of this great city” (Pope Francis, 2015, September 25, “Interreligious Meeting: Address of the Holy Father”). As a promoter of interreligious dialogue, the Roman Pontiff called on Americans to draw inspiration from this religious encounter that recognized the intrinsic goodness of every religious tradition. He hoped “that our presence together will be a powerful sign of our shared desire to be a force for reconciliation, peace, and justice in this community and throughout the world” (Pope Francis, 2015, September 25, “Interreligious Meeting: Address of the Holy Father”). Here the Pope seemed to invite Americans who blamed Islam for the events of 9/11 to reconsider their perspective. As a religious tradition, Islam, like Christianity and Judaism, aspire toward reconciliation, peace, and justice. Hence, Muslims, must be allowed to worship freely in the country. Religious uniformity, or any kind of uniformity for that matter, must be jettisoned. Instead, what Americans and the world at large must seek is unity (Pope Francis, 2015, September 25, “Interreligious Meeting: Address of the Holy Father”). Finally, because the visit to the 9/11 Memorial in New York was meant to express solidarity with Americans and to call for peaceful co-existence among the various religious traditions in the country, the prayer intention of the Pope to bring closure to the religious ceremony at Ground Zero was peace—peace in every sector of American society, including homes, families, schools, neighborhoods, and ultimately in the world. From an epideictic perspective, the Pope’s rhetoric of conciliation at Ground Zero appealed to America’s exceptionalism, resilience, sense of solidarity in the face of tragedy, and plurality. His applauding these values was meant to invite his audience to embrace them.

### **Conclusion**

Pope Francis came to the United States in September 2015, seeking to employ the rhetoric of conciliation to establish and deepen a bond of friendship with Americans on one hand, and, on the other, to bring the various segments of American society together. This papal conciliatory communication was grounded in epideictic rhetorical dance as the Pope engaged various groups, including religious leaders, politicians, diplomats, prison inmates, the homeless, immigrants, victims of clergy sexual abuse, ordinary Catholic Americans, and non-Catholic Americans. By strategically grounding his rhetoric of conciliation in the epideictic, the Roman Pontiff was able to identify with his audiences and their values. Moreover, Pope Francis authenticated his rhetoric of conciliation by adding a performative dimension to it—visiting and interacting with the homeless, prison inmates, sexual abuse victims, immigrants, and leading an interreligious prayer service at the 9/11 Memorial. One can therefore argue that the Pope’s

identification and consubstantiation with Americans legitimated his call for social charity or friendship in the United States of America. His rhetoric of conciliation resonated with a majority of Americans because it was grounded in American values.

Ultimately, Pope Francis has several lessons to teach religious communicators in a postmodern world. In the first place, he teaches us that religious communication finds resonance when grounded in the values of audiences with whom a communicator identifies in both word and deed. Secondly, religious communication is effective and credible when presented in the form of dialogue rather than when couched in absolute truth-statements. Thirdly, being dialogic, credible religious communication respects the voices of communication partners, as it recognizes the validity and authenticity of the Other's lived experiences and worldview. Moreover, authentic religious communication is a never-ending process, requiring remediation, clarification, and repetition. Then, also, authentic religious communication privileges unity in diversity *as sine qua non* to peaceful co-existence among the religions of a postmodern American society or any twenty-first society for that matter.

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