JOURNAL INFORMATION

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Welcome to NTR Year 2

by the Co-Editors

Welcome to our second year of publishing NTR as an online, open access journal. In addition to our regular columns and reviews, our latest issue offers essays covering diverse scholarly areas—biblical studies, systematic theology, practical theology, historical studies, among others—that meaningfully resonates with our equally diverse readership.

We’d like to thank everyone who made our first year a success, especially CTU’s former President, Donald Senior, C.P. and Vice President and Dean, Barbara Reid, O.P., all the writers who we have been pleased to publish, and John Christman, S.S.S., whose wonderful art works were featured in our second issue. We’d also like to thank Hoang-Chuong Nguyen for diligent work to provide the archive back to volume 10.

This year holds much in store for NTR editors. Dawn Nothwehr is on a full-sabbatical and Melody Layton McMahon will be on sabbatical in the spring. We hope to digitize and upload the first ten years of the archive to the journal website so that access can be provided to all who seek it. Further, the editorial staff has been involved with the conceptualization of Theophilus: A Student Journal of CTU, which will be publishing its first issue in the spring. Feel free to sign up for the journal and explore the works of theologians of the future. And of course, in store for us is working with you—our writers and readers—to continue to publish essays that help deepen your theological journey and ministry life.
Use of Social Media by Catholic Organizations

by Karl Bridges

Introduction

Social media is now a dominant force in the online world. Tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are new forms of communication, drastically altering how organizations interact with the public. By examining the use of social media by Catholic non-profit organizations, it is possible to see how those organizations are exploiting (or not) social media to advance their agendas.

This paper seeks to examine three research questions: 1) What content do Catholic non-profit websites contain? 2) What is the level of use of social media in Catholic non-profit websites generally? 3) What is the level of use of social media by organizations directly connected with the Catholic Church (e.g., parishes, missions, etc.)?

It should be noted that for purposes of this study, for-profit Catholic entities, such as online bookstores and online dating sites, were excluded. The websites examined may have a commercial aspect (e.g., online gift sales), but that is not their primary focus. The goals, technical resources, and funding sources of commercial operations are very different from non-profits and excluding them provides more focused results. In this article, websites were examined to determine their use of social media and a numerical rating scale was developed to compare the various rates of implementation.

Literature Review

A 2011 article, “Web 2.0 Applications in Government Web Sites” by Chua and Goh, found that more advanced countries had more social media applications and that implementation of these applications had a correlation with both website and service quality. Chua and Goh in particular mention that there are a variety of different classification schemes that have been used in research to classify Web 2.0 applications. An article by researcher Helena Coelho, also in 2011, performing a multiyear analysis of Portuguese universities, found that Web 2.0 tools were increasingly used over time and that they were primarily used for informational purposes rather than collaboration. Although there is extensive literature available on social media in general and the use of social media in other non-profit settings, such as libraries, the research literature on the use of social media by Catholic non-profits appears to be almost nonexistent. A November 2012 search of EBSCOhost’s Religion and Philosophy Collection on “catholic church” and “social media” found only six articles—none of which dealt with pastoral ministry or technical issues.¹

¹ Alton Y. K. Chua, Dion H. Goh, and Rebecca P. Ang, “Web 2.0 Applications in Government Web Sites: Prevalence, Use and Correlations
Selection of Websites

One hundred ninety five websites were selected using a range of different tools. Sites were found by using search terms such as “Catholic Church,” “Catholicism,” and “Roman Catholic” on online search engines, such as Google and Yahoo. Print reference works, such as the National Catholic Directory and the National Directory of Associations, were also used to identify organizations, which were then searched on the Internet. Links were followed from those websites to find other websites that might be of interest. The websites selected were from the United States, Canada, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. They were all in English—with the exception of the Canadian websites, which, in accordance with Canadian law, were also offered in French. From this initial list of 195, arranged in alphabetical order by title, every third website was selected, yielding a sub-sample of sixty five.

As will be discussed below in coding, eight different subject categories were designated and each website was assigned to one of these categories:

Catholic Church—sites directly operated by the Catholic Church, e.g. dioceses and individual churches engaged directly in ministry

Media—journals, newspapers, and online media outlets

Apologetics—sites working to promote Catholic doctrine

Professional—sites promoting Catholic life and faith in regards to specific professions or trade (e.g., medicine or security)

Scholarly—primarily research websites (e.g., archives)

Education—related to K-12 and higher education

Health Care—hospitals and nursing homes

Social Work—charities, missions, and social service

In some cases, there was a distinct overlap. A religious order, for example, has both charitable and religious aspects. In those cases, the group was placed where the majority of its work was centered. Religious orders, for example, were classified under Catholic Church since they are primarily ministries. Catholic hospitals were placed in Health Care even though they obviously have a strong component of religious social service.

Coding

Coding for this research took two forms. First, each website was classified into a category, as discussed under the heading Selection of Websites. Then each website was further individually coded as to whether or not it had any of twenty-five separate elements defined below:

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Table 1

Elements of Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>About</th>
<th>Newsletters/Journals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archival Collections</td>
<td>Organizational Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>Photos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio Files</td>
<td>Podcasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awards</td>
<td>Readings/Position Papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>Scholarships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Information</td>
<td>Store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations</td>
<td>Videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>Weblinks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Listings</td>
<td>YouTube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Method and Procedure

Each website was classified into a particular category, as described above. Then each website was individually reviewed. The particular elements of each website were individually coded and results were analyzed. For the purposes of this research, there was only an analysis of the presence of various informational elements. Except in a most general and anecdotal way, as will be discussed in the conclusion, no attempt was made to analyze the layout and organization of the websites and what effect, if any, these had on the use of social media. Using this classification, it was then determined what Web 2.0 applications were in use by the organizations, both collectively and by the type of organization. Finally, a numeric ranking scheme was used to determine the extent or penetration of Web 2.0 applications within the organizations.

Findings

General Observations

Table 2 demonstrates that there is a wide variety of content provided on the websites of Catholic groups. The vast majority of organizations make use of their websites to convey organizational information, with categories such as contact (93.85 percent), about (90.77 percent), organizational (78.46 percent), news (69.23 percent), and articles (60 percent) appearing on many sites. Additional content seems to be focused on issues such as membership (29.33 percent), conference information (29.23 percent), and fund raising (35.38 percent). In general it seems that Catholic organizations in this sample make use of their websites to replace and/or supplement traditional non-web communication channels, although there has been no direct comparative measurement of use of paper communications.
Table 2

Catholic Non-Profit Website Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awards</td>
<td>3.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podcast</td>
<td>4.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships</td>
<td>6.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival Collections</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readings/Position Papers</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audios</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters/Journals</td>
<td>9.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Listings</td>
<td>18.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos</td>
<td>21.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Store</td>
<td>23.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You Tube</td>
<td>23.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership Info</td>
<td>29.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>29.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>32.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>32.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Events</td>
<td>33.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donation</td>
<td>35.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>41.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weblinks</td>
<td>49.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos</td>
<td>50.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>60.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>69.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>73.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org. Info</td>
<td>78.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About</td>
<td>90.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>93.85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numerical Rankings of Web 2.0 Usage

Examining whether organizations make use of multiple forms of social media is one useful method of determining the significance of these tools within the organization. For the purposes of this research, a classification scheme using the system developed by Coelho as a base was utilized. Coelho developed a multiple level organization structure ranging from Level Zero—Absence of Web 2.0 Tools to Level Six, which had integration of multiple Web 2.0 tools with library resources. Unlike Coelho, we did not attempt to measure the integration of the usage of the various social media tools but focused on simply measuring the number of tools in use. A higher numbers of tools would imply higher integration but no attempt was made, based on the relatively small sample size and limited knowledge of the organization’s web strategy, to postulate an overall integration level.
The results in Table 3 show that half of the websites (52.31 percent) make no use of social media while 47.69 percent use one or more forms. The number of websites making use of three or four social media tools was very small—only 13.85 and 1.54 percent respectively. When combined with the results discussed above in Figure 2, it’s clear that Catholic social media use is limited. As will be discussed in the conclusion, the low use of social media tools has distinct implications for the success of Catholic non-profits in the modern online environment.

### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Social Media Tools Used</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 social media tools used</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>52.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 social media tool used</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 social media tools used</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 social media tools used</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 social media tools used</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Availability of Web 2.0 Applications*

Table 3 shows that there is some penetration of social media among the sample group. While the majority of websites are not using social media tools (52.31 percent), there are a number that are using just one (12.31 percent) or two (twenty percent). This would suggest that websites using social media are concentrating their efforts on a single medium—such as Facebook or Twitter—rather than evenly distributing their resources across all available social media tools.

As can be seen from Table/Figure 4, podcasting is significantly less popular than any of the other three social media forms measured. Although it is rapidly becoming easier to create podcasts than it was several years ago, it is still significantly more complicated and time consuming. Podcasting also requires both technical expertise and equipment that this low level of usage suggests is unavailable to those contributing to Catholic non-profit websites, or that, if available, they are choosing not to use.
Table/Figure 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>About</td>
<td>93.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>93.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org. Information</td>
<td>68.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weblinks</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readings/Position Papers</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facebook</strong></td>
<td><strong>43.75%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations</td>
<td>43.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YouTube</strong></td>
<td><strong>37.50%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Twitter</strong></td>
<td><strong>31.25%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Events</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Listings</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival Collection</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audios</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Store</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Podcasts</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.00%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awards</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

YouTube, with its ability to easily upload videos, even from laptops or cell phones, sits somewhere in the middle. The ready availability and growing amounts of digital content, from cell phones or from other filmed events, could suggest that the use of YouTube represents a repurposing of content created for other purposes into a social media stream. For the most part, this appears restricted to the use of Facebook and Twitter followed by YouTube and podcasting. This usage pattern would suggest that Catholic non-profits are using social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, that are commonly available and have relatively low barriers to entry both in terms of financial cost and training.
Use of Web 2.0 Applications by Catholic Church Websites

A comparison of the usage of social media by websites designated Catholic Church to websites in other classifications was considered, but it was determined that the sample size in this research was too small for such comparisons to be meaningful. From these numbers, it does seem clear that the Catholic Church, while making some use of social media, is not making use of more sophisticated social media tools, such as podcasting. Given the assumption that the Catholic Church has more resources and expertise than any other Catholic non-profits, it would be presumed that the participation rates of other Catholic non-profits with social media would be lower, with the possible exception of professional media outlets. The proving of such a hypothesis would require further research.

Discussion

It seems clear from these results that Catholic non-profits are making some use of web-based tools in order to accomplish their mission. It seems equally clear that the majority of these uses are not focused on the use and development of social media but, as suggested above, on the use of the web as replacement for traditional publication channels.

No formal effort at a usability analysis of these websites was performed. It was anecdotally observed in the review of the websites that there did seem to a wide variation in the organization and quality of website presentation. Some websites, especially those from larger organizations, were extremely well organized and showed excellent design—and, in many cases, were clearly labeled as developed by professional website designers. Other websites were clearly designed with little or no regard to current standards of professional web design. In particular, it is noted that there seemed to be little effort to maintain the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which places an emphasis on making website content available to those with sensory or motor impairments.

A study by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate shows that only four percent of Catholics described themselves as “very” involved in parish life. At the same time, research by the Pew Foundation shows that seventy three percent of American teenagers use social networking, as do forty seven percent of adults. The increased use of social media tools like YouTube and others could be a valuable pastoral tool in reaching these populations.2

Why are parishes not making use of these social media tools? Various reasons can be suggested. First are the simple issues of the lack of funding and the unavailability of technical expertise. Many organizations, especially parishes, work with an extremely low resource base. To place much more than a simple listing of resources and contact information on their website is a high expectation. In addition, given the shortage of priests and the demands on their time, the use of electronic media is simply not a priority. This situation is exacerbated by the age of many priests who, unlike the younger members of their parishes, came of age in a non-computer era. This is further compounded by the fact that seminary education is primarily focused on theology and practical ministry and not on education in the use of technology for pastoral outreach.

Catholic organizations in general seem to share these problems. In some cases, such as in some evangelization ministries, the use of social media is more sophisticated—as is the case with very well-funded parts of the Church, such as the Vatican; national organizations, such as the National Conference of Bishops; and private organizations in the media, such as newspapers and television outlets, which by nature are focused on an advanced understand-

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ing of modern communication techniques. So, this tells us nothing that we don’t already know. This research only puts numbers on what those participating in Catholic activity already understand by experience and anecdote—a phenomenon already well documented in other areas, such as library science. There is a substantial digital divide between different elements of the Church.

The question then becomes: How does the Church avoid these problems? In the long term it suggests that it would be useful for seminaries and religious institutes to be more proactive in including training in social media tools as part of the curriculum. It seems clear that: 1) the subject of content analysis of Catholic non-profits should be addressed in future research to determine what effects, if any, design components have on website usability; and 2) training and education of staff in Catholic non-profits regarding basic web design principles and best practices would be beneficial—especially if it could be offered online at a nominal cost.

Using Social Media: Some Basic Steps

A reasonable first step is to ask: Does the parish want to do this? If it is a parish where the economics or the demographics are such that social media isn’t an option, one should admit that fact and move on. It’s not that it isn’t desirable, but the Church lives in the world. A focus on technological innovation at the expense of the fundamental mission of the Church and the need for charity is a false advance. In most cases, however, a simple survey of interest will find that people will appreciate the use of social media, especially if it will make it easier for them to participate in the parish by having better information about parish activities. An appropriate approach might be to promote this as a logical extension of existing evangelization efforts and to stress that the resources to be used will not detract from the central activities of the parish. Having a well-written plan, some well-produced examples, and a clear structure for measuring the effectiveness of the project would go a long way in marshaling support. Several parishes might want to collaborate on a project by sharing equipment and expertise.

Rarely is the integration of social media into daily pastoral ministry a technological issue. It is a people issue. It is easy to see the technological problems—getting equipment, creating web accounts, uploading documents—as the main problem, but the real concern is having people willing and able to accomplish these tasks. In many instances, there may already be an identified group of people who have some technological expertise within the parish, such as a committee that deals with the website, produces the parish newsletter, or makes videos of parish events. In particular, this might be an area in which the teenage members of the parish, under appropriate adult supervision, could make a real contribution. Young adults often have a facility with this technology that their elders lack, although they sometimes also have a corresponding lack of mature judgment—hence the need for adult guidance.

It would be vital in these instances to also make sure that whoever is engaged in these projects has an active involvement with the various other ministries of the church so all are on board with the endeavor. It may be possible to simply include this activity in an existing committee (Audio Visual, for example) or ministry. It might be profitable to twin social media engagement with some existing program, such as RCIA. Converts are often quite enthusiastic and would readily engage with such a project—which also gives them an opportunity to get to know the people in the parish and vice versa. Service projects for various youth groups are also an obvious source of volunteers.

The second issue is the kind of content the parish wishes to have available. The obvious first thoughts, such as videos of church services for YouTube, may not be appropriate. Doing this kind of videography in a large space presents technical problems of sound and lighting, as well as possibly being disruptive to the services. In addition, some people would probably prefer not to be videoed in their public worship. More to the point, what one wants
to do in the early stages of this kind of project is create an audience; smaller and more personal projects might be more appropriate.

One excellent example would be to simply have someone go through some basic practice of the Church, such as saying the Rosary. A simple ten or fifteen minute explanation with someone explaining the Rosary, its associated prayers, and its history could be quite effective and, often, could involve no more than the volunteer sitting in front of a laptop webcam. One good example can be found on YouTube. A young woman in one clip walks people through the Rosary—the how and the why.\(^3\) It is something simple and clear, without fancy special effects or even a display of film editing techniques. It may be desirable to post videos of parish events, especially those that have wide interest (for example, a May Day celebration or a school graduation). Interviews with elderly members of the parish might be appropriate and appreciated. Some training or interest in how to do oral history would be helpful, but the results, when done properly, could add greatly to the historical knowledge and dimension of the parish. Another thought might be to video RCIA classes—making them available both online and in the parish library might be useful.

The proper selection of the right social media tool is important. A good use of Twitter with its 140 character limit might simply be to remind people, “This Tuesday is a day of obligation. Mass at 9, 12 and 6,” or for unexpected events, “I will be 15 minutes late to hear confessions today. Please wait.” These informal Twitter posts make it easy to communicate with the parish, especially if the priest serves multiple parishes. Twitter is not, however, a good place to discuss theological issues or answer any but the simplest questions.

The proper use of non-technological media is also important. In essence, you are creating a new group of users from the potential audience that exists within the parish. Thus, an important aspect of implementing new media is making sure that parishioners are aware of what is going on. This may require some publicity, the creation of some training and advertising materials, and making people aware of the help that is available. This doesn't necessarily mean having to set up a program of parish training classes, but it may mean allowing space in the weekly bulletin to make people aware of community resources, such as training sessions at their local public library in the use of Twitter. However, it might be productive to make space available for workshops taught by interested and knowledgeable parishioners. As a way to encourage interest and participation by parishioners, the development of small, focused social media projects would seem to be a highly effective strategy.

**Conclusion**

Clearly the Internet and the use of social media are no substitute for religious practice. Catholicism by its nature requires the community of believers to be physically engaged with the Real Presence and the sacraments. The use of social media, however, can be an effective informational tool that can encourage parishioners to be active and involved in their parishes while allowing clergy to interact with their congregants.

The use and value of the Internet in Catholic ministry is widely recognized by the Church. A variety of pronouncements and studies have emphasized the appropriate use of the Internet in evangelization efforts. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications stated that:

> The Church's interest in the Internet is a particular expression of her longstanding interest in the media of social communication. Seeing the media as an outcome of the historical scientific process by which humankind “advances further and further in the discovery of

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the resources and values contained in the whole of creation,” the Church often has declared her conviction that they are, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, “marvelous technical inventions” that already do much to meet human needs and may yet do even more.4

It would seem that an organized effort to promote the adoption of social media resources throughout the Church would be useful. This would allow the message of the Church to be more universally available and promote better coordination between the various different elements that comprise the Church.

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Siblings or 2nd Cousins-Once-Removed: A Relational Taxonomy for Practical Theology

by Edward Foley, Capuchin

The definitions of practical theology are almost as numerous as the people who consider themselves practical theologians. When the Ecumenical D. Min. program between Catholic Theological Union, the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, and McCormick Theological seminary began in 1992, Herbert Anderson and I started collecting some of those definitions. The current count of definitions in that collection is now twenty-six. At the onset of that program, we also indicated that practical theology as practiced in the Ecumenical D. Min. program was marked by several distinctive characteristics.¹ Now, twenty years later, it might be helpful to take up the definitional task again. Instead of simply delineating characteristics, however, it might be useful to offer some comparative reflections on practical theology and some of its theological siblings.

This loose relational taxonomy is offered as a way to clarify further an understanding of practical theology, at least as this author has come to understand it, as well as how to practice and teach it. Such work is, by its very nature, experimental; it is neither definitive nor complete but propositional. I would like to think, however, that—like every good experiment—this propositional approach is not without foundations. The litmus test of its value is, at least to a certain extent, found in the conversation it stimulates and its ability to generate further clarifications and definitional frameworks.

There are many siblings one could discuss in this kind of mapping. This includes some siblings that are actual theologies (e.g., empirical theology)² and others that

¹ These were: 1) practical theology is not a single method but an approach marked by various characteristics. Practical theology is as much art as it is science; 2) Praxis is an essential dialogue partner in doing this kind of theology and even holds a certain priority [thought not necessarily a chronological priority]—thus, this is a more inductive than deductive approach; 3) There is a priority of the communal over the individual in both praxis and theory. This is a communal and collaborative way of doing theology; 4) All praxis is theory-laden, and this theory must be seriously engaged; 5) There is need for an adequate or thick description of the situation; 6) This theological enterprise, even in its descriptive aspect, is interpretive or hermeneutical. There is no such thing as the purely objective in the human framework; 7) Practical theology is both constructive and imaginative, not simply reflective and repetitive; 8) Practical theology is always provisional, tuned to cultural and historical particularities; 9) By nature practical theology is multidisciplinary, with special attention paid to the social sciences; 10) Practical theology attempts to be holistic. For example, it is concerned with orthopraxis, orthodoxy, and orthopathy; 11) This venture is for the sake of human transformation, i.e., the transformation of the faith community but also the transformation of the world; 12) The primary standard of validity is not the distinction between right and wrong, but between good and evil; 13) Thus the practical theological enterprise is prophetic, giving special attention to those on the margins without power; 14) Practical theology is always exercised with a sense of mutual regard and even humility, being careful not to judge, critique, or dismiss too quickly those people, experiences, contexts, and things that may be unknown or difficult to grasp.

² See, for example, Hans van der Ven, "Practical Theology: From Applied to Empirical Theology," Journal of Empirical Theology 1, no. 1
are related theories that well wed themselves to practical theology (e.g., action theory, postcolonial theory, ritual theory, etc.). For this reflection, however, we will limit ourselves to three theologies and consider them in alphabetical order: applied theology, contextual theology, and pastoral theology. It is envisioned that this mapping might be expanded in the future. It is presumed that that each of these is as pluriform as practical theology, so referencing them in the singular is more grammatical convention than some implied dogmatic about their respective unicities. While pluriform, it seems that each of these is so characterized by concepts and methods that they can be understood as constituting more than simply a field of inquiry but actually a discipline. This position is empirically supported by the fact that multiple schools today offer advanced degrees or courses of study in applied theology (a Ph.D. at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary), contextual theology (University of Agder and the Norwegian School of Theology), and practical theology (Boston University).

Applied Theology

The roots of applied theology can be found in the scholastic debate between figures like Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) and Duns Scotus (d. 1308). Representing an emerging understanding of a university on the continent, Aquinas understood theology as a more speculative than practical discipline, more concerned with God than human activity: it was *scientia* in the Aristotelian sense of the word. This matched with the vision of emerging European universities concerned more with “the desire to know the truth rather than to provide training for a profession.” Duns Scotus disagreed and, in continuity with an older sapiential tradition linked to Augustine (d. 430) and already reflected in the work of Alexander of Hales, held that theology was *scientia practica*, not purely rational “but a discipline concerned with the seeking of salvation.” Since Scotus understood theology as having a different *telos* than Aquinas—not just knowing about God but knowing God as its object—its speculative exercises found their true purpose only insofar as they informed and enabled people to achieve salvation. This influence, however, only went in one direction, from speculation to practice. This theory applied to the practice with *scientia* was virtually hermetically sealed from *practica*.

While sometimes considered the father of practical theology, Friedrich Schleiermacher (d. 1834) might better be understood as the father of applied theology. His *Kurze Darstellung des Theologischen Studium* (*Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*) does speak of theology as a “positive science” (§ 1); is concerned with “the equilibrium … [of] both theory and practice” (§ 9) and “the mutual connection … between the different parts of theology” (§ 18); and considers practical theology the “crown” of his threefold division and sequence (§ 31) of philosophical, historical, and practical theology. Nonetheless, “his view of theology still had a theory-to-practice structure,” and his approach never moves “beyond that of an applied science.” In the assessment of John Burkhart, “con-

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4 This argument was persuasively made decades ago by Paul Hirst in his *Knowledge and the Curriculum* (London: Routledge, 1974).


6 Heitink, 107.


9 Heitink, 107.

10 These citations are taken from *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology*, trans. William Farrer (T & T Clark, 1850), available online at [http://www.archive.org/details/briefoutlinestu00lcgoog](http://www.archive.org/details/briefoutlinestu00lcgoog).


12 Heitink, 27.
course between theory and practice is a one-way street [in Schleiermacher] .... [and] action does not really influence thought.”

Schleiermacher’s Protestant conception of “practical as applied” theology finds its Roman Catholic antecedent in the 1774 proposal of Benedictine Abbot Stephen Rautenstrach of Braunau (d. 1785) to Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, which was eventually published as The Instruction for all the Theological Faculties in the Empire (1776). This reorientation of theological education in the empire, which followed the suppression of the Jesuits in 1773, took a decidedly pastoral turn. A fifth year of intentionally practical studies was added to the existing four year curriculum and symbolized in the establishment of the first chair in pastoral theology, assumed by Rautenstrach in 1776. While the language symbolized in this newly created chair clearly indicates that the activity of the church is the field for this pastoral engagement, the method remains that of an applied science and thus inadequate according to the common standards of practical theology as it is defined today.

As Johannes van der Ven effectively summarized over two decades ago:

> The inescapable conclusion is that there can be no standard model for how theological insights should be applied in practice, because the current societal, ecclesiastical and pastoral situation is not uniform. For this reason, too, the deductive approach that is contained in the concept of applied theology is inadequate. Theology is in need of inductive research into the current pluraliform, heterogeneous and chaotic societal, ecclesiastical and pastoral fields. A prerequisite is that the one-sided relationship between theological theory and the pastoral field, characterized by a line running from top to bottom, be replaced by a two-way relationship, one represented not by a line but by a circle or, better yet, by a spiral moving in inductive fashion from bottom to top.

Returning to our relational taxonomy, applied theology can be considered a distant forebear of practical theology. While some forms of applied theology actually shared the theological surname of practical theology, twenty-first century practical theology has largely distanced itself from that part of the family tree and would classify “applied theology” as a something akin to a second cousin, once removed.

**Contextual Theology**

As Stephen Bevans has noted, “there is no such thing as ‘theology’; there is only contextual theology.” At the same time, Bevans recognizes that all theologies are not necessarily aware that they are contextual, and so one can consider that “a contextual approach to theology is in many ways a radical departure from the notion of traditional theology.” Thus he concludes, “to understand theology as contextual is to assert something both new and traditional.”

If engaging contemporary human experience through serious reflection on the present context is the key distinguishing characteristic of contextual theology, it is certainly possible to argue that St. Paul, for example, in his

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16 Van der Ven, 92-3.
dialogues with the Corinthian community was contextual; the same could be said of the letters of Ignatius of Antioch (d. 107), hastily penned as he was in route to his own martyrdom, or Irenaeus of Lyons (d. ca. 202-3) in his attempted intervention in the quartodeciman controversy. Increasingly, however, Christian theologians were less concerned about engaging common human experience as a source for theology and more concerned with employing it as the trigger for posing questions that theology answered, often as a corrective to shared human experience. This is already clear in Tertullian, especially in his Montanist period (after 206), when he condemned the current bishop of Rome for allowing murderers and fornicators to return to the church despite the evidence and sincerity of their penance (De Pudicitia, chapter 4). Even in the fourth century, when contemporary writers quoted the great mystagogues as models of offering theological reflection on the meaning of the rites of initiation, it is clear that these reflections have little to do with the experience of the initiates and are more a scriptural explanation of what the rites are supposed to mean to them. While there are exceptions over the centuries, especially since many Christian theologians borrowed elements from their context for their theologizing (e.g., Aquinas turning to the recovery of Aristotelian metaphysics), shared human experience was seldom a positive and explicit source of revelation for Christian theology as it emerged in the universities in the West. Eventually theologians such as Paul Tillich (d. 1965) would recognize the importance of human existence in raising theological questions. However, his correlational method would only admit that “the Christian message provides the answers to the questions implied in human existence.”

The turn to the subject in Western philosophy, symbolized by René Descartes’ (d. 1650) famous cogito ergo sum, took place outside of theological discourse. Even more than that, Immanuel Kant’s (d. 1804) critique of metaphysics effectively divorced philosophy from God, whom he argues lacks any objective reality and needs to be relegated (like the soul) to the category of a mere thought entity. Besides this philosophical turn to the subject, the so called age of enlightenment paved the way for the emergence of social sciences that not only focused on the individual (e.g., psychology) but also increasingly on individuals in the community (e.g., sociology, social anthropology, and social psychology). Nineteenth century social philosophy embraced this idea as well, culminating in the work of Martin Buber (d. 1965). As the arts and social sciences in the West extended their inquiry into the exotic (e.g., ethnoanthropology), it became increasingly clear that such socio-centric thinking not only existed in other cultures but was also actually a dominant model in many global contexts. Finally, philosophers such as Hans Georg Gadamer (2002) insisted on the historicity of being and human consciousness that is historically effected, providing a credible framework for considering the phenomenon of one’s dynamic situation (i.e., one’s horizon). This lent further theoretical credibility to considering subjects in a community as important and, further, to considering concrete historicity of such communities as essential to hermeneutics.

As Schreiter has noted, theological attention to the “role that circumstances play in shaping one’s response to the gospel [first] became evident in regions where Christianity was relatively new.” Early language for this type of theologizing was that of “indigenous theology.” This language appeared in a variety of studies in the ensuing decades, as did that of “ethnotheology”—mirroring the adaptation by other disciplines of the “ethno” prefix (e.g.,

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ethnomusicology, ethnohistory, ethnoart, etc.). Around Vatican II there was much talk of the “local Church,” and in the early 1970s discussions turned to “local theologies.” The Local Theology Project at CTU dates from classroom teaching from 1975, and from 1976 in a series of lectures offered by Robert Schreiter. Schreiter holds that the language of local theology has the advantage of allowing “the overtone of the ‘local church’ to be sounded.” Also, since all local theories are not “equally sensitive to the context … this allows keeping the term ‘contextual’ for those theologies that show greater sensitivity to context.”

The language of contextual theology was also developing in this milieu. In 1963 Paul Lehmann was already writing about what others would deem “contextual ethics,” and in the early 1970s, he was writing explicitly about contextual theology. In 1971 the World Council of Churches held a consultation in Bossey, Switzerland on “Dogmatic or Contextual Theology,” and within a few years, the concept had such currency that some were already writing about the problems of contextual theology. Stephen Bevan’s breakthrough article in 1985, “Models of Contextual Theology,” paved the way for the 1992 book of the same title, now in a second expanded edition, an acknowledged landmark in the field.

Bevans thickens the definition of context by suggesting it encompasses four broad realities: 1) the experiences of an individual or group's personal life, i.e., the experiences of success, failure, births, deaths, and relationship that affect the way we experience God; 2) culture, whether that be a religious culture like that of India or Thailand, where culture and religion are rather indistinguishable, or a more secular culture like that of France or the United States, where religion and culture can be separate or highly distinguished realities; 3) the particularities of one's social location shaped by factors such as gender, education, wealth, and access; and 4) local and global powers of social change symbolized, for example, by contemporary communications and commerce. He originally proposed five but then expanded to six “models.” While he orders them in the book as the translation model, the anthropological model, the praxis model, the synthetic model, the transcendental model, and the countercultural model, I find his reordering—which he often presented in the first methodological course to CTU’s Ecumenical D.Min. students—more valuable for considering the relationship between practical theology and contextual theology.

