

The Practical Implications of Pope Francis' Culture of Encounter and its Objectives of Establishing and Maintaining Peace in East Asia

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Abstract: This article explores the realization of Culture of Encounter or COE in Pope Francis' objectives of sharing the expertise of the Church in establishing peace and security in the East Asian region. The researcher used text-based analysis in reading Pope Francis' prepared and impromptu speeches in his Apostolic Journeys in East Asia. An author-based analysis is also utilized to align the aims of COE in Pope Francis' Apostolic Journeys. Since the last East Asian country visited was in 1995 by John Paul II, Pope Francis' interest in the region was reawakened. The researcher finds that the East Asian countries that Pope Francis' visited are 'geographical peripheries'. The highlights in his apostolic journeys are consistent with the COE's four principles of building a people of peace found in sections 222-237 of his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*. Furthermore, as far as the assessment is concerned, Pope Francis' Apostolic Journeys have a significant impact on the growth of peace in the region.

Keywords: Apostolic Journeys • Culture of Encounter • East Asia • Peace • Pontifical Diplomacy • Pope Francis

Introduction

Vatican spokesperson Federico Lombardi said in an interview that Pope Francis' (PF)¹ Asian agenda reveals

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¹ Pope Francis, hereinafter abbreviated as PF.

the Church's renewed interest in the region. He said, "Very important is the frontier of Asia...these great trips of Pope Francis reflect the Church's renewed attention to this predominant portion of humanity of today and tomorrow."² Alberto Melloni, secretary of the Foundation for Religious Studies in Bologna, interpreted this renewed interest as a matter of urgency: "There is geography in Pope Francis. The most important countries are the ones that are more thirsty for peace and justice."³

The Asian agenda revealed by Lombardi in 2015 and Melloni's interpretation of the Church's renewed interest in the region is also an indication of the tension occurring in the region. Catholics and their ecumenical siblings are growing in numbers, particularly in the East Asian region. However, the protection of religious freedom, especially in countries where Christianity is a minority, remains lacking. In the words of George Weigel, East Asia (with the exception of the Philippines) had been the Church's "great evangelical failure."⁴ This gap is where the Holy See enters. The Holy See uses diplomacy to protect the Church's believers, especially that Catholics are now increasing in South Korea, Vietnam, and People's Republic of China.⁵ In comparison to his immediate predecessor, PF's attention to Asia⁶ is more

² Prashanth Parameswaran, "The Pope's Pivot to Asia: Why Southeast Asia is Featuring Prominently in the Catholic Church Agenda," January 6, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/01/the-popes-pivot-to-asia/>, (accessed 13 February 2020).

³ Yuichi Nitta, "Pope Francis Clearing New Path in Asia," <https://asianikkei.com/Spotlight/Asia-Insight/Pope-Francis-clearing-new-path-for-Christianity-in-Asia2> (accessed 13 February 2020).

⁴ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of John Paul II* (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 2009), 732.

⁵ Nitta, "Pope Francis Clearing New Path in Asia."

⁶ Only the countries in the East Asian region will be included here, except for Bangladesh which had been involved in the Ronghiya incident with Myanmar. Hence, any reference to Asia or East Asia automatically refers to the countries in the East Asian region.

pronounced. In a video in 2017, PF said, “On this continent, where the church is a minority, the challenges are intense. Let us pray that Christians in Asia may promote dialogue, peace, and mutual understanding, especially with those of other religions.”⁷

PF visited South Korea in 2014 and the Philippines in 2015. Deputy Vatican spokesperson Ciro Benedettini said in an interview in 2014 that PF’s Asian agenda begins in the Philippines, a predominantly Catholic country.⁸ This is to say that the pope gathers strength by witnessing the faith of the Filipino Catholics, before venturing into serious matters relating to the freedom of religious expression.

As of 2021, the East Asian countries which have existing diplomatic relations with the Holy See are Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand.⁹ Those without are Brunei, People’s Republic of China¹⁰, North Korea, Laos, and Vietnam.¹¹ Only Myanmar had had formally entered into bilateral relations with the Holy See under the leadership of PF. Nevertheless, PF continues to direct the Holy See in negotiation tables vis-a-vis communist countries. A temporary delegation was sent to Vietnam to discuss with civil authorities the policies that would protect

⁷ Nitta, “Pope Francis Clearing New Path in Asia.”

⁸ Prashanth Parameswaran, “The Pope’s Pivot to Asia: Why Southeast Asia is Featuring Prominently in the Catholic Church Agenda.”

⁹ Bangladesh is not included in the East Asian region. However, the Ronghiya incident in Myanmar had involved Bangladesh. So in the discussion below, Bangladesh will be included.

¹⁰ People’s Republic of China herein abbreviated as PRC.

¹¹ Holy See, “Diplomatic relations,” http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/documents/rc_seg-st_20010123_holy-see-relations_en.html (accessed 18 March 2019).

religious freedom,¹² while a provisional agreement with PRC took place in November 2018¹³ and was extended until October 22, 2022.¹⁴ Meanwhile, a delegation headed by the Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin was sent to the ASEAN to deliberate on policies against terrorism, violent extremism, and radicalism.¹⁵

In this light, the objective of this article is to show how PF's Culture of Encounter¹⁶ is present in his apostolic journeys in East Asia. The purposes and highlights of his journeys will be interpreted and analyzed using COE's four principles of building a people of peace found in sections 222-237 of *Evangelii Gaudium*.

¹² Holy See, "Joint Press Communiqué on the Viet Nam – Holy See Working Group (21-22 August 2019)" <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2019/08/23/190823a.html> (accessed 13 February 2020).

¹³ Details regarding PRC will be discussed in the last section of this article. Cf. Thomas Farr, "The Vatican Accord with China: Riding the Dragon: A Testimony Before the Congressional-Executive Committee on China, November 28, 2018" https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57052f155559869b68a4f0e6/t/5bfee46803ce64aca78d5153/1543431272570/Thomas+Farr_Testimony+on+Vatican+Accord+with+China_Cong_Exec+Cttee+on+China_11.28.18.pdf (accessed 13 February 2020).

¹⁴ Holy See, "Holy See and China Renew Provisional Agreement for Two Years," <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2020-10/holy-see-china-provisional-agreement-renew-appointment-bishops.html> (accessed 7 January 2021).

¹⁵ ASEAN, "Holy See to Explore Cooperation with ASEAN in Promoting Inter-Religious Tolerance and Understanding" <https://asean.org/holy-see-to-explore-cooperation-with-asean-in-promoting-inter-religious-tolerance-and-understanding/> (accessed 13 February 2020).

¹⁶ Culture of Encounter herein abbreviated as COE.

Apostolic Journeys as a Unique Type of Pontifical Diplomacy

The Purpose of Apostolic Journeys (AJ)

Apostolic journeys are known for their many names: apostolic travel, pastoral visit, or pastoral voyage. Despite the lack of a universal definition, the purpose of apostolic journeys can be sourced from the responsibilities of the Petrine office. As stated in *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23: “The Roman Pontiff, as the Successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity of both bishops and the faithful.” Therefore, apostolic journeys are aimed toward the unity of all the faithful. After all, the papal title hails from the Latin *pontifex*, meaning ‘builder of bridges’.

Apostolic journeys give light to the expression of the pope’s dual roles as the Pastor of the Universal Church (religious) and as the Chief Agent of the Holy See (political). Hence, the pope has to include a number of meetings with political and religious leaders in his itineraries. These meetings are crucial in protecting the interests of the Roman Catholic Church with regard to her faithful.

