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Spiritan Horizons is a journal of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit, Pittsburgh. Published annually by the Center for Spiritan Studies at Duquesne University, the Journal combines scholarly articles on Spiritan history, spirituality and mission with others related to the praxis of the Spiritan charism in a wide variety of cultural and life settings.

Special attention is given in each issue to the ethos of Spiritan education (including service learning) and especially the interface of faith and reason in the setting of higher education. Past issues of the journal can be accessed online at the Spiritan Collection at http://www.duq.edu/about/centers-andinstitutes/spiritan-studies/spiritan-collection-information.

The Center for Spiritan Studies is a collaborative venture between the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit. The Center was founded in 2005. Its purpose is to foster and disseminate research into Spiritan history, tradition, and spirituality. It serves the Congregation throughout the world and Duquesne University by making resources for the Spiritan charism available for ministry, learning, and teaching. It likewise serves all people who wish to benefit from the Spiritan charism in their various callings.
Quite a few milestones are being celebrated this year. It is 150 years of the arrival in Mauritius of Blessed James Laval, C.S.Sp., and of Spiritan evangelization in Tanzania. The worldwide church is still mesmerized after fifty years of Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae*, not to talk of the recent debate on Pope Francis’ *Amoris Laetitia*.


The editor requested two specialists not to take a position but to outline what is involved both in arguments for and arguments against two hotly debated papal documents. The purpose is to enlighten the issues at stake. Dr. George Worgul in “Amoris Laetitia – Joy of Love or Scandal of Heresy,” delves into the underlying ethical and pastoral issues. Paulinus Odozor, C.S.Sp. handled “Humane Vitae after Fifty Years – Diverse Perspectives on its Message.” Dr. Daniel Burston then outlines the various types and ramifications of conversion in “A Leap of Faith. What is Conversion? A Psychologist’s Perspective.” Missionaries and pastors take note. Dr. Marinus Iwuchukwu picks up the baton and reflects on the possibility of salvation in other religions and what this means for mission and pastoral practice, in “Interreligious Dialogue in a Postmodern Culture – the Challenges and Development of Inclusive Religious Pluralism vis-à-vis Levinas’ Philosophy of Being.” The editor requested an article on My Faith as an African. Bonaventure Ugwu, C.S.Sp. sees faith giving rise to hope and so reflects on “My Hope as an African,” precisely the intercultural give-and-take he experiences in the Spiritan International School of Theology, of which he is current Rector.

Under Education, the Duquesne President, Dr. Ken Gormley, teamed up with James McCloskey, C.S.Sp. to reflect on the process and content of Duquesne’s recent Strategic Plan, in “The Spiritan Charism, the University Mission, and the Duquesne Strategic Plan.” Hopefully, we will be hearing from other Spiritan Higher Institutes about how their Strategic Plan embodies the Spiritan spirit. James McCloskey, C.S.Sp.
adds a short but illuminating reflection on the delicate task of the University Officer for Mission and Identity: “A Tolerance for Ambiguity: the Catholic Mission Officer.”

Headlining the Lived Experience is a couple whose ecumenical dialogue is taking place in their married life. Kenneth Hendrata and Rev. Kimberly Greway drew the curtain a bit to let us into how “A Couple Lives the Dialogue of Catholic and Methodist Faiths.” The church prizes social justice and human dignity, especially of workers engaged in “lowly” tasks. Two education psychology professors, Jocelyn Gregoire, C.S.Sp. and Dr. Christin Jungers, set out to test how well the church is treating and paying sacristans and house stewards, in “Perceptions and Experiences of Creole Workers in Catholic Parishes of the Diocese of Port Louis, Mauritius.”

This number of Spiritan Horizons closes with six reviews of recent books. William Cleary, C.S.Sp. reviewed two. Pope Francis, Joy of Holiness, set out an everyperson’s recipe for holiness that includes joy and humor. Cardinal Sarah, God or Nothing. A Conversation on Faith, is an interview in which the Cardinal shows great admiration for the French Spiritan evangelizers of his village. Cycus Chungu, C.S.Sp. reviewed William Cleary, C.S.Sp., Spiritan Life and Mission since Vatican II, showing how the Congregation of the Holy Spirit found its path to renewal through a re-discovery of its founding charism. James Okoye, C.S.Sp. reviews three books. Gerhard Lohfink, Is This All There Is? is a good place to start reflection on the current theology of death, what really is resurrected, what the groaning of material creation for redemption might mean. James Chukwuma Okoye, Genesis 1—11: A Narrative-Theological Commentary, follows the narrative-theological commentary with a succinct treatment of the reception of the text in the early fathers of the church and early rabbinism. CARA, Going, Going, Gone! The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics, is a brief but enlightening survey of “sorta Catholics,” “almost-done,” “done,” and “nones” that is helpful in following the proceedings of the current Synod on Youth, 2018.