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24 Schreiter, Constructing Local Theologies, 6. Schreiter notes that this is the most common English translation for ecclesia particularis, a phrase common in the documents of Vatican II, e.g., Lumen Gentium, no. 23. It sometimes references a single diocese but also sometimes references associations of dioceses, e.g., Christus Dominus, no. 6; De ecclesiis orientalibus, no. 10.


27 Schreiter, Constructing Local Theologies, 6.


33 Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, 4-5.
After his presentation, the doctoral students would engage in small group work around the question of whether or not contextual theology and practical theology are the same thing? Over the years, especially with the introduction of the counter-cultural model—whose understanding of context Bevans characterizes as “radically ambiguous and resistant to the gospel”34—it became clear to me that while practical theology needs to be contextual, all contextual theologies are not practical theology. Especially as one moves to the extreme left and right of Bevan’s diagram, I believe contextual theologies fall outside the boundaries of practical theology. The translation and counter-cultural models do not seriously engage the context as a source of theology and thus step out of a correlation that seems essential to practical theology. On the other hand, certain forms of the anthropological model so value human experience and the present context that they can diminish the role of tradition or revelation in the dialogue. Thus, I would suggest that practical theology and contextual theology can be siblings but not twins and that certain forms of contextual theology seem to divorce them from the immediate family.

**Pastoral Theology**

As with contextual theology, one can see glimpses of pastoral theology from the birth of Christianity. Some would argue that there is actually a biblical pattern of pastoral theology that stretches back into the Hebrew Scriptures.35 More cautiously, one can see what Gerben Heitink calls “an elementary form of pastoral theology” in the New Testament.36 In large part this New Testament form is concerned with the internal care and ordering of the community, as reflected in Paul’s enumeration of certain leadership roles (cf. 1 Cor 12:28), and the instructions to said leaders in the Pastoral Letters. Several writing from the so-called patristic era offer pastoral reflections on the role of the bishop: noteworthy here is Chrysostom’s (d. 407) *Peri hierōsýnēs* (“On the Priesthood”). One of the more notable works in pastoral theology from this era was Gregory the Great’s (d. 604) *Liber Regulae Pastoralis* (“The Book of the Pastoral Rule”), which was not only an instruction on the who and how of shepherding souls but also an embodiment of his understanding of the very mission of the church (to cure souls).37

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36 Heitink, 91; much of what follows on the history of pastoral theology is indebted to Heitink’s chapter on “The History of Pastoral Theology” in *Practical Theology*, 90-99.
While pastoral activity—increasingly understood as care by clergy given to the members of one’s own parish or community—has been a mark of the church in every age, systematic and comprehensive reflection on that care was ordinarily replaced by specific aids for guiding the clergy in discreet acts of care, such as the emergence of penitentials or the *ars moriendi*. Cannon 1139 of Lateran IV (1215) actually requires that cathedrals must have a master teacher to instruct the clergy and laity about the care for souls. Heitink sees this requirement as connected to the yearly requirement for auricular confession required by the same council. He writes, “for this reason canon moved toward preaching under Luther’s influence and away from sacraments under Zwingli and Calvin’s. This led to comprehensive rethinking of the whole of pastoral practice by some Protestant theologians, such as Andreas Hyerpius (d. 1564) from Marburg. Roman Catholics did their own rethinking, partly in view of the “flaws and abuses of the religious-liturgical practice” that lead to the sixteenth century rupture in western Christianity. As noted above in the previous discussion of the work of Stephen Rautenstrauch, however, much of this pastoral theology was applied theology. While the great missionary movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did witness notable rethinking of pastoral practice in new contexts, such thinking did not find much resonance in the European-dominated Roman Catholic Church.

A singular name in the transformation of pastoral theology in the twentieth century was that of Seward Hiltner (d. 1984), whom Michael Jinkins calls “a primary founder of the modern discipline of pastoral theology.” While Hiltner’s *Preface to Pastoral Theology* (1958) conceived of pastoral ministry from three interrelated perspectives (instead of from the traditional tasks of preaching, catechetics, etc.), shepherding, communicating, and organizing, he gives almost exclusive attention to shepherding in that volume and even in subsequent writings. According to Bonnie Miller-McLemore, at the center of the revival of pastoral theology for Hiltner was the turn from formal to dynamic knowledge—an idea that was borrowed from twentieth century psychology and “more specifically [focusing] on the ‘conflicts, tensions, and counterbalances among forces’ within doctrine as embodied in Christian life.” Hiltner was emblematic of those who discovered in the social sciences new models for relating theory and practice.

The Roman Catholic who in some ways paralleled Hiltner’s influence on pastoral theology was Karl Rahner (d. 1984). As Robert Kinast summarizes Rahner’s perspective:

> According to Rahner, pastoral theology (or practical theology, as he prefers) is not limited to the work of the clergy but extends to everything which the church as such has to do. This leads to the conclusion that practical theology is both a discipline in its own right and a constitutive dimension of all the other theological disciplines. As an individual discipline, pastoral theology takes up the task of comprehending the present situation

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38 Cf. A Companion to Pastoral Care in the Late Middle Ages (1200-1500), ed. Ronald J. Stansbury (Leiden: Brill, 2010).
40 Heitink, 96.
41 Heitink, 97.
42 See, for example, Jaime Lara, *City, Temple, Stage: Eschatological Architecture and Liturgical Theatrics in New Spain* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2004).
in which the church finds itself (an ecclesial existentielle) and in relation to which the church must actualize itself.\textsuperscript{46} 

While pastoral theology and practical theology have sometimes been used as synonyms, there are increasing clear reasons for suggesting they are not. Bonnie Miller-McLemore is in the forefront here: someone who both self-identifies as a “pastoral theologian at heart,”\textsuperscript{47} but one who “understands her work as situated within the broader enterprise of practical theology,”\textsuperscript{48} the latter as evidenced by her recent stint as President of the International Academy of Practical Theology (2009-11), and also the editor of The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology (2011). While acknowledging that both pastoral and practical theology “share interest in dynamic theology,”\textsuperscript{49} “connote interest in church, ministry and faith practices … [and] share common historical roots,”\textsuperscript{50} she yet notes that “it is crucial to differentiate them and their distinctive gifts.”\textsuperscript{51}

In her presidential address to the International Academy of Practical Theology,\textsuperscript{52} Miller-McLemore continues this theme. She notes:

> Use of these terms to refer to a single enterprise obfuscates one of practical theology’s distinctive contributions as that discipline most concerned with mediating and integrating knowledge within theological education and between seminary, congregation, and society. We also lose sight of the distinctive resources of twentieth-century pastoral theology as developed in the United States in rigorous conversation with modern psychoanalytic theory and psychology.\textsuperscript{53}

Roman Catholic theologian Kathleen Cahalan has written extensively on the importance of practical theology for Roman Catholics and why it is distinctive from pastoral theology.\textsuperscript{54} She clearly argues that practical theology and pastoral theology are not synonymous. While acknowledging that the language of pastoral and pastoral theology assumed critical importance when John XXIII (d. 1963) called a “pastoral council,” she seeks to demonstrate that “pastoral theology never became a serious, well-developed discipline,”\textsuperscript{55} citing Peter Phan, who noted that “it is common knowledge that the nature and task of pastoral theology is highly controverted.”\textsuperscript{56} In tracing the post-conciliar history of pastoral theology, she further notes that, while it became a category in seminary education, it happened at a point when seminary education was no longer the determining factor of Catholic theology, which was moving to Catholic universities.\textsuperscript{57} In the seminary context, citing Katarina Schuth, she notes that among semi-

\textsuperscript{47} Bonnie Miller-McLemore, “Also a Pastoral Theologian,” 813.
\textsuperscript{48} Miller-McLemore, “Also a Pastoral Theologian,” 814.
\textsuperscript{49} Miller-McLemore, “Also a Pastoral Theologian,” 819.
\textsuperscript{50} Miller-McLemore, “Also a Pastoral Theologian,” 819.
\textsuperscript{51} Miller-McLemore, “Also a Pastoral Theologian,” 814.
\textsuperscript{52} Bonnie Miller-McLemore, “Five Misunderstandings about Practical Theology,” Amsterdam, 25 July 2011; manuscript used with permission of the author.
\textsuperscript{53} Miller-McLemore, “Five Misunderstandings about Practical Theology.”
\textsuperscript{56} Peter Phan, “Karl Rahner as Pastoral Theologian,” \textit{Living Light} 30 (Summer 1994): 5-6.
\textsuperscript{57} Cahalan, “Locating Practical Theology,” 6-7.
nary faculties, “it is the most controversial [area], the area about which there is strongest disagreement and the greatest concern about what and how to teach.”  

Cahalan summarizes:

There is little evidence of pastoral theology as a theological discipline in Catholic discourse. There are no academic journals for pastoral theology, no professional organizations, and no graduate programs for a doctorate in pastoral theology, and few theologians would identify with pastoral theology. In terms of the practice of ministry, the pastoral as practice never became a respectable arena of scholarly inquiry.

I would add that it is methodologically possible to do Roman Catholic pastoral theology as either applied theology (as evident from its historical roots) or as a theoretical enterprise that takes no particular practice or concrete context as a source for theory. It is not simply a field in which such hermetically sealed theories are to be applied. Thus, as a broad term without a cohesive or core method (except as understood, in Protestant circles in the United States, as closely allied to psychology in its various forms, e.g., cross-cultural psychology) and with little apparent contemporary effort towards attempting to forge such, pastoral theology appears at this stage to be largely a field rather than a discipline.

Miller-McLemore’s broader based understanding of pastoral theology (what she calls a person- and pathos-centered discipline) is a subdiscipline of practical theology61 with a more integrative intent. She writes:

Practical theology has an important breadth. It encompasses pastoral theology. It provides an overarching method and aim within which I situate my thinking, teaching and writing on pastoral theology. The content of my courses, for example, are often concerns distinctive to pastoral theology, such as the care of families, children, and spirituality. But I approach them in a practical theological fashion, moving from thick description and interdisciplinary investigation to normative action and religious practice.

Given Cahalan’s analysis from a Roman Catholic perspective, my own methodological concerns, and the perspective of Miller-McLemore, I would suggest that practical theology and pastoral theology are related only as cousins who can easily live outside of each other’s ambit but who might spend special holidays together.

Ongoing Work

There is no conclusion here, insofar as this is a first attempt on this author’s part at some kind of relational taxonomy between practical theology and some of its other relatives. This admittedly preliminary beginning will eventually have to take into account inculturated forms of theology, liberation theology, and other siblings. In his book The Whole Shebang, Timothy Ferris speaks about the sadness of maps insofar as they are imperfect in two ways: 1)
they contain less information than the territory they are trying to represent and 2) they introduce distortion.63 This is an admittedly imperfect map and probably does introduce some distortion. It is not the last word, but hopefully it is still both speakable and useful.


by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J.

New Testament study is not like the hard sciences, where one generation may build on the work of the past and then move away from it, even to the extent of jettisoning it entirely. This discipline has more in common with the humanities (like the study of Shakespeare), where there is constant engagement with both the new and the old. The seven areas I am going to discuss remain objects of fascination and puzzlement for every generation of biblical scholars. Just when we think we have moved beyond this or that problem, it comes back upon us and demands renewed scrutiny.

This article is concerned with where the academic study of the New Testament has been, is now, and might be in the future. I have chosen areas in which I think significant contributions have been made in the last fifty years (since Vatican II), but some important questions remain. I will explain briefly what has been accomplished, raise a few questions that still clamor for an answer or at least a rethinking, and note an important book or two on each topic along the way.

Early Judaism as an Academic Field

What is meant by “early Judaism” is now best encountered in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, edited by John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow.¹ The field of Early Judaism covers the period from Alexander the Great (4th century BCE) to the Bar Kokhba Revolt (CE 132-135), involves both the Land of Israel and Diaspora Judaism, and studies Jewish history, literature, and culture. The major catalyst for scholarly interest in this field was the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls in the late 1940s. As the various manuscripts were made available, they prompted research on related documents and in related fields. The result is that what had been a very sketchy and dry area of study has turned into a full and fertile discipline.

Let me list some of the major accomplishments in the field of early Judaism in recent times. The publication of the Dead Sea scrolls has been completed, largely due to the great learning, industry, and organizational skill of the Israeli scholar Emanuel Tov. The general availability of these texts to the scholarly world has now ushered in a new round in the restudy of these often difficult and fragmentary texts. This has been accompanied by the rediscovery of the importance of the so-called Old Testament Apocrypha or Deuterocanonical Books and recognition of their value for introducing new generations of Bible readers to a sample of Early Jewish life. Likewise, the serious attention to the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha through new textual editions and translations has greatly opened up

our perspectives on Early Judaism. Work on these texts has also inspired new editions, translations, and commentaries for the works of Philo and Josephus.

Many of these early Jewish writings are about or inspired by the Hebrew Bible, thus bearing witness to the centrality of the Hebrew Bible in Early Judaism. Of course, the biblical manuscripts among the Dead Sea scrolls have provided us with the earliest textual evidence, by more than a thousand years, for all the biblical books except Esther. The biblical commentaries found in the Qumran Pesharim, the phenomenon of the “rewritten Bible,” and the obvious importance of the Bible in much of early Jewish literature further attest to how important “the Bible” was in this world.

From careful study of the use of biblical texts in these writings, we have come to see that, in some cases, the Septuagint was not a free rendering but was based on a different Hebrew text, and the text of the Hebrew Bible was more fluid than had been imagined. Renewed interest in careful study of the biblical texts has in turn led to several fine translations and commentary projects on the Greek Septuagint and the Aramaic Targums, as well as an appreciation of the distinctive literary practices and theologies of these translations.

We have also learned that Early Judaism was not a hermetically sealed entity confined to the Land of Israel. Rather, as Martin Hengel and others have shown, it was part of the larger Hellenistic world and the Roman Empire. Diaspora Judaism spawned a rich literature (Tobit, the Greek Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon, Philo, Josephus, etc.) aimed at securing the place of Jews in foreign lands.

Despite all the great accomplishments in the study of early Judaism, its practitioners still acknowledge that “we see in a mirror, dimly” (1 Cor 13:12). The major emphasis in this field has been to show the great diversity within Second Temple Judaism. However, the old questions remain. What, if anything, held early Judaism together? Was it simply the trio of Land, Law, and Temple? Do we need to imagine something still more unifying, like E. P. Sanders’s “common Judaism” or George Foot Moore’s “normative Judaism?” Do we have only a set of marginal fragments that have been preserved accidentally? How do we link the traditions preserved in the early rabbinic writings to Early Judaism and to the New Testament? These are old questions. But they take on new urgency in light of the many positive achievements in the study of Early Judaism.

The Greco-Roman World as a Context of Early Christianity

Developments in the field of Early Judaism have been accompanied by major shifts in what we used to call the classics, that is, those Greek and Latin writings that once achieved quasi-canonical status in secondary education and in many colleges and universities. Somewhere along the line that classical canon got broken up, and attention was given to a much larger corpus of materials consisting not only of ancient literary writings but also of inscriptions and other archaeological artifacts. At the same time, biblical scholars like Martin Hengel were showing that Hellenistic influences had penetrated many different areas of life in Palestine and that the Roman Empire was very much a presence in the land and life of Jesus.

A watershed in the study of early Christianity in the Greco-Roman world was Wayne A. Meeks’s The First Urban Christians. This book offered a social description of life within the Pauline communities on the basis of Greco-Roman writings, archaeological evidence, and Paul’s own statements. It treated the urban environment of Pauline Christianity, the social level of the Pauline Christians, the formation of the ekklesia, governance, ritual, and patterns of belief and life.


Where Meeks represented the method of social description, Bruce J. Malina in *The New Testament World* applied theoretical social science models, developed by cultural anthropologists to explain various segments of human behavior, to the first-century Mediterranean group of “foreigners” who produced the New Testament.\(^4\) The toolkit of this social science approach included honor and shame as pivotal values, the dyadic relationship between individuals and the group in the understanding of personality, the perception of limited good, the function of kinship and marriage, and the concepts of clean and unclean according to rules of purity. Attention to the patriarchal and hierarchical character of the world of the New Testament raised questions in turn about whether the earliest followers of Jesus could have constituted “the discipleship of equals” envisioned in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s groundbreaking *In Memory of Her*.\(^5\)

Still another area of interest regarding the social situation of early Christians in the context of the Greco-Roman world has been their relationship to the Roman Empire itself. The explicit New Testament evidence is slim and ambiguous, apart from the cautious attitude displayed by Jesus in Mark 12:13-17 and Paul’s exhortation to cooperate with the governing authorities in Romans 13:1-7. Of course, the book of Revelation can and should be read as a sustained polemic against the efforts of a local Roman political and/or religious official in western Asia Minor to force Christians into worshiping the emperor and the goddess Roma. But more common in recent years have been sustained scholarly efforts also to read the Gospels and Paul’s letters as written explicitly in the context of pressures and persecutions coming from the Roman empire. Often this approach has been accompanied by implicit or explicit suggestions that the Roman empire of the first century had much in common with the alleged American empire of our own time.\(^6\)

These different approaches to the social setting of early Christianity have greatly enriched our reading of New Testament texts. They do, however, raise their own set of problems. The materials used in social description are often fragmentary and sometimes distant in time and place from the biblical passages they are alleged to illuminate. Also, social science concepts and methods developed in very different cultures may not fit well into the first century; they may be forced to fit the ancient texts. Much of the support for the empire studies approach seems textually thin, apart from Revelation. There are some anti-Roman empire elements in the other texts, but how much is hard to know since there is much ambiguity.

**The Third Quest of the Historical Jesus**

The so-called Third Quest is often dated to the publication of E. P. Sanders’s *Jesus and Judaism* in the mid-1980s.\(^7\) What was ground-breaking in Sanders’s work was his effort to describe the actions and teachings of Jesus rigorously within the context of first-century Judaism. Rather than contrasting Jesus with Judaism and thus showing his superiority to it (as many scholars have done), Sanders wanted to place Jesus within Judaism. He claimed to act as a historian, not as a theologian. Primarily interested in what the Gospels say about Jesus’ actions, Sanders then fitted what they say that Jesus taught within the framework of what he did. He gave special emphasis to the so-called “cleansing of the Temple” episode (a traditional title that Sanders vigorously disputed) as galvanizing Roman and Jewish opposition to Jesus and facilitating his arrest and execution.

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\(^6\) For example, see Richard A. Horsley, *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008).

The quest of the historical Jesus has a long history, of course. Its first phase—from Reimarus in the late 1700s to Wrede in the early 1900s—was brilliantly catalogued and critiqued by Albert Schweitzer. Its second phase was very brief, a mere blip on the radar screen. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the students of Rudolph Bultmann rose up in opposition to their teacher’s skepticism about achieving historical knowledge of Jesus and sought to recover Jesus’ own existential self-consciousness.

What have we learned from the Third Quest? On rereading Schweitzer’s work, one might say not much. There are not many things said in the recent incarnation of the Quest that are not also somehow present in Schweitzer’s descriptions of various representatives of the First Quest. However, there has been in much of the Third Quest a new and sounder emphasis on first-century Palestinian Judaism as the proper context for understanding the life and teaching of Jesus. Whereas representatives of the Second Quest made abundant use of the criterion of “double dissimilarity” (what is dissimilar to both Judaism and to early Christianity very likely goes back to Jesus), Sanders and those who have followed him have given much more attention to those aspects of Jesus’ life and teaching that fit best within the context of first-century Judaism, that is, to the criterion of similarity.

In his multi-volume study of the historical Jesus, John P. Meier has tried to cut a middle path between the old and new approaches. On the one hand, he has used the so-called authenticating criteria (such as double dissimilarity, multiple attestation, etc.) to isolate Jesus’ distinctive teachings on matters such as marriage, divorce, and on oaths. On the other hand, Meier has repeatedly emphasized first-century Palestinian Judaism as the proper context for the historical study of Jesus. The result is the title of his book on Jesus, A Marginal Jew. Thus he seeks to preserve and balance the distinctiveness (if not uniqueness) of Jesus (the “marginal” one) from the Second Quest and the emphasis on the Jewishness of Jesus from the Third Quest.

The Third Quest of the Historical Jesus has produced thousands of books and articles, including several of my own. But when the New Schweitzer comes along to cover the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, I am convinced that John Meier’s project will receive great attention. The reason is that he has taken the best elements of the Second and Third Quests, subjected them to rigid scrutiny, and produced a modest portrait of what can be known about Jesus from strictly historical methods.

The problem now is the question so what. Certainly any serious historical study is worth doing, and worth doing well, as John Meier has done. But Pope Benedict XVI/Joseph Ratzinger in his two-volume Jesus of Nazareth has raised some hermeneutical issues that biblical scholars also need to take seriously. In an endnote he refers to John Meier’s project as illustrating both the value and the limits of historical criticism. The pope is skeptical about what can be achieved by going behind the texts of the Gospels as they have come down to us to reconstruct “the real Jesus.” Rather, his starting point for studying Jesus is the Gospels themselves. In trying to understand Jesus he sometimes refers to first century Palestinian Jewish texts. But his range of resources is much wider; it involves the theological tradition, including various patristic and modern theological sources. His Jesus is not so much the historical Jesus as it is the theological Jesus.

Perennial Problems with the Gospels and Acts

In many respects research on the Gospels has become relatively tranquil in recent years. There are now few organized challenges regarding the Synoptic Problem. Most of us make do with the Two Source Hypothesis while

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8 Albert Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).
acknowledging its deficiencies around the edges (those pesky “minor agreements”).\textsuperscript{11} The reconstruction of the most primitive text of the Q Source remains a major ongoing enterprise. Although most accept that the Gospel of Thomas may include a few cases of primitive sayings, there does seem to be a growing consensus that the so-called apocryphal Gospels and the Nag Hammadi texts tell us more about second and third century Christianities than they do about Jesus and the earliest Christians.

What is now abundantly clear is that the individual Gospels exhibit distinctive literary styles and theologies. Proof of this can easily be found in Pheme Perkins’s excellent synthesis in her \textit{Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels}.\textsuperscript{12} While the three Synoptic Gospels share a common geographical-theological outline and a common stock of Christological titles, at the same time they emphasize different aspects of Jesus—the Suffering Messiah in Mark, the Wise Teacher in Matthew, and the Good Example in Luke—and what it means to follow him. Working with an independent tradition, John, of course, has Jesus make several journeys to Jerusalem and stresses Jesus’ identity as the Word of God—the revealer and the revelation of God.

What is not so clear are the Gospels’ historical settings, genre, and historicity. Although I find the traditional view of Mark’s composition in Rome around Nero’s time to be fruitful, efforts to move it eastward to Syria or Galilee have met acceptance in many circles. The post-CE 70 anti-“Jamnia” settings for Matthew and John, which again I have found quite reasonable and productive, have also been losing support among scholars. And no one is quite sure where to locate the composition of Luke. Indeed, the rise of literary analysis and of narrative criticism of the Gospels has tended to put those historical hypotheses on the shelf.

In turn, these new literary methods, which work best with fiction, raise questions about the Gospels as historical documents. Should they be described as biographies, even in the ancient sense of the term? Are they not products of a long and complex traditional development? Were they the result of the cleverness of the individual evangelists? Do they portray a real person behind the texts or an ideal figure or myth with little grounding in history?

These issues are even more severe in scholarship on the Acts of the Apostles. A sizable number of reputable scholars now regard Acts as fiction, a kind of early Christian novel or romance, while others dutifully search for remnants of history within it. Most scholars are in the middle of this debate, supposing that Acts consists of both literary artistry and some historical information. But the problem of trying to discern what is fact and what is fiction in Acts remains.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{New Perspectives on Paul}

In recent years, biblical scholars, both Christians and Jews, have developed new and better ways of looking at Paul and his letters. They have tried to take much more seriously first-century Judaism as the proper context for understanding Paul’s life and work, and they have situated Paul’s preaching about the saving significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection in its wider biblical framework. This approach has been called “the New Perspective on Paul.” Its most prominent proponents include a Lutheran bishop (the late Krister Stendahl), a self-described “low church Protestant” (E. P. Sanders), a charismatic Scotch Methodist (James D. G. Dunn), and an Anglican bishop (N. T. Wright). Catholic and Jewish scholars have eagerly participated in the conversation. One can find a good discussion of this movement in the wider context of modern Pauline research in Magnus Zetterholm’s \textit{Approaches to Paul}.\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{footnote12} Pheme Perkins, \textit{Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).
\bibitem{footnote14} Magnus Zetterholm, \textit{Approaches to Paul: A Student’s Guide to Recent Scholarship} (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009).
\end{thebibliography}
The title “the New Perspective on Paul” may give a false impression that these scholars all agree, and that there is only one new perspective on Paul. Neither proposition is true. Thus, I prefer to speak of new perspectives on Paul. Here is my version of ten of the new perspectives. 1) Paul’s work and writings must be interpreted in the context of first-century Judaism. 2) Jews in the time of Jesus and Paul were not legalists per se. 3) Paul did not have a tender conscience with regard to his past in Judaism. Rather, his experience of the risen Christ trumped his past in Judaism. 4) Paul’s conversion was from one form of Judaism (Pharisaic) to another (Christian), and his call was to bring the gospel to non-Jews. 5) Paul did not set out to found a new religion separate from Judaism. Rather, he regarded himself as a Jew and viewed Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel. 6) The major and most pressing concern in Paul’s letters to the Galatians and the Romans was not the theological principle of justification by faith but the ecclesiological-pastoral question about how non-Jews could be part of the people of God. 7) For Paul, the “faith of Christ” (Jesus’ fidelity to God) came before and provided the basis for “faith in Christ” (Jesus as the object of faith). 8) Paul was reasoning from solution (Christ) to plight (all humankind before and apart from Christ was under the hostile powers of Sin, Death, and the Law). 9) For Paul, the works of the Law were first and foremost the distinctive identity markers attached to Jews in the Greco-Roman world: circumcision, Sabbath observance, and ritual purity and food laws. 10) Paul looked forward to the salvation of “all Israel” in accord with his own pronouncement in Romans 11:26: “And so all Israel will be saved.”

Each of these propositions is both interesting and controversial, and each has been vigorously debated and criticized. Their most obvious contribution has been to breathe new life into Pauline studies and to rescue it from repeating the same old Reformation/Counter-Reformation theological arguments. They have also changed our image of Paul from being mainly a writer of dense and often opaque letters (as if he were a professor of theology) to being an apostle and a pastoral theologian addressing the problems and needs of early Christian communities as they arose. They have helped Jews and Christians to see that Paul can now be viewed as a bridge between them and thus a help toward appreciating better our common spiritual heritage.

Most of the opposition to the new perspectives on Paul has come from conservative Protestant scholars. For many of them, the Reformation heritage is at stake. Their major concern has been the dilution of Paul the theologian into the historical Paul—the first-century Mediterranean Jewish apostle of Christianity. As in the case of the quest of the historical Jesus, again we meet the conflicts between historical particularity and abiding significance, between history and theology, and between justification by faith alone and salvation history (mystical experience as the center of Paul’s theology and apostolic activity). I should also mention here that what I have been calling the “new perspective” on Paul is, of course, no longer so very new. The “new new perspective” on Paul comes from a very unlikely source: European philosophers (most of them non-Christians, and even nontheists) who have taken a lively interest in Paul’s writings. But that is a story for another day.

Reading the Bible Both Critically and Religiously

For many years in biblical studies we have repeatedly come up against the tension between the historical-critical reading of texts and the spiritual or religious reading. Most of us have been trained in some version of biblical criticism, and despite our criticisms of it we regard it as foundational to what we do. Many forms of official Catholic documentation about the Bible and its interpretation produced since Pope Pius XII’s 1943 encyclical Divino afflante Spiritu, through Vatican II’s Dei verbum in 1965 to the recent statements from the Pontifical Biblical Com-

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mission and Pope Benedict XVI’s *Verbum Domini* (2010), have dealt with this issue. In the typically Catholic way they tend to affirm both critical reading (within certain theological and philosophical limits) and spiritual reading (within certain textual limits) as possible, necessary, and indeed indispensable.

Most of these documents, it seems to me, have been concerned with describing what the Bible is and is not (theological issues) and with insisting on the importance of the spiritual or religious reading of biblical texts. In *Divino afflante Spiritu*, the historical-critical reading was sketched and affirmed, and this sketch in turn provided the basis for its treatment in *Dei verbum* and subsequent documents. However, by far the most thorough and useful treatment appears in the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s 1993 “Document on the Interpretation of the Bible in the Church.” Early on, the document asserts that “the historical-critical method is the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts.” It characterizes Holy Scripture as the “word of God in human language” and affirms that “its proper understanding not only admits the use of this method but actually requires it.”

Besides affirming the value of historical criticism, the document also describes the various methods that constitute it: textual criticism, literary criticism, genre criticism, tradition criticism, redaction criticism, and so on. It also notes the major limitations of the historical-critical method: “It restricts itself to a search for the meaning of the biblical text within the historical circumstances that gave rise to it and is not concerned with other possibilities of meaning which have been revealed at later stages of the biblical revelation and history of the church.”

Another limitation would surely be the European Enlightenment’s philosophical and theological presuppositions, which have been associated with the historical-critical method since the time of Baruch/Benedict Spinoza’s *Tractus Theologico-Politicus* of 1670. What the Biblical Commission has given us is a version of the historical-critical method that is compatible with Catholic theology and practice. In this context historical criticism is preparatory to a theological, spiritual, and/or religious reading of the biblical text—something like a rigorous form of lectio in *Lectio divina*.

For those seeking to read the Bible both critically and religiously, the recent Catholic documentation on biblical interpretation can provide a good model or framework, especially on the religious side. The documentation also insists that the task of interpretation does not end with determining the Bible’s meaning in the past, challenging us to consider its significance for today and inviting us to engage in a religious or spiritual reading of the text.

In dealing with Old Testament texts especially (but also the New Testament), a special challenge for biblical scholars is helping Catholics in the future be more open to and comfortable with the historical-critical method as we have come to understand it. There are many untapped riches in biblical texts, and the historical-critical method can help us to recover them. In particular, our appreciation of Old Testament texts may be greatly enriched by taking them more seriously on their own merits rather than forcing them into a “promise and fulfillment” Christological schema (however valid that may be).