Through time, the nature of apostolic journeys changed. At the demise of the Western Roman Empire, the pope used apostolic journeys to preserve religion, culture, and civilization. During the Middle Ages, the pope communicated with political and religious leaders of nearby states for the protection of the papal states and their allies. Only in 1964, when the Holy See entered the United Nations as a Permanent Observer, were the aims of apostolic journeys clearer. The purpose is to dialogue with the leaders of the UN member-states, especially developed ones, in deciding for the good and for reaching an agreement in matters relating to peacebuilding,

mediation, and conflict resolution.¹⁷ Not only has this aligned the Holy See's religious diplomacy with the cosmopolitan definition of public diplomacy, but it also debuted papal diplomacy, which makes religious diplomacy more 'personalized'.

The first pope to test the apostolic journey¹⁸ outside Europe was Paul VI. In his first public speech addressed to civil authorities (with particular attention to King Hussein of Jordan), Paul VI declared the spiritual purpose of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land:

Our visit is a spiritual one, a humble pilgrimage to the sacred places made holy by the Birth, the Life, the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ, and by His glorious Resurrection and Ascension. At each of these venerable shrines, We shall pray for that peace which Jesus left to His disciples, that peace which the world cannot give, but which comes from the fulfillment of His commandment: to love one another as He loved us.¹⁹

In other words, Paul VI upholds the Petrine responsibility of uniting all faithful as his way of following the footsteps of Jesus, the Apostle to the Nations. In his meetings with the Armenian Patriarch, Yegheshe Derderian, and the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Athenagoras, Paul VI publicly declared that the pilgrimage was not only about the rediscovery of one's spiritual roots but for spiritual reconciliation as well:

¹⁷ Stephen Ray and R. Dennis Walters, *The Papacy: What the Pope Does and Why it Matters* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2018), 104-105.

¹⁸ From this point forward, apostolic journeys will be cited as AJ.

¹⁹ Paul VI, "Address of Paul VI to the King of Jordan," January 4, 1964, http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19640104_jordania.html (accessed 19 February 2020).

It is the desire to carry out what the Apostle to the Nations counseled us: to forget what is past and push on to what lies ahead, with our eyes fixed upon Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. This spirit has already been manifested in a concrete way in this Holy City, in the efforts being made by all Christians to work in common accord for the reverent care and fitting veneration of that hallowed place where Our Lord, triumphant on the Cross and victorious over the grave, effected the great mission of reconciliation which He had received from His Father.²⁰

Crucial to the unity of all faithful is the great mission of reconciliation that Christ had entrusted to his apostles. The successors of the apostles are to carry out this mission through pastoral voyages. Paul VI's meeting with the political and religious leaders was the prototype of papal diplomacy that his successors had followed.

Concerning Asia, it was also Paul VI who initiated the first AJ in 1970. His voyage was entitled "Pilgrimage to West Asia." Before settling on a three-day visit to the Philippines for the first Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC), stopovers were chanced at the conservative Muslim countries of Iran and Pakistan. These stopovers were opportune moments of communicating the spirit of fraternity with religious leaders belonging to other faiths:

We hope that Our journey will bear fruit of closer understanding between communities of all origins and all religious denominations in this part of the world; that it will encourage united action for progress, for justice and for peace; that it will stimulate the

²⁰ Paul VI, "Address of Paul VI to Armenian Patriarch Yegheshe Derderian," January 4, 1964, http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19640104_derderian.html (accessed 19 February 2020).

spirits to seek the ways of peace so much desired of the heart of the men.²¹

The Philippines is the first country in the East Asian region to be visited by a pope. Paul VI's presence with his college of bishops on this other side of the globe was a fulfillment of Vatican II's spirit of collegiality. Forty years later, PF visited the Philippines to witness the strong Catholic presence of the Filipinos.

Pope Francis' Apostolic Journeys in East Asia (a profile)

On June 9, 2019, PF was heard saying to the children that he was not fond of traveling. His wants are deposed by his sense of mission and dream to visit East Asia. Furthermore, Alessandro Gisotti reported in the Vatican News that PF's AJ's are toward geographical peripheries. Thus, PF's voyage from Rome to East Asia might be challenging to the pope's health, yet the memory of his days as a young missionary overwhelms the problem.²²

PF was able to visit six East Asian countries from the beginning of his pontificate until the present year: South Korea (2014), Philippines (2015), Bangladesh and Myanmar (2017), and Thailand and Japan (2019).

The number of Catholics in every East Asian country he visited is provided in the table below:

²¹ Paul VI, "Address of Paul VI at Teheran Airport, Iran," November 26, 1970, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/fr/speeches/1970/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19701126_aeroporto-teheran.html (accessed 19 February 2020).

²² Alessandro Gisotti, "A Pontificate on the Roads of the World," December 23, 2019, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-12/pope-francis-apostolic-journeys-2019.html> (accessed 21 February 2020).

Country	Number of Catholics (in thousands) ²³	Rank in East Asia ²⁴
South Korea	5,800	3
Philippines	85,000	2
Bangladesh	375	14
Myanmar	659	10
Thailand	389	12
Japan	536	13

Source: FABC and World Population Review

The data above present that out of the sixteen countries in East Asia, Myanmar, Thailand, Japan, and Bangladesh rank among the lowest in the region, while the Philippines and South Korea are in the company of the highest. These data help explain why PF started his journey in countries where the seeds of Catholicism have blossomed well, even as he shifted his attention to the main agenda of his travels: toward those countries where the growth of Catholicism is challenged. His papal diplomacy mapping was congruent with John Paul II (JPII). JPII started his East Asia AJ in a country with a

²³ The data in this table is gathered from the FABC, "FABC Papers Nos. 155 and 161," http://www.fabc.org/offices/csec/ocsec_fabc_papers.html (accessed 13 February 2020). While the data for South Korea was taken from: Robin Gomes, "Catholic Population of S. Korea grows by 50% in 20 years," <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2020-01/south-korea-catholic-population-statistics.html> (accessed 19 February 2020). Meanwhile, the data for the Philippines was obtained from: Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Fact Book: the Philippines," February 7, 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rp.html> (accessed 19 February 2020).

²⁴ Ranking is based on author's interpretation of the data collected from World Population Review, "Highest Catholic Population," <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/highest-catholic-population/> (accessed 19 February 2020). The comparison is made against East Timor, Vietnam, Brunei, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan, Myanmar, China, Cambodia, and North Korea.

robust Catholic presence (the Philippines). The beatification of the Filipino saint Lorenzo Ruiz in 1981 was supposed to create a domino effect with all Christians in the region.²⁵

The purposes of PF’s AJs are provided in the table below.

Country	Purpose of Visit²⁶
South Korea (2014)	To attend the 6 th Asian Youth Day, to beatify Paul Yun J-Chung and his 123 companions, and to conduct a holy mass for peace and reconciliation.
Philippines (2015)	To celebrate with the Filipino people the 500 th anniversary of the Gospel proclamation in the Philippines and to comfort the victims of the typhoon Yolanda in Tacloban
Bangladesh (2017)	To have a meeting with the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian communities
Myanmar (2017)	To pray, confirm the faith, and lift the spirits of the Burmese people.
Thailand (2019)	To celebrate the 350 th anniversary of the Apostolic Vicariate of the Siam Mission, and to meet the Supreme Buddhist Patriarch Wat Ratchabo Phit Sathit Mana Simaram
Japan (2019)	To give tribute to the martyr saints at Nagasaki and to meet for peace at the peace memorial in Hiroshima

Source: Pope Francis’ Speeches to Civil Authorities (2014-2019)

²⁵ Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of John Paul II*, 735.