James Chukwuma Okoye, C.S.Sp. (Editor)
Goals of the Center

- Prepare a new generation of experts in Spiritan history and spirituality.
- Encourage the inculcation of the Spiritan charism where the Congregation is rapidly expanding, particularly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.
- Develop publications and other appropriate materials to train professed Spiritans and Spiritan Lay Associates for contemporary mission.
- Organize workshops and seminars to ensure the continuity of the Spiritan ethos in educational institutions founded by Spiritans.
- Promote Spiritan spirituality in the contemporary world.
- Disseminate Spiritan classics, by translation if necessary.

History of the Center

The Center for Spiritan Studies was founded in 2005 as a collaborative venture of Duquesne University and the Congregation of the Holy Spirit to foster research on Spiritan history, tradition and spirituality, as well as to disseminate the results throughout the Congregation, the University and the general public. The rich legacy of the Spiritan tradition lies at the very heart of Duquesne University and forms its guiding principles and practical ethos.

Resources of the Center

- The Center, along with the Gumberg Library, created and continues to develop the online Spiritan Collection, a treasure of publications on Spiritan founders, history, and spirituality. For more information, see Spiritan Collection.
- The Ed Supple Room housed on the third floor of the Gumberg Library is a research space on campus and a mini Spiritan library.
- Spiritan Horizons, a scholarly annual journal, publishes articles that further research on Spiritan tradition and spirituality. Attention is given to the ethos of Spiritan education and pedagogy.
- Other publications of Spiritan or Duquesne interest.

Programs of the Center

- The Spiritan Scholar program is a year of research in Spiritan tradition and spirituality.
- International Essay Competitions for Spiritans in formation worldwide and others.
- Workshops for Spiritan formators worldwide.
- Roundtable meetings on Spiritan ethos of education.
- Conferences on Topics of Spiritan interest.
- Translation and/or Publication of seminal Spiritan Works.

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Spiritan Scholar Program
Center for Spiritan Studies
Division of Mission and Identity
Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, USA

Purpose

The purpose of the program is to develop scholarly specialists in Spiritan Studies. Outcomes of the program will include lectures, colloquia and articles and books on topics such as:

- Spiritan Founders and Heroes
- Spiritan Rules, Constitutions and Chapters, especially since Vatican II
- Spiritan history, including the history of various missions or circumscriptions
- The French School of Spirituality and its times
- The Theology of the Holy Spirit
- The Holy Spirit in Spiritan Life and Mission
- Spiritan Mission, Yesterday and Today
- New Trends in World Mission
- Spiritan Pedagogy and Education
- Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC)
- Experiences in Intercultural dialogue

Eligibility

Eligible candidates include Spiritans, especially those in formation roles, who fulfill the academic requirements. Candidates must possess and demonstrate research ability, as well as language competency in English and French. Spiritan candidates are nominated by the general council and approved by their respective authorities. For more information see Spiritan Scholar.

Privileges and Support

Duquesne University provides library access and technology support. A faculty mentor is matched to each scholar. Spiritan scholars may reside on campus as a member of the Spiritan community.

Application Process

Required documentation includes a resume or Curriculum Vitae (C.V.) and a personal statement of 1,000 words or less outlining a proposed research project that conforms to the topics listed in the Purpose section. Candidates should also provide a letter of recommendation or support from their respective superior. Application deadline is March 1.

History

Launched in 2013 by Duquesne University and the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, the Spiritan Scholar Program provides an opportunity for selected individuals to conduct research on the Spiritan tradition with immersion in the extensive resources available at Duquesne University. These resources include the print and online resources of the Center for Spiritan Studies and the Gumberg Library. They also include access to academic courses and faculty expertise, the Spiritan community, and various other educational and religious organizations in the Pittsburgh area.

The program operates on an academic year calendar (nine months, September through May). At this time the program is open only to two qualified Spiritans per year.

Application Contact

Apply online to be the next Spiritan Scholar at Duquesne. Candidates may also print the application form and mail along with C.V. and personal statement to:

Director, Center for Spiritan Studies
Duquesne University
GW05 Libermann Hall
Pittsburgh, PA 15262

Documents may also be sent by e-mail to:
Fr. James Chukwuma Okoye
okoye@duq.edu
Competition on Spiritan Mission

The general council announces an essay competition for all Spiritans in formation on The Challenges and Future of Spiritan Mission.

The results of the competition will be announced at Pentecost, 2019. The best two essays will receive prizes; the first essay will be published in Spiritan Horizons.

The evaluating panel appointed by the general council consists of the following experts:

Raymond Jung, C.S.Sp.

Raymond Jung, C.S.Sp., is director of the Maison Poullart des Places in Rennes (France), whose mission is to disseminate Spiritan spirituality. He has been formator in various houses of Spiritan formation in the Republic of Central Africa and in Europe. From 1996 to 2012, he was assistant novice director, then director of novices in Ireland, Cameroon, and the European novitiate opened in Chevilly, France, in 2004. As such, he invested much in the study of the founders.