**Problems and Possibilities in New Testament Theology**

The obituary for biblical theology and for New Testament theology in particular has been written many times. But a look at any issue of *New Testament Abstracts* will show that, for many biblical scholars, it is alive and well. It can take many forms. To name just a few, it can be the study of a word or theme in one or several biblical books; a synthesis of the theological thoughts of a book, such as Matthew’s Gospel or Paul’s letter to the Romans; or the use of biblical material in constructing a theological argument.

Frank J. Matera’s *New Testament Theology* strikes a good balance by moving from the individual writings to more general themes. Most of his book is devoted to describing the distinctive theological approaches in four major blocks of New Testament books: the Synoptic tradition, the Pauline tradition, the Johannine tradition, and other voices. Within those blocks he treats the key theological perspectives in individual writings: the kingdom of God (Mark), the righteousness of the kingdom (Matthew), the salvation that the kingdom brings (Luke-Acts), and so on. What sets Matera’s approach apart is his effort also to trace five master themes through the New Testament as a whole: humanity in need of salvation, the bringer of salvation, the community of the sanctified, the life of the sanctified, and the hope of the sanctified.

A more traditional and yet more daring approach is taken by the evangelical scholar, Thomas R. Schreiner, professor of New Testament interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, in *New Testament Theology*. There he proceeds from the general to the particular. He contends that “magnifying God in Christ” can be taken as the master theme of the entire New Testament. He summarizes his work in this way: “NT theology is God-focused, Christ-centered, and Spirit-saturated, but the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit must be understood along a salvation-historical timeline; that is, God’s promises are already fulfilled but not yet consummated in Christ Jesus.” His thematic approach is balanced by devoting separate sections to Matthew, John, and Paul as he develops various aspects of his main theme.

A related development that fits under the heading of biblical theology is the rise of what is often called theological exegesis. At its simplest level, that phrase means taking seriously the theological and religious concerns of the New Testament texts. Perhaps a better term is theological reading. This is what Pope Benedict does in his books on Jesus. In some respects, theological exegesis represents a reaction against the modern massive commentaries, stuffed with everything but theological and homiletic concerns. This approach takes its inspiration from the church’s great commentary tradition represented by the Church Fathers, Thomas Aquinas, Luther and Calvin, and Karl Barth. While not ignoring totally the concerns of historical criticism, theological exegesis puts its energy into the theological thoughts of the New Testament writers.

The major methodological problems with biblical theology are familiar, and they too are still alive and well. Is the canon of the New Testament more a source of diversity than of unity? Is it better to move from the particular to the general, as Matera has done, or from the general to the particular, as Schreiner has done? Should New Testament theology be simply descriptions of the biblical writers’ theological thoughts? Should it be more than that if it is to be called theology? Is theological exegesis rigorous enough to merit the noun “exegesis?”

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20 Schreiner, 23.
21 For example, see David M. Williams, *Receiving the Bible in Faith: Historical and Theological Exegesis* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2004); and A. K. M. Adam et al., *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).
The Holy See in the United Nations: An Assessment and Critique

by Emeka Xris Obiezu, O.S.A.

The Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations is an eloquent expression of the Roman Catholic Church’s solidarity with, and respectful affection for, the whole human race and has many positive aspects and implications. This article outlines its historical development, gives an overview of the dynamics of the Roman Catholic Church-UN relations, and explores the contributions of this Mission. It also provides a creative analysis and assessment of the Holy See’s controversial choice of neutrality within the context of the imperative of solidarity that serves as the theological foundation for the Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the UN.

Although the Holy See has the right to vote, it has chosen to refrain from exercising that right in order to maintain the neutrality it deems consistent with the role of a spiritual and moral guide at the UN. I argue that this decision remains seriously problematic. It may lead to the perception that the option for neutrality is effectively a refusal to take decisive and public positions on specific issues and concrete instances of injustice suffered by people around the world. Not only does it call into question the credibility of the Church’s pledge of solidarity with and support for the poor, it arouses the suspicion of a possible ulterior motive, perhaps the need to save face so as to preserve good relations with certain nations. This controversy reflects the unresolved struggle within the Church between what Gregory Baum has called the logic of maintenance and the logic of mission, specifically between a desperate desire to protect the institution and the need for a preferential option on behalf of the poor. Furthermore, it reveals that too often, maintenance takes precedence.

Finally, the neutrality of the Holy See at the UN relates to serious pastoral issues. Indeed, one may wonder what practical, pastoral effect the Holy See could have by renouncing its United Nations voting neutrality. What difference would this renunciation make for the ordinary person in the pew or even for pastoral ministers? What roles can ordinary Catholics play in making the Holy See reconsider its stand on this matter? Such questions are valid and worrisome. However, they should be approached in the wider reality of the present limited awareness and impact of the Church’s presence and activities at the UN in the life of ordinary Catholics and their ministers. This present impact is arguably far less than warranted by the importance of the UN in world affairs and in the lives of ordinary people. It is far less than warranted by the work of the Holy See at the UN. It is also far less than warranted by the now world-wide nature of the social question. Seen in that perspective and in the light of Church history, a more prophetic stance by the Holy See at the UN would be one of many steps toward integrating itself more appropriately into pastoral ministry international issues, the world, and the United Nations. Every op-
portunity for education in Catholic parishes, schools, and other ministries should be used to create this awareness. That is the main goal of this article, to initiate this dialogical conversation as a way to educate Catholics about the presence and activities of their Church at the UN. The historical descriptions and theological analyses provided here are simply meant to guide the ordinary Catholic reader to appreciate and assess the relevance of a UN apostolate in the realization of the salvific mission of the Catholic Church today.

The History and Participation of The Holy See in the UN

By Holy See or Apostolic See, as it is sometimes called, we mean the government of the Roman Catholic Church that is centered around the pope, i.e. the Roman Pontiff and the Roman Curia—the various ministries or departments that assist the Pope in the administration of the universal Church. It has the responsibility of discharging the duties of Vatican State, as provided in the Lateran treaty of 1929. This treaty, signed by Benito Mussolini for Italy and Pietro Cardinal Gaspari, the Secretary of State to Pope Pius XI, settled the dispute between the Church and the Italian government following the annexation of the Papal States to central Italy in 1870. It recognized and guaranteed the sovereignty of the Holy See as indisputable by granting it the geographical territory of Vatican City.

On April 6, 1964, the Holy See established a Permanent Observer Mission at the UN in New York, marking the official beginning of the Church's presence at the UN. Historically, the foundation for this initiative was already laid by Pope Pius XII and Pope John XXIII and inspired by a few Catholic individuals whose words and actions influenced the initial formation of the United Nations itself. Before its official formation, Pope Pius XII had endorsed the UN as a justified response to a plea coming "from the depths and [calling] for justice and a spirit of collaboration in a world ruled by a just and compassionate God." He noted that there was a just and legitimate request of the people of the world for a new international alliance, a "real new world," that would address the global imbalance fostered by greed, power struggles, rivalry, and hostility that culminated in the Second World War. In his encyclical Summi Pontificatus, "On the Unity of Human Society," and his Christmas Eve messages, especially that of 1939, otherwise known as the "Peace Program," Pius stated the need for a new world order and called for its universal support, presenting the principles upon which this order should be structured to ensure peace. These documents had a significant influence on several key players in the formation of the UN. For instance, the 1941

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5 It is important to mention that Pius XII's experience as a former trained diplomat with a comfortable knowledge of the world's power was very helpful in his appreciation of the war situation and the way forward. It is true that a different interpretation might suggest that his "new world order," especially as emphasized in his 1939 encyclical Summi Pontificatus (Of the Supreme Pontificate or "Darkness over the Earth," as it was known in English), was simply a call for all nations to once again recognize the sovereignty of Christ, the "King of kings, and Lord of lords," which had been abandoned with the growth of secularism and what the Pope condemned as "Laicism." See John Cornwell, Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII (New York: Viking Penguin, 1999), 233. However, his "Peace Plan," issued later in 1939, as the Christmas Eve message, in its suggested principles for the realization of the "new world order" makes the case that the Pontiff meant a secular world institution or governance rather than ecclesiastical dominion.
6 See "The Christmas Editorials," Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, December 2, 2008, http://www.catholicleague.org/pius/nyt_editorials.htm. The impact of the Pope at the time was not recognized by religious sources alone. The New York Times editorials on Christmas Day 1941 and 1942 recognized the singular contribution of the Pope, particularly his Christmas Eve messages, towards ensuring a "real new order," one based on "liberty, justice and love." These editorials acknowledged the pontiff as "a lonely voice in the silence and darkness enveloping Europe" and described his peace program as richer than the Atlantic Charter in advocating an end
Atlantic treaty, signed by Winston Churchill acting for Great Britain and Franklin D. Roosevelt on behalf of the United States, reflected the principles of the Pope's Peace Program on almost every issue. Apart from the indirect influence his works exerted on the founders and principal actors in the formation of the UN, Pius XII also made a direct attempt to register the Church as a member of the UN. In 1944, he reportedly asked US Secretary of State Cordell Hull what the conditions and possibilities of the Holy See becoming a member State of the future UN were. Hull apparently responded in the negative, saying, “The Vatican would not be capable of fulfilling all the responsibilities of membership.”

The participation of some Catholic members of national delegations in initial UN conferences bears testimony to early Catholic influence on the organization. With the encouragement provided by the papal Peace Program, considered the indispensable Christian model of peace for the postwar world order, these Catholics actively participated in the formulation of the UN’s foundational documents. Prominent among these committed Catholics was the American laywoman Catherine Schaeffer of the Catholic Association for International Peace, one of the first Catholic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with a specific relation to the United Nations. Schaeffer participated at the Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C. 1944 meeting, the drafting of the San Francisco 1945 UN Charter, and the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ratified in 1968. Schaeffer and colleagues, such as Alba Zizzamia, also made a lasting contribution in redressing the imbalance caused by disproportionate government influence in the UN. They were responsible for the insertion in the UN Charter of Article 70, which made provision for the inclusion of NGOs in the very structure of the UN. They also sought to place women’s issues on the UN agenda. Mainstreaming women into administrative positions within the organization so early can be credited to the interventions of these Catholic women. From then until this day, Catholic groups, especially NGOs, continue to collaborate with the UN in promoting and implementing its mission. They also continue to have a significant, though indirect, impact on the formulation of UN policies.

Even though, in accordance with the UN policy, Catholic NGOs do not require Holy See sponsorship for their admission into the UN and must maintain their independence from the Holy See as a Member State, they have maintained a healthy relationship with the Holy See UN Mission. Long before the establishment of its UN office at New York, the Holy See collaborated with those Catholic groups already present at the UN, particularly the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) Office for United Nations Affairs. Through these groups, it sought to achieve its goals in certain areas of interest. For example, as Jean Gartlan writes, “It was at the instance of the Holy See that Alba Zizzamia, a staff member of the USCC UN office, and a member of the first Catholic NGOs at the UN, was sent to Geneva in 1950 to monitor the UN Trusteeship Council deliberations on the status of Jerusalem.”


7 Rossi, 37.
9 Rossi, 30-33.
11 Jones, “Catholics Were There at the Start.
12 See Rossi, 189, 193, 194; Jean Gartlan, At the United Nations: The Story of the NCWC/USCC Office for United Nations Affairs 1946-1972 (Baltimore, MD: Gateway Press, 1998), 67-77. From Jean Gartlan we read of the enormous influence these Catholic actors had on Eleanor Roosevelt, the chair of the Universal Human Rights Drafting Commission, as they were given many opportunities to address the commission. During both informal and formal discussions, drafters of the UN Human Rights found an original document prepared by the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC) very useful.
13 See Gartlan, 54.
most recently, Olivier Poquillon, O.P, the Dominican Order’s UN representative, attended a European Union event in 2011 representing both his Order and the Holy See. Co-sponsorship of side events at UN conferences is another way the Holy See maintains its outreach to and collaboration with Catholic NGOs.\(^{14}\)

It is important to remember that the Holy See had been participating in some international organizations that predate the UN. Its membership in these earlier organizations, such as the Universal Postal Union, International Telecommunication Union, and International Labor Organization, helped pave the way for its present status in the UN. The Holy See began to attend the UN General Assembly's sessions as an observer in 1951 due to its membership in the Universal Postal Union and International Telecommunication Union.

Like his predecessor, Pope John XXIII devoted significant attention to the UN. His praise of the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is repeatedly echoed in later documents of Catholic social teaching. Not only did Pope John devote a significant section of \textit{Pacem in Terris} to acknowledging the timeliness of the United Nations and its achievements,\(^{15}\) he also recognized the UDHR as resonating with Catholic principles and natural law theory. His two encyclicals, \textit{Mater et Magistra} (1961) and \textit{Pacem in Terris} (1963), also encouraged a healthy Christian participation in, and dialogue with, secular organizations such as the UN. \textit{Pacem in Terris} sees this participation as a moment of discovering and adhering to the truth and cautions that such a venture not be abandoned on account of a history of past failure. “What was formerly deemed inopportune or unproductive,” he remarked, “might now or in the future be considered opportune and useful.”\(^{16}\)

The basis for this hope is grounded on the principles of natural law, the universality of reason, and operative honesty. This orientation differs from nineteenth and early twentieth century ecclesiology, which viewed the Church as “holy and spotless” and looked disdainfully upon the world as sinful and incapable of solving its problems without Church guidance. This understanding of the Church’s self-containment can trace its roots to early scholastic theology, which held the Church to be inherently self-sufficient, in possession of all of the resources required for the fulfillment of her mission, and therefore in no need of mutual and free participation in a secular institution.

The spirit of the new ecclesiology reflected in the documents cited above reflects the Church’s interrelatedness and mutual responsibility with the world and is epitomized in the formation of the Holy See’s UN Mission, April 6, 1964. The theological significance of this new development, the assumption of the permanent observer status in the UN, outweighs its political or historical significance. Considering that this took place barely a year and six months into the proceeding of the Second Vatican Council, it demonstrated the church’s determination to a new theological self-understanding that would reposition her in service of the common good of global humanity for the cause of justice and peace in the world. As Pope Paul VI later declared, this relationship was sought “to solicit, encourage and promote the pursuit of the universal common good and the integral good of [humanity].”\(^{17}\) It is not a privilege but a matter of duty, which must be carried out respectfully and confidently.\(^{18}\)

**Understanding the Dynamics of the Holy See Permanent Observer Status at the UN**

Confusion about the Holy See’s nature and presence in the UN requires us to highlight a few key facts, for serious questions arise. Is the Catholic Church involved in the UN as a state or a faith community? What is the difference

\(^{14}\) During the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Brazil (June 2012), the Holy See with Franciscans International, Caritas International, and Catholic Relief Services co-organized a side event titled “Agriculture and Sustainable Societies: Food Security, Land and Solidarity.”


\(^{17}\) See Paul VI, “Address to Holy See Representatives to International Organizations,” (September 4, 1974), \textit{Paths to Peace}, iv.

\(^{18}\) See Agostino Cardinal Casaroli, \textit{Paths to Peace}, iii.
between the Holy See, Vatican City, and the Roman Catholic Church? What does Non-Member State Permanent Observer status mean? What are the requirements and process for admission, and what are the privileges of this status? Why is the Roman Catholic Church the only religion with this privileged association with the UN?

In its dual role as representative of both the universal Church and the territorial city of the Vatican, the Holy See discharges both temporal and spiritual duties. The Holy See is a true juridical personification of the Catholic Church. It exists and operates in this manner within the international community. Thus, by definition, the Holy See, unlike any other religious entity, can and does legitimately enter into bilateral and multilateral relations with nations and international organizations. Its status at the UN, unique among religious entities, puts it on a par with other member states, a privilege accrued by the virtue of the Lateran Treaty.

In its present relation to the UN, the Holy See enjoys the status of Non-Member State Permanent Observer. UN membership is open to all “peace-loving states which accept the obligations contained in the present Charter and in the judgment of the organization, are able and willing to carry out these obligations.” The privilege of Permanent Observer, though not officially recognized in the UN Charter, has become an enduring custom, granted to states with some limitations to becoming full members of the Organization. To be granted this privilege, the applicant must have fulfilled the requirements stipulated by the UN Office of Legal Affairs. These include full membership in one or more specialized agencies of the UN and recognition as a state by member-states of the UN.

When the Holy See applied for this status in 1964, it had already become a full member of at least two UN special agencies and enjoyed diplomatic relations with at least 14 member states of the UN.

The given fact notwithstanding, there is still a divergence of opinion regarding how the Church came to enjoy this favor. Some groups, especially critics of the Holy See, took John Paul II’s remark that “Pope Paul VI initiated the formal participation of the Holy See in the United Nations Organization, offering the cooperation of the Church’s spiritual and humanitarian expertise” to mean that the Holy See invited itself to the UN. This claim is equally contestable. On the other hand, other groups interpreted then Secretary-General U Thant’s invitation to the Holy See to become a permanent observer at the international human rights organization of the United Nations to mean what the Holy See enjoys today. Whatever confusions may remain on the Holy See’s legitimacy for this privilege, they have been put to rest by recent action of the UN General Assembly. On July 1, 2004, the General Assembly unanimously adopted Resolution A/58/314, acknowledging the Holy See’s privilege as an Observer State of the UN, a status it has enjoyed since the establishment of the Holy See Permanent Observer Mission in the UN on

19 Cardinale, 83.
20 See UN Charter, 4:1.
22 By 1951, the Holy See began to attend UN General Assembly sessions, and meetings of the World Health Organization (WHO) and UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as an ad hoc observer. It was admitted as a full member of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1956. See, William Schabas, “Notes on the Legal Status of the Vatican City and Holy See,” (1994), in “The Catholic Church at the United Nations: Church or State?” Cardinale, 233, in “The Catholic Church at the United Nations: Church or State?”
April 6, 1964. By the same token, it is accorded “the rights and privileges of participation in the sessions and work of the General Assembly and the international conferences convened under the auspices of the Assembly or other organs of the United Nations, as well as in United Nations conferences as set out in the annex to the present resolution .”25 More than a favor done to the Holy See, the confirmation of its status was considered by this resolution as very important for the UN, whose interest is that all States be invited to participate in its work.26

Not only does Observer State status confer on non-members the right to participate in the sessions and works of the General Assembly and other Organs of the UN, it more significantly offers such States some specific privileges due to member states. These include the privilege to place items on the provisional agenda of the GA and greater access to the plenary sessions of the UN and its main committees, as well as to the Security Council. More important among these privileges for this essay is the right to vote in all UN conferences.27

Within this capacity, apart from its presence and office at UN headquarters New York, the Holy See also sends Permanent Observers to other UN offices, such as those in Geneva and Vienna, and to establishments such as the International Labor Organization (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organizations (FAO), High Commission for Refugees, World Health Organization (WHO), Institute for the Unification of Private Law, the International Committee of Military Medicine, World Trade Organization (WTO), and UN Industrial Development Organization.28 Beginning with Paul VI, the Roman Pontiff and the Holy See’s Permanent Observers have addressed the General Assembly on a number of occasions. These addresses take place in a general debate and later the issues are discussed at the committee level, depending on the subject matter. In many of these instances, the various pontiffs have lauded the mission and successes of the UN, though not without drawing attention to its deficiencies. Paul VI, in his address to the twentieth Session of the General Assembly of the UN, praised the labour and sacrifice, even to the point of death, which illustrious men and women of the UN had endured for the cause of peace in the world.29 His reference to the UN as a “great school of learning” in which all participants are students, implying even Church-members, has a huge ecclesiological significance.30 This is another expression of the humble recognition by Vatican II that the Church must not only teach but also learn from the world. The appreciation that the world has something to offer the Church is a humble affirmation of the basic doctrine that the spirit that inspires and permeates the Church is also at work in the world. This theological principle is the basis for the present role of the Holy See as both pupil and teacher in “this great school of learning” that is the United Nations.31

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28 The Holy See is also a permanent observer of the following UN and other international organizations: European Union, International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Latin Union (LU), Organization of American States in Washington (OAS), African Union (AU), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS), World Tourism Organization (WTOO), and World Food Programme (WFP). The Holy See Permanent Observer at the UN headquarters, Geneva, is Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, C.S.
30 Pope Paul VI, “Appeal to Peace,” 9. “... The United Nations is the great school ... and we are today in the Assembly Hall of the school. Everyone taking his place here becomes a pupil and also a teacher ...”
31 See Gaudium et Spes, nos. 11, 22. In these sections GS teaches that the “Spirit who leads the Church also ‘fills the earth,’ and the same grace with which the Church is blessed is equally at work in the heart of all men of Good will.”
On many occasions, John Paul II, who visited the UN more than any other pope and for this was fondly referred to by UN news reporters as the pope of the UN, gave credit to the organization for its promotion of human rights and for ensuring respect for the rights of nations, their cultures, and their particular models of development. Benedict XVI has continued in a like manner, as is evident in his visit to the UN and in the various interventions he has made in support of the many good works of the UN. In his speech to the UN General Assembly (April 18, 2008), he recognized “the founding principles of the Organization, the desire for peace, the quest for justice, respect for the dignity of the person, humanitarian cooperation and assistance.”

In a very similar manner, these pontiffs in their addresses pointed out the many factors inhibiting the achievement of the UN’s goals. These include: the lack of authority to carry out its goals; the growing tendency towards nationalism; the non-compliance of states with UN policies; and the failure to consider the common good, especially of those most threatened by hunger and injustice. Paul VI, addressing the twentieth UN General Assembly, maintained, “Your courage and your work impel you to study ways of guaranteeing the security of international life without recourse to arms. This is an aim worthy of your efforts; this is what the peoples of this world expect of you; this is what you must achieve. And for this, unanimous confidence in this institution must increase, its authority must increase; and this goal, one may hope, will be attained . . .” To the fiftieth UN General Assembly John Paul II said, “The United Nations Organization needs to rise more and more above the cold status of an administrative institution and to become a moral center where all the nations of the world feel at home and develop a shared awareness of being, as it were, a ‘family of nations . . .’”

From the inception of the office of the Permanent Observer mission in 1964 to date, the Holy See has made a series of contributions through submissions that have left a lasting influence on the world’s attempts to significantly reduce suffering and foster an enduring peace in the world. These contributions touch on various areas, such as environment and development, human rights, natural disaster reduction, population and development, social development, women, human settlements, food, and disarmament. Among these, its contribution to the World Summit for Children demands commendation. On June 5, 2001, the Holy See, together with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, co-sponsored a symposium at UN headquarters in New York on children in armed conflict. A complete documentation of these and other submissions and interventions has been compiled by Path to Peace Foundation in its publication, Serving the Human Family: The Holy See at the Major United Nations Conferences. By no means do these achievements make void the reality that there are still areas of this Holy See-UN relation that need improvement.

34 See John Paul II, “Address to the 50th UN General Assembly,” 14.
35 See John Paul II, “Address to the 50th UN General Assembly,” 14.
The Holy See's activities in the UN generally adhere to the traditional pattern of Roman Catholic Church diplomatic affairs. These come under the authority of the Secretary of State, the prime minister/chief executive and foreign secretary, who is represented by the papal delegate, the Permanent Observer. The present representative is Archbishop Francis A. Chullikat. The senior members of the staff of this office are drawn from the curial diplomatic service. This structural composition and its decision-making processes often resurrect the theological debate and irresolvable tension between a hierarchically centralized authority model and a more pluralistic and colligate model.

**Holy See Voting Option and the Imperative of Solidarity with the Poor**

There are other areas of UN activity within which the Holy See might function more effectively. The mere presence of the Holy See in the UN system—a conglomeration of people of every variety—is itself a witness to her embrace of solidarity, of being with the poor and with others for the sake of the poor. As mentioned earlier, through its presence and participation in the UN, the Holy See seeks dignity, equality, social participation, and care for the basic needs of all, especially the most disadvantaged of the world. It continues to seek the transformation of social conditions, solidarity, and openness to transcendental values.38 Still, some of the positions it takes in the UN differ visibly from the manner in which Christ fulfilled the imperative of solidarity, especially in its incarnational aspect.

Regarding its participation in the General Assembly, the Holy See has, of its own volition, chosen observer status instead of full membership, preventing it from voting in the General Assembly or recommending a candidate of its own.39 Even though its Permanent Observer status allows it to vote in other UN conferences, it remains neutral in all voting matters in the UN. It deems this choice consistent with its role as spiritual and moral guide to the organization. To some extent, this neutrality has worked to the Holy See's advantage, as the Rev. Vittorio Guerrera of the Holy See Mission pointed out during my interview with him in November 2008. He referred particularly to the successes of the Holy See in conflict resolution between adversaries, many of whom regard the Holy See as an honest broker. He believes also that this neutral option enables the Holy See, more than any other nation, to respond to issues on the floor of the General Assembly honestly, without fear or favor.

However, the decision not to vote remains problematic; it may lead to the perception that the option for neutrality is effectively a refusal to take decisive and public positions on specific issues and concrete instances of injustice suffered by people around the world. It calls into question the credibility of the Church's pledge of solidarity with and in support of the poor. Many social justice activists would argue that, in any case concerning the poor, no one can afford to be neutral, for neutrality is itself a position—a support of the status quo. Thus the Holy See's position arouses the suspicion of a possible ulterior motive, perhaps the need to save face so as to preserve good relations with certain nations with which it enjoys bilateral relations. The same might also apply to its lack of any visible commitment to challenging unjust structures within the UN, another unavoidable imperative of solidarity.

Not voting is obviously a pragmatic judgment that hopefully is based on what is best for carrying out the full mission of the Church, as evidenced in the example cited by the Holy See mission above. In other words, if the Holy See is to exercise its voting right, it might lose its image of a non-political participant, and thus its respect among some States might be jeopardized, especially among those States who see the Holy See's neutrality as a commitment to being an honest broker of peace. However, in particular individual cases, not voting will be detrimental to the option for the poor and the criticism of unjust structures. Take, for instance, the case of Palestine's request for UN membership, a significant step in resolving the age-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On Friday, September

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23, 2011, Palestine, in accordance with the UN Charter and Procedure, requested the Secretary General of the UN submit its application to become a full member of the UN to the Security Council. The request was returned to the General Assembly in September 2012 because of the threatened US veto. It took a majority vote by the General Assembly on November 29, 2012 to make Palestine a state observer, with increased access to the UN system. Such a vote also would increase moral pressure on the US to not use its veto, as it will be very obvious that it is the only opposition. To a Palestinian, whatever genuine concern the Church had shown to Palestinians and any good effects that might be accomplished by the decision not to vote might be offset by the Church’s neutrality and failure to stand up for Palestine’s UN membership, a specific need of the poor and oppressed of Palestine. Another example would be the growing global demand for the review of the UN Charter, the reformation of the Security Council, and the revitalization of the General Assembly. To begin any of these processes requires a majority vote and, in some cases, a consensus of the members of the General Assembly. Again, the choice not to vote would negate all the church’s very vocal criticism of the unjust structure of the UN, as seen in the various popes’ addresses to the UN. This is tantamount to the church not matching her words to her actions.

The biblical and Christological perspective of solidarity highlights its bipolar character, namely its universal and preferential dimensions. The universal dimension refers to our ontological relatedness, by which we have the responsibility to participate with the rest of humanity in a shared effort for the common good. The preferential dimension, emphasized by Gaudium et Spes (no. 1), refers to the special affinity with those who are less privileged or disadvantaged in society, particularly those impacted by systemic causes within the structures of human society. The distinction between the two dimensions, universal and preferential, is then expressed as “coming together” and “going over to the other side.” Properly interpreted, the poles of solidarity, though distinct, are not separated in practice, as illustrated by Christ’s own practice. His incarnation and redemption are both demonstrative of his identification with our entire humanity and of his preferential options for specific individuals, especially those on the margins of society.

From his example, we learn that solidarity is not merely virtual and sentimental. Rather, it is “practical, embodied, and comes at a cost: the uncomfortable, challenging, disruptive aspects of a face-to-face, shoulder-to-shoulder way of acknowledging our ‘we-ness.’” As the post-conciliar document, Sollicitudo rei Socialis, proclaims, “Solidarity then, is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are really responsible for all.” Christ did not withdraw from choices that constituted an option for the poor, even at the risk of misrepresentation of his identity as the sinless one. Jesus’ sinlessness, an act of solidarity, is his fidelity to his mission; his continuous choice of others, not self, so “that they may have life and have it to the full” (Jn10:10).

Some specific actions of Christ, such as his baptism, a meal at the Pharisee’s home, being in the company of women, going to the graveyard to deliver the demoniac, and touching the leper, all reveal this idea of solidarity as a continuous choosing of others, not self, at the cost of risking his identity as the sinless one. This is illustrated by John the Baptist’s hesitation to baptize him and the Pharisees’ criticism of his activities as inconsistent with their expectation of the son of God. William Reiser holds that the early Church universalized Jesus’ solidarity with the people of Israel, ritually expressed when he received John’s baptism, in order to encompass the whole human sto-

ry. He has no need of baptism, Matthew writes, yet Christ filed out with his people for John's baptism. It was more an act of identifying with his people in their brokenness, because he felt the weight of their depression caused by the structures of sin. Rather than stand aloof from the crowd, Jesus was part of the people wailing, yearning, and seeking their God, desiring to cross over the threshold of new life that God was offering through the Baptist. The baptism and other activities of Christ's solidarity provide us with both the opportunity and the criterion for judging such Christian activities of solidarity as the Holy See's UN voting option.

The presence of Holy See and the many actions it has taken for the common good in the UN witness to the universal aspect of solidarity. Concerning the preferential dimension of solidarity—unconditional commitment to standing with those oppressed, with the outcasts and those on the margin of society—the Holy See's choice of neutrality in all voting matters in the UN remains questionable and controversial. Reconsidered in the light of Christ's example, this choice suggests that this particular option is an ineffective or inadequate witness to solidarity with the poor at least in some circumstances.

The choice for neutrality is inconsistent with the theological and ecclesiological self-understandings of Vatican II that support the Holy See's activities in the socio-political realm. It belongs rather with the practice of the pre-conciliar Church's obsession with preserving its identity. The pre-conciliar Church would not get involved in anything that would mar its image, no matter how noble the cause. This neutrality supports the criticism of many today, that even though the Church of Vatican II expresses deep compassion for the poor, it has not exhibited enough evidence of its solidarity with them. I see this situation in terms of Gregory Baum's expression of the unresolved struggle in human institutions between the logic of maintenance and logic of mission—between a desperate desire to protect itself and the need for preferential solidarity—and how much the former often takes precedence.