²⁶ The data in this section is collected by the author from PF’s speeches to the civil authorities. They intend to show that the motive of the pope is primarily pastoral. The address to the civil authorities and the diplomatic corps is always first in the AJs. This protocol was only broken in PF’s visit to Japan.

The data above present that there were two-year gaps between the visits in 2015-2017 and 2017-2019. PF's visits target recent or impending ecclesial milestones and ecumenical and interfaith meetings. Before a pope fulfills his itineraries, he must disclose before the civil authorities the purposes of his visits.

His visit to the Philippines slightly differed from other aims because of his motive to meet and comfort the surviving families of Typhoon Yolanda. His meeting with the Ronghiya Muslims in Bangladesh was not verbally announced to the general public. Still, in the disclosed itinerary of the pope published by FABC, this special meeting was included.²⁷

The highlights of his AJs are provided in the table below.

Country	Highlights	Dominant Theme²⁸
South Korea (2014)	During the meeting with the Asian Youth at the Shrine of Somoe, PF called all to pray for silence for the reconciliation of the two Koreas.	Reconciliation
Philippines (2015)	Instead of reading his prepared texts for the audience at Tacloban and at the University of Santo Tomas Manila, PF delivered impromptu messages from his heart, as he was moved by the tears of the Filipino people.	Healing

²⁷ In his ecumenical and interreligious meeting with the religious people of Bangladesh, he had a special meeting with the Ronghiya Muslims.

²⁸ The themes in this section are effectively the ones that the researcher found to be striking from the data collected.

Myanmar (2017)	Together with the Supreme Sangha Council of Buddhist Monks at the Kaba Aye Center in Yangon, PF renewed commitments to uphold justice, peace, and fundamental dignity.	Interreligious Dialogue
Bangladesh (2017)	PF met Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian communities and committed themselves to honor the values that are common in world religions and use these against those who try to use the name of God to cause division, hatred, and violence. Toward the Ronghiya, PF asked for forgiveness in behalf of those who have wronged them.	Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue
Thailand (2019)	PF met Supreme Buddhist Patriarch, Wat Ratchabo Phit Sathit Maha Simaram, as continuation of a tradition started by Paul VI and JP II before.	Interreligious Dialogue
Japan (2019)	PF comforted the victims of the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident at Bellesalle Hanzomon Tokyo. In light of the recent nuclear disaster, he appealed to political leaders not to use nuclear energy in developing military weapons.	Healing

Source: Author

The data above present that PF's charisma, spontaneity, desire for an encounter, and vibe of mercy dominated the highlights of his AJs. Reconciliation and dialogue—consistent with the pope's mission of 'building bridges'—are the prevailing themes.

The Culture of Encounter in Pope Francis' Apostolic Journeys

This section will interpret the highlights of PF's AJs in East Asia using the COE principles of building a people of peace: 1) Time is Greater than Space, 2) Unity Prevails over Conflict, 3) Realities are More Important than Ideas, and the 4) Whole is Greater than its Parts.

Time is Greater than Space

This principle is described in *Evangelii Gaudium* as the appreciation of the process in the long-term goal of building people of peace:

This principle enables us to work slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results. It helps us to patiently endure difficult and adverse situations, or inevitable changes in our plans.²⁹

In the words of Thomas Rourke, Victor Manuel Fernández, and Juan Carlos Scannone, this principle teaches the art of patience and appreciation of all realities and perspectives. Furthermore, mastery of this principle is more effective if accompanied by prayerful discernment.³⁰ This was manifested in PF's AJs in three ways:

²⁹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*: Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons, and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, <http://www.vatican.va> (accessed 5 October 2017), no. 222. Or EG in the succeeding citations.

³⁰ See Thomas Rourke, *The Roots of Pope Francis' Social and Political Thought: From Argentina to Vatican* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 9; Victor Manuel Fernández, "Encounter," in *A Pope Francis Lexicon*, eds. Joshua McElwee and Cindy Wooden (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2018), 62;

First, PF values peace by sustaining long-term friendships, especially with international peers, in the infancy stages. Myanmar is PF's first achievement in the East Asian region. The establishment of the formal diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Myanmar occurred instantaneously with the severe ethnic cleansing of the Ronghiya Muslims in the Rakhine state. PF flew to Myanmar, hopeful that their newly found friendship will convince the Burmese government to cooperate with the peace demands of the international community.³¹

While human rights advocates waited for PF to condemn the Burmese junta or to mention Ronghiya in his addresses, their expectations were not fulfilled. Faithful to the spirit of COE (working slowly but surely), PF's silence was in consideration of the efforts of his predecessors. Since 1990, John Paul II and Benedict XVI invested in apostolic delegations to earn Myanmar's trust. Had PF been uncontrolled with his words, he might have extinguished the efforts that his predecessors had carefully built.

The international community failed to see PF's alternate course of action to the problem. PF met with the Supreme Sangha Council of Buddhist Monks at the Kaba

and Juan Carlos Scannone, "Pope Francis and the Theology of the People," *Theological Studies* 1 (2016): 128.

³¹ "I would like to see this decision as a sign of the nation's commitment to pursuing dialogue and constructive cooperation within the greater international community, even it strives to renew the fabric of civil society," quoted in PF's "Meeting with Government Authorities, the Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps, International Convention Center, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar." All of PF's speeches in his apostolic journeys are gathered from the website of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference: http://www.fabc.org/offices/csec/ocsec_fabc_papers.html and British Broadcasting Company, "Myanmar Ronghiya: What You Need to Know about the Crisis," January 23, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41566561> (accessed 20 February 2020).

Aye Center in Yangon. Since Myanmar is a predominantly Buddhist country, PF's meeting with the Buddhist monks was a wise move, indeed. In an approximate manner, PF alleviated the unpleasant memories between his predecessors and the Buddhists. In the past, JP II called Buddhism an "atheistic system,"³² while Benedict XVI branded its spirituality as "autoerotic."³³

Along these lines, PF tends to build on what his predecessors achieved in the past. "Appealing to memories" is the second expression of the first principle, while South Korea, Thailand, and Japan turned out to be its testing grounds. South Korea fondly remembers JP II's canonization of Paul Yun Ji-Chung (and his 123 companions), Andrew Kim Taegon, and Paul Chong Hasang in 1984. In his meaningful encounter with the Korean bishops, he told them to be "guardians of [the memories]" of these martyrs who labored in silence and perseverance.³⁴ The appeal to memories extended to political leaders too. While in Thailand, PF evoked the agreement between Pope Leo XIII and King Chulalongkorn in 1897, which resulted in the abolition of slavery.³⁵

From people, PF turns to places of encounter to evoke more memories. Following in the footsteps of JP II's

³² Edward J. Renehan Jr., *Pope John Paul II* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007), 69.

³³ Garry O'Connor, *Universal Father: A Life of John Paul II* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005) 392.

³⁴ "Holy mass, Beatification of Paul Yun Ji-chung and 123 Martyr Companions, Gwanghwamun Gate, Seoul, August 16, 2014."

³⁵ "May the memory of that significant encounter, as well as that of his reign, whose virtues included the abolition of slavery, challenge us, in our time to pursue the path of dialogue and mutual understanding," quoted in "Meeting with the Leaders of Christian Denominations and other Religions, Chulalongkorn University, November 22, 2019."

'healing memories', PF mentioned in his World Day Peace Message in 2020 that memories should be used to inspire and draw new energies for peace. Japan's Nagasaki and Hiroshima have the shrine of the martyrs, and the Peace Memorial made sacred by the blood of the martyrs (particularly of St. Paul Miki and his companions in February 1597) and those who perished in World War II.³⁶ Having been dubbed as places of hope, Nagasaki and Hiroshima become living examples of why peace is only achievable through non-violence. PF used the opportunity to appeal to Japanese political leaders to forego the conversion of nuclear energy into military warheads.³⁷

PF's charisma and spontaneity helped to boost the credibility of faith-based diplomacy. This is the third expression of this principle, while Bangladesh and Myanmar witnessed its reliability first hand. Faith-based diplomacy is hybrid diplomacy that uses the persuasive tools of theology, ethics, and praxis. As a unique foreign policy actor, the pope can utilize his upstanding reputation to reconcile and mobilize a group of people.³⁸ The interfaith and ecumenical meetings held in Bangladesh and Thailand were convenient grounds for faith-based diplomacy to plant on. In the Archbishop's

³⁶ "Tribute to the Martyr Saints, Martyrs' Monument, Nishizaka Hill, Nagasaki, November 24, 2019," and "Meeting for Peace, Peace Memorial, Hiroshima, November 24, 2019."

³⁷ "We cannot allow present and future generations to lose the memory of what happened here. It is a memory that ensures and encourages the building of a more fair and fraternal future; an expansive memory, capable of awakening the consciences of all men and women, especially those who today play a crucial role in the destiny of the nations; a living memory that helps us say in every generation: never again!" quoted in "Meeting for Peace, Peace Memorial, Hiroshima, November 24, 2019."

³⁸ Gerard Powers, "Religion and Peacebuilding," in *International Relations and Religion*, Vol. 3, eds. Ron E. Hassner and Isak Svensson (Los Angeles: Sage Reference, 2016), 337.

Residence in Dhaka, PF introduced the fundamentals of facilitating peace: 1) open the door of the heart to peace and prioritize the sharing of life over the sharing of ideas, 2) let the heart seek and be purified by the Absolute³⁹ and 3) allow the heart to cultivate a path for the human family and the environment.⁴⁰ Whereas in Thailand, PF met Supreme Buddhist Patriarch Wat Ratchabo Phit Sathit Maha Simaram. Before he met with the Supreme Patriarch, PF visited a group of Buddhist monks who follow the same Theravada tradition two years prior. In his notable encounter with the Supreme Patriarch, PF develops his previous experience with the Sangha council and the scholarly exchanges between the Theravada tradition followers and Paul VI and JP II.⁴¹

Unity Prevails over Conflict

This principle is described in *EG* as the principle that goes beyond the presence of conflict. It goes by

³⁹ “By recalling this transcendent dimension of our activity, we realize the need of our hearts to be purified, so that we can see all things in their truest perspective,” quoted in “Ecumenical and Interreligious Meeting for Peace, Garden of the Archbishop’s Residence, Dhaka, December 1, 2017.”

⁴⁰ “Religious concern for the welfare of our neighbor, streaming from an open heart, flows outward like a vast river, to quench the dry and parched wastelands of hatred, corruption, poverty and violence,” quoted in “Ecumenical and Interreligious Meeting for Peace, Garden of the Archbishop’s Residence, Dhaka, December 1, 2017.”

⁴¹ “These are small steps which help testify that the culture of encounter is possible, not only within our communities but also in our world, so prone to creating and spreading conflict and exclusion. When we have the opportunity to appreciate and esteem one another in spite of our differences, we offer a word of hope to the world, which can encourage and support those who increasingly suffer the harmful effects of the conflict,” quoted in “Visit to the Supreme Buddhist Patriarch, Wat Ratchabophit Sathit Maha Simaram, Temple Bangkok, November 21, 2019.”

recognizing what is common and different between persons who encounter one another:

In this way, it is possible to build communion amid disagreement, but this can only be achieved by those great persons who are willing to go beyond the surface of the conflict and to see others in their deepest dignity.⁴²

In the words of Rourke and Fernández, the mastery of this principle is possible because of the unifying action of the Holy Spirit. In every peacemaker or builder, the Holy Spirit instills the ability to harmonize differences without eliminating its truths.⁴³ This principle was manifested in PF's AJs in two ways:

The first expression has something to do with PF's Ignatian training. The core of Ignatian training, discernment, emphasizes a sense of reality.⁴⁴ Foreign policy actors, especially world leaders, are trained in the art of calculated risks. A step into foreign soil necessitates a different persona. However, in the case of the pope, who was an eyewitness to dirty politics in his younger years, wearing a different mask destroys the integrity of a universal pastor. On the contrary, PF's directness is a breath of fresh air. In every country he visited, he highlighted both their desirable and undesirable features. His moral authority to bespeak paradoxes was a proper exercise of his prophetic voice. The art of moving consciences (in the form of soft power diplomacy) has the power to bear legal consequences in

⁴² *EG*, no. 228.

⁴³ Fernández, "Encounter," 62 and Rourke, *The Roots of Pope Francis' Social and Political Thought: From Argentina to Vatican*, 94.

⁴⁴ Thomas Massaro, "The First Jesuit Pope: The Contribution of the Jesuit Charism to His Political Views," in *Pope Francis as a Global Actor: Where Politics and Theology Meet*, eds. Alynna Lyon, Christine Gustafson, and Paul Christopher Manuel (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2018), 49.

the future, especially on policies relating to religious freedom.⁴⁵

Country	Desirable features	Undesirable features
South Korea	Praised for her natural beauty, present in her people, history, and culture.	Objected the presence of violence, persecution, and war. ⁴⁶
Philippines	Liked for her ample human and natural resource for everyone.	Evaluated for her waning moral influence and resources. ⁴⁷
Myanmar	Praised for her natural beauty.	Criticized for patronizing deep-seated conflicts and hostilities. ⁴⁸
Bangladesh	Extolled for her diversity (language, cultures, traditions and peoples).	Disapproved of her government's choice for political isolation from the international community. ⁴⁹
Thailand	Recognized for her harmony and peaceful	Assessed for the presence of trafficking that

⁴⁵ Orlando Antonini, "The Diplomatic Activity of the Holy See," Lecture, Megatrend University, Belgrade, December 10, 2014.

⁴⁶ "Meeting with the Authorities, Chungmu Hall, Seoul, August 14, 2014."

⁴⁷ "Meeting with Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps, Rizal Ceremonial Hall of the Malacañang Presidential Palace, Manila, January 16, 2015."

⁴⁸ Here, PF implied the suffering of the Ronghiya people, who were denied of citizenship in Bangladesh since 2014. "Meeting with Government Authorities, the Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps, International Convention Center, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar."

⁴⁹ "Meeting with Government and Civil Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps, President House, Dhaka, Bangladesh, November 30, 2017."

	coexistence with ethnic groups and for welcoming the migrants and refugees who flooded to her borders.	profited from the migrants and refugees' exodus. ⁵⁰
Japan	Praised for her sensitivity toward those in need.	Appraised for her choice of deterring aggression by relying on nuclear energy. ⁵¹

PF has Romano Guardini among his pool of theological influences. Guardini speaks that opposing truths naturally contradict, but by grasping and keeping the integrity of both, the fullness of reality will be known without the danger of eliminating its differences. Branding it 'creative tension', an encounter with the 'other' is an acknowledgment of its givenness, essentiality, uniqueness, and mystery.⁵²

From political systems, this creative tension is extended to ecumenical and interfaith discourse. PF's meetings with religious leaders in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Thailand demonstrate his search and recognition of doctrinal and pastoral similarities. While the appreciation of similarities is a deed of PF's predecessors in the past, PF is, in a sense, an innovator. JPII and Benedict XVI made headlines for how they

⁵⁰ "Meeting with Authorities, Civil Society, and the Diplomatic Corps, Inner Santi Maitri Hall of the Government House, Bangkok, November 21, 2019."