Although the two logics are essential for the survival of any institution and the realization of institutional goals, all too often institutions give unjustified precedence to maintenance. Thus, the good programs of these institutions are often sacrificed to the desire to protect the status of the institute. Where this is the case, there is an often distorted obsession with institutional perpetuation and support to the detriment of the very purpose for which it was established. The Church, like any other institution, can get caught up in this exaggerated attention to the logic of maintenance. To preserve its dignity, it is sometimes reluctant to take action that might place its self-image at risk in the sight of other nations, even when these decisions would benefit the poor. It is within this tendency that the Holy See's neutrality in every vote becomes a betrayal of the true characteristic of incarnational solidarity as being-with, even in the face of personal discomfort. Pope Benedict XVI recently alluded to this tension between the logic of maintenance and logic of mission and the fact that the former often wins to the detriment of the later. Addressing representatives of Catholic associations active in the life of the Church and society at Freiburg on September 25, 2011 on the occasion of his visit to Germany, the pontiff says, “In the concrete history of the Church, however, a contrary tendency is also manifested … She gives greater weight to organisation and institutionalisation than to her vocation to openness.” In his analysis, he referred to this in terms of worldliness of the Church. By this he means the Church becoming too settled in this world, adapting herself to the standards of the world and


Jesus' baptism was more than a pre-figure of our own baptism through the sanctification of the baptismal water by his immersion in the Jordan, as scholastic theology taught. It was sharing in the others' vulnerability, entering with them into the experience of weakness and powerlessness, becoming part of uncertainty, and giving up control and self-determination. See Henri J.M. Nouwen, et al., Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 14.


to the feeling of self-sufficiency. He therefore recognizes the need and the urgency for the Church to "constantly rededicate herself to her mission, [of] filling the world with God's word and in transforming the world by bringing it into loving unity with God." To accomplish this task adequately, she must commit herself to a renewed effort to detach herself from the worldliness of the world, such as those logic maintenance proclivities identified in this work—self-preoccupation, self-centeredness, and self-preservation. Without this liberation, her missionary activity, especially in the context of new evangelization that supports such participation in the United Nations, will not maintain its credibility.

From the example of Christ's sinlessness as solidarity emerges a new understanding of dignity in which sin becomes anything that prevents us from experiencing or exercising solidarity with others because it is fundamentally a choice of self over others and over God. Examples of such defects, with which the Church still struggles, include self-centeredness, self-preoccupation, and self-preservation. To be the chosen of Christ implies that we are loved and are enabled to choose others and God. It is allowing self-love to prevent us from realizing our vocation of living for others that, more than unpopular actions, mars our dignity and identity as a compassionate Church. In order to fulfill its desired vision, in the light of the theological self-understandings of the UN mission, the Holy See must pay heed to these new soteriological implications of solidarity. In reality, the obsession for self-preservation, as Christ foretold in John’s gospel, initiates its own decline. “Whoever loves his life will destroy it, and whoever despises his life … keeps it” (Jn 12: 20-27).

The real problem with the logic of maintenance is that it creates a divide between what the institution says and what it does. The Church’s official social teaching promotes the logic of mission, yet in practice this teaching seems to be struggling with some inconsistent actions, such as the voting choice we are discussing. Situations like this may lead some people to wonder whether the Church applies its teaching to itself. How can one interpret this action, the choice of neutrality, in light of Benedict XVI’s insistence that defending, articulating, and witnessing the truth are the exacting and indispensable forms of our charity? Voting is a unique demonstration and articulation of one’s conviction to a truth, as well as one’s commitment to defending and witnessing that truth. It does not matter which side one votes; all that matters is that our vote is our voice. The veracity of this statement makes more obvious the problematic nature of the Holy See’s neutrality. Thus the Holy See’s critics would conclude that either the Holy See is not convinced of the seriousness of UN decisions, it is afraid to stand for what is the truth at all times, or it is serving some ulterior motive. The argument of diplomacy, its dynamics, and knowing how to play the game, which has been conjured by some Holy See supporters, may not be an effective defense.

Examples of the way Christ lived out the implications of this incarnational solidarity reveal another aspect of solidarity that has often been taken for granted by the Church, especially in its UN mission. Solidarity with Christ’s experience involves not only mutual support and cooperation but also includes a critique of the diametrically opposed attitudes of structures of sin found in the socio-economic and political arena. While Jesus identified with humanity in its pursuit of abundant life, he also chastised humanity for those activities and lifestyles that contributed to its own sufferings. Some examples of this are seen in the way he challenged the structures of his society, exemplified in his attack on temple activities (Mk 11:15-18). He put His life at risk by challenging the ‘business as usual’ attitude in his time. Being hopeful about the world is not the same as being “naively optimistic.” Hope does not refrain from remarking, often quite critically, on imbalances and failures in the system within which we work. We again recall Saint Augustine’s understanding of human institutions and the Christian’s responsibility to them.

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45 Pope Benedict XVI, “It is Time for the Church to Set Aside Her Worldliness.”
To him, within every social institution is a paradox of grace (love) and sin (sin) and their role. It is for the Christian who participates in them to work to increase opportunities for love (a commitment to common good) and to diminish opportunities for lust (the hunger to dominate) that are present in these institutions. Thus the Holy See must add to its UN activities a vocal and strong opposition to the unjust structures within the UN system itself, so that the UN may provide for the sincere, energetic, and generous cooperation of all people.

Examples of UN structural issues include the present composition of the General Assembly, the main decision-making body of the world community, which consists exclusively of state governments, with minimal participation and no active voice accorded to non-government agencies. The immense power vested in the Security Council by the founders of the UN to deal with violations of peace has proven a structural deficiency that often thwarts its responsibility to protect humanity from violence. The managerial and financial unaccountability and the inequitable dispersion between male and female staff of the Secretariat are also systemic issues that compromise the transparency and honesty of the UN system. There are also cases of inconsistencies and incompleteness in the foundational documents of the UN that stand between it and the realization of its goals, such as the peace, equality, freedom, and development of all peoples and sovereignties.

While it collaborates with the UN in achieving its goal of advancing peace and development in the world, the Holy See is equally called to stand against injustice in all structures, including the UN itself. With a prophetic voice, it is to speak courageously about truth, justice, fairness, and love. It will be more unchristian for a Christian representative to remain indifferent in such moments. The Holy See's campaign in this regard would not be without sacrifice and political risk. Yet, it is only in refusing to remain mute in the face of injustice that it deserves to hear the praise, “You have come here as Christians, and what you have done is truly Christian.”

Finally, as we have seen in this reflection, it is obvious that the real issue is not whether the Holy See should participate or even be present in the UN. The real question is how to improve its participation so that it may bear the desired fruits that witness to the basic theological and pastoral principle of solidarity that gives foundation to its activities. The Holy See's joining the UN in the universal concern and pursuit for lasting peace and human security expresses its solidarity with the poor and with the whole human family in its struggle for a better life. Yet its refusal to vote in all matters in the UN betrays another equally important aspect of the principles of incarnational solidarity.

Since this discussion is still open, as the former Permanent Observer, Archbishop Celestino Migliore, suggests, I think it is time for the Holy See to re-evaluate critically its position. How we stand with the poor following the example of Christ remains the basis of our solidarity with and for the poor. As Richard Gaillardetz writes, “The Church is a Church of the poor to the extent that it stands in solidarity with the powerlessness of the poor in this world and looks to the crucified Christ, who embraced powerlessness on the cross and effected its transformation in the resurrection.” This re-evaluation may also sharpen the dilemma of the Holy See remaining both a state and a Church: on the one hand, to vote jeopardizes the Church's role as a spiritual and moral guide at the UN and other institutions, but on the other hand, to remain neutral may compromise its role as defender of the poor.

Every Catholic, irrespective of his/her position, has a role to play in our Church as it faces these issues. The first step, as I mentioned in the beginning of this article, is attending to the limited awareness ordinary Catholics have about this mission of the Church. That includes enabling them to appreciate the social question as a world-wide


issue as well as an everyday faith life issue. Church documents from before the Second Vatican Council had already begun to see the social question as a world-wide issue. Concurrently, Popes have gradually but progressively brought their teaching into global context. Pope Paul VI made his key visit to the UN, bringing the Second Vatican Council itself (1965). Letters by Pope John Paul II to youth (1985), families and children (1994), and the elderly (1999) were written as part of special UN celebratory years. This same Pope also spoke of work in his 1982 address to the UN’s ILO. Pope Benedict XVI spoke on hunger in 2009 to the UN’s FAO. Pope Francis spoke on international cooperation and care for the poor in an address to the FAO in June 2013.

These concerns for universal solidarity are always held in harmony with the principles of subsidiarity. John Paul II observes in *Sollicitudo rei Socialis* that concern for the global should not diminish concern for the local. Instead, both levels of concern should complement each other. Without such unity of complementarity, solidarity may give way to a demeaning paternalistic social assistance and subsidiarity to social privatism.

Further examples of the UN as occasion or context for specific Church teaching could be multiplied over and over. So could examples of the gradual, progressive shifting within the Church of the social question into a world-wide issue. We cannot predict how much time it will take for the ordinary person in the pew, pastoral ministers, and the church as a whole to integrate fully this world-wide shift of the social question. Many obstacles stand in the way, including excessive nationalism, anti-UN ideologies, and a legitimate need to focus exclusively upon what is local, among others. The lack of sufficient catechetical materials focusing on this issue shows how far we have to go.

Some positive signs of this can already be seen. Every year the Holy See organizes a one week educational program, “Catholic Social Teaching Seminar,” for youths and college students. The Holy See Mission uses this opportunity to introduce to these young people its activities at the UN and to other social questions of our time. Similar education programs are also organized by Catholic NGOs working with the UN. Those of religious congregations hold series of seminars and workshops around UN issues to educate their constituencies about their work at the UN. They emphasize the significance of such activities as witnessing to their call to follow Christ as religious today. Since 1999, *IMCS-Pax Romana*, “a Catholic Confederation of students from all over the world,” has brought the UN’s agenda on human rights to both its members and diocesan promoters of justice and peace through its two annual internship programs. On these occasions for on-going formation, theologians are often invited to interact with UN presenters. Participants assume responsibility for organizing similar events at their local campuses. It will be important to see some of these seminars organized in parishes across the global in order to reach a larger audience of the Catholic faithful.

Church teaching is clear and emphatic: the social question as a constituent part of preaching the Gospel is now world-wide. Myriad factors of Church life, renewal, and pastoral activity promote increased awareness of this reality. But a particularly glaring missing piece of the puzzle is a more prophetic UN presence of the Holy See—the witness of its vote.
Imagination and Difference: Beyond Essentialism in Church Teaching and Practice

by Christopher Pramuk

For Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men’s faces.
Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J.

Theology makes progress by being always alive to its own fundamental uncertainties..
John Henry Newman

Few have captured the heart of the Christian and Catholic sacramental imagination so vividly as the English Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. Hopkins’ luminous vision of the Christ who “plays in ten thousand places” is not an exercise in literary fantasy. It begins, like all authentic Christian hope, with the world as we encounter it, the world in which God became flesh, “a broken world with many broken people.”¹ It is there, through eyes of faith, that we meet Christ, “lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his.” In the words of Jesuit Superior General Adolfo Nicolas, the act of sacramental faith and incarnational hope begins with a “profound engagement with the real, [and] a refusal to let go until one goes beneath the surface.”² But alas, how difficult it is to get beneath the surface of people, especially those whom we are inclined to identify ahead of time as suspect or dangerous because they are different. How often do we presume, without the benefit of a real encounter, that what lies beneath the surface is not trustworthy?

We who are the Church might ask ourselves honestly: In whom are we least prepared to meet Christ, the incarnate face of Love? The Jew? The Muslim? The young black man from the inner city? The “welfare mom”? The gay couple down the street? The atheist? The priest behind the altar? This essay is an attempt to wrestle honestly with the reality of human difference and the ways we handle racial, biological, and cultural differences imaginatively, theologically, and pastorally in relation to God and the sacramental realm of religious practice. The intuition I wish to explore here is that our theology—our ways of thinking about, speaking from, and practicing the presence of

² Nicolas, “Depth, Universality, and Learned Ministry.”
God—requires a method, a language, and above all an imagination that does not seek to manage or erase difference out of the gate but is committed to listening to the other receptively, contemplatively, as “an other with words to speak—words of his or her own that may challenge from difference and may love with freedom.”

More precisely, the question at hand is not only how we relate in church and society to all manner of differences—racial, cultural, sexual, biological—but also God’s freedom to love in and through all of God’s creation, not least those we hold apart, categorize, and often demonize as different. Theology, for the sake of love, must interrogate the ten thousand ways we cut ourselves off from the unfamiliar or feared other and, thus, from the hidden Christ who plays in all things. Our poverty, I will argue here, is foremost a poverty of theological imagination.

It should be clear in what follows that by imagination, I do not mean the realm of make believe or fantasy. Following John Henry Newman and the Ignatian tradition of Hopkins, Adolfo Nicolas, William Lynch, and many others, I mean that dynamic mode of cognition that perceives the basic resemblances between things and selects and organizes experience into a meaningful whole. The imagination is not separate from reason but enables us to reason differently by enlarging and reordering our perception of reality, providing a new unity to our understanding and knowledge. For Newman, the “theology of the religious imagination” summons forth all our most subtle faculties: reason and imagination, intuition and deduction, experience and memory, and analysis and prayerful realization. The aim of theology is not strictly faith or truth but wisdom, which Newman describes as “the clear, calm, accurate vision, and comprehension of the whole course, the whole work of God.” Wisdom seeks “a connected view of the old with the new,” and insight into “the bearing and influence of each part upon every other, without which there is no whole, and could be no centre.” Wisdom implies growth, slow-paced change, and prayerful discernment. Because our faith is not fantasy, the path toward wisdom in the church must begin, often with a jolt, again and again in the reality of things as they are, as best as we can discern them, and not as we should like them to be.

We begin, then, with a montage of contemporary realities that serve to illuminate the challenge of difference as it confronts us from all sides in society and church. By difference I mean not only racial, religious, and cultural differences but also biologically inscribed differences, such as gender and sexual orientation. From these cases I then identify a pervasive essentialist style of thought and imagination that permeates our language-worlds and ritual practices in society and church, crippling our capacity for love and transformative engagement with others. Drawing from Thomas Merton, St. Paul, Newman, and others, I conclude with some schematic reflections on the imagination and theological development as the difference comes into play, or meets painful impasse, in the lives of Christians and Catholics everywhere.

Language, Reality, and Difference

Like any recitation of images or examples the following montage is highly selective and leaves aside a great deal of contextual nuance, not least any silver linings or graces that may be hidden in each of these contexts and the different worlds they represent. What follows are only partial snapshots of the real, yet together they suggest a society and church increasingly, sometimes dangerously, impoverished of empathy, theological imagination, and hope.

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5 John Henry Newman, Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1997), 287–93. One of Newman’s enduring gifts to Catholic thought is the gift of wisdom, his reflective manner of discerning the shape of the whole not by way of “generalized laws or metaphysical conjectures” but by basic trust in and careful attention to the “concrete” and “living” soil of experience and religious imagination.
• An unarmed 17-year-old black man named Trayvon Martin, wearing a hoodie and walking in a gated community in Florida, is identified as “suspicious-looking” by an armed 28-year-old Hispanic neighborhood watch volunteer, confronted, and shot to death as a 911 operator records screams for help and gunshots. Americans are divided along racial lines as to whether or not racial profiling is self-evident in the case.

• Black parents everywhere describe the obligatory ritual of teaching their sons the “Black Male Code,” i.e., the rules of how to act in the presence of white people and, above all, how to act when—not if—they are pulled over by the police while driving.6

• Analyzing thousands of music videos aired on MTV and BET in the last thirty years, media critic Sut Jhally describes the dominant portrayal of young black men as possibly “the most racist set of images ever displayed in public” since D. W. Griffith’s white supremacist film of 1913, “Birth of a Nation.” The portrayal of women in music videos, and black women especially, is almost universally dehumanizing and objectifying. “Their value [is] often reduced to a single part of their anatomy.” Several infamous hip-hop videos, for example, feature the male star running a credit card through a willing woman’s buttocks. Jhally describes the dominant lens or narrative through which men and women have been portrayed in music video since the early 1980s as the “adolescent male heterosexual pornographic imagination,” a narrative now so dominant in American popular culture as to be widely considered normal.7

• Federal statistics report that one in five college women are victims of sexual assault, most often during their first few months on campus. College women express conflicted feelings about reporting sexual assault in the face of enormous social pressures not to do so, especially when incidents involve alcohol (as most do) or high-profile male student athletes. As one University of Notre Dame professor sees it, “Most of my colleagues and almost all of my students tend to be very protective of the institution and our image, and they’re not eager to look too closely at anything that might raise questions.”8

• A 2010 Kaiser Family Foundation survey reports that children between age eight and eighteen in America spend an average of fifty-three hours per week engaged with television or some form of electronic media. African American and Hispanic kids spend nearly one-third more time than white kids. Jesuit ethicist Fr. John Kavanaugh describes the advertising imagery driving these media as the dominant form of education and moral formation in our lives, crippling our deepest capacities for social empathy and loving, committed sexual relationships.9

• A study commissioned by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops reports that between 1950 and 2002, approximately 10,667 children were sexually abused by clergy in the United States. The revelation of widespread sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church and the systematic denial and obfuscation by bishops around the world continues to this day.10

Several African American Catholic eighth graders in a Midwestern parochial school habitually refer to one another in casual conversation as “niggers.” Their white classmates understand that they are never to use the term but confess bewilderment as to why the black kids, and presumably their parents, would use it.11

The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio estimates that some twelve to twenty-seven million human beings are caught in one form or another of modern day slavery with as many as 17,500 trafficked into the United States annually. Nearly three out of four victims are women and half are children.12

Congress repeatedly fails to pass The Dream Act. Opponents decry any hint of “amnesty” for the children of “illegal aliens.”13

During a televised Mass presided by Pope Benedict in Washington, DC, following Prayers of the Faithful and a Presentation of the Gifts marked by diverse languages and spirited Gospel and Spanish singing, a noted commentator on the influential Catholic EWTN network remarks: “We have just been subjected to an over-preening display of multicultural chatter. And now, the Holy Father will begin the sacred part of the Mass.” Black Catholic ethicist Fr. Bryan Massingale observes that such a statement reflects an attitude “more typical and widespread than many are willing to acknowledge,” namely, that Catholic equals white. “In U.S. Catholicism,” Massingale writes, “only European aesthetics and cultural products are truly Catholic—regardless of the church’s rhetorical commitment to universality.”14

The white pastor of an urban black Catholic parish in a Midwest diocese is reprimanded by his bishop for sitting among the parishioners during the Liturgy of the Word instead of remaining situated above them in the presider’s chair in the sanctuary as liturgical norms dictate and for participating with parishioners in a spirited, wide-ranging, and lengthy sign of peace. Asked to explain, the priest says, “They forget that I, too, like the laity, am the object of the Word.”15

The Roman Catholic Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei clarifies that the newly reinstated Tridentine or Latin form of the Mass does not permit girls to serve at the altar. Pastors in Arizona, Michigan, and Virginia forbid altar girls during all forms of the Mass under the logic that “replacing girls with boys as servers leads to more vocations to the priesthood.” Facing objections from parishioners, a Phoenix pastor says he did not consult the parish council “because they are not theologically trained.” One (female) Catholic blogger applauds the move, describing girl altar servers as a “liturgical aberration” and “one more example of the devastating feminization of worship which has contributed in no small measure to the prevalence of effeminate priests and the sex abuse scandal.” A Virginia mother whose pastor instated a boys-only policy says, “That’s when I knew, in my heart, that we couldn’t stay any longer at this parish.” She and her husband and daughters have since “floated around” between area parishes, feeling “heartbroken by our church.” The diocese of Lincoln, NE, has forbidden girl servers since 1994.16

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11 Conversations with the author’s son, March 2012.
12 See http://www.freedomcenter.org/slavery-today/.
13 See http://dreamact.info/.
15 Interview with the author, April 2012. The priest, for obvious reasons, wishes to remain anonymous.
• Pastoral staff and teachers in many dioceses across the United States are increasingly required, as a condition of remaining in employment, to sign loyalty oaths indicating that they personally embrace the official teachings of the Catholic Church on matters of widespread conscientious dissent such as contraception, gay marriage, and women’s ordination. Many choose to sign; some refuse and resign or are terminated.¹⁷

• A 2012 survey reports that ninety-two percent of American youth aged two through seventeen years old play video games while some nine percent of players between eight and eighteen are “pathological players,” or clinically addicted. A respected medical journal describes video games as possibly “the most effective educational technology ever invented. Players are immersed in an environment where they are rewarded for doing well and punished when they don’t. Either way, they get to keep doing it until their performance improves.” In the case of the massively popular “Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3” and “Grand Theft Auto,” mostly what children “keep doing until their performance improves” is kill people. “If you’re being rewarded for killing female hookers,” worries Dr. Michael Rich of Children’s Hospital in Boston, “that’s bound to teach you something over time.”¹⁸

• A 2012 Nielsen report shows that children aged thirteen to seventeen send an average of 3,417 text messages a month. The Pew Research Center notes that the near ubiquity of handheld devices has had an enormous impact on kids’ free time, filling up the “interstitial spaces” in their daily lives. Yale professor Stephen Carter worries that as young people “increasingly fill their free hours with texting and other similarly fast-paced, attention-absorbing activities, the opportunities for sustained reflective thought will continue to fade.” One cost of social media, suggests Carter, may be to accelerate the decline “of what our struggling democracy most needs: independent thought.”¹⁹

• A gay student at Rutgers University commits suicide after his roommate secretly records him engaging in sexual activity with another man and posts the video online. Educators describe cyber-bullying as a national epidemic and the harassment of gay students during the high school and college years as a particular cause for alarm.²⁰

Ways of Seeing and Managing Difference

A great deal could be said about any one of the above points or any number taken together. I limit myself to three observations, each subject to my own biases and need for greater understanding and conversion, and trust the reader will find (or reject) other possible connections.

First, in all of these snapshots, from music videos and national political discourse to the Catholic liturgy, note how prevailing images, language-forms, and ritual practices often serve not to open up the circle of loving encounter between persons in a community but rather to create image and language-worlds that effectively divide, dehumanize, and close the circle of mutual encounter, friendship, and grace. Young men of color are routinely profiled as “suspicious-looking,” often with tragic consequences; black women are “welfare queens,” “hoes,” and “bitches” and are visualized and treated as such in popular public imagery ranging from political campaign ads to music videos.


Freshmen women in college are targeted as easy prey and plied with alcohol to facilitate the easy hookup or the traumatic sexual assault. Adolescent boys score points and esteem among their peers for their efficiency in gunning down female prostitutes and stealing cars in sexually-charged virtual feedback loops. Gay students are bullied and exposed via the Internet to the point of suicide.

In the realm of the church, the Catholic laity cannot be trusted for consultation or insight in matters of faith or worship because “they are not theologically trained,” nor daily immersed in the “sacred” realm of the ordained; the sexual abuse crisis is rooted in the “liberal culture of the 1960s” and can further be blamed on the “feminization of worship” and “effeminate priests.” European cultural imagery is “authentically Catholic” while African and Latin American forms of imagery and worship are suspect. God is a reflection of the white European “Holy Father”; and altar girls (it can only follow) are a “liturgical aberration.”

While it is true that not all the differences in play here are of the same order—e.g., socially constructed differences such as race and class are not of the same order as biologically inscribed differences such as sex and sexual orientation—nevertheless one can discern a certain tendency or common style of thought epidemic both in society and church in the way language and imagery are used to manage, compartmentalize, and contain difference. Following a number of seminal feminist writers, Thomas Merton diagnosed the problem almost fifty years ago. The basic error underlying all manner of dangerous “isms” or phobias of the other—racism, classism, sexism, misogyny, clericalism, homophobia, xenophobia—“is the logical consequence of an essentialist style of thought.” Merton laments the degree to which language is used not to facilitate genuine communication or understanding but to identify and label the other’s essence, so as to manage and contain our fear of difference:

[An essentialist style of thought involves] finding out what a man is and then nailing him to a definition so that there can be no change. A White Man is a White Man, and that is it. A Negro, even though he is three parts white is “A Negro” with all that our rigid definition predicates of a Negro. And so the logical machine can devour him because of his essence. Do you think that in an era of existentialism this will get better? On the contrary: definitions, more and more schematic, are fed into computers. The machines are meditating on the most arbitrary and rudimentary of essences, punched into IBM cards, and defining you and me forever without appeal. “A priest,” “A Negro,” “A Jew,” “A Socialist,” etc.21

Whether conservative or liberal, gay or straight, white or black, Christian or Jew, an essentialist style of thought errs dangerously by employing language and imagery as an unyielding straitjacket, short-circuiting the imagination and nailing a person (and everyone like them) to a definition, a tautology, an essence, so that the game is up well ahead of time. There can be no room for change, no room for dialogue, no room for encounter, no room for growth, no room for transformation, no room for freedom, no room for curiosity, no room for spontaneity, no room for discovery, no room for risk, no room for error, and above all, no room for mercy or forgiveness. In short, depending on your essence, you are innocent or guilty, never both. There can be no room for love.

Second, what scandalizes about many of the above accounts is not just that individuals would be capable of bigotry, willful ignorance, and mischaracterization of others, fantastic displays of ego, sexual dysfunction, and violence—all marks of sin and human freedom gone badly awry—but that the very institutions that profess a commitment to

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human dignity and justice and that hold the power to effect positive transformation in society would fail or refuse
to do so when sinful patterns of injustice are brought into the light. Nothing threatens a child’s emergent sense
of identity and belonging so much as the realization that his very presence is perceived as a crisis and a threat to
his society. Because of his parents’ country of origin, his skin color, or the clothes that he wears, he is not only
unwelcome but also, according to the prevailing legal system, literally disposable. Nothing is more damaging to
the church’s moral authority or more disheartening to the laity than the hypocrisy and willful blindness of some of
its shepherds and the punitive disciplinary measures often employed to silence thoughtful, conscientious dissent.
Few practices—though I am open to correction on this point—are more demeaning to the dignity of peoples of
color than their adoption of the racist terms, images, and misogynist practices long used against them in the white
“master’s house.”

If language makes a world, the future of hope in families, society, and church depends not a little on the image and language-worlds we choose to inhabit.

Third, while it is difficult to measure or fully understand the impact of television and electronic media in our lives,
it is impossible to ignore their enormous sway in the imaginative lives of our children. What is the status of our
loving presence—our capacity to “just be” with our spouses, children, or by ourselves in reflective solitude—when
there is hardly a moment of the day that we (and our children) are not tethered to an electronic device? What are
the prospects for social empathy when the media to which we are addictively present, and through which we so
often surrender our capacity for independent thought, fill our imaginations with so much fear, aggression, and
unmitigated garbage about those who look and think differently than us?

If culture may be broadly described as the constellation of images and stories by which we live our lives, it is not
too strong, I think, to suggest that the crisis of culture threatening our very personhood and the pursuit of the
common good in America today is not just white privilege or white racist supremacy but an all-encompassing
media supremacy. This is a public and increasingly private atmosphere of imagery and language so rancorously
divisive and often violent with respect to difference that it threatens to bury our most basic capacities for empathy,
intimacy, and love beneath an avalanche of narcissism, political self-interest, and distraction. All of this adds up
to a very different kind of presence and power at work in our relational lives, shaping our conception of the real at
every level.

Indeed these points come into particularly intense focus when we consider the dominant images and practices
shaping our conceptions of sexuality, intimacy, and family life. What are the prospects for sacred eros or erotic
love, for example, when so many children, adolescents, and not a few adults are exposed regularly, if not addic-
tively, to sexually charged video games and to pornography, accessed easily via the Internet in ever more fantastic
iterations? Even more contentious from a theological perspective is the question of homosexual love. A great many

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22 See the influential essay by Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” Sister Outsider: Essays and

23 This is not to deny the potential for good of the Internet and other forms of electronic media as tools of communication and building
community, especially where person-to-person means are impossible or even forbidden. It is also important to note that the factors
contributing to excessive television and media exposure among children are socially variable and complex.

24 According to Jesuit Superior General Adolfo Nicolas, one of the greatest challenges facing university educators today is what he calls
the “globalization of superficiality,” partly a consequence of our ability to instantly access unlimited quantities of information via the
Internet without personal engagement, depth of thought, or intellectual labor. “People lose the ability to engage with reality, a process
of dehumanization that may be gradual and silent, but very real.” Nicolas, “Depth, Universality, and Learned Ministry.”
thoughtful people who love the church and who also love their gay and lesbian friends, sons and daughters, and brothers and sisters are asking for theological clarity on this most vexatious of all issues of human difference.25

This is clearly not the place to attempt a discussion of homosexuality in the Scriptures or the Christian tradition, but the question, as an acute problem of difference, merits brief consideration along the lines of reasoning (and imagining) already laid out in this essay. Can sexual love, this most wondrous of mysteries of our relational life as fashioned in the image of God, be fixed to a single image and essence so that the mystery is resolved and contained ahead of time?26 Is it congruous with our experience that homosexuals, by virtue of biological denotation, are “objectively disordered” and incapable of familial covenental love or selfless contribution to the common good of society and church? The gathering chorus of Christians who question an essentialist or strictly heterosexual vision of sacred eros evidently do so from the intuition, rooted in the loving witness of gays and lesbians themselves, that homosexual love can be and in practice often is sacramental, an incarnate sign and instrument of covenental love and divine grace. More and more Christians and Catholics are coming to grasp the issue at its heart (and in their hearts) as a question not of political correctness, minority rights, or accommodation to liberal culture but rather of theological integrity, wholeness, and doctrinal development. In whose image are homosexual persons made?27

Unfortunately, even to clear a space for such questions is to wade deeply into the turbulent waters of the culture wars, where efforts at dialogue are often met with scorn and punitive ad hominem reprisals. That there is little room in the church to discern such questions safely, openly, and honestly should be a matter of deep concern for every Catholic and Christian, no matter where one's convictions lie on the spectrum of sexuality. Gays and lesbians continue to suffer a terrible existential and theological loneliness, a great many doing so in the heart of the church they love.28

How much easier to keep quiet and swallow the beautiful opiate pill of consumerism! Gay or straight, white or black, rich or poor, Christian or Jew, in practice we all seem to agree that what really promises to set us free is money, glorious money, and splendid, self-driven success in the real world of capital. No presence, no mutual vulnerability, no companionship, no attentive silence, no deference to the earth, no making room for the hidden,

25 Sexual diversity raises the dilemma of difference in ways arguably more primordial than race, insofar as it manifests differences that are biologically inscribed and not just, or primarily, socially constructed. Among my college's students there are few issues that generate more intensive discussion than homosexuality and the question of how to account for gay and lesbian persons, theologically, sacramentally, in God, and in the life of the church.