⁵¹ "Meeting with Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps at Kantei, Tokyo, November 25, 2019."

⁵² Robert Royal, *A Deeper Vision: The Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Twentieth Century* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015), 181 and Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Romano Guardini: Reform from the Source* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 25.

addressed “doctrinal dissenters.”⁵³ PF’s directness of the other hand is complemented by his experience of working with a Rabbi and friend, Abraham Skorka.

Country	Audience	Doctrinal and Pastoral Similarities
Bangladesh	Muslims, Buddhists, and Christian denominations	PF recollected the Judaeo-Christian account of creation and underscored its similarity with the other faiths’ creation accounts. He told them that all religions uphold the truth of being created after the image and likeness of the living God. ⁵⁴
Myanmar	Buddhists	PF recalled the words of Buddha, “Overcome the angry by non-anger; overcome the wicked by goodness; overcome the miser by generosity; overcome the liar by truth,” side by side with St. Francis of Assisi’s

⁵³ O’Connor, *The Universal Father*, 396.

⁵⁴ “They too, are an image of the living God. One of your religious traditions says that God, in the beginning, took some salt and cast it in the water that was the soul of all men and women. Each of us carries within himself a little of the divine salt,” quoted in “Ecumenical and Interreligious Meeting for Peace, Garden of the Archbishop’s Residence, Dhaka, December 1, 2017.”

		prayer: “Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, let me bring pardon...where there is darkness, let me bring light, and where there is sadness, joy.” ⁵⁵
Thailand	Christian denominations	PF evoked the cultural value of respect for elders and encouraged commitments to research and knowledge. He said that these commitments should promote spiritual heritage, respect for dignity, and life, and social justice. ⁵⁶

PF upholds the consistent ethic of non-violence and clamors for the reevaluation of existing peace mechanisms and institutionalization of humanitarian norms as threats to peace transition from being a problem between states to being humanitarian in nature. PF’s peacebuilding gains momentum when he is acknowledged as a credible moral resource by his target audience. His AJs become openings to share the competence of the Church on peace matters. Following

⁵⁵ “Meeting with the Supreme Sangha Council of Buddhist Monks, Kaba Aye Centre, Yangon, November 29, 2017.”

⁵⁶ “Meeting with the Leaders of the Christian Denominations and Other Religions, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, November 22, 2019.”

Benedict XVI's "love [is] nourished by an encounter with Christ,"⁵⁷ PF communicated that religious leaders need to step up and lead in the culture of encounter.⁵⁸ This is made possible if religions remain faithful to their spiritual roots and share in the responsibility of transmitting to the young the building of a just and humane future.⁵⁹ The building of a just and humane future called the attention of the political leaders who are frontrunners in peace mechanisms and institutionalizing humanitarian norms. In Japan, for instance, he called for the cultivation of trust⁶⁰ than the conversion of plutonium and uranium to military weapons.⁶¹ PF had

⁵⁷ Benedict XVI, "Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Men and Women Religious, and all the Faithful on Christian Love," no. 34, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html (accessed 15 July 2019).

⁵⁸ "When Religious leaders speak out with one voice against the violence that parades as religion and seek to replace the culture of conflict with the culture of encounter, they draw from the deepest spiritual roots of their various traditions," quoted in "Meeting with the Bishops Bangladesh, Home for Retired Priests, Dhaka, December 1, 2017."

⁵⁹ "Good relations between the different religions are not only essential for a future of peace, but for training present and future generations to cherish the ethical principles that serve as the foundation of a truly just and humane society," quoted in "Meeting with Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps at Kantei, Tokyo, November 25, 2019."

⁶⁰ "We need to ponder the catastrophic impact of their deployment, especially from a humanitarian and environmental standpoint, and reject heightening a climate of fear, mistrust, and hostility fomented by nuclear doctrines," quoted in "Message on Nuclear Weapons, Atomic Bomb Hypocenter Park, Nagasaki, November 29, 2019."

⁶¹ Japan Times, "No Need to Review Three Non-Nuclear Principles, Kono Says," September 8, 2017, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/09/08/national/no-need-review-three-non-nuclear-principles-kono-says/> (accessed 20 February 2020).

endorsed democratic principles as crucial to a better future. His endorsement does violate the Holy See's political distancing policy since religious freedom, human dignity, and peace are principles honored in democratic governments. To demonstrate, he lauded Bangladesh for choosing democracy as a path to harmonize diversity.⁶²

Realities are More Important than Ideas

This principle is described in *EG* as the principle that concretizes ideas based on Christ, the Divine person who assumed human nature. Also:

This principle has to do with incarnation of the word and its being put into practice...at the same time, this principle impels us to put the word into practice, to perform works of justice and charity which makes the word fruitful.⁶³

This principle was manifested in PF's AJs in two ways.

First, PF expressed countless times how religion is often labeled as a leading cause of global conflict.⁶⁴ To this unfair labeling, he responded by leading in the

⁶² "President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman understood and sought to embody this principle in the national Constitution...For only through sincere dialogue and respect for legitimate diversity can a people reconcile divisions, overcome unilateral perspectives, and recognize the validity of differing viewpoints," quoted in "Meeting with Government and Civil Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps, President House, Dhaka, Bangladesh, November 30, 2017."

⁶³ *EG*, no. 233.

⁶⁴ "This commitment stands as a subtle yet firm rebuke to those who would seek to foment division, hatred, and violence in the name of religion," quoted in "Ecumenical and Interreligious Meeting for Peace, Garden of the Archbishop's Residence, Dhaka, December 1, 2017."

change of such a worldly perspective.⁶⁵ PF used his AJs to renew commitments with other faiths. Publicizing these meetings in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Thailand not only showcased the powerhouse force of the papal diplomacy but conveyed his seriousness to cooperate on peace commitments and tap on their spiritual reserves.

Second, PF's embodiment of Christ's mercy in his gestures made his papal diplomacy more relatable. To name a few, there were times that he relied more on impromptu speeches than the prepared ones by his advisers. Once in Tacloban, he said: "I do not know what to say to you. But surely he knows what to say to you! Many of you have lost members of your family. I can only keep silent; I accompany you in the silence of my heart."⁶⁶ PF made God's mercy felt by telling the surviving families that God not only listens but is also capable of feeling our suffering.⁶⁷

When PF shifts to his native language (Spanish), he becomes more capable of expressing what he feels in his heart. A young girl named Glyzelle caught him by her words, "why do children suffer?" to which he replied:

Only when Christ wept, and he was capable of weeping, did he understand our troubles. Dear young people, our world today needs weeping. Certain realities of life are seen only with the eyes that are cleansed by tears...Let's learn to weep, the way [Glyzelle] taught us today. Let's not forget this witness.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ "For her part, the Catholic Church is irrevocably committed to promoting peace between peoples and nations. This is a duty to which the Church feels bound before God and every man and woman in our world," quoted in "Message on Nuclear Weapons, Atomic Bomb, Hypocenter Park, Nagasaki, November 24, 2019."

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ "Holy Mass at Tacloban International Airport, January 17, 2015."

⁶⁸ "Meeting with Young People at the Sports Field of Santo Tomas, University, Manila, January 18, 2015."

PF's directness mixed with spontaneity appeared to have a familiar pattern in his AJs. He tended to spend ample time with those who have been struck by natural and human-made disasters. Apart from the surviving families at Tacloban, he listened and consoled the surviving victims and truth seekers of the 'Sewol' ferry incident in South Korea, and the remaining 'comfort women' at the Village of flowers. PF showed solidarity to the victims of the Sewol ferry incident by wearing the yellow ribbon on his chest in his first public mass in Seoul.⁶⁹ In Japan, he spent time with the survivors of the Triple Disaster. His most notable act of mercy was begging for forgiveness from the Ronghiya Muslims in Bangladesh.

The Whole is Greater than the Part

This principle is described in *EG* as the principle that obligates all sectors of humanity to work for the common good of peace, regardless if their contributions are historical, cultural, or religious. All contributions are essential to the unified whole. Furthermore:

It is a polyhedron, which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness...it is the convergence of peoples, who within the universal order, maintain their own individuality; it is the sum total of persons within a society which pursues the common good, which truly has a place for everyone.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Thomas Fox, "Pope Francis' Focus on South Korean Trip: A Call for Reconciliation," August 23, 2014, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/pope-francis-focus-south-korean-trip-call-reconciliation> (accessed 24 February 2020).

⁷⁰ *EG*, no. 236.

This principle was manifested in PF's AJs in two ways:

First, PF's itineraries included meeting with people from the different sectors of society. To demonstrate, a table containing these facts is provided below:

Country	Sectors
South Korea	1) civil authorities, 2) bishops of South Korea and Asia, 3) Asian Youth representatives, 4) religious communities and leaders, 5) leaders of the apostolate of the laity
Philippines	1) civil authorities and diplomatic corps, 2) bishops, priests, and religious people, 3) families, 4) survivors of Typhoon Yolanda, 5) young people
Myanmar	1) civil authorities and diplomatic corps, 2) Buddhist monks, 3) bishops of Myanmar, 4) young people
Bangladesh	1) civil authorities and diplomatic corps, 2) bishops of Bangladesh, 3) ecumenical and religious leaders, 4) Ronghiya Muslims, 5) priest, religious, and consecrated peoples
Thailand	1) civil authorities and diplomatic corps, 2) young people, 3) Supreme Buddhist monk, 4) priests, religious, seminarians, and catechists, 5) bishops of Thailand, 6) leaders of Christian denominations
Japan	1) bishops of Japan, 2) victims of the Triple disaster, 3) young people, 4) civil authorities and diplomatic corps

Source: FABC

The data above present that PF's AJs include standard protocols of meeting civil and religious leaders and meeting with those in the peripheries (victims of natural and human-made disasters, women, and children). PF demonstrated that those in the peripheries are essential to the unified whole.

Attention to the peripheries also included a neglected part of the whole: the environment. As human security issues become the primary threats to peace, PF also reminded his audience that environmental problems and disasters are interconnected with human dignity. For instance, in Japan, he responded to a young boy who stressed the correlation between the people and the earth: "He rightly pointed out that we are part of this earth, part of the environment, inasmuch as everything is, in the end, interconnected. Important decisions will have to be made about the use of natural resources, and future energy sources in particular."⁷¹ To this, PF warned against the culture of indifference⁷² and firmly pointed out [as he spoke to his Japanese audience] that the use of nuclear energy for the deployment of military weapons must be reconsidered from both its humanitarian and environmental standpoints.

Assessment of the Culture of Encounter

This section will now assess the employment of COE in maintaining peace in East Asia. The first part will assess COE in the East Asian countries visited by PF from 2014-2019. The second part will be about the countries where possible relations are prioritized.

⁷¹ "Meeting with the Victims of Triple Disaster, "Bellesalle Hanzomon", Tokyo, November 25, 2019."

⁷² *Ibid.*

***Assessment of COE in the East Asian Countries
Visited by PF***

The following table contains the mottos tailored to every country visited by PF from 2014-2019.

Countries	Motto
South Korea	Arise, Shine
Philippines	Mercy and Compassion
Myanmar	Harmony and Peace
Bangladesh	Love and Peace
Thailand	Christ's Disciples, Missionary Disciples
Japan	Protect all Life

Source: FABC

South Korea – As was stated, PF visited South Korea for the following reasons: to attend the 6th Asian Youth Day, to beatify Paul Yun Ji-Chung and his 123 companions, and to conduct a holy mass for peace and reconciliation between the two Koreas. Using COE, these itineraries prove that PF: 1) uses the memory of martyrs to unify the two Koreas and 2) empowers and sources strength from the young in building a people of peace. Under the motto, 'Arise and Shine', PF attempts to wake all generations in South Korea to be aware of their situation and consolidate all efforts to reconcile the two Koreas.

PF's visit had an indirect impact on the two Koreas. The year 2018 was necessary for the two Koreas as four events took place to put both parties together: the PyeongChang Winter Olympics in 2018 and the three peace summits. President Moon of South Korea (who is a Catholic himself) visited PF in October 2018 to personally give Chairman Kim Jong-un's invitation to visit North

Korea.⁷³ However, the Vatican responded that a formal request [from the Chairman] is necessary before the negotiations for a visit would occur.⁷⁴ PF also remembered that sending an apostolic delegation to North Korea was rejected, so as his invitation for the North to be present in his last mass in Seoul.⁷⁵

The overall experience in South Korea resulted in an increase in the Catholic population to 2.2 percent.⁷⁶

Philippines – PF visited the Philippines to celebrate the first proclamation of the Gospel and to provide comfort for the surviving victims of Typhoon Yolanda. Using COE, the theme, ‘mercy and compassion’, was indeed at work. PF shared consoling words to the victims of the typhoon and to the young people who welcomed him in UST. He admitted in an in-flight interview from Manila to Rome that he was moved the most in his experience at Tacloban.⁷⁷

After witnessing PF’s concretization of mercy at Tacloban and UST, six million Filipinos attended his last

⁷³ British Broadcasting Company, “North Korea’s Kim Jong-un invites Pope Francis to Pyongyang,” October 9, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-45796303> (accessed 24 February 2020).

⁷⁴ Ahn So-Young, “Pope, Unlikely to Visit North Korea Next Year, Vatican Says,” December 7, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia/pope-unlikely-visit-north-korea-next-year-vatican-says> (accessed 24 February 2020).

⁷⁵ Josephine Mckenna, “5 Things to Know about Pope Francis’ Visit to to South Korea,” August 13, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/5-things-to-know-about-pope-francis-visit-to-south-korea/2014/08/13/c9aa1fb2-231a-11e4-8b10-7db129976abb_story.html (accessed 24 February 2020).

⁷⁶ Robin Gomes, “Catholic Population of S. Korea Grows by 50% in 20 Years.”

⁷⁷ N.J. Viehland, “Pope Francis’ Visit to the Philippines Spoke to Filipinos Heart-to-Heart,” *National Catholic Reporter*, January 23, 2015, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/pope-francis-visit-philippines-spoke-filipinos-heart-heart> (February 24, 2020).

public mass at the Luneta. It was reported that this public mass surpassed JP II's record of 5 million.⁷⁸

Myanmar – PF visited Myanmar to pray, confirm the faith, and lift the spirits of the Burmese people. Despite the freshness of the Ronghiya incident, PF practiced diplomatic delicacy and followed the advice of Cardinal Charles Bo to “take a less direct approach,”⁷⁹ as it will be vital to the growing friendship between the Holy See and Myanmar, Myanmar's recent turn to democracy, and the protection of the Catholic faithful. Human rights advocates may be disappointed with this less direct approach, but the motto ‘harmony and peace’, must prevail.