26 The relevant Church teachings, available at www.usccb.org, include The Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 2331–400; Homosexualitatis problema, or “On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons” (1986); “Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers” (1997); especially influential among younger Catholics are John Paul II's conferences on the “theology of the body;” For a balanced summary of “gender essentialism” and “complementarity of the sexes” in Church teachings, see Beth Haile, “Catechism Commentary: The Sixth Commandment,” at http://catholicmoraltheology.com/catechism-commentary-the-sixth-commandment/.

27 “What are gays and lesbians to do with their bodies, their selves?” asks M. Shawn Copeland, one of a handful of Catholic systematic theologians who calls explicitly for the development of Catholic theological anthropology inclusive of homosexual embodiment, in her case primarily through the lens of Christology. See M. Shawn Copeland, Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 55–84, and references therein. See also Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 2008).

28 Bishop Thomas Gumbleton has openly supported Catholic ministries to gays and lesbians while emphasizing primacy of conscience. See Thomas Gumbleton, “A Call to Listen: The Church’s Theological and Pastoral Response to Gays and Lesbians,” in Sexual Diversity and Catholicism: Toward the Development of Moral Theology, ed. Patricia Beattie Jung with Joseph Andrew Coray (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), and other essays in this volume. Catholic priest and theologian James Alison and Jesuit author James Martin have also written eloquently on this topic; see, e.g., James Alison, On Being Liked (New York: Crossroad, 2004) and James Martin, “Respect, Compassion, and Sensitivity” (Jan. 12, 2012), and “She Loved Prophetically” (Jan. 9, 2013), both accessible at www.americamagazine.org.
the sick, the ugly, the forgotten—just swipe your credit card, hit the gas, and enjoy the ride. “Love: it’s what makes a Subaru, a Subaru.”

Love: The Uncontainable Mystery

It may be that our most urgent task today is to take back the word “love” from the corporate spin doctors, best-selling psychologists and self-help gurus, and self-appointed prophets of religious orthodoxy and return it fully to the boundless mystery of God. The Bible itself offers not one image or metaphor for love but at least three—*agape*, *illos*, and *eros*—and even these with their beautiful and various shades of meaning cannot fully contain the mystery. The much-neglected Song of Songs gives us a wondrous affirmation of erotic love but still no room for affirming homosexual love as holding a place in God’s heart from the very beginning. Yet if God is Love—not a fixed and solitary essence but a way of being-in-relationship—and God remains free and beyond our comprehension, does not the burden lay upon us to make room in our hearts and theological imaginations for the mystery of covenantal love in all its potentially sacramental realizations? Might that mystery not also include homosexual love?

I ask the question provisionally, granting that the discussion here is far from complete. Nevertheless I ask with an eye on the freedom of God to love in and through different forms of bodily human agency. If we are going to err in our ignorance, should we not err freely on the side of inclusion, both in doctrine and deed, and not on the side of exclusion so long as the mystery of covenantal love is served? As St. Paul reminds us, “We know partially and we prophesy partially.” For now, we see only “indistinctly, as in a mirror” and not yet “face to face” (1 Cor 13:9, 12). One has only to think of Christianity’s historical record with slavery or with the Jews to discern that the risk of getting it wrong in theological development is ever outweighed by the demands of love, social solidarity, and pastoral care: the call to encounter God’s presence in those who challenge from difference, and who might yet teach us something beautiful about the mystery of God-made-flesh, something we haven’t before been able to realize.

How might we make ourselves a little more worthy of the great Welcome Table before our eyes are privileged to see it? We might begin by taking a critical look at ourselves, and our prevailing images of God, through the lens of love:

> Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, (love) is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Cor 13:4-7)

Perhaps these lines are too familiar to Christians for their profound meaning to be really knowable or contemplated in a sustained way for their implications in every aspect of our lives.

The Christian mystical tradition interprets St. Paul’s sublime teachings on love through the lens of the Beatitudes, especially what Jesus calls purity of heart and poverty of spirit. Both purity of heart and poverty of spirit describe an interior disposition that is very difficult to realize outside of grace, namely, the humility of love as we stand...
before the other, a humility that is not quick-tempered and does not seek its own interests. Politically speaking, such a disposition would seem a recipe for disaster! Yet the deep source of all such humility is incarnational. It is the presumption, in the mystery of faith, that no less than Christ, the incarnate face of God, approaches us in the other: “For Christ plays in ten thousand places, / Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his / to the Father through the features of men’s faces.”


In whose image, specifically, are we made? As a father myself and, more pointedly, as the son of a loving father, the paternal face of God as Father evokes well for me Christianity’s sublime teachings about love. For many men, women, and children alike, “Father” has long been and can continue to be a beautiful divine image, a sustaining metaphor of divine presence, constancy, and loving care. (Picture the father, for example, in Rembrandt’s incomparable painting “The Return of the Prodigal Son.”) But for many people whose experience of “father” is traumatic, domineering, or cold, the image does not evoke or make room enough for love. For many, the line between paternal presence and patriarchal power is much too thin. Clearly it is not enough to insist in perfect tautological fashion that God equals Father.

We must remember that God is also Mother, Spirit, and Shekhinah, lest we deny our maternal and feminine experiences of grace, tighten the noose around divine-human wholeness, and foreclose the imaginative flexibility of the Bible itself, not to mention the great intellectual and mystical tradition of the church. My own prayer life, like that of countless Christians from east to west for nearly two millennia, has been enormously enlarged and enriched by the biblical image and memory of God as Sophia, or Holy Wisdom: “For there is nought God loves, be it not one who dwells with Wisdom … Indeed she reaches from end to end mightily and governs all things well” (Wis 7:28, 8:1).

32 Shepard, a twenty-one-year-old college student in Laramie, Wyoming, was tortured and left to die suspended from a fence post by two attackers because he was gay. During his funeral in his hometown of Casper, Wyoming, protestors from the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas were on hand to deliver their “God Hates Fags” message to Shepard’s family and friends. Their picket signs read: “No Tears for Queers” and “Fag Matt in Hell.” The harassment of young gays around the country—and in not a few cases their subsequent suicide—is described by many observers today as epidemic. An arresting icon by Fr. William Hart McNichols, “The Passion of Matthew Shepard,” moves the debate surrounding homosexuality from head to heart, from abstract ideals to concrete persons, identifying the suffering of gays and lesbians directly with the passion of Christ. The icon can be viewed at www.fatherbill.org.

33 The phrase is borrowed from Sue Monk Kidd’s The Secret Life of Bees (New York: Viking Penguin, 2002), a beautifully realized, almost mythic protest against the forces of racism, sexism, and classism—indeed against a whole civilization, and implicitly a patriarchal church—that seem determined to obscure the extraordinary good news of our shared life together in God, reducing men, women, and children alike to “doubt and small living” (289).
yields a number of logical but dangerously un-Christian consequences in the life of the church. The Christ of Hopkins’ imagination is not (simply) the male Jew from Nazareth whose essence we must all physically mirror or whose actions we must all robotically emulate—as if the New Testament presented such a cookie-cutter model of holiness and discipleship (it does not). It is not Christ as essence that we worship but Christ the humanity of God, who hides and plays in every person’s latent desire, unique God-given gifts, and implicit freedom for love. God gifts us, as God gifted Jesus, with the faculties to grow in wisdom and love (Lk 2:52). The vulnerability of such a covenantal God, who makes room for the slow flowering of human freedom-in-grace, cannot be overstated.

Imagination and Theological Renewal

In his own reflections on the challenges of theological growth and discernment facing every generation in the church, Blessed John Henry Newman reminds us why a static or essentialist vision of God will not do for the Catholic sacramental imagination:

> From the nature of the case, all our language about Almighty God, so far as it is affirmative, is analogical and figurative. We can only speak of Him, whom we reason about but have not seen, in terms of our experience. When we reflect on Him and put into words our thoughts about Him, we are forced to transfer to a new meaning ready made words, which primarily belong to objects of time and place. We are aware, while we do so, that they are inadequate, but we have the alternative of doing so, or doing nothing at all. We can only remedy their insufficiency by confessing it. We can do no more than put ourselves on the guard as to our own proceeding, and protest against it, while we do … it. We can only set right one error of expression by another. By this method of antagonism we steady our minds, not so as to reach their object, but to point them in the right direction; as in an algebraical process we might add and subtract in series, approximating little by little, by saying and unsaying, to a positive result.34

Theological discernment can never reach its destination so perfectly as a logical syllogism or a smoothly functioning astronomical machine. God, the object of theology, is no object at all; the human person, too, is an irreducible mystery. Theological language needs room to breathe and be caught up breathless, to speak and not speak, to affirm and deny, and to hold firm and develop. It is not that theology must begin again in a conceptual vacuum with every new generation. Rather, because our grasp of God is always “analogical and figurative,” theology speaks of God, “whom we reason about but have not seen, in terms of our experience.”35

This means that theology at its catholic best, like Christianity itself, is an organic and living language. We are still learning how to give full (and full-bodied!) voice to the mystery of the incarnation. In our stumbling efforts to realize the mystery, we must not only attend carefully to the Scriptures and appeal methodically to reason but also drink deeply from the wellspring of human experience in all its mosaic diversity, an open realm of discovery much more ambiguous and even antagonistic than we should like in speaking of God. To do so is not an act of creativity

35Newman calls this dynamic, holistic, cumulative, often “antagonistic” manner of growing into the truth “the illative sense.” Where scientific rationality proceeds by linear or deductive thinking, imaginative rationality (the illative sense) is closer to literary or poetic cognition, involving an organic process of discernment which Newman compares to a skilled climber on the rock face—we advance “not by rule, but by an inward faculty.” For a more thorough discussion of Newman on the imagination and doctrinal development see Christopher Pramuk, “‘They Know Him By His Voice’: Newman on the Imagination, Christology, and the Theology of Religions,” Heythrop Journal 48 (Jan 2007): 61-85.
or theological daring for its own sake; it is an act of trust in God who breathes life into all things. “Theology,” as Newman observes, “makes progress by being always alive to its own fundamental uncertainties.”

The alternative—to reduce divine and human mysteries to facts akin to axioms of mathematics or science—is the great temptation and error of religious fundamentalism, the death of theology and the death of authentic Christian hope. Newman writes:

Our theological philosophers are like the old nurses who wrap the unhappy infant in swaddling bands or boards, put a lot of blankets on him and shut the windows that not a breath of fresh air may come to his skin—as if he were not healthy enough to bear wind and water in due measures. They move in a groove, and will not tolerate anyone who does not move in the same.

Thus what threatens our grasp of the great human mosaic is the same captivity of imagination that threatens our grasp of the living God. Like the old nurses who wrap the unhappy infant for fear she will catch ill, the church risks trading in its theological vitality and growth in wisdom of love for withering slowly in self-contained protectiveness.

Historically the great beauty of Catholicism resides in its intellectual and imaginative capacity to renew itself. A danger point is reached when the language of theology is not permitted to renew itself and becomes, as John Coulson put the matter some forty years ago, even less sensitive than the surrounding culture “to that sense of complexity, even paradox, which, in the public language of our poets, novelists, and dramatists, is, in origin, theological.”

It is worth pondering this insight very carefully. Wherever the church shuts down—imaginatively, theologically, liturgically—the culture rushes in to fill the void, not least in the imaginative lives of Christians themselves. The fertile complexity and paradox to which Coulson speaks refers not only to our encounter with the mystery of God but also to our encounter with the deepest mysteries of human being. How often our poets and filmmakers do a better job attuning our spiritual senses to the wondrous play of Christ, the humanity of God, in all things than our increasingly restrictive theologies and liturgies. By Christ, I mean the revelation of our common humanity limned in divine potentiality through the freedom of love.

Of course, as detailed in the montage above, the secular image-makers also hold the power to get it terribly wrong about the human person, and this fact undoubtedly complicates the relationship between church and culture. Witness the rapacious language-world and pseudo-liturgical aesthetics of the Third Reich or, closer to home, the new universe envisioned by so many Hollywood films, where robots and computers vie to dominate (and liberate) the world and the boundary between persons and machinery dissolves. What kind of corporate imagination—and dashed hopes in the (merely) human species—would give rise to the enormous popularity of such films? Both for better and for worse, we become creatures of our own image, ritual, and language-worlds. “The machines are

59 Witness the enormous commercial success of quasi-mystical films like Avatar, as well as my teenage son’s fascination with the Transformers films and his concomitant dread of attending Mass.
60 As Vatican II put it, Christianity in full bloom comprises a vision and way of life in which “nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in [our] hearts” [Gaudium et spes, no. 1, Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello, 1996), 163]. The principle is brought home beautifully in Gaudium et spes, no. 22, which centers on the mystery of God’s incarnation in the person of Jesus and, by extension, in every person: “For, by his incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each individual. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin” (185).
meditating on the most arbitrary and rudimentary of essences, punched into IBM cards, and defining you and me forever without appeal.”

As a leavening presence within a domineering technical-economic culture, the church must help people (and then trust them enough) to discern the difference between the sanctification of creation and its profanation. In the realm of sexuality, the church will be a powerful leavening and humanizing force for the good in society by distinguishing between sacred eros and its dehumanizing opposites, the narcissistic and pornographic—not with condemnations and self-inflated rhetoric but with humility of love, trust in the transcendence of human freedom, and respect for the dignity of conscience.

At issue here is not foremost the individual rights of peoples of color, women, or gays in the church as an extension or microcosm of liberal democratic society. Rather it is the vocation to theological wholeness and integrity in the church that ought to be out ahead of the game, leavening a secular society by its visible embodiment of love, justice, and unity-in-difference. Is it possible that the fullness of Christ's dwelling place inside us is being halved and quartered from the vine, withering the humane vitality of the whole? What so many racist, patriarchal, and homophobic cultures have yet failed to do, the church can and must do to preserve and live fully into its own inherent but tenuous (and free) theological dignity. In the words of Etty Hillesum, executed by the Nazis on November 30, 1943, “We must help You and defend Your dwelling place inside us to the last.” How we imagine, speak of, and perform the presence of God is where that defending and leavening of God's dwelling place within us begins. It is where hope bursts forth or despair sets in in the heart of the pilgrim community.

This is not to say that engaging difficult questions in church and society, such as the empowerment of peoples and cultures of color, the role of women, or the sacramental potentiality of homosexual love, will be painless or free of convulsive birth pangs. Far from it! Nor can we predict what the results of such discernment will be or if our pilgrimage in Christ will be free and uncoerced in the Spirit. It is to insist, again, in the words of Etty Hillesum, and with all the saints who have suffered much greater trials before us, that so much that is hard to bear, if we are ready to bear it together with trust and grace, can be “directly transformed into the beautiful.” Indeed, Hillesum, a Jew who died far too young and horrifically, seems to grasp the paschal lure of God's beautiful but demanding love better.

And the beautiful was sometimes much harder to bear, so overpowering did it seem. To think that one small human heart can experience so much, oh God, so much suffering and so much love, I am so grateful to You, God, for having chosen my heart, in these times, to experience all the things it has experienced.

In Christ, God has gifted us with hearts large enough to bear all things in faith, hope, and love. May we show ourselves, one and many in the Spirit, to be worthy of the gift.


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41 Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 201. Or, as Metz has it: "So-called modern man stands in danger of becoming increasingly faceless and (to speak biblically) nameless ... he is being bred back more and more into a cleverly adaptable animal, into a smoothly functioning machine." Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. and ed. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Crossroad, 2007), 80.


43 Etty Hillesum, 198.
Porters, Catapults, Community, and Justice: Augustine on Wealth, Poverty, and Property

by Kate Ward

In a continuing global recession, Christians more than ever look to their faith traditions for guidance amid the vexing issues of wealth, poverty, and property. Ministers can be sure those they serve are worried about their families’ financial security. Yet even as Christians in the well-off world struggle with layoffs and shrinking real wages, they are also called to recognize that the conditions causing their real suffering also represent unimaginable wealth to millions of world citizens.

Amid the rich tradition of Christian thought on wealth and poverty, the African theologian St. Augustine (354-430 CE) offers clear and challenging guidance. Despite his immense influence on theology from his own time until today, Christians have not often referred to Augustine on economic issues. However, particularly in his pastoral letters and sermons, Augustine criticized wealth, encouraged the poor to advocate for justice, and urged Christians to create interdependent, mutually supportive economic communities. He offers Christians a comprehensive body of thought on wealth and economic justice that links lifestyle choices to moral development, both challenging current practice and supporting action for change.

Critique of Wealth

Augustine clearly and frequently proclaimed that wealth is morally dangerous. When the wealthy widow Proba wrote to him asking how to pray, Augustine responded by warning her on the moral dangers of wealth for several paragraphs before he addressed prayer. Augustine never claimed that Proba used her wealth for evil purposes. Rather, he believed that simply possessing wealth carries the risk of over-attachment to it, drawing the heart away from God. He strongly hinted that Proba’s safest chance at salvation would be to rid herself of her wealth: “Many holy men and women have been on guard in every way against riches … and have cast them aside by distributing them to the poor, thus … storing up treasure in heaven.” Many Christians in the Roman Empire shared Augustine’s belief that wealth can endanger one’s virtue, even to the point of ignoring the consequences of their own virtuous practice for others’ lives. Melania and Pinian, a wealthy couple who later became Augustine’s friends, rid themselves of their wealth so quickly after converting to Christianity that they may have left many of their former slaves unable...
to support themselves. Augustine believed wealth contributes to the growth of evil desires: “Fear is all the more increased and covetousness is all the more unloosed according as there is an increase of those things which are called riches […] Riches, more than anything else, engender pride.”

Wealth taints so much by association that Augustine thought even a person whom others suspected of being wealthy might have an immoral attachment to goods. In City of God he implied that anyone tortured for their goods during the sack of Rome probably deserved it, even if they were not actually rich!

As well as increasing sinful desires, wealth can facilitate vice. For example, Augustine deplored as irreverent and wasteful the custom of wine-soaked funeral banquets, mockingly envisioning the dead burning in hell while their friends feasted. He accused a wealthy Donatist sectarian of bribing people to join her church and claimed that the higher social status of the rich inhibits their moral growth by making others less likely to challenge the wealthy about their sins. Augustine's exposure of the fact that people of privilege can and do engage in greater debauchery with fewer consequences applies tellingly to the United States today, given our disproportionate incarceration of poor and marginalized people, particularly people of color.

For Augustine, the fact that our attempts to acquire wealth sometimes fail should only remind us how useless riches are in light of salvation. He apparently enjoyed reminding his hearers about the risks of business setbacks and theft. Even arguments of saving wealth for one's children failed to strike Augustine as practical, let alone moral: “I refrain from asking: For what kind of children? Perhaps debauchery may squander what avarice has amassed.” He even taught that vice passes to children along with wealth, writing: “It may be they will be good children, they will not be dissolute, they will keep what thou hast left, will increase what thou hast kept, and will not dissipate what thou hast heaped together. Then will thy children be equally vain with thyself, if they do so, if in this they imitate thee their father.” Augustine was so vehemently anti-inheritance that he suggested parents who have lost a child should “send” the inheritance to the child in heaven by giving it to the poor as alms.

Many of Augustine's correspondents worried about a widespread doctrine that wealthy Christians could not be saved unless they gave away all their possessions. Despite his moral cautions against wealth, Augustine came to a more moderate conclusion. “Rich Christians who, although they possess riches, are not possessed by them”

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5 Augustine, Commentary on the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, with Seventeen Related Sermons, 11.2, 11.4, trans. Denis J. Kavanaugh (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1951). Augustine usually adopted a suspicious tone towards “riches.” An exception is in Sermon 21, where he suggested that we might “adorn gold” (rather than being adorned by gold) by using it for good and feel sorry for gold that is used for vice! Edmund Hill, O.P. “Augustine, Sermon 21, On the Verse of Psalm 64: ‘The Just One Will Take Delight in the Lord and Hope in Him, and the Upright of Heart Shall Be Praised,’” in Augustine and the Bible, ed. Pamela Bright (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 104-106.
11 Sermon on the Mount, 60.3-4.
12 Sermon on the Mount, 60.3.
14 New Testament, 36.11.
can hope for heaven. However, Christians who remain unduly attached to wealth or, worse, expect God to enrich them "agree to give up Christ and deny Him rather than be deprived of what is dearer." For Augustine, refusing to be attached to wealth and placing hope in God instead of worldly things is the safest way to be wealthy, although giving wealth away is better still. His teachings challenge Christians to focus on God and resist cultural pressure for wealth and increased material security.

Importance of Almsgiving

For Augustine, almsgiving is absolutely necessary for salvation and so synonymous with Christian practice that he said marriages are not Christian if one spouse opposes giving alms from the household budget. Augustine pointed out that Jesus does not say this:

“Come, take possession of the kingdom; for you have lived chastely, you have defrauded no man, you have not oppressed any poor man, you have not plundered any man’s property, you have deceived no one by an oath.” That is not what He said. Here are His words: “Take possession of the kingdom, for I was hungry and you gave me eat.”

Augustine warned of the many who led virtuous lives “but, if they had not added almsgiving, their lives would have remained fruitless.”

Christians of Augustine’s time took almsgiving seriously but sometimes developed theories and practices of giving that missed the mark. A woman named Ecdicia earned Augustine’s criticism for giving away much of her household wealth without her husband’s consent, nearly causing a breach in their marriage. Augustine told her, “You need not repent over having given your property to the poor but over not having wanted to have [your husband] as a partner and guide in your good work.” Augustine consistently advocated equality in almsgiving within marriage. Some Christians believed husbands should hide their almsgiving from wives in a bizarre interpretation of the biblical order “do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (Mt 6:3) that assumed wives would be stingier. Augustine angrily responded, “As though only men were Christians!”

Augustine offered pastoral guidelines for almsgiving that are timeless enough for modern Christians to follow. He suggested that Christians make alms a planned part of their yearly or daily budget to help them stick to their commitment. He had clear opinions on how much to give. Jesus calls Christians to “exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees,” who gave away one-tenth of their income. Another suggestion responded to those who insist on saving wealth for their children. Augustine proposed they consider Christ as another child in the family and allot his share of the inheritance for alms. This is not only a practical suggestion but evokes a spirituality of almsgiving. Wealthy Christians should display the same daily concern for Christ, embodied in the poor, that they do for their own children.

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16 Letters, 157, 34.
17 Augustine, Letters, Volume III (131-164), trans. Sister Wilfrid Parsons, S.N.D. (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1953), 157, 33. It is fascinating that what we today call the Prosperity Gospel was already known in Augustine’s time.
18 Sermon on the Mount, II.2.7.
19 Sermon on the Mount, 60.9.
20 Sermon on the Mount, 60.9.
22 Letters, Volume V, 262, 8.
23 Sermon on the Mount, II.2.7.
24 Expositions, 147.17.
26 New Testament, 36.13
Augustine's sermon on the Lord's Prayer foregrounds human dependence on God and calls Christians to help the poor as we want God to help us:

No matter how rich a man may be in worldly wealth, he still is a beggar in relation to God. A beggar stands before the rich man's door; the rich man himself stands before the door of Him who is rich and mighty. Someone is begging from the rich man, and the rich man himself is begging … How is it that he has an abundance of all things? Only because God has bestowed it upon him. … If a man is not in want, that is due to the mercy of God—not to man's own ability.  

The duty to help the needy is as eternal as human dependence on God. “In order that [God] may receive [God's] beggars,” Augustine urged, “let us also take notice of ours.”

Christians today still hear calls to help the needy in their churches, and some communities have even developed practical ways to support the poor that Augustine would no doubt applaud. The aspect of Augustine's thought on wealth that may sound more challenging to many Christians today is his firm belief that wealth is morally dangerous. Augustine believed the wealthy are more prone to vice and less given to relying on God. He challenges those of us today who enjoy any type of privilege—whether due to our education, race, social and global location, or our material prosperity—to think seriously about how this privilege might interfere with our dependence and trust in God and how we can work beyond our privileges and comforts to avoid sin and help those in need.

**Poverty as Protection**

It’s no surprise that Augustine promoted voluntary poverty, which remains a powerful Christian witness even in our own time. But he also defended the moral protection of poverty that is not chosen, which might make some modern readers uncomfortable. While Augustine did support the poor in working for their own uplifting (as we will see shortly), he just as consistently promised them salvation if they remained poor. It is important to note here that Augustine, like other Fathers of the Church, does not use the word poor only for utterly destitute people. He understood poor to include those who might be working but with uncertain income or those in danger of sudden economic reversal, like small farmers or urban craftspeople.

Augustine preached, “I urge all of you who are poor and have heard these words not to seek to become rich.” He encouraged wealthy Proba to “pray like a poor woman, for you have not yet the true wealth of the world to come … pray as a desolate widow,” and he attributed St. Paul's praise for the spiritual life of widows to their typically “desolate” material life. Considering that Augustine at times depicted even marital sex as morally suspect, it is especially remarkable that he praised widows not because of their (theoretically) celibate lives but because of their involuntary poverty.

Augustine held that even involuntary poverty imposed as punishment could provide moral benefit and protection. He recommended hefty fines to help reform a group of pagans who destroyed a Christian church:

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27 *Sermon on the Mount*, 56.9. Note that those blessed by God are not described as wealthy, a state Augustine would not promote, but as "not in want."
28 *Sermon on the Mount*, 61.8.
30 *Sermon on the Mount*, 11.2.
Burdensome poverty … is, in fact, a restraint and restriction on the sinner … I did not say that the enemies of the Church … should be punished by being reduced to such poverty as to lack the necessaries of life … They have their bodily integrity; they have the means of livelihood; they have the means of living wickedly. Let the first two of these remain intact … It is better to be in want than to possess to the full everything that satisfies evil desire.33

As this passage shows, Augustine did not believe the moral protection of poverty demanded total destitution; virtuous people could desire enough wealth to afford food and covering. “This sufficiency is not an improper desire in whoever wishes this and nothing more,” Augustine clarifies. “Whoever does wish more does not wish this, and therefore does not wish properly.”34 However, even basic goods should not be desired for their own sake but because they support human “personal dignity” and afford the ability to “honorably and respectably” live in community.35 As we know, the Christian respect for poverty has at times been misused to tell poor people they should not work to improve their lives. So it is important to note that while Augustine praised even involuntary poverty, he expressed strong support for poor people working for better lives.

Self-Advocates and Porters to Heaven: The Poor in Christian Community

Since Augustine saw no harm in everyone having sufficiency—and knew that access to basic needs helps us live in community with dignity—he strongly supported poor people in working for improved living conditions. He encouraged the poor to ask for help from God: “While it would be shameless for you to ask God for riches, it is not shameless to ask Him for daily bread. It is one thing to ask for what might make you proud; it is another to ask for what enables you to live.”36 He also urged the poor to advocate for themselves with the wealthy. Calling himself the ambassador of the poor, he said to the rich in his congregation, “[The poor] have urged us to speak to you. When they see that they are receiving nothing from you, they think that we are laboring in vain among you.”37 Augustine insisted that requests from the poor to the rich are tests from God.38 Clearly, he did not want those in poverty to suffer needlessly and he vocally supported them in asking for help.

Augustine wanted all members of his Christian community to realize their economic interdependence. He validated the obvious claim of the poor to assistance by the wealthy. But Augustine also wanted the rich to know there is an important service the poor can render them, too: “bearing their goods to heaven” by receiving alms. He explained:

Let us transfer [our possessions] to a place where we shall not lose them. The poor to whom we give alms! With regard to us, what else are they but porters through whom we transfer our goods from earth to heaven? Give away your treasure. Give it to a porter. He will bear to heaven what you give him on earth. But you will say to me: “How does he bear it to heaven, for I see that he consumes it by eating it? Certainly, he eats it. It is by eating it, and not by keeping it, that he bears it to heaven. … Christ has received what you have given.”39

33 Letters, Volume II, 104, 3-5.
34 Letters, Volume II, 130, 12.
35 Letters, Volume II, 130, 12.
36 Sermon on the Mount, 56.10.
37 Sermon on the Mount, 61.13.
38 Expositions, 125.2.
39 Sermon on the Mount, 60.8.
Augustine reversed the view common to his time and our own that the rich, at the center of things, can choose whether to ignore the poor or to help them. He insisted that the wealthy need the assistance of the poor to gain reward in heaven.

Augustine used the image of the poor as porters to heaven frequently, writing in one sermon, “What are the poor to whom we give, but our carriers, by whom we convey our goods from earth to heaven? Give then: thou art but giving to thy carrier.” and in another, “Help the hungry, the naked, and the needy; help strangers and those in bondage. They will be the porters to convey your riches to heaven.” To underscore how reliably the poor deliver wealth to heaven, Augustine even compared their work to an undeniably effective machine: the catapult!

Today, Catholic social teaching promotes the value of participation for all; a just society is one where all are encouraged and able to contribute according to their abilities. Augustine's understanding of the poor as God's porters presents a similar vision of an inclusive and participatory society. Augustine insisted that rich and poor people are “companions on the journey” of life. By transferring some of their earthly “baggage” to the poor, the wealthy can afford relief to themselves and to their poor companions. He also noted that the poor can give alms to each other and even to the wealthy by, for example, helping a rich person cross a river. Augustine insistently urged his Christian community to recognize their mutual need in economic life and honor the contributions of every community member.