The Burmese Church was persecuted for Myanmar's “one race, one religion, and one language” policy, leading to the discrimination of the Christians by Buddhist extremists.⁸⁰ After the pope's visit, the Burmese Church strengthened its adoption of faith-based diplomacy by continually communicating with religious leaders, diplomats, and the international community.⁸¹ This tapping of resources from the different sectors of society is an undeniable effect of COE.

Bangladesh – PF visited Bangladesh for the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue at Dhaka. The motto ‘love and peace’ was faithfully demonstrated in the

⁷⁸ British Broadcasting Company, “Pope Francis in Manila: Six Million Attend Outdoor Mass,” January 18, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-30869019> (accessed 24 February 2020).

⁷⁹ Nitta, “Pope Francis Clearing New Path for Christianity in Asia.”

⁸⁰ Nirmala Calvalho, “Persecuted Church in Myanmar Thrived, Cardinal Says,” February 3, 2018, <https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2018/02/persecuted-church-myanmar-thrived-cardinal-says/> (accessed 24 February 2020).

⁸¹ Nirmala Calvalho, “Persecuted Church in Myanmar Thrived, Cardinal Says.”

meeting, mainly when PF dedicated a section of his time to talk to the Ronghiyas himself.

When asked about the impact of the pope's visit to Bangladesh, Cardinal Patrick D' Rozario said that the empowerment from the universal pastor was achieved, as the Bangladeshi Church needed it in responding to the humanitarian situation caused by the mass exodus of the Ronghiyas.⁸² The Caritas Bangladesh had been giving aid to 300,000 Ronghiya refugees.⁸³ It was also reported that before PF's landing on Bangladesh, the leaders of Myanmar and Bangladesh had been communicating regarding the repatriation of the Ronghiyas.⁸⁴

PF's successful visit to Bangladesh also demonstrated good dialogue with Islam. As the only Muslim country in his AJs, PF had shown his desire to communicate with the more conservative Muslim countries in the East Asian region.

Thailand – PF visited Thailand to celebrate the 350th anniversary of the Apostolic Vicariate of Siam and meet the Supreme Buddhist Patriarch. Known as the 'land of interreligious dialogue', it highlighted the demonstration of solidarity between Buddhists and the Catholic leaders. Furthermore, Thailand's acceptance of Ronghiya refugees in their borders—despite sharing the same religion as Myanmar—brought out the true essence of religion as bearers of peace. In his visit, PF emphasized the generosity of the Buddhists.

Monsignor Andrew Vissanu Thanya-anan, Secretary-General of Thailand's Catholic Bishops' Conference, said

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Gerard O' Connell, "In Bangladesh, Pope Francis will Encounter Natural and Man-made Disasters," November 29, 2017, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/11/29/bangladesh-pope-francis-will-encounter-natural-and-man-made-disasters> (accessed 24 February 2020).

⁸⁴ O' Connell, "In Bangladesh, Pope Francis will Encounter Natural and Man-made Disasters."

that PF's visit demonstrated appreciation for harmony and diversity, which Thai peoples honor and value.⁸⁵ The visit also strengthened the Thai Church's missionary work toward peace, despite being a minority there.

Japan – PF's visit to Japan was to give tribute to the martyrs at Nagasaki and attend the peace meeting at Hiroshima. The motto 'protect all life' was inserted in all of PF's messages, especially in his appeal to political leaders to forego the possible amendment of Article 9 (which forbids Japan to possess and deploy the use of nuclear weapons) and in his consolation of the victims of the Triple Disaster in 2011.

It was also reported that Japan appreciated the pope's visit, as especially shown by Emperor Naruhito, who had demonstrated high respect for the pope by welcoming him and accompanying him back to his car after their 30-minute conversation,⁸⁶ and by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who mentioned about the "passing of the Catholic faith in silence," for seven generations.⁸⁷ These gestures by the two leaders also reminded the collaboration between Pius IX and Emperor Hirohito in the 1870s in lifting the ban on Catholic worship.⁸⁸

Hiroshima and Nagasaki are known as the main bases of Christianity. In history, Japan was the first East Asian country to embrace Christianity, thanks to PF's

⁸⁵ Gerard O'Connell, "What it Means for Pope Francis to Visit Thailand, a Majority Buddhist Country," November 18, 2019, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2019/11/18/what-it-means-pope-francis-visit-thailand-majority-buddhist-country> (accessed 24 February 2020).

⁸⁶ Devin Watkins, "Pope in Japan-Overview of Day Three," November 25, 2019, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-11/pope-francis-apostolic-visit-japan3.html> (accessed 24 February 2020).

⁸⁷ Watkins, "Pope in Japan-Overview of Day Three."

⁸⁸ Peter Mauch, "On the Trail of the Pope in Japan," December 4, 2019, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/trail-pope-japan> (accessed 24 February 2020).

fellow Jesuit, Francis Xavier. Although Japan trailed third to the last in the East Asian countries as far as the Catholic population is concerned, hope prevails that Christianity will still grow in this 'land of the rising sun'.

Implications of COE in the Countries Prioritized by the Holy See for Future Diplomatic Relations

As far as securing peace in East Asia is concerned, PRC had long been the Holy See's goal, since this country holds political principles that have impeded the freedom to worship. Toward this, the development of relations between the Holy See and other communist countries in East Asia is worth mentioning.

North Korea – As was previously mentioned, Chairman Kim extended an invitation to PF through President Moon of South Korea, and the Vatican responded that a formal request must come directly from the Chairman himself.

In an in-flight interview from South Korea to Rome, PF was asked about the situation of the Christians in North Korea, "Is there a particular commitment in your heart to try to change the approach of Pyongyang towards North Korean Christians?" To this, PF replied honestly with, "I don't know... I know that there is suffering... I do know one thing for sure: that there are some relatives, many relatives, who can't be reunited, and this creates suffering, that is true."⁸⁹

The North Korean situation was validated by the United States International Commission for Religious Freedom (USICRF) in their report in 2019. The said

⁸⁹ Holy See Press Office, "In Flight Press Conference of His Holiness Pope Francis From Korea to Rome," August 18, 2014, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/august/documents/papa-francesco_20140818_corea-conferenza-stampa.html (accessed 13 February 2020).

commission categorized North Korea as Tier 1, where the government widely executes religious persecution and discrimination. The estimated number of Christian detainees in *kwanliso* or labor camps was 50,000. They were forced to work in the development of nuclear warheads and military equipment. Furthermore, they will be pushed to starvation, torture, and arbitrary execution once discovered that they are Catholics.⁹⁰

Before PF's arrival in South Korea, three short-range rockets were fired by North Korea. Another two were fired as soon as he landed.⁹¹ Yet, the invitation by Chairman Kim somehow reflected the hope of his father, Kim Jong-il, who sent an invitation to JPII in 1991 to help Pyongyang out of diplomatic isolation. This was disclosed by a North Korean diplomat defector, Thae Yong-Ho, in 2016.⁹²

Vietnam - The future of the Holy See-Vietnam relations is more promising compared to its communist contemporaries. Similar to North Korea, Vietnam was classified by the USCIRF under Tier 1, and the Holy See responded by sending a non-resident papal representative in 2011. Soon, two delegations followed: one in 2016 and another in 2018. Both were during the time of PF, hoping that a permanent papal

⁹⁰ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, "North Korea Chapter," <https://www.uscirtf.gov/reports-briefs/annual-report-chapters-and-summaries/north-korea-chapter-2019-annual-report> (February 24, 2020).

⁹¹ Choe Sang-Hun, "Kim Jong-un Invites Pope Francis to North Korea," October 9, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/09/world/asia/kim-jong-un-pope-francis-north-korea.html> (accessed 24 February 2020).

⁹² Choe Sang-Hun, "Kim Jong-un Invites Pope Francis to North Korea."

representative in the status of a nunciature will be allowed by Vietnamese government.⁹³

By August 21-22, 2019, another delegation was sent, which carries the same responsibility of negotiating the protection of the Catholic believers in the Vietnamese constitution.⁹⁴

People's Republic of China – In his in-flight interview from South Korea to Rome, PF was asked this question, “Do you think that these [sending of telegram between Beijing and the Holy See] may be steps forward in a possible dialogue? And would you like to go to China?” To this, PF responded with, “Of course!”⁹⁵

The situation with PRC had always been tricky and sensitive, following the severing of ties between Beijing and the Holy See in 1951. Since 2013, it has been reported that PF and PRC's Prime Minister Xi Jinping had been exchanging letters and telegrams.⁹⁶ The greatest achievement so far was the provisional agreement that was signed between the two in 2018. The said agreement was initiated by JP II and worked on tediously by Benedict XVI. Coincidentally, developments between two the Koreas and the extended invitation also happened within the same year that the provisional agreement was made public. This was a feat under PF's papacy. As it was known, JP II [for his strong anti-communist stance] was prevented from flying over PRC

⁹³ Carol Glatz, “Vietnam, Vatican Agree to Update Diplomatic Relations in Near Future,” December 20, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/vietnam-vatican-agree-upgrade-diplomatic-relations-near-future> (accessed 24 February 2020).

⁹⁴ Holy See Press, “Joint Press Communiqué on the Viet Nam – Holy See Working Group (21-22 August 2019).”

⁹⁵ Holy See Press Office, “In Flight Press Conference of His Holiness Pope Francis From Korea to Rome.”

⁹⁶ Nitta, “Pope Francis Clearing New Path in Asia.”

in his East Asian AJs. Benedict XVI, on the other hand, was not able to visit East Asia during his time.⁹⁷

While the agreement received both positive and negative remarks from the Catholic community, the Holy See is hopeful that diplomacy will work. The situation of Catholics and Christians in the PRC had been worse since Xi Jin Ping assumed leadership. Even after the agreement was signed, persecution still occurs, with churches destroyed and religious people abducted and persecuted.⁹⁸ In his message to the Catholics of PRC and to the Universal Church on September 26, 2018, PF admitted that “the situation has become more acute.”⁹⁹

Still, under the agreement, the Holy See hopes for these spiritual and pastoral aims: 1) that the Catholics in PRC will be unified (the Catholic Patriotic Association of the Chinese Communist Party and the Underground Church recognized by the Vatican); 2) that the persecution of Catholics will stop, 3) that there will be an increase in converts, and 4) that there will be reconciliation between the Catholic followers of the two churches.¹⁰⁰ Though considered little, it is still a huge step toward protecting the Catholic faithful.

Conclusion

Papal diplomacy has personalized the Holy See's religious diplomacy, taking into it the personalities of the

⁹⁷ Boris Vukievi, “Pope Francis and the Challenges of Inter-Civilization Diplomacy,” *Revisita Brasileira de Política Internacional* 2 (July-December 2015), 75.

⁹⁸ Thomas Farr, “The Vatican Accord with China: Riding the Dragon.”

⁹⁹ Holy See Press Office, “Message of Pope Francis to the Catholics of China and to the Universal Church,” September 26, 2018, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/09/26/180926b.html> (accessed 24 February 2020).

¹⁰⁰ Farr, “The Vatican Accord with China: Riding the Dragon.”

popes that have utilized it ever since papal travels started. The various gestures and expressions of COE in PF's AJs prove that there is momentum, consistency, and most especially sustainability which develops on the peace achievements of his predecessors. PF's simplicity, charisma, and servant-model leadership¹⁰¹ have dominated his AJs.

This article presented the practical implications of COE, as read in PF's AJs in East Asia.

The first section traced the essentialities of the word 'apostolic journey'. Reading from Paul VI's travel excerpts, AJs are intended to communicate the spiritual and pastoral aims of the Church. It undeniably showcases the dual roles of the pope, as a chief agent who observes protocols by meeting civil authorities and diplomats and as a universal pastor who protects, empowers, and inspires his flock.

PF happened to visit six out of sixteen countries in East Asia from 2014-2019. The purposes and highlights of his visits are pastoral, usually to commemorate ecclesial events and to offer consolation to the victims of natural and human-made disasters.

Through these pastoral aims, PF utilized faith-based diplomacy, especially in addressing catastrophes that threaten peace and security. PF conscientized political leaders, renewed commitments with religious leaders, and sourced inspiration from the peripheries (women, poor, and children). These pastoral aims are read using the four principles of building a people of peace: Time over space, unity prevails over conflict, realities over ideas, and whole is greater than its parts.

Time is greater than space. PF used diplomatic delicacy and adopted a less direct approach in Myanmar.

¹⁰¹ Michael Kelly, "Pope Francis and the Challenge to Catholics," *The Francis Factor: A New Departure*, eds. Little John and Eamon Maher (Dublin Ireland: Columbia Press, 2014), 27.

He rallied with the council of Buddhist monks instead since these monks are influential in directing the political decisions of the Burmese government. This gesture was also observed in renewing commitments with other religious leaders, such as Bangladesh and Thailand. This principle was also applied in PF's invocation of the martyrs' memories and the spaces consecrated by their witnessing. These memories were used for healing and for moving forward.

Unity prevails over conflict. PF made his audience see the paradox of their realities to value the good from their experience of the bad. He also created opportunities for scholarly exchanges as the first step toward "sharing life" (and not just ideas) with other faiths. He consistently upheld his ethic of non-violence and promoted COE over the culture of conflict.

Realities are more important than ideas. PF renewed commitments with religious leaders to show the world that religion is a contributing factor to peacebuilding. He showed mercy in action. His spontaneity, which resulted in consoling words, warmed and pierced the hearts of his audience, particularly the victims of natural and human-made events.

The whole is greater than the part. PF communicated to all sectors of the society in his AJs, especially the peripheries. PF also reminded the people that environmental concern is closely connected with human security issues. He also said that indifference toward the environment is indifference toward humanity too.

The last section was the assessment of COE in the East Asian countries he visited, and with those that are crucial for future diplomatic relations. This motive is as far as maintaining peace in the region is concerned.

The mottos of PF's AJs were successfully implemented, with impacts that are visibly seen in the

growth of peace in the country. Toward countries that do not have diplomatic relations with the Holy See yet, PF's focus is undeniably the communist countries, especially PRC. Developments with Vietnam are underway, while the first step in PRC was taken. This gesture is to counter government policies that are crucial to the practice of religion and the propagation of peace.

Overall, PF's COE proves to be beneficial to updating papal diplomacy, the image of the Catholic Church in East Asia, and building the momentum of peace in the region. COE is about investment in time and people, learning from each other's differences, actualizing mercy and compassion through concrete and direct steps, and drawing from people's energies from various walks of life. These personalize PF's papal diplomacy from all angles. By investing in a global and religious friendship, learning from other cultures and religions, performing spontaneous deeds of mercy, and magnifying the role of the periphery, PF has perfectly executed his dual roles without confusion.

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