Property, Ownership, and Justice

As a bishop whose followers consulted him on financial matters and an author who sometimes had to bill friends more than once for copies of his books, Augustine experienced a range of practical issues in economic life, which should prevent us from dismissing his views as idealistic or uninformed by reality. He knew the financial laws of his time well but sometimes disagreed with them on moral grounds; for example, he condemned usury as “cruel” and “ill-gotten gain.” Perhaps the most important aspect of his thought on financial legalities is his distinction between legal and just with regard to wealth, where Augustine initiated an argument for distributive justice:

Do we not prove that those who seem to rejoice in lawfully acquired gains, and do not know how to use them, are really in possession of other men's property? Certainly, what is lawfully possessed is not another's property, but 'lawfully' means justly and justly means rightly. He who uses his wealth badly possesses it wrongfully, and wrongful possession means that it is another's property. You see, then, how many there are who ought to make restitution of another's goods, although those to whom restitution is due may be few; wherever they are, their claim to just possession is in proportion to their indifference to wealth … money is wrongly possessed by bad men while good men who love it least have best right to it. … some of them become faithful and fervent—and these have a right to all things.

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41 Sermon on the Mount, 11.6.
42 Sermon on the Mount, 11.6.
44 Sermon on the Mount, 11.6.
45 Expositions, 126.13.
Here Augustine claimed that wealth belongs to those unlikely to “use [their] wealth badly” in sinful practices, including trusting in wealth instead of in God. However, elsewhere he suggested that the right to goods comes not from virtue but from need, writing: “Find out how much [God] hath given thee, and take of that what is enough: all other things which remain as superfluities are the necessaries of others. The superfluities of the rich are the necessaries of the poor. Thou possessest what belongs to others, when thou possessest more than thou needest.”

While the theme that the poor have a right to share in all wealth occurs only rarely in Augustine, what he did say almost constantly is that wealth should belong to those who love it least. A comprehensive reading of his work suggests that those who have wealth but aren’t overly attached to it are just the kind of people who would likely give wealth away as alms. This collected evidence allows us to speak of an Augustinian distributive justice. Augustine believed that mere ownership does not create a right to goods; that those who are most likely to redistribute wealth based on others’ need should have control of it; that any wealth beyond basic necessity really belongs to the poor; and that, while wealth brings moral danger, anyone in need is entitled and encouraged to ask for help. Augustine seems to have imagined that inequality would always exist, but any serious movement toward his ideal society, where the poor are empowered to ask for help and only generous givers have a right to property, would clearly reduce inequality and want and foster more widespread human flourishing.

**Augustine and Christian Economic Life**

Most Augustine scholars believe that he, like most people of his time, did not see social change as a priority or even as possible. This separates him from most Christians today, who tend to believe it is both possible and important to work to change the social order to, for example, reduce evils like poverty, war, and racism. Economic life in Augustine’s time was naturally very different from our own. Some might protest that these differences in viewpoint and experience make Augustine’s teachings on wealth and poverty irrelevant to Christians today. However, this perspective misunderstands Augustine’s intent in his writings and consequently misses out on the rich resources of his thought.

Augustine’s writings on economic topics are deeply concerned with the human person, with the individual’s development of virtue and relationship to God. It is safe to say that his first concern regarding wealth is how it affects the owner’s tendency to have virtue or vice—rather than, for example, how one’s accumulation of wealth might affect the natural environment or the poor. Augustine’s concern with how our wealth or our poverty affects our being and our becoming is deeply resonant with current concerns about virtue and moral growth. One act of alms given or withheld does not make one a good or bad person, but a lifetime of decisions about how we make, use, and share our wealth does affect our development as moral beings. Although Augustine understood his financial world with all its flaws, his primary concern was not the reform of economic structures but the saving of souls and the development of better Christians. His work at the interface of wealth and moral growth remains relevant as long as we believe that Christians today are just as capable of sin and of virtue as were those in Augustine’s time.

Augustine’s view of economic life is not results-oriented, which can be frustrating to modern people who want to judge even their good deeds by return on investment. Christians today, particularly in Western societies, have been trained to judge actions based on results. From this perspective, if I help someone financially and she is still poor at the end of the day, I have accomplished nothing. Augustine would have seen things differently. He would have asked first what changes the act of giving made in my soul. Was I reminded of my own dependence on God? Did I give away something I was perhaps overly attached to, freeing my emotions to care for God and God’s creatures? Was I transformed by the opportunity to give, or did I reject the opportunity to recognize that my salvation could be bound up in the opportunity to help another? Furthermore, the one who asked for help might well be called by

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49 Expositions, 147.12.
God to help others rid themselves of their morally dangerous wealth, offering them moral protection at the same time as she improves her own comfort and security. Answering the call to participate in the Christian community in this way could be an important factor in her own moral growth.

Another question we might ask is whether, given that Augustine's main concern was with the moral development of individual Christians, his writings on economic issues can be helpful to those today who discern a call to work for more just societies and structures. I believe the answer is an unequivocal yes. Two of his contributions are perhaps most relevant to conversations around global and local justice issues in Christian settings today. First, Augustine recognized the poor as moral agents. Augustine's poor advocate for themselves with the powerful—a concept promoted today in liberation theology—and they advocate for the wealthy with God when they bear goods to heaven by receiving alms. Christians who are struggling economically deserve to know that Augustine supports them in advocating for their own well-being, contrary to the magical thinking taught by the “Prosperity Gospel” or the messages of shame and silence wealthy cultures can impose on those in poverty. Augustine's teachings remind today's well-off Christians to respect the ability of those in poverty to know what they need, to ask for it, and to enlist powerful people (as Augustine's poor enlisted him) to their own cause. Today's globalized economy has made it quite obvious that the world's wealthy need the poor to provide cheap labor in farms and factories. Augustine reminds all Christians how much more the wealthy need the poor as spiritual leaders whose work as “porters” helps mediate God's blessings.

While Augustine's thought belongs to the heritage of the global Church, his insistence that wealth is morally dangerous should feel particularly significant to Christians in the United States and other wealthy nations. Christians today hear the same words of Jesus that Augustine repeatedly cites to teach this (Luke's Beatitudes: see Sermons 11 and 60), yet we struggle to interpret these words for our own lives. American Christians can name many stratospherically wealthy, the modern equivalents of Augustine's friends Melania and Pinian—and we could probably do better at preaching Augustine's truth to them. Yet in today's global economy, how can middle-class Christians be sure that their lifestyle includes only what Augustine would call sufficiency and not what he would blast as superfluity, the rightful property of millions in poverty? The groundswell of interest in class issues in the United States, sparked by the Occupy Wall Street movement, and the abiding passion of so many American Christians for relief of global poverty, suggests that Americans are more than ready to hear Augustine's message. Augustine's deeply felt compassion for the poor, his suspicion of wealth, and his insistence that rich and poor Christians need each other's help remain profoundly timely lessons.

50 Of course, religious leaders are sensitive to the feelings of those who fund the parishes, hospitals, and universities in which faith is lived and made visible. But Augustine, too, relied on such support (see Letter 96), which did not deter him from what he saw as the moral emergency of preaching about wealth's danger.
The Terrible and Sublime Liturgy: Sustaining Mission to the Suffering in Beauvois’ Of Gods and Men

by Anne M. Windholz

But as for me, I know that my Vindicator lives and that he will at last stand forth upon the dust;
Whom I myself shall see;
my own eyes, not another’s, shall behold him.
And from my flesh I shall see God;
my inmost being is consumed with longing.

Job 19: 23-27
From Pastoral Care of the Dying

The violence is killing me and I ought to find somewhere some support not to let myself be carried away by this flood of death.

Fr. Christophe LeBreton,
Our Lady of Atlas Monastery, July 11, 1995

Those who dedicate their lives to serving the sick and the dying are well aware of the emotional and spiritual demands such work places upon them. According to Bruce Morrill, faced with inevitable mortality, many doctors disengage. They are trapped within “a highly pressured medical industry whose frontline care providers experience high rates of alcoholism, divorce, and suicide.”1 “Fear,” he contends, “is the problematic emotion here, not only fear in the immediate situation, such as failure in one’s task … or personally failing the patient, but also fear ultimately of death itself.”2 This fear of death—another’s death and one’s own—is tangled in myriad tensions for physicians, nurses, and caregivers of the sick as well as the dying: societal stresses, unresolved grief, inability to find meaning in

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4 Morrill, Divine Worship, 193-94.
suffering, and a tendency to divorce their own faith commitment (if they are people of religion) from their work. The result is a lost chance to access a well of spiritual resources that, while not always answering all questions, can nonetheless provide a foundation upon which to form a mature response to suffering. Within the Catholic Christian tradition, catechesis that foregrounds our roles as disciples of Christ, members of Christ’s church, and practitioners of the rites and sacraments that shape and undergird our faith can remind those who minister to the sick (not just healthcare providers but also social workers and ministers) that they have a source of sustenance capable of comforting them and renewing their sense of mission as they struggle with the very human realities of injustice, cruelty, and loss.

Toward this end, I will present the catechetical possibilities offered by Xavier Beauvois’ award-winning film Of Gods and Men.5 The film, by virtue of its setting in war-torn 1990s Algeria, necessarily introduces viewers to the challenges of interreligious dialogue and service within a context of violence, brutality, and religious extremism. In a post-9/11 world, this is a fraught topic, likely to raise strong emotions (not all of them good) among Americans even a decade later. And yet the film consistently demands of its viewers (even as real-life circumstance demanded of the Cistercians who lived and were kidnapped from the monastery at Tibhirine) a more nuanced view of humans’ relations with their God (Muslim or Christian) and their neighbor. Further, it represents the lives of the Cistercian monks as integrating spirituality, liturgy, and mission in a way that upholds the integrity of both mission and minister in a most extreme situation. Ministry to the sick is a powerful motif running through the film’s narrative: the monks’ ministry in their healthcare clinic; their ministry to each other as they themselves face disease, physical infirmity, old age, and (increasingly, as the situation around them gets more tense) mental anguish; and their ministry to the war’s victims as well as to the wounds of those who are apparent enemies. In the face of inevitable persecution and likely martyrdom, perseverance in their vows of stability, poverty, obedience and (not least) the call to love their neighbor demands that the monks draw sustenance from their communal prayer and liturgy; from the spirituality that ties them to the land and people they serve as well as to their God; and from the mission they embody: Christ’s healing work among the poor and marginalized. Ministry to the sick is a powerful motif running through the film’s narrative: the monks’ ministry in their healthcare clinic; their ministry to each other as they themselves face disease, physical infirmity, old age, and (increasingly, as the situation around them gets more tense) mental anguish; and their ministry to the war’s victims as well as to the wounds of those who are apparent enemies. In the face of inevitable persecution and likely martyrdom, perseverance in their vows of stability, poverty, obedience and (not least) the call to love their neighbor demands that the monks draw sustenance from their communal prayer and liturgy; from the spirituality that ties them to the land and people they serve as well as to their God; and from the mission they embody: Christ’s healing work among the poor and marginalized. The extent to which they succeed—and the extent to which we, as healers and ministers watching their story, feel strengthened for our own work by the catharsis and hope their tragedy inspires—has something to teach us about how liturgy, spirituality, and mission can intersect and be truly integrated. This integration is not achieved without great cost—sometimes, indeed, the cost of crucifixion—but in a way that brings healing in spite of sickness and resurrection in spite of death. At the site of this intersection we witness—and are ultimately, ourselves, called to celebrate ourselves—what Karl Rahner calls the “terrible and sublime liturgy” of the world.6 In that liturgy, we find the real school of Christian discipleship.7

Fitna: The Violent Context of 1990s Algeria

Perhaps because I ignored the Other or because I denied his existence,
one day he suddenly leapt right in front of me.
He burst open my sheltered universe, which was ravaged by violence…
and asserted his existence.

Bishop Pierre Claverie of Oran8

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5 Of Gods and Men, dir. Xavier Beauvois, with English subtitles (Paris: Armada/Why Not Productions, 2010), DVD.
During the 1990s, the “black decade” during which seven Cistercian monks were martyred, over 100,000 Algerians were killed in civil unrest and guerilla warfare. Historian Philip Naylor labels this violence fitna, a word suggesting trial, intra-Muslim discord, and even chaos, because “insurgency in Algeria has involved many sides.” When Islamic militants won preliminary elections in 1992, the government suspended the electoral process. Violence erupted. Muslim extremists (associated with an organization known as GIA, or Armed Islamic Group) responded by ordering all foreigners, including Christian religious, out of the country, backing their demands with a campaign of terror against civilians.11 While the fighting was primarily internecine, Naylor insists that it was “much more complicated than explanations citing conflict between the governments and insurgents or ‘secularists’ and Islamists” suggest.12 Foreigners tended to be caught in the middle. Sixteen years after the 1996 kidnapping and execution of seven Tibhirine monks, it remains unclear who exactly was responsible for their deaths. Some have argued that the GIA was responsible; others believe that a government helicopter shot the monks and then tried to make it look as though GIA had done it by decapitating the corpses and hiding the rest of their bodies.13

What must be made clear to anyone seeing the film Of Gods and Men, and especially to Catholics seeking its spiritual wisdom in a catechetical context, is this: among the many Christians terrorized and killed, the monks of Tibhirine, like Bishop of Oran Pierre Claverie, did not consider Algerian Muslims their enemies. All these churchmen worked tirelessly for respectful dialogue in the tradition of Vatican II’s Nostra Aetate. We misconstrue their sense of mission and discipleship if we caricature all Muslims—including those involved in perpetrating violence—as nefarious and godless villains. God mattered to all the people involved. Therein resides the root of inexplicable violence as well as restorative compassion. Brother Luc, the doctor at Our Lady of Atlas in Tibhirine, ruefully quotes Pascal, “Men never do evil so cheerfully or completely as when they do it from religious conviction.” Bishop Claverie himself, who served as a member of the Papal Commission on Interreligious Dialogue, confessed, “For me … God has many names,” insisting that “[e]ach religion carries in it the seeds of possible totalitarianism.”15 He refused to condemn, recognizing too well the damage inflicted by European colonialism (and the Church’s complicity in it) and also believing that all are brothers and sisters under God. “To reject the other … is to condemn oneself,” he maintained.16 Radical love of neighbors informed the spirituality and the mission of these Christians. That they died for it—Bishop Claverie was assassinated along with his Muslim chauffeur only a few months after the deaths of the seven Tibhirine monks17—would not, from their perspective, invalidate their viewpoint. “The brutal death of one of us or all of us,” the Tibhirine monks wrote only a few months before their kidnapping, “would only be a consequence of this choice of life following Christ.”18 Christian de Chergé, Prior of the monastery and an avid student of Arabic and of Islam,19 expressed his solidarity with any victim of violence, whether Christian or Muslim. Anticipating the loss of his own life, he wished to “tie” his death “to so many equally violent deaths, which were

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11 See “Algeria’s Export of Terror.” The repudiation of foreigners was traceable to residual anti-colonialist sentiment: Naylor, in France and Algeria: A History of Decolonization and Transformation (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2000), 231, notes that “Catholic orders collectively symbolized the ‘colonizing mission’ of France” and that the GIA assaults were correspondingly intentional and targeted.
14 Of Gods and Men.
17 Veilleux, “The Witness of the Tibhirine Martyrs.”
18 Quoted by Veilleux, “The Witness of the Tibhirine Martyrs.”
19 Christian actively promoted interreligious dialogue with the monks’ Muslim neighbors, sharing prayers and “religious experience” at the monastery in “a group called Ribât el Salam” (see Veilleux, “The Witness of the Tibhirine Martyrs”).
anonymous and therefore did not affect people. My life has no higher price than any other, [sic] it has no lower price either.”

Mission to the People

“… the church exists primarily to proclaim the Kingdom to the whole world, rather than to make the whole world coextensive with the Church.”

Anthony Gittins

Perhaps it is not enough to say that we have not to choose between the [political] power and the terrorists. In fact, every day and in concrete ways we choose those whom Jean-Pierre calls “the common people.” We cannot remain if we cut ourselves off from them.

Fr. Christophe LeBreton
Our Lady of Atlas, Tibhirine

The danger of focusing on the martyrdom and grisly end of the seven kidnapped Tibhirine monks is that (much as happened with Mel Gibson’s Passion of the Christ) we lose sight of the life and mission of the men who died. The seeming simplicity and beauty of that original mission and witness is represented in the bucolic, picturesque opening sequences of Beauvois’ film. We see the monks getting up in the night for prayer (Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will proclaim your praise) and later, in daylight, quietly at study in the library. We see Fr. Christophe watering the garden by hand, two other brothers labeling honey for sale in the local bazaar, a third brother helping an Islamic woman apply (apparently) for a visa to visit her son in Europe, and Brother Michel loading logs onto a wheelbarrow. The scenes focus most, however, on Brother Luc, the monk who in real life volunteered to nurse Nazi concentration camp inmates as a young man in occupied France. The scenes emphasize his connection with the people: he is shown gathering medicine to take to the dispensary which he inaugurated at the monastery in 1946; invited by a Muslim worker to a khtana celebration; gently examining a little Muslim girl with a horrific head wound and then delighting her with new shoes from a bag of donations; and advising a young woman who works at the monastery on the nature of real love. He confesses to her that decades before he was in love several times—but then he encountered a love “even greater” and he “answered that love.”

Answering “that love” is clearly key to the mission of all these men, though the focus on Brother Luc in the opening scenes highlights the importance of healthcare ministry in this impoverished, if picturesque, region. Each scene helps to embed the French monks not just in the culture but also in the community. That community is composed of Christians and Muslims—people together seeking to follow God in the best way possible and with kindness. It is, perhaps, a somewhat idealized version of what an everyday life dedicated to God is all about, yet it sets up for viewers an ethically normative state against which to judge the eruption of violence that breaks into the story when a distressed Muslim tells the brothers an eighteen-year-old girl, his relative, was murdered on a bus for not wearing a hijab. By their presence, service, and engagement, the monks epitomize John XXIII’s ideal of “Christians

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20 Quoted in Naylor, France and Algeria, 232.
22 Veilleux, “The Witness of the Tibhirine Martyrs.”
23 Veilleux, “The Witness of the Tibhirine Martyrs.”
24 Of Gods and Men.
[as] the eighth sacrament and the only sacrament the nonbeliever could receive. But we also see the Muslims, the “common people,” as blessing in turn to the Christian monks. Love of neighbor is the guiding principal. And love of neighbor is precisely what is violated. By the time viewers are presented with the brutal murder of Croatian Christians along a road not far from the monastery—witnessed by a Muslim neighbor—they are aware that carrying out this mission will, for the monks as well as for their Muslim community, be a daunting and dangerous challenge. The film is dedicated to exploring the monks’ discernment of whether they should stick by Tibhirine and risk death or (perhaps more reasonably) abandon it for safety and, arguably, many more years of service to the Church. Brother Luc, who already practices medicine in trying circumstances, sets the bar for Christian discipleship high. Old, suffering from asthma himself, and facing “lots of hypertension” and even “shock” among his patients as the violence escalates around them, he nonetheless tells Christian, “Throughout my career I’ve met all sorts of different people. Including Nazis. And even the devil. I’m not scared of terrorists, even less of the army. And I’m not scared of death. I’m a free man.”

Freedom, the power to choose, is in some respects the greatest weapon (as it were) that the monks have against those who would violate their principles and their monastery with violence. On Christmas Eve, the armed insurgent al-Fayattia demands medicine and a doctor, threatening, “You have no choice.” Christian replies, “Yes. I do.” He goes on to say, “You know the Koran? ‘Those nearest in love to the believers are those who say, ‘We are Christians. And among them are priests and monks.—Then al-Fayattia breaks in, finishing the verse, ‘—and they wax not proud.’” “That,” Christian adds, “is why we’re close to our neighbors.”27 His appeal depends on an assumption of respectful interfaith dialogue, a shared kinship as children of Abraham, and a mutual understanding of ethical responsibility. In a violent situation, his gamble (for, although principled, a gamble it is) depends on an ability to discern sensitively and with wisdom. While the situation is not, technically, pastoral, it nonetheless accurately represents what might be considered the ultimate ministerial challenge: to know “what is the wise and healing word, the freeing word, the accepting word, the old yet radically new word, that we have to discern and to speak?”28 It depends, Margaret Farley asserts, on what Karl Rahner identified as the fundamental call of the “human person … to a radical and free response in love for God and neighbor. In the heart of each person lies the capability of self-determination, of utter self-disposal, for better or for worse … an offer from divine freedom to human freedom.”29 And in this respect Christian’s action is inherently pastoral, an example of successful intersubjectivity: a situation “where we use all our senses to perceive not only what may be coming up inside of us that could be getting in the way of our understanding of the other, but that we ‘tune in’ more deeply and empathetically with the other’s experience … a tool that can sensitize us to the sacred multiple truth, the logos, the ‘I am’ of each person.”30 Christian’s choice—for himself and for his community—is rooted in a relational understanding of mission.

But that his is the wise, morally correct choice does not mean it was—or is presented as—the easy choice. Al-Fayattia, on learning he and his men have violently intruded at the monastery on Christmas Eve, apologizes and reaches out to shake hands with Christian. Christian pauses. To accept the potential enemy, the armed and violent enemy, as neighbor is the most demanding part of Jesus’ Great Commandment. In the film, the struggle, the uncertainty, and possibly even unwillingness is evident on Christian’s face. The two men do grasp hands. It is this connection,

26 Of Gods and Men.
27 Of Gods and Men.
29 Farley, Compassionate Respect, 52-53.
perhaps, which later allows Christian to pray over the corpse of the dead al-Fayattia, whose body has been ruthlessly dragged through the streets by enraged army militia, months later. This act of compassion for a man who, as the film makes clear, has committed heinous atrocities, earns Christian the contempt—and possibly more than contempt—of the government forces. Yet the film takes care to emphasize that al-Fayattia was also a vulnerable human who called to his mother as he died in pain, surrounded by mocking enemies. Mission, Anthony Gittins reminds us, “is always characterized by outreach, inclusion, embrace, reconciliation, invitation, and healing.” Mission demands of us a choice for compassion and forgiveness. We will not always like those we serve who are sick and dying, but we must love them. Mustering that love, finding the strength to make the Christ-like choice, depends on much more than mere good will or even an earnest desire to follow Jesus. The example of the Tibhirine monks as presented in Of Gods and Men makes that eminently clear. Anguish, suffering, guilt, and fear dog those who are called to love in the face of death. Despite the “holy-card” rays in which many still shots from the film depict Fr. Christophe, his soul battle is no less severe than Christ’s agony in the garden. All the monks of Tibhirine sweat blood.

**Liturgy and Contemplation: Food for the Journey**

Some would like to think that the disciples somehow knew all along that Jesus was meant to die and meant to rise again …
But in their actual experience of their Lord being taken from them and hung on a cross, they were crushed, scandalized, filled with fear, and cast adrift.
That is how they experienced this particular death at the moment it occurred.

Edward Jeremy Miller

The freedom to choose is perhaps the greatest compliment God ever gave humanity and the most devastating challenge. For those seeking to serve God’s mission faithfully in the face of meaningless suffering, arbitrary violence, and unequivocal mortality, the strength needed to discern and then follow through on the right choice can seem gargantuan. Fr. Christophe most painfully and outwardly represents this in Of Gods and Men. He is vociferous about the fact that he did not join a monastery “to commit collective suicide”; he cries out in the night to an

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31 Of Gods and Men.
32 Anthony J. Gittins, 6.
34 Of Gods and Men. Wayne Teasedale matter-of-factly observes, “The monastic life is not a rejection of the world; it is a decision to engage with this world from a different dimension, from the enlarged perspective of love, as perceived by the Gospel in its utter simplicity and clarity” (quoted by Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder in Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2004), 367. As Christophe discovers, the Gospel’s “utter simplicity and clarity” does not always make for easy choices. The road to Jerusalem may be simple and clear, but it is not, as Peter makes poignantly evident in Matthew 16: 22-23, the one a disciple most desires to follow.
absent God: “Help me, help me. Don’t abandon me,” his prayer echoing the desolate anguish of Christ’s last words in the Gospel of Mark (15:34). All the monks, the film makes clear, hear Christophe’s cry. In a community, no one suffers alone—and there is no place to hide from another’s pain. Celestin, who has the unenviable job of trying to secure the monastery grounds at night, seconds Christophe’s attitude, announcing, “I became a monk to live, not to sit back and have my throat slit.”\textsuperscript{35} Considerable animosity is directed toward Christian for autonomously deciding that the monastery should reject military protection; he is accused by his brothers of violating the very ideal of community. Wrestling their way toward consensus on whether to remain at Tibhirine or leave for safer ground, they gather around a table on which a candle is lit. This scene of meeting is repeated throughout the film as the monks struggle with decision, with the power of choice. Behind them, a map of the world recalls the vast scope of God’s mission. Their own vulnerability—they are, after all, only nine men—is emphasized by its global expanse. Symbolically, the map can be seen as the monks’ call to celebrate Rahner’s “liturgy of the world,” their own participation in that history “composed of silent submission, responsibility unto death, mortality and joy, heights and sudden falls.”\textsuperscript{36} After the initial meeting around that table, the monks, clearly struggling, gather for night prayers. Unlike in the first scene of the film, where they serenely (if somewhat sleepily) carry out the liturgy, here we find them huddled in the chapel, crouching, silent, strangely isolated from each other despite being in the same room. In that room resides their “very help in time of trouble.”

Celebrating the liturgy of the world with integrity and right sacrifice depends, for the Christian and especially the Christian under stress, the rite and ritual that recalls the Word which revivifies, the prayer that orients toward grace, and the sacrament that strengthens through memory of what has been and awareness of what now is and must be.\textsuperscript{37} The bucolic opening of the film, with its emphasis on the peaceful activities of normal days and life, is not without its own threat. As Richard Gaillardetz notes, “[W]e must acknowledge the danger that a preoccupation with the discovery of grace in daily life may lead us to overlook the demands that the life of grace places on us.”\textsuperscript{38} Grace is not given for our self-satisfaction, though the gratitude and praise in life’s beauty that it can invoke certainly matters. Still, its primary role is to enhance our participation in the hard and sometimes painful work of bringing about the Kingdom. As Jeffrey Kauffman observes, “Openness to the pain of another is the difficult spiritual pathway of compassion”; it demands the ability to recognize and resist “our subtle denials, our whispers of self-assurance, our urges to fly from the agonizing emptiness, our dread and numbness,” and even our “passion to cure’ the helplessness of those we care for.”\textsuperscript{39} The burden is immense and the demands profound. Though Jesus said “my yoke is easy and my burden light” (Mt 11: 28-30), the brutality of his crucifixion surely left his disciples with no illusions that they could take on that yoke unsupported by divine love. For the monks at Tibhirine, then, proper celebration of the liturgy of the world depends upon constant celebration of the liturgies of their Catholic, Christian call: the Liturgy of the Hours, the Liturgies of the Word and Eucharist, and (no less) the private liturgy and ritual of individual prayer and contemplation. Their mission among the people of Algeria to heal the sick, to clothe the poor, and love their neighbor utterly cannot succeed without the nourishment provided by liturgy and its nurturing of ecclesial community.

This is emphasized by the repeated interpolation of scenes of communal prayer (most notably the Liturgy of the Hours and the mass) throughout the film’s narrative. We first see the monks gathered at Night Prayer. Later, after

\textsuperscript{35} Of Gods and Men.

\textsuperscript{36} Rahner, “Secular Life and the Sacraments,” 267.

\textsuperscript{37} The chapel is that place where sacraments “represent and make present in the particular something that is always happening.” See Beatrice Bruteau, Radical Optimism: Practical Spirituality in an Uncertain World (Boulder: Sentient Press, 2002), 4.


word of the young girl’s murder, the monks are shown sitting facing each other, silently, in the chapel. The Liturgy
of the Hours, as Stanislaus Campbell held, reinforces “at certain times of the day what the quality of all times
should be, that is, an experience of time which is sacramental or revelatory of the mystery of Christ and a means
of union with God in him.” The prayers contextualize the lives and choices of the monks. At a meeting with their
Muslim neighbors, Br. Celestin admits, “We’re like birds on a branch. We don’t know if we’ll be leaving,” to which
a woman responds, “You are the branch. If you go, we lose our footing.” The scene immediately cuts to the monks
concluding the Liturgy of the Hours with the Lord’s Prayer—the part where supplicants pray to be forgiven their
trespasses and delivered from evil. Later, Brother Luc treats a terrorist insurgent for infected gunshot wounds; this
too is followed by a scene of the Liturgy of the Hours, the monks bowing and praying, “Glory be to the Father
and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit….” When, upon concluding a painful conversation, Christian embraces a
distraught Fr. Christophe, who cannot find meaning in either the actual or the potential suffering, we again hear
and see the monks chanting, this time Psalm 143: “O Lord, hear my prayer / Listen to my cry for mercy… / My
spirit grows faint within me, / my heart dismayed.” Ritual communal prayer also unites the brothers to each other
as church, strengthening them. Early on, after the massacre of the Croatians and Christian’s refusal of military
protection, the monks pray, “Because he is with us in time of violence / Let us not dream / That he is everywhere
/ Other than where we die … Let us not forego / The blood he shed / Let us drink from
the chalice of passage.” By the time they at last commit as a group to staying—Jean-Pierre noting that “our mis-
sion here is not finished” while the once doubt-battered Christophe concludes joyfully, “Let God set the table here
for everyone, friends and enemies”—they are ready to face the reality that the net of violence is closing in upon
them. We see them sitting in prayer in the chapel. A military helicopter approaches and circles menacingly over
the monastery. The alarmed men rise, then stand together facing the altar with their arms around each other, and
begin to sing:

    Our Father of Light, Eternal Light and source of all light,
    You illuminate us at the threshold of the night with the radiance of your face …
    The shadows are for you not shadows …
    May our prayers before you rise like incense
    and our hands like the evening offering.44

They stand together as church, supporting each other in the moment and the mission. The ritual of the Liturgy
of the Hours orders their lives as chaos descends. It serves less as a comforting spiritual prop than as the ultimate
expression of their identity as persons committed to the God of light. It binds them as a community of disciples:
united, they stand.45 The helicopter leaves; the liturgy has given them strength to stay.46

Eucharistic celebration similarly and with equal power punctuates the narrative as the monks decide to stay at
Our Lady of Atlas and almost inevitably be martyred. They celebrate mass after Dom Christian rejects military

40 Quoted in Gaillardetz, Transforming Our Days, 92.
41 Of Gods and Men.
42 Of Gods and Men.
43 Of Gods and Men.
44 Of Gods and Men.
45 Armand Veilleux stresses, “The Mystical union with God was not lived by these brothers as so many isolated individuals but as a com-
munity; rather, their witness was communitarian.”
46 The decision to stay is profoundly in keeping with their monastic vow of stability, “which implies not only stability in the monastic voca-
tion, but also in a concrete community and in a determinate place… Of course, an entire community can displace itself, but it cannot
do so without taking into account the bonds established with the local society and culture” (Veilleux, “The Witness of the Tibhirine
Martyrs”).
protection, they celebrate mass again after the jarring Christmas Eve intrusion of al-Fayattia and his men, and they celebrate mass after determining that, come what may, their mission is to be with the people they serve, who have no choice whether to go or stay. The gospel reading at this final mass (and it will be their final Eucharistic celebration together) is portentous: Matthew 24: 40-41. “One will be taken, and one will be left.” The scene then cuts to show each monk receiving Eucharist. It is, for seven of the men (though they cannot know it), viaticum, “food for the passage through death to eternal life … the completion and crown of Christian life on earth.”47 This ritual banquet is followed by and paired with a scene that is arguably the climax of the film: a final meal together, an agape celebration where in sharing fine wine and listening to the lovely strains of Tchaikovsky’s Swan Lake, the monks at once enjoy the tremendous beauty of life and being alive and also bid it adieu. Their increasingly sober expressions and tears underscore a series of close-up shots that culminate with Christian’s eyes looking straight into the camera. Having celebrated the Paschal Mystery, they are called upon to live it, fed by “the sacramental-liturgical encounter” with Jesus so as to realize the “ongoing mission of meeting him in lives of service patterned on his historical mission.”48 Mark Searle eloquently notes:

The paschal mystery we rehearse ritually cannot be detached from the paschal mystery lived by the victims of violence, poverty, and disease, by those who are marginalized and oppressed, by the “little ones” of this world. The prayer that rises like incense is the prayer of the ovens of Dachau, the prayer of the streets of Calcutta, the prayer of the woman beaten by her lover, the prayer of the child tortured by his own parents, the prayer of the hungry of Mexico’s barrios, the prayer of the AIDS victims. The litany is endless. In the liturgy we join our prayers with theirs, put their prayers into words. A priestly people. A people who can offer in memory the sacrifice of the whole Christ, the passion of Jesus and the passion of the poor, the “little ones” of our generation.49

Simon Chan rightly notes, “Eucharistic worship does not end in cozy fellowship, but in costly mission to the world.”50 That said, what follows this pairing of shared communions at altar and at refectory table is (despite its potentially sensational content) mere denouement. The great choice, the ultimate exercise of human freedom that a frightened but committed Jesus of Nazareth articulated with the words, “Not my will, but yours be done” (Lk 22: 42), has already been made.51 The subsequent and terrifying night raid in which seven of the Tibhirine monks are hustled away in vans, the grim scene of them speaking into a microphone for those holding them captive, and the final vision of them trudging to death through a heavy snowstorm—each face etched with the brutal physical and emotional reality of death (and violent death at that)—is mere postscript. As the prior Christian reassured Fr. Christophe during the months of discernment, “Remember, you’ve already given your life. You gave it by following Christ when you decided to leave everything to come to the abbey at Tibhirine … We’re martyrs out of

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47 From the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Pastoral Care of the Dying (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2002), 45. Of viaticum Bruce Morrill writes, “The healing Christ’s Spirit mediates through sacramental rites is the affirmation of the sick person’s inestimable value before God and people and the renegotiation of the person's mission in life. The foundation of that mission of following Christ was made in baptism (the irreversible permanent condition of every Christian), but the details continuously emerge over the unique course of each individual's living and finally dying in that call,” 140-41.
49 Searle, Called to Participate, 85.
50 Quoted by Bevans and Schroeder, Constants in Context, 363.
51 That this choice is at once self-emptying and self-gifting is apparent even in the small moments of joy which culminate in the refectory celebration. As Paul Metzler points out, “Living with dying means appreciating life, even as it grows shorter, living each day with gratitude and faithful confidence that joy, growth, and love can thrive, even in the face of death. Thus life itself is sanctified on the journey to death. Holy living and holy dying are joined.” See Paul A. Metzler, “Holy Living, Holy Dying,” in Spiritual and Psychological Aspects of Illness, 224.
love, out of fidelity … Our mission here is to be brothers to all. Remember that love is eternal hope. Love endures everything." Living out—to death—the implications of such love is easier for those who have been nourished by prayer, the support of ecclesial community, and the grace-filled gift of communal worship. In the words of Margaret Farley, “There is a love stronger than death, a crucified love that does not turn away from swords of sorrow, and that goes forth unconditionally no matter what the forces of evil may do against it. The point of the cup and the cross is not death, but that relationships can hold.”

In Perfect Charity with the World

I think that real faith is when nothing is going right
and you know it will not happen the way you want and then you believe anyway. …
Doesn’t that sound like faith, Mom?

17-year-old cancer patient

The great vocation of the minister is to continuously make connections between the human story and the divine story.
We have inherited a story which needs to be told in such a way that the many painful wounds about which we hear day after day can be liberated from their isolation and be revealed as part of God’s relationship with us. Healing means revealing that our human wounds are most intimately connected with the suffering of God.

Henri Nouwen

When the dangers became clear for foreigners in Algeria, many felt that the monks, as opposed to other missionaries, should go because “they could live their life of prayer anywhere”; Veilleux rightly points out that this “was to misunderstand their life completely.” He explains, “The contemplative life is not lived in the abstract. It is always incarnated, rooted in a concrete place and cultural context. The Tibhirine monks in no way wanted to be martyrs; they were not visionaries.” More to the point, perhaps, for the purposes of those seeking how to better support their own ministries among the sick and dying, is that mission, liturgy, and spirituality cannot in any vocation subsist without each other. Of Gods and Men illustrates that without constant prayer, without eloquent ritual, and without the love of ecclesial community and a love for the greater community which they served, the men at Tibhirine’s abbey would likely not have been able to embrace the choice that they did. As Richard Gaillardetz stresses, “Only by hearing God’s Word proclaimed (kerygma), by common worship and the celebration of the sacraments (leitourgia), by experiencing Christian fellowship (koinonia), and by engaging in actions of committed service to others (diakonia) can we grow as followers of Christ.” Further, for those called to positions of leadership, as Prior Christian was, contemplative prayer away from the group can also be of significant help. In a beautiful montage,

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52 Of Gods and Men.
53 Farley, Compassionate Respect, 78.
56 “The Witness of the Tibhirine Martyrs.”
57 “The Witness of the Tibhirine Martyrs.”
58 Transforming Our Days, 65.
the film shows how at a crucial point Christian, like Jesus, retreats to the wilderness to pray: wandering amid giant trees, sitting beside still waters, and (in a symbolically freighted scene) hiking among a flock of restless sheep and goats.59

The camera’s panoramic sweep of the landscape and the way it traces the flight of birds across a wide, empty sky emphasizes not only the desert nature of Christian’s retreat but also how God’s creation puts human struggle into perspective. Sustained by prayer both with and in isolation from the community, Christian finds the strength to support his fellow brothers, to continue living in dialogue and love with the poor Algerians terrorized by internecine war, and (not least) to hold himself together physically, psychologically, and spiritually in a period of personal and vocational crisis. In the film’s final scene we see him supporting the weakened Brother Luc—whose own prayer was “God, grant us the grace to die without hatred in our hearts”—during the monk’s march into the snowy fog of death. Christian not only dies without hatred, he dies in thanksgiving, in love of the neighbor who is friend and of the neighbor who might reasonably be considered enemy. Addressing the executioner he could only imagine, he wrote in what is known as his Testament, “And also you, the friend of my last minute, who will not know what you are doing. Yes for you also I wish this THANK YOU, this “A-Dieu,” for in God’s face I see yours. And let it be given to us to find ourselves there, two happy thieves in paradise, if it please God, the Father of us both.”60 This expression of camaraderie (if you will) and of generous forgiveness springs from a prayer-nurtured intimacy that makes it possible for one “to see in the other … the image of God” and allows one to live forgiveness as a “healer, mender, restorer, and peace-maker.”61 It is an intimacy that makes us greater, more authentic participants in the “sublime and terrible liturgy” of the world, “aligning us with God’s purposes in the world and … opening [us] up so that God’s will may be done in us and in God’s creation; it transforms us into more available partners with God’s work.”62 It allows us to begin to realize the full, Spirit-infused power of discipleship. “God walks in us and through us,” says Pamela Cooper-White, “incarnate in history” and present “in the bloody realities of concrete, fleshy living and dying.”63 For those who have dedicated themselves to the service of the sick and the dying, the catechetical lessons of Of Gods and Men are clear: take time for prayer, communal and individual; rely on the ordering beauty of church ritual; allow the sacraments, especially Eucharist, to feed and sustain you in memory of not only Christ’s passion but also Christ’s rising; be fed by the Word of God written in Scripture and in Nature; and expect to find the face of God in every neighbor. Summing up the story of their painful struggle to make a meaningful choice within the context of hatred and senseless violence, Christian reminds his brothers that “We did all we had to do … We sang the mass … we found salvation in undertaking our daily

59 Benedict XVI, citing Gregory the Great, stresses that “the good pastor must be rooted in contemplation. Only in this way will he be able to take upon himself the needs of others and make them his own.” See his encyclical Deus Caritas Est (Vatican City, 2006), no. 7. So must the good doctor, the good nurse, the good social worker, the good chaplain, the good neighbor.

60 Quoted in Veilleux, “The Witness of the Tibhirine Martyrs.”


62 See Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est, no. 18.


64 Bevans, Constants in Context, 367.

65 “Pastoral Care in Relational and Theological Perspective,” 27-28.
tasks. The kitchen, the garden, the prayers, the bells day after day.\textsuperscript{66} Also among these daily tasks were caring for the sick, work and prayer, the Benedictine motto, and unconditional love for those around them and for each other.\textsuperscript{67} “Greater love has no man than this,” said Jesus, “than to give his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13). Admittedly, the sacrifice, the perpetual engagement with death, can at times feel like too much, the challenge to faith too brutal. But, Christian maintains, “Our identities as [humans] go from one birth to another. And from birth to birth we’ll each end up bringing to the world the child of God that we are … The mystery of incarnation remains what we are going to live.”\textsuperscript{68}

Where is God in the suffering, heartache, and loss of these individuals (and countless others) in Algeria? Of those people destroyed in the World Trade Center, Afghanistan, and Iraq? Of that young cancer patient who is dying with her head on her pillow? God is where he has always been: “in the acts of compassion that were [and are] everywhere observed amid the very real pain of these events,”\textsuperscript{69} not necessarily “removing the pain, but … securing safe passage through it.”\textsuperscript{70} In our actions, however humble, in our love, there is the incarnate God, living out God’s mission, Jesus’ healing ministry, through us. May we be strengthened for this mission by our prayer and our song, by our ritual and our silence, by our life in the Church and also beyond the Church, realizing what Jeremy Taylor called “perfect charity with the world.”\textsuperscript{71} Where charity and love prevail, there God is ever found.

\textit{Photo Credits: Of Gods and Men (© 2011 Sony Pictures Classics Release)}

\textsuperscript{66} Of Gods and Men.
\textsuperscript{67} For an in-depth discussion of unconditional love, see Bruteau, \textit{Radical Optimism}, 111 ff.
\textsuperscript{68} Of Gods and Men.
\textsuperscript{70} Kauffman, “Spiritual Perspectives,” 170.
\textsuperscript{71} Quoted in Metzler, “Holy Living, Holy Dying,” 226.
Are They Finding a Place in Our Parishes? Young Adult Catholics and the New Evangelization

by Kathleen M. Mitchell, FSPA

Not long ago a young middle school teacher approached me for help. He was obviously embarrassed and proceeded to tell me he was new to Catholic schools and faced the daunting task of teaching religion to his students, although he knew little about being Catholic. “I'm a Catholic, but I didn't learn much growing up,” he told me. “I really don't know what a sacrament is, and I have to teach about seven of them! Can you give me some help?” This kind of encounter with an otherwise well-educated young Catholic is too familiar to me. As an educator I often meet young Catholic teachers like him with little foundation in their faith. The same is often true in my encounters with young people discerning religious life, priesthood, or lay ministry.

There is an urgent need for young adult faith formation, as well as for young adults to be more actively invited and integrated into parish life. As a woman religious, I have worked in various ministries with young adults. I have served as a member of my religious congregation’s vocation team, as a mentor and theological facilitator for Catholics on Call, and, most recently, in parish ministry where I began a young adult group. I have found that young people are unlikely to be able to explain their faith to others. I believe we are facing a crisis because many young adults not only fail to understand what is distinctive about being Catholic but also are ever more distancing themselves from participation in the faith community.

Many young adults that I meet disagree with the Church on numerous issues and question its moral authority, although I encounter a smaller number of more traditional young people committed to a conservative Catholicism. Although many young adults tell me that they disagree with the Church on issues, they are often eager to learn about its traditions and want to build a relationship with Christ. They are frustrated when they don’t find help to grow in their faith or a welcoming parish community that is young-adult responsive and open to listening to their questions and aspirations. It is essential to connect with these young people in a way that is authentic, dialogical, relevant, and meaningful, taking into consideration the challenges and issues of a new generation.

Young adulthood is often a time when individuals try to bring together their personal experience and understandings with what the official Church is asking them to believe. They also face the demands of establishing a professional identity and starting a family. It’s a sad reflection that young adults often face this critical journey alone, without being engaged in conversation or accompanied on their faith journey by those in ministry.

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The New Evangelization

In recent years there has been a great emphasis on the New Evangelization. If carried out well, I believe it could be a positive approach to reaching out to young Catholics, walking with them, sharing faith with them, and entering into a more profound dialogue with them. The new evangelization, one of the clear fruits of the Second Vatican Council, can be traced back to *Ad Gentes* (1965). The expression “new evangelization” has appeared in Latin American documents since at least 1968, and evangelization is a thread that runs through documents such as *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), and the writings of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, leading finally to the Synod on the New Evangelization (2012). Since Latin America provided the original context for the term and the Argentinian Pope Francis comes from this milieu, it will be interesting to witness his insight into the new evangelization.

Pope Benedict XVI placed great emphasis on the new evangelization and, in fact, the twenty-fifth Synod of Bishops was dedicated to “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.” Archbishop Nikola Eterović, Secretary of the Synod, distinguished three senses of evangelization:

1. Evangelization as a regular activity of the Church, directed at practicing Catholics.
2. The mission *ad gentes*, meaning the first proclamation of Christ to non-Christian persons and peoples.
3. New Evangelization as outreach to baptized Catholics who have become distant from the faith.

The Synod concluded with fifty-eight propositions that focused on the pastoral implications of the faith and the need for the new evangelization. This evangelization is directed at traditionally Christian countries weakened by secularization. There seems to be significantly more emphasis being placed on content, context, and the problem of prevalent secularism, with much less importance being given to using different models or methodologies of evangelization than in the past.

With the new evangelization has come much encouragement to be bold in proclaiming the faith, as well as a pronounced emphasis on what is wrong with the world. The late Avery Dulles once wrote:

Evangelization is not and has never been easy. Today we tend to blame the prevalent culture for our lack of success. We denounce its individualism, secularism, relativism, hedonism and other vices, which do indeed render the environment unfriendly to the proclamation of the gospel. But we too easily overlook the deep religious hunger that continues to stir in the hearts of contemporary men and women.

Rather than accentuating this as an era of crisis, something I often hear in relation to the new evangelization, it is important to address the religious hunger that is alive and well in our world today. It’s alive and well among young adult Catholics, too.

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1 See, for example, the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, *The Church in the Present-Day: Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council, II Conclusions* (Washington, DC: Division For Latin America-USCC), 28. This letter (September 6, 1968) by the bishops of Latin America introduced the conclusions of the Medellin gathering and encouraged a “new evangelization.”
Young Adult Catholics

Young adult Catholics in the United States live in a society that has undergone massive changes in the last fifty years. Unlike members of previous generations, who may have been nurtured by a family and community strongly influenced by a culture of faith, many young people today are not raised in any faith tradition. Contemporary young adults are more likely to be influenced by popular culture and a pervasive individualism. In addition, they often research religion on the Internet, where they have access to unlimited information. Many construct a hybrid religious identity, picking and choosing what suits them, although this is not unique to young adult Catholics.

Recently a young couple preparing to get married approached me, saying they felt uncomfortable going to Sunday Liturgy. I asked them what would help. “There is no one there our age! Everyone has grey hair, and we feel uncomfortable,” they lamented. “We would like to meet other young Catholics like us and talk about things that are important to us.” They were right.

As parish communities, the primary point of contact for most young adults, we often provide very little for persons in their twenties and thirties. There are sacramental programs for children and teens but little that is specifically for young adults. Younger people, therefore, have to invent their own ways of making decisions and of finding support. Often, what drives young adults away is a failure to address the needs that are relevant to their lives. The parish could be a valuable support for young adult Catholics during this time when they are facing difficult decisions and the unsettling pressures of young adulthood.

Recent studies on religious trends in the United States document the steep rise in the number of young adults in the United States who say they are “spiritual but not religious.” Indeed, many young adults have a tenuous relationship with the Catholic Church, jeopardizing its capacity to retain the young. Dean R. Hoge and his co-authors completed a sociological study of young adult Catholics that offers an analysis of this relationship, as well as the attitudes and needs of those in their twenties and thirties. Their book, Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice, reveals a gap in and directly challenges the Church’s efforts at transmitting faith and values to this generation. Their study notes that young adults give a low grade to the church in this area. The authors indicate that young adults seek spiritual meaning in their lives but often draw inspiration from the US spiritual marketplace. They underscore the influence and significance of a highly relativistic, individualistic, pluralistic culture, one that is also suspicious of institutions. The young people in this study stressed the need for the Church to be more welcoming to young adults and more open to dialogue with them. They believe young people should be integrated into the parishes and that programs, faith formation, and activities should be offered for them. They also feel there is a need to dialogue about certain teachings, especially on sexuality, which erode the Church’s credibility among young adult Catholics.

Hoge and his colleagues offered a number of their own suggestions to address the needs of young adult Catholics. Some of their recommendations are building a distinct Catholic identity, enhancing liturgies, offering better faith formation, teaching the rich spiritual traditions of the faith, and having a “preferential option” for young adult Catholics.

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4 Dean R. Hoge, William D. Dinges, and Mary Johnson, Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).
5 Hoge, Young Adult Catholics, 148.
6 Hoge, Young Adult Catholics, 172–173.
7 Hoge, Young Adult Catholics, 230–231.
Catholics. These recommendations bring to light some of the hopes and aspirations, as well as the issues and concerns, of young adults, casting light on areas the new evangelization needs to address.

**Young Adults and the New Evangelization**

The new evangelization is not a detailed curriculum or program but an effort and a vision to revitalize and renew Catholics, moving them to a deeper encounter with Christ and fuller participation in the Church. Looking at young adults in particular, the new evangelization is ideally about sharing faith. The fundamentals are important but sharing these can be done in a way that is dialogical, relevant to contemporary young women and men, and speak to our times. World Youth Days, college days of prayer and retreats, and strategies that involve the use of media and technology have been successful, relevant, vibrant, and transformative. An essential part of the new evangelization with young adults is capturing their hearts with stories, images, symbols, and possibilities that grab the imagination and lead to a renewal of faith. It means using transformative models and methodologies.

I followed the recent World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro with great interest, reflecting on the significance of millions of enthusiastic young people gathering to celebrate faith. It brought to mind my 2011 experience of traveling with a group from Chicago to the Madrid World Youth Day. During that week young people gathered for numerous events, such as catechesis, liturgy, reconciliation, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, celebrations of praise and music, and testimonial festivals. There were about 30,000 other US pilgrims with us, as well as several million from around the world. World Youth Days are marked by young people excited to be Catholic and are a testimony to relevant, transformative evangelization that helps young people encounter Jesus Christ in a living community of faith. This is an essential focus of the new evangelization, and I see this happening at World Youth Days. Questions remain, though, about how to carry the enthusiasm from large events like this into the parish, making them springboards for a deeper faith formation that endures beyond the event.

Frequently there is a lack of socialization among young Catholics, who see faith as a private matter. Coming together in small groups of shared faith, especially in parishes, can be a support to young adults and key to helping them become more involved in and committed to their faith. This can also enhance their connection with the larger faith community. It is difficult for people to grow in faith in the absence of a vibrant, welcoming faith community. Small faith groups can be places where young people can raise questions, feel supported, and learn more about their faith.

Today’s world, the only one young people have known, is marked by the explosion of social media. Young adult Catholics will often engage in interaction through social media, even seeking a religious community and relationships of faith. Many questions arise about the quality of these relationships, which sometimes replace a face-to-face faith community. Coming together with others can bring them out of isolation to a safe place where their experiences and issues can be shared. In order to do this, we need dedicated ministers and mentors who can be present for these young people.

I believe that the new evangelization can be positive and lead to a time of grace if we look closely at how we are imagining and engaging in evangelization. Important elements such as dialogue, renewal and reform, respect for others’ beliefs, the role of experience, transformative ways of sharing faith, humility, and a pastoral approach need to be present. This is what our young adult Catholics are hoping to find in the Church: a vibrant faith community and the transformative practice of a living faith.

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8 Hoge, *Young Adult Catholics*, 230–237.
The Work of Justice Is to Confront “Bad Religion”

by Joshua Van Cleef

In 2011, I found myself returning to the Catholic Theological Union after years in formation with the Franciscans, of whom I have fond memories of ministry, academic work, community, and discernment. This return followed my decision to leave the Friars and heed the call to the ministry and mystery of lay vocation. For me it was a time of searching and discovery. I was excited and a bit terrified. I knew I was called to ministry and called to build the kingdom, but now, for the first time in a long time, I didn’t know how I was going to do that in any significant way.

I did something new: I landed a part-time job at a retail coffee shop. Having been in ministry for nearly five years, my new work was a jarring contrast. I had gone from being a minister on the Navajo Reservation to serving coffee in Lincoln Park. Jarring as it was, it was kind of exciting at first because I felt like a complete foreigner in the land of shiny watches, condescending voices, and expensive coffee. In the beginning, the novelty of the situation largely whitewashed the reality of the working conditions. Then I discovered that employees were paid minimum wage received no sick days, and that the healthcare option was a mere corporate public relations ploy. I began to talk to the other employees and discovered that these working conditions were far from novelty for them. The majority of them had been in the retail industry between three and ten years, and they didn’t have the privilege of calling this a transition job. A transition job suggests that there is a better opportunity waiting around the corner. But the reality for my co-workers was that retail was their main work, working poor was their economic class, and the horrible working conditions were their life. It was then that the novelty wore away for me too.

I began to ask them questions about the dignity of work and every person’s right to a living wage. Within three weeks of my employment, a large group of employees met to talk about their experience of working for this corporation. These conversations became a weekly meeting as we began to get more organized. Within two months, a living wage campaign was born. Within a few more months, we had our first public action and media coverage, which led to the sprouting of similar initiatives in retail locations all over the country. A few months after that, I had a private, hour-long conference with the CEO. I will return to this topic at a later point, but first let me tell you about some of the difficulties I faced in organizing.

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Resistance at the Root

To my surprise, it was among the working poor, the majority retail workforce, that I found the most resistance. The eighty percent of this billion dollar company who were being paid under a living wage were the hardest to convince that positive change was possible or even warranted. Efforts to discuss injustice were met with fierce corporate loyalty or seasoned learned helplessness. Attempts to educate my co-workers about worker rights were met with widespread corporate codependence. Employees reaching out for help from outside organizations were met with coworkers and HR representatives shaming them to keep it in the family. Some employees even interpreted the news of organizing within the company as a personal attack. With the majority workforce subjected to policies that demanded a five-day work week yet offered salaries below the Illinois poverty line, I assumed that ideas of collective bargaining, dignity of work, and solidarity would be received as a glass of water on a hot day. Instead, the victims of this system fiercely defended the company and the competitive market that drove it. I had underestimated how deeply the roots of passivity extended.

The fierce loyalty, refusal to question, institutionalized fear, and learned helplessness of the masses were not unique to my experience. They are the fundamental stumbling blocks to working for justice. I realized that I needed to make a paradigm shift on how I thought about corporate retail.

Look at Nordstrom versus Melville. Notice the heavy-duty indoctrination process at Nordstrom, beginning with the interview and continuing with Nordie customer service heroic stories, reminders on the walls, chanting affirmation, and cheering. Notice how Nordstrom gets its employees to write heroic stories about other employees and engages peers and immediate supervisors in the indoctrination process. (A common practice of cults is to actively engage recruits in the socializing of others into the cult). Notice how the company seeks to hire young people, mold them into the Nordstrom way from early in their careers, and promote only those who closely reflect the core ideology. Notice how Nordstrom imposes severe tightness to fit—employees that fit the Nordstrom way receive lots of positive reinforcement (pay, awards, recognition)—and those who don't fit get negative reinforcement (being “left behind,” penalties, black marks). Notice how Nordstrom draws clear boundaries between who is “inside” and who “outside” the organization, and how it portrays being “inside” as being part of something special and elite—again, a common practice of cults.

This is an excerpt from Jim Collins’ book Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies. His research suggests that, over time, the best visionary companies share certain characteristics that make them great—a formula for success. One of six fundamentals of visionary companies is to build a cult-like culture. Such a culture has four major characteristics: 1) Fervently held ideology; 2) Indoctrination; 3) Tightness of fit; and 4) Elitism. The work of Collins offered insight into the struggles we faced in organizing. Is it just happenstance that stumbling blocks for working for justice are the building blocks of visionary companies in corporate America? How do you confront a corporation with economic ends relying on cult-like means?

I am well acquainted with religious fundamentals that could, at times, work against the promotion of a fuller humanity. It was that ring of familiarity that gave rise to a paradigm shift in me: working for justice in corporate retail

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is confronting “bad religion.” An openly professed deity doesn’t necessarily sit atop the retail pyramid, but there is some indication of where ultimate authority rests.

**Atop the Areopagus**

In the face of a workforce suffering from corporate Stockholm syndrome, a living wage campaign was eventually born. In the midst of that campaign, I found myself at the figurative doorstep of my CEO’s office. We had arranged a meeting to discuss a number of justice issues. I confronted him with the fact that the company *could* offer a living wage to all employees and that dignity of humanity demanded it *should*. His response gave me great insight into where the authority ultimately rests. He summarily divested himself of responsibility and pointed to the free market, professing that it decided what they should do.

Scary as the thought might be that the ultimate authority, the moral compass, lies in the invisible hand of the free market, it is a given for most of corporate retail. Scrape away the faint religious sentiments that whitewash high-end grocery stores or the values tattooed across the all-too-hip corporate coffee shops, and you will find the bottom line: the free market decides. Corporate leadership merely interprets the decision of the free market within the context of minimal state safeguards (that do not guarantee wages that sufficiently cover the basic cost of living).

**Working for Justice in Corporate Retail**

So what were some basic principles that I found to be relevant as we organized from the root up and faced bad religion in corporate retail?

**Rooted in Experience**

Working for justice must be rooted in experience. How do corporate doctrine and policy square with the lived experience of the employees at the bottom? In my situation, the actual experience of the retail worker was that we had to commit to full-time availability for part-time work. Four-hour shifts were a company standard. This meant that if I wanted healthcare (offered if you maintain twenty-one hours a week), then I had to work a minimum of five days a week. If employees are compelled to work at least five days a week to get healthcare—at four-hour shifts—then they are left with no other option but to rely on a part-time job that pays poverty wages as their primary source of income. What other job could they get to fill in the gaps?

According to Elizabeth Johnson, if a group of people believes that a viewpoint or experience may threaten their authority and security, it is not uncommon for them to systematically ignore that group’s voice. If the voice, wisdom, and experience of the common worker will threaten the financial security or power of the minority leadership, it is no surprise that any such insight is ushered into the blind spot. Bringing the perspective of the marginalized into view, we can see clearly whether or not an institution’s policies uphold human dignity or diminish it. It is therefore the work of justice to rescue this insight from the blind spot so that informed decisions can be made and bad religion can be confronted. It is the work of justice to turn corporations, no matter how iconic or visionary, on their side, exposing the easily corruptible underbelly, in order to have an honest look at the premises behind the policies. It is the work of justice to seek validation for the oppressed.

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4 “Living Wage Calculator: Poverty in America.”
Negative Experiences of Contrast

The ultimate voice of divine authority does not work to legitimize injustice but rises prophetically to unmask and denounce it. According to theologian Edward Schillebeeckx, within the experience of injustice, people can hear the voice of God saying in no uncertain terms, “This is not the Kingdom!” This unmasking of what is “not-god” by way of protest and praxis against injustice and their causes is termed by Schillebeeckx as “negative experiences of contrast.” With widespread hopelessness and ever widening “learned helplessness,” negative experiences of contrast are an invitation to find the voice of justice as a still whisper and a whirlwind of anger saying, “This is not how it is supposed to be!” How do you keep your compass pointing true north when you are overwhelmed by injustice and surrounded by an industry that practices systematic victim blaming? You regain your foothold by naming injustice as such, divesting yourself of the victim-blaming that legitimizes your unfortunate position. Then like a master carver or sculptor, you chisel away at what you know should not be there and what should begins to take form.

Ideal Centered

In the words of G. K. Chesterton, “Reform implies form. It implies that we are trying to shape the world in a particular image; to make it something we already see in our minds.” To organize in corporate retail, we must be ideal-centered. Once we named what was unjust, we were ready to claim what justice is. Then we set that idea as a reference point, our true north. And just as a builder pictures the finished house well before he ever lays the first brick, we too knew that our true cornerstone must be our ideal of worker justice. Grounded in our vision, we were ready to take a step toward building it.

Organizing, to use the words of Martin Luther King Jr., must involve “going to the mountain.” It is not sufficient to assume that the free market, fair market, or status quo will get us there. We have to envision a just world, reset our compass, and acknowledge that we all have been charged to walk in justice and build that ideal.

Accountability

If we are to work for justice in retail, we must hold our corporate leadership accountable for the policies that simultaneously drive their workers into poverty and line their own pockets in unbridled proportion. We must identify that the objective third party that we call the free market is nothing other than our own shadow and the shadow of corporate policy. If we are to work for justice, we must acknowledge that remaining silent in the face of injustice is consent. Commenting on Schillebeeckx, Mary Catherine Hilkert proposes that we are called to a “creative dissatisfaction.” That means our dissatisfaction must make us builders of a better world. We are neither naysayers nor people of despair—we are bold builders of our collective future. We must embrace with resolve the words of Elizabeth Johnson, when she writes: “no more prizes for predicting rain; only prizes for building arks.”

6 Injustice and human suffering runs contrary to the eschatological vision and promise of God. It is in this context that Schillebeeckx develops “negative experience of contrast” and inextricably links the Spirit to the dynamic center of the process, animating the movement from experience to action. “These contrast-experiences show that the moral imperative is first discovered in its immediate, concrete, inner meaning, before it can be made the object of a science and then reduced to a generally valid principle. The initial creative decision which discovered the historical imperative directly in its inner meaning in the very contrast experience is, for the believer, at the same time the charismatic element of this whole process.” (God the Future of Man, trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968), 155-56).

7 G.K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co, 1908), 108.


9 Johnson, 17.
My experience of organizing a living wage campaign was a blessed one. I was able to witness people regain their hope and strength to work for justice. It was a blessing for me to be able to tap into my own tradition’s prophetic teaching and challenge a major institution that oppresses many workers today. It was a time of learning as I began to realize the unfortunate premises that often hijack both economic and religious institutions. I watched as young people who claim no religion but have inadvertently imbibed toxic religious practices take on the prophetic paradigm to challenge the status quo. As I came to understand my own vocation better, I also came to understand the vocation of the church: to confront bad religion wherever we see it.
Pope Francis Puts Latin America on the Ecclesial Map

by Sheila Curran, R.S.M.

From the very beginning, Pope Francis was different.

He began his address in such a normal way, greeting the crowd at St. Peter’s Square with a simple “Good afternoon.” Before addressing the crowd, he requested that they pray for him. With heads bowed, all who had gathered in the Piazza of St. Peter prayed in silence. Since then, Francis has won the hearts of many Catholics, observers from all religious affiliations, and non-believers. His evident simplicity and humility made an immediate impact around the world. People were quick to note that things were different. This new man brought to mind the much loved John XXIII. This election, more than most of the previous ones, sent a wave of hope through all sectors of the church.

In this article I would like to look briefly at Pope Francis’ impact on the Latin American Church. The Latin American Church in particular is buzzing with hope at the moment. It would be simplistic to state that this is so simply because a Latino is Pope for the first time in history. We have to look more closely at the recent history of the church in Latin America to understand why hope is buoyant just now in the Christian communities there. People there feel so delighted simply because the new man understands what they are all about. After all, Cardinal Bergoglio was the head of the redaction committee that produced the final document from the fifth general assembly of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops Conference (CELAM) in Aparecida in 2007.

Pope Francis and a Preferential Option for the Poor

Pope Francis, from the very outset, talked about the “Church of the poor and for the poor.” This reflects his experience in the Latin American Church, which, in its response to Vatican II, identified itself with the poor. The Latin American Bishops in Medellín (1968) made the “preferential option for the poor” a theme that runs through all subsequent CELAM conferences.1 The preferential option for the poor is central to the Gospel, and it is out of this option that the church denounces poverty, injustice, inequality, and institutionalized violence, all of which are prevalent in Latin America. Pope Francis began his papacy by choosing to live simply in a less spacious apartment in the papal guesthouse rather than in the Vatican palace. When the conclave finished, he collected his suitcase


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and paid his own bills at the hotel where he had been staying. He has denounced the culture of waste and comfort in which we live.

In his visit to Lampedusa, a symbol of the many unrecognized places in our world, Pope Francis said, “We have fallen into a globalization of indifference. We have become used to the suffering of others. It doesn’t affect us. It doesn’t interest us. It’s not our business.” This is something that resonates with many people in Latin America. In his address to the Latin American Bishops in Rio de Janeiro, he reminded them once again that an option for the poor is God’s option:

God becomes visible precisely through us, through the poor, because it is in the poor that God always acts. The Church cannot distance itself from simplicity. Without the guarantee of simplicity, the church is seen as deprived of the necessary conditions in order to “fish” for God in the deep waters of the divine mystery.

The Latin America people know that a preferential option for the poor is not something abstract. They understand that, when using the term “poor,” one size does not fit all; the faces of the poor are diverse. Poverty is a complex issue. It is unjust and inhuman and not from God. A church that identifies with the poor and joins in their struggle for justice has to be prepared to suffer. Bishops, priests, sisters, and thousands of committed Christians throughout Latin America have given their lives as they lived out their commitment to the Gospel. This church, through its solidarity with the poor, gives hope by believing in a God of Life. By “unblocking” the cause for the beatification and canonization of Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was assassinated as he celebrated Mass in March, 1980, Pope Francis has given hope to many Latin Americans, especially the families of those whose loved ones lost their lives or been “disappeared” as a result of struggling to manifest God’s reign of justice and peace.

Pope Francis has also acknowledged that at times the church has distanced itself and has not adequately responded to the complexity that is involved in interpreting the “signs of the times” (Mt 16:3) as it has ministered to those who are on the margins.

Maybe the church has presented itself in a very weak manner, far too removed from the needs of those who have abandoned it, much too weak in responding to their questioning, much too cold in dealing with them, far too self-absorbed, a prisoner of its own rigid expression; maybe the world has converted the church into a relic of the past, unable to deal with new issues; maybe the Church was only able to provide answers in the infancy stages of life, but not in the adult stages.

This is a challenge to all of us as Church. It requires that we check our prejudices and assumptions. It is a call to solidarity with those on the margins. It is a call to listen to all as equal, to be open to people, and to receive and embrace them all warmly.

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4 "Tal vez la Iglesia se ha mostrado demasiado débil, demasiado lejana de las necesidades de los que han abandonado, demasiado pobre para responder a sus inquietudes, demasiado fría para con ellos, demasiado autorreferencial, prisionera de su propio lenguaje rígido; tal vez el mundo parece haber convertido a la Iglesia en una reliquia del pasado, insuficiente para las nuevas cuestiones; quizás la Iglesia tenía repuesta para la infancia del hombre, pero no para su edad adulta.”
Renovation of Structures

We now know that the Pope chose the name of Francis not only for the simplicity of the lifestyle of the saint but also because St. Francis was called to reform a Church in ruins. Pope Francis has taken a significant step towards collegiality by forming an advisory group of eight Cardinals that represent the five continents to help him reform the curia, the Vatican Bank, and, one hopes, the Church as a whole. Given that the Church is the people of God, it is hoped that this is an opportunity for all people to put forward their issues to their representatives.

In his presentation to the CELAM, Pope Francis highlighted the need for bishops and priests to be close to the people. This closeness creates communion and a sense of belonging, a meeting place. This closeness takes the form of dialogue and creates a culture of encounter. If this truly happens, the bishops and priests will then be able to witness to, and learn from, the diversity that exists within the global church.

In his flight back from World Youth Day, Pope Francis surprised the world by saying that if gay persons “accept the Lord and have goodwill, who am I to judge them?” This is in stark contrast to the remarks of his predecessors and indicates a small shift from the position held previously by the church leaders.

On a less positive note, Pope Francis made an unclear statement about the need for a theology of womanhood in the church. More than half the members of the church are women. In Latin America, women have been leaders of Basic Christian Communities for many years. He appears, so far, not to recognize the struggle of women and the theology that women have been producing for decades now. To date, Pope Francis has avoided the issues of sexual ethics and morality. Perhaps he felt that if he addressed these issues at World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro (July 2013), he would have lost many young people. These are painful and complex issues that still need to be addressed.

Conclusion

Six months after his election, it is uncertain whether Pope Francis’ words will result in concrete transformations within our Church. We are the Church. We need to take advantage of this new moment. We cannot be mere spectators. If we all respond to Pope Francis’ call to be a church of the poor, to be in solidarity with those on the margins, and to become creators of hope, then true transformation of the church and the world can happen.

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6 CELAM, Encuentro con el Comité. “La cercanía crea comunión y pertenencia, da lugar al encuentro. La cercanía toma forma de diálogo y crea una cultura del encuentro.”

Han (恨) and Salvation for the Sinned-Against

by Kevin Considine

For over six years now, I have been part of a home-based, ecumenical Bible study group here in Chicago. Our group gathers each week to pray, study Scripture, and learn how to be a life-giving community. As a tiny ekklesia, we have learned to share each other’s joys and burdens. Together, we eat, laugh, celebrate milestones, and enjoy each other’s company. However, like many communities, our members have wounds that run broad and deep, the causes of which include sexual violence, mental illness, racial denigration, persistent sexism, chronic miscarriages, cultural chauvinism, and family strife, to name but a few. I have quickly learned the depth and breadth of my own wounds, as well as those carried by others.

This experience, as well as my time working with at-risk youth, led me to focus my doctoral studies upon how we connect God’s offer of salvation, through Jesus the Christ, to the wounds that are the result of being “sinned-against”—of being the victims of sin. I am convinced that within the church and world we lack an adequate vocabulary to account for the depth and breadth of the effects of sin. Thus, I focused my studies on this problem and the question of how God persistently works in moments of fragmentary salvation in this world.

Our group is comprised of many interracial couples from a variety of Christian backgrounds, and this diversity has enriched our collective vocabulary for talking about God. Within this context, my own marriage to a Korean-American woman and my interaction with her family kindled my interest in exploring other ways of speaking about God and the effects of sin upon the “sinned-against.”

In my studies, I encountered one word for offering a more adequate account of the effects of sin—a thick description of woundedness—that comes from Korean culture and theology: Han. Han is not identical with the English term suffering. Suffering is too thin to account for the full complexity of woundedness. Han points to the interconnected levels of woundedness in human beings, their communities, and all of creation. Han is a festering wound and frozen energy in need of unraveling. The question is not if it will unravel, but when and how it will unravel and what the consequences will be.

1 The term “sinned-against” is found in Raymond Fung, “Compassion for the Sinned-Against,” Theology Today 37, no. 2 (July 1980): 162-169.

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Han is neither an abstract concept nor a philosophical category in the Western, Kantian sense. Han, essentially untranslatable, is akin to an anthropology that refers to the deep wounds carried by oppressed and violated individuals, groups, and peoples. Chang-Hee Son provides a philosophical-linguistic analysis of han. Son traces its origin to two Chinese characters (恨) upon which the full character is based. Son argues that the first carries the meaning of “heart” or “mind” and the second carries the meaning “to remain still or calm.” Son describes the fullness of the character (恨) as connoting a tree with roots stretching very deeply into the earth. As Son writes:

... [han] is used to describe the heart of a person or people who has/have endured or is/are enduring an affliction but the pains, wounds, and scars are not always apparent and visible because they are the kind that occur deep within the essence, core being, or heart of a person ... [han] connotes a mind’s or a heart’s affliction and struggle with a deep emotional or spiritual pain which either poisons the entire being or even ends up nourishing the person ...

Han is a black hole in the soul, so to speak, and it is an enormous, churning energy that can be unraveled either to bring life or death. The positive unraveling of han can lead to psychological, emotional, spiritual, and physical healing; the creation of a nurturing and constructive community; and the strength for positive resistance, protest, and action to confront and change unjust political and social systems. The negative unraveling and continued festering of han can lead to mental illness, physical and spiritual sickness, suicide, interpersonal violence, and a nihilistic attachment to a great political cause that can lead to little more than greater pain, suffering, and oppression for the most vulnerable of society.

Korean-American Protestant theologian Andrew Sung Park is the foremost interpreter of han within Christian theology. He provides a basic definition of han as a multifaceted “abyss of pain” and a “wounded heart” that is the residue of violence unleashed upon the innocent. Park describes han as a “black hole” and a festering wound whose energy must be channeled and resolved either to give life or to give death to one’s self and others. For Park, han is essentially untranslatable yet he attempts to describe it through phrases such a “wounded heart,” “bitter resentment,” and “frustrated hope,” as well as narratives of exploited workers, sexual abuse victims, and Holocaust survivors. Han is a deep woundedness that festers within the mind, body, and spirit of violated and exploited women and men. It has its major roots in the structural sins of racism, classism, and sexism.

Jae-Hoon Lee and Kim Chi-Ha offer further assistance in explaining han. Lee brings the psychology of Carl Jung and Melanie Klein into dialogue with Korean culture and arrives at three interconnected variations: won-han, jeong-han, and hu-han. To simplify, these variations are based in aggression, resignation, and nihilism, respectively. They are all of a piece, yet one variation tends to manifest and dominate the life of a victim. Kim, a Korean poet, provides some of the most definitive images and understandings of han. As theologian Suh Nam-Dong has argued, Kim is “the person who has done the most to develop han as a theme in Christian theology.” Kim thinks han is the destructive experiences of oppression that also carry constructive energy for social transformation. He writes, “… accumulated han is inherited and transmitted, boiling in the blood of the people,” and it possesses “the

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3 Chang-Hee Son, 14.
emotional core of anti-regime action.”7 However, Kim emphasizes the intense negativity of han for, as Wonhee Anne Joh points out, han is never innocent.8 Its deep negativity cannot be underestimated, and one of Kim’s sharpest descriptions of han is “a people eating monster.”9 For Kim, han is a “ghostly creature” that “appears as a concrete substance with enormous ugly and evil energy …”10

Chung Hyun-Kyung has pointed out that the han of women is the most severe and mostly overlooked. The han of women is so pervasive that some have argued that han should be applied almost exclusively to the woundedness of women.11 Due to the interconnections of patriarchy, class oppression, and neo-Confucian gender roles, women are the most saturated with han within a han-filled world.12 Many women have embraced the general description of Han Wang-Sang: “Han is a sense of unresolved resentment against injustices suffered, a sense of helplessness because of overwhelming odds against one’s feeling of total abandonment, a feeling of acute pain and sorrow in one’s guts and bowels.”13 This description shows how deeply women’s han runs and how insidious is its marginalization by the male power structure. Although women’s han traditionally has been addressed by Shamanism—Korea’s oldest religion—some theologians have attempted to re-think Christian theology and praxis in light of women’s han. For example, Grace Ji-Sun Kim constructs a Christology in which Jesus-Sophia is deeply involved in the resolution of the enduring han of women.14

The problem of innocent suffering is moving closer and closer to the center of Roman Catholic theology. This is because we find ourselves in a world saturated with a barbarous excess of violence and injustice. In my own journey with my Bible study group, the problems of innocent suffering, injustice, and where to encounter God’s salvation in this world have been more pressing than the problem of atheism or belief (although that, too, is important). The language of suffering has reached a saturation point and, on its own, is in danger of losing its meaning and relevancy. It is quickly becoming unable to account for the depth and breadth of woundedness within this world, as well as unable to envision God’s ongoing and relentless work of healing, liberation, redemption, and reconciliation. If theologians and ministers can better understand the interconnected physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of human brokenness, we become better equipped for articulating the means by which healing may occur. This thick understanding is what han offers for the future.

7 Kim Chi-Ha, quoted in Suh Nam-Dong, 64.
9 Kim Chi-Ha, quoted in Suh Nam-Dong, “Towards a Theology of Han,” 64.
10 Kim Chi-Ha, quoted in Suh Nam-Dong, 64.
12 Chung Hyun-Kyung, Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women’s Theology (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991).
13 Wang-Sang Han, quoted in Wonhee Anne Joh, Heart of the Cross, xxi.

Reviewed by Sammy Alfaro
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Pastors are often on the lookout for resources to assist them in the ongoing task of self-guided continued education in ministry. In his book, *Making Your Vision a Reality*, Paul Canning intends to provide a proven step-by-step guide to help a pastor assess the lack of vision in a church, develop a strategic plan for reenergizing a church through a new found purpose, and then implement that plan. The book is written for pastors who find themselves in a church where vision is lacking or needs re-articulation. Although a church planter could glean something from the guidelines presented in this book, the majority of ministry and leadership examples provided pertain to an established church that is either on the verge of extinction or has become stagnant due to a lack of vision. The book aims to remedy the problem with a solid dose of vision crafting, casting, and communication.

The knowledge the author shares from his experience of pastoring churches and helping other pastors to implement their vision plans is the greatest strength of this book. I commend the author for seeking to outline a biblically-substantiated plan for developing a vision for a church. Indeed, Canning employs examples taken directly from the biblical narrative and expounds on the leadership lessons learned from people like Moses, Nehemiah, and Paul. In particular, in chapter two, the author attempts to demonstrate how the scriptures provide guidelines for a pastor to lead a church with vision.

Although the book gets off to a good start, it does have some notable weaknesses with regard to content and scope. The book is not written for those trying to start a new church, and at times it even seems to be at odds with more contemporary approaches to church planting. At other times, the author unnecessarily takes shots at leaders who have sought to create Sunday worship experiences with more “dynamic worship services and short sermons designed to tickle ears and attract members” (16). This and other similar critical remarks present a somewhat antagonistic attitude toward the seeker-friendly model more and more contemporary churches have turned to in the last couple of decades. How can one dismiss the recognizable success modern church plants have had in developing a vision and seeing it come to fruition?

Perhaps the book presents a narrow-minded approach to developing a vision for a church because the author considers the task from a very particular perspective. For example, the book presupposes an audience of churches with a lead pastor in the very traditional sense, who has more or less full discretion to implement changes in the liturgy and overall activities of the church. The author also consistently refers to the lead pastor with masculine pronouns. How, though, would it work in a church system where the congregation or the presbytery has been given a greater control of the governance of the local congregation? Thus, although the book has a strong biblical foundation, it would need to consider various forms of ecclesial governance and even focus on issues of multicultural church leadership in order to achieve its purpose for a wider audience.
The major shortcoming this writer finds in this book relates to its shift to a more prescriptive form, beginning with chapter five. Instead of further articulating the inevitable problems a pastor will encounter when seeking to communicate the vision to a ministry team or working towards the completion of a plan, the author provides annotated ministry outlines from his own church. As helpful as this might be from a biblical standpoint, it does not fully consider the practical implications culture and ethnicity have in developing a vision for a church in different ministry contexts. In the end, I hesitantly recommend this book as a sort of biblical study tool a pastoral leadership team could work through as they aim to clarify the vision for their church. But I would advise the reader to seek as a supplement more theologically rigorous works that critically engage contemporary approaches and encourage developing a strategic vision that is more aware of the cultural and ethnic challenges and opportunities facing the church in the twenty-first century.
Kim Power and Carol Hogan use the fitting image of a basket full of loaves of bread to introduce us to the origins and purpose of this anthology. They see each loaf as prepared lovingly and uniquely by its respective author. The papers originated from a seminar on Eucharist in honor of Carol Hogan’s Golden Jubilee celebration with the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. Overall, the authors seek to enter into conversation with “men’s discourse” in order to reinterpret and re-vision the Eucharist based on the perspectives, thoughts, experiences, and hopes of women (1). The contributors come from a variety of theological specialties, including emphases in bible, gender, liturgy, art, cultural context, pastoral theology, psychology, and ecological theology. Recurring themes in the work include community, embodiment, symbolism, suffering, and justice.

While individual chapters deserve more thorough critical attention, a brief look at each illustrates how the power of this collection arises from the creative variety of the recipes used. After a concise introduction, Carol Hogan tells the story of the transitions in her religious community, focusing on the shifting understandings of their charism, vows, and the Australian context. She narrates how the Second Vatican Council and exposure to emerging feminist theologies led to an increase in individualized living and working situations for the sisters that still maintained communal integrity. Next, Carmel Pilcher re-visions community and sacrifice to offer a Eucharistic theology that activates the worshipping community to lives encouraging peace and justice. Lee Miena Skye uses the notion of racial ontology to engage the suffering and Eucharistic experiences of Australian aboriginal Christian womanist sisters. Elizabeth Dowling and Veronica Lawson explore women’s roles in the Gospel of Mark to pose a Eucharistic theology that is inclusive of all creation, especially women. In a timely piece (given Pope Francis’ recent foot-washing of Muslim women on Holy Thursday), Kathleen Rushton examines the biblical and historical testimony relative to the practice of foot-washing and how women came to be excluded from this practice. Frances Gray challenges a disembodied understanding of transubstantiation and proposes instead a notion of transubstantiation as the transformation of community “through conversion, tolerance and compassion” (27). Claire Renkin highlights the place of women in late-medieval Eucharistic art to reflect on real presence and the senses, paying particular attention to how artists portrayed women as encountering Jesus through the senses. For Kim Power, artistic representations of the Christa, the crucified Christ as a woman, show not only that women act in persona Christi but also that Christ took on and embodied all suffering, including that of women. The final chapter, by Anne Elvey, builds upon the interconnection of all living beings through hospitality and sacrifice to promote living in a Eucharist way, “each one for the other” (203).

Beyond its broad and diverse approaches, the book has much to commend it. The writers critique the tradition and then quickly move on to spend energy creating constructive theological content. They engage a variety of male voices (such as Theilard de Chardin, Chauvet, Zizoulas, and Derrida) and official magisterial teaching without...
falling into the trap of letting these voices continue to define the conversation or control theological development. They are fully aware of their contextual perspectives yet address issues related to the Eucharist that Christian believers seeking full Eucharistic participation encounter in any context. While the authors do not spend too much time explicitly exploring the symbol and role of “the word” in the Eucharist (see the treatment of this theme in Carmel Pilcher’s article), the entire book implicitly becomes an example of women’s use of words to incarnate the body of Christ.

This anthology serves up an abundant breadbasket of original ways of re-imagining and re-symbolizing the Eucharist to change perspectives, expand imaginations, and, most importantly, enable full participation by women in the celebration of the Eucharist. I recommend this book for purchase by theologians of all specialties as it offers an interdisciplinary and inter-specialty approach to the Eucharist. Each loaf deserves to be taken, blessed, broken, and shared so as to nourish the theological conversation and generate further reflection on the Eucharist, “the source and summit of Christian life” (Lumen Gentium, no. 11).

Reviewed by Mary Lynne Gasaway Hill
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In *Stealing Home*, Sebastian MacDonald, C.P., invites readers to explore moral agency with an eye toward the eschatology of the human experience. In this exploration, he guides readers along a continuum of factors at play in the moral decision-making process. He begins with internal processes, such as perspective and inclination, and leads into external ones, such as experience, particularly in relation to the church and to culture.

As MacDonald indicates in the introduction, this text is a generalist text, emphasizing the whole person striving for moral grounding. As such, it does not focus on particular moral issues but instead provides an overview of factors shaping moral choice.

These factors include perspective and inclination as innate but malleable dimensions at play in moral choices. In the initial chapters, he distinguishes perspective as “the horizon enveloping the world we inhabit” (9) and inclination as how we position ourselves toward our experiences, whether we process experience like Mary, an introvert, or Martha, her extroverted sister (Jn 11-12). Perspective and inclination are “premoral” influences that are “suggestive but not predictive of an agent’s moral status” (18).

However, together they influence the external factor of experience, which is at “the heart of morality” (20). He supports this claim by dedicating three chapters to it, addressing experience generally, personally, and negatively. MacDonald highlights how negative experiences, through appreciative inquiry, provide opportunities for transformation and conversion.

Conscience, as active judgment, serves as the bridge between these internal and external dimensions of moral agency on this continuum. MacDonald contends, “Unlike perspective, which is a viewpoint, or inclination, which is a tendency, conscience is a judgment that either clearly supports a course of action, or warns against it” (50). Experiences of church and culture shape conscience just as they shape perspective or inclination.

Ultimately, for MacDonald, compassion is the primary virtue for judgments of conscience that lead to moral action. He asserts that compassion is the criterion upon which the Christian will be judged. As the cornerstone for moral choice, compassion is a “significant achievement on the part of a person” because through it one becomes more fully human. MacDonald deftly distinguishes compassion from its cousins, sympathy and empathy, by highlighting the mutuality and relationality of compassion as suffering *with* another, whereas sympathy and empathy are one-way expressions from one *to* another (68).

The book concludes with a discussion of the end of things, the Kingdom of God. The driving focus of the work, this notion of eschatology is what needs to inform all moral decision-making according to MacDonald’s framework. It
is the ending of life, and foresight of this, that should shape Christian morality. He closes the work by reminding readers to “take our cue in this from the thief whom Jesus addressed on the cross, since it was only at the end that he underwent the conversion that made him the person he finally became (Lk 23:39-43). We could never say we knew the man, if we missed his final moment on earth” (77). MacDonald calls us to a mindfulness of action rooted in compassion through each moment of our lives.

The chapter on compassion is perhaps the strongest in the text due to its articulation of the virtue’s mutuality. Another of the strengths of Stealing Home is MacDonald’s clear, concise, and integrative writing style. He leads gently, illuminating his points with examples and metaphors from daily life. However, he does not develop the metaphor between playing baseball and enacting moral agency that, based on the title, we assume he will. He only implies that home plate lures the base runner in baseball like the promise of the Kingdom of God lures Christians into lives of moral action. The eschatology of the kingdom parallels the eschatology of home plate.

Unlike this implied metaphor, MacDonald clearly explicates the concepts with which he is working, linking them by providing supporting examples from often competing perspectives. Such a writing style benefits the reader by exploring the complexities of moral choice, allowing the text to be a starting point for dialogue for parish reading groups or undergraduate students.

However, MacDonald repeatedly falls back on faith and the mystery of God as almost a naïve response to life’s most difficult moral challenges. The text is rooted in the assumption that the reader holds the same level and type of faith in God, divine providence, and the church that MacDonald holds. For readers searching for support of a stalwart faith, MacDonald provides; for readers questioning the foundations of faith, MacDonald does not. Unlike the chapter on compassion, which refines an understanding of the virtue, the chapters on the church and on culture read more as assertion and justification. As an illustration of this, in regard to the church, MacDonald asserts that loyal Catholics “are responsive to the church’s competence and experience” in socially conservative issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and contraception but frequently balk at church teaching on socially progressive issues such as health care, the death penalty, or a living wage. This assumes a questionable definition of a loyal Catholic. For example, a recent Gallup poll revealed that eighty-two percent of US Catholics found birth control morally acceptable.1 Are these all disloyal Catholics because they are not receptive to this particular church teaching? Are loyal Catholics defined only as those who are socially conservative? The text on the back cover of the book states that early in his career, MacDonald was concerned that he was teaching about issues, such as sexuality and marriage, in which he had no personal experience. As a result, he shifted his focus to the basic foundations of moral theology, in which he did have experience. Then why wouldn’t he expect the church to be as brave as he himself was and come to similar realizations?

This unsettling chapter on the church is followed by the one on culture. In it, MacDonald states that culture is at its best when representing “a blend of experiences contributing to the improvement of the human person” (43). As part of these experiences, MacDonald considers the role of beauty, along with the true and the good, as contributing to human flourishing. Unfortunately, this segues into a justification of Vatican preservation of beauty in its vast collections and museums, leaving the chapter reading almost as apologetic.

Overall, Stealing Home offers a clear approach to a consideration of the moral enterprise but does so by making assumptions of faith in God and the church that leave this reviewer a bit uncomfortable.

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Reviewed by Dawn M. Nothwehr, O.S.F
Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, IL

In this small but mighty volume, Robinson contends that white American theologians have an urgent call to uncover, analyze, and dismantle racism. She pleads, “If theologians don’t address the questions of race, the implicit message to church members and leaders is that race and racism are not theological or ecclesial matters” (10). Robinson addresses racism, utilizing theologians—classical white males, African Americans, Latino/as, Asians, and Native Americans—as well as experts in related fields of political science, sociology, and economics, not shying away from the complexity presented by the “multifaceted hydra” (18). James H. Cone’s Black liberation theology is her lens and method as she challenges the complicity of Christianity in the United States in constructing, promoting, and sustaining racist structures.

Not surprisingly, her sources and audience are primarily Protestant Christians. Significantly, she also reflects on insights gained through sustained relationships with the likes of the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference, the Nueva Vida United Methodist Church, and the Quayle United Methodist Church, as well as her personal efforts toward Du Bois’ double consciousness.

In chapter one, she outlines and examines key notions and dynamics of racism, white privilege, and white supremacy. She rightly points out that the very nature of the church shifted when, under Constantine the Great, it became an association of the privileged and a function of the state.

Chapter two explores theological anthropology. Robinson demonstrates how both whites and persons of color are dehumanized and how the *imago Dei* is violated by the systemic sin of racism. Deplorably, white theologians are reluctant, under the guise of neutrality, to name racism and engage in dismantling it. Robinson adopts Ali Ratansi’s use of racialization, which connotes institutionalized racism that is a combination of factors that result from unjust discrimination—social, political, economic, etc. Peggy McIntosh’s classic material identifies white privilege as unearned individual advantage, and white supremacy as a function of hierarchal power in whole societies. Using Cornell West and Enrique Dussel, Robinson explains how “Constantinian Christianity” thwarted efforts to expose systems of racism while “Prophetic Christianity” required speaking truth to power (24-25).

Chapter three is an outstanding, concise exposé of Christianity’s involvement in racialized US history. Using Cornell West’s methodology of demythologizing and demystifying, Robinson uncovers three historical periods: 1) Pre-US Civil War–1865, when whites questioned whether other racial and ethnic groups were human or of another species. Here theology’s sin was to provide the warrants for the dehumanization of people of color and privilege for whites. 2) 1865-1960s Civil Rights Movement, when science and pseudo-science maintained white supremacy by asserting the continued inferiority of people of color through ever more sophisticated means. Theology’s sin
here was silence, allowing “scientific” and “legal” oppression to go unchallenged. 3) Contemporary racism, which assumes that legislation has taken care of all injustices and leveled the playing field for all. Theology’s sin is to use civil law to do the work of justice without questioning the ever more subtle forms of racism in churches, society, institutions, and academic guilds.

In chapter four, Robinson proposes a three-part reformation strategy. First, repentance must be solidified by “becoming black with God,” i.e. white theologians and Christians must commit to engage with and learn from people of color (87). The sole incentive is the Gospel. Second is to “establish an ethical component to theological reflection” that includes the liberating demands of the Gospel (89; Lk 1:52). Finally, we must adopt a “logic of inclusion”—presumed white normativity, resulting in token hiring or assumed inferiority of scholars of color and their work, must yield to respectful mutual relations (93).

Much of what Robinson presents here is not new, but she concisely outlines essentials for an urgently needed conversation on racism, calling Christian theologians and churches to accountability. Her treatment of Native American theology on race is rare. The book’s format makes it attractive as a great tool for undergrads, adults in education classes, or graduate students exploring Protestant theological sources. I recommend it!