Translated by Roberta Hatcher

THE RELEVANCE OF POULLART DES PLACES FOR SPIRITAN IDENTITY AND MISSION

“I will proclaim what your goodness has made me hear today.”

In 2002–2003 we celebrated our two founders and 300 years of Spiritan history, then in 2009, the anniversary of the death of Poullart des Places. These celebrations made it clear that the entire Spiritan family recognizes Claude François Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann as its founders and that we owe what we are today to the two of them. Poullart des Places has taken his rightful place in the consciousness of Spiritans.

In fact, these celebrations would not have been possible a hundred years earlier, for Poullart des Places had fallen into obscurity in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was only in 1901, following the suppression of the Congregation by the French government, that a rediscovery began, one that continued throughout the twentieth century.

We now have the Spiritual Writings of Poullart des Places available to us in several languages, as well as several biographies, including the work by Joseph Michel, a standard reference that seeks to restore “the true face of our founder.” Thanks to Fr. Koren and the publications of Paul Coulon and others, we are more familiar with the history of our Congregation. In addition, many initiatives of the Spiritan Provinces have made the figure of the first founder and our Congregation’s history better known.

Yet this activity should not stop there: In his introduction to the re-reading of the Spiritual Writings of Poullart des Places, Fr. Lecuyer says: “These books should be in all community libraries. And if they are, they should be read.” A little further he confesses with humility that “he had largely neglected knowledge of the writings and work of Poullart des Places” and “that the same is probably true for many of my Spiritan confreres.”

We are fortunate to have more reliable sources that reduce our distance from the founder. However, a founder is more than a text. He is a person to encounter, a gift to be embraced in order to build our identity and to live the mission in vibrant fidelity, responding in a creative way...

...a person to encounter, a gift to be embraced in order to build our identity and to live the mission in vibrant fidelity.
(SRL, 2) to the needs of our time. Our generation and each and every one of us is invited to embrace Poullart des Places, to live his charism and the grace which he was granted.

Are we prepared for this encounter? Though all acknowledge his work, some seem to think he does not have much else to say to us - too removed from us, too rigorous, with an over-the-top piety, *et cetera*. Let’s not stop at appearances and prejudices. If the *Spiritual Writings* disappoint us, let his life speak. Let us embrace his witness which remains today a source of inspiration for us. It is important to take it into account in order to face the present, to clarify what we hope for, and to open new horizons. It is in this spirit that I share what, in the life and work of Poullart des Places, continues to call to us, as much in his search for a vocation in the spiritual experience that led him to become founder, as in the launching of a work where his charism is revealed.

**Searching for his Vocation through Formative Experiences**

From the period of his life when Claude was probing within himself and searching for his life’s direction came discoveries and realizations that would prove decisive for his life. At the Jesuit College, Claude received not only quality instruction, but also a pedagogy designed to spark his talents and personality. In the “Company of Mary,” he found group support for reflection, prayer and service to others. He was even among the most fervent of the group that gathered around Fr. Bellier, then Vicar of the cathedral. He saw this priest as a model, and in the select group he found strong support for his approach. His relation to Christ became more personal. He learned to listen to his interior voice and felt the stirring of new aspirations, the desire to be a priest. The Gospel, far from “formatting” him as some today fear, on the contrary awakened him to his interiority and his own freedom.

Another formative experience was his encounter with the poor. Sent by Fr. Bellier, Claude visited the orphans at the Saint Yves hospice to read them “sacred history” or teach them the catechism. There he discovered boys who did not have a comfortable life like his own, but who were nonetheless friendly, and had like him the desire to live and grow and be happy. He was probably surprised at times by their behavior or their responses, but he felt joy in meeting them. What he experienced there was of impact for the rest of his life. He would later describe himself as “liking very much to give alms and naturally sympathizing with the misery of others . . .”

Finally, Claude became aware of his weakness. He was nineteen when he left to study law in Nantes. Like the other students, he was torn between attraction to the world and his wish to succeed versus his desire for an authentic spiritual life. He experienced a lack of constancy, sometimes being filled with fervor, at other times “soft, cowardly, and lax in my Christian practice.” A painful experience, but necessary if he is to know himself better and become more mature. Not everything could be reconciled – he could not be responding to this call while at the same time satisfying his ambition. The choice was a difficult one. His parents’ desire to re-enter the ranks of the nobility through their only son weighed heavily on his shoulders. Back from Nantes, he went for months without being able to make a decision. A bright future was awaiting him, but at heart he remained divided, incapable of uniting his life around a plan.
The Defining Experience of a Conversion

The resolution came about during a two-week retreat according to the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius which he took in 1701. There he had two key experiences which allowed him to put an end to the indecision. First, he discovered God’s merciful love for him despite his many infidelities: “*I seek my God...* The world will not reward me for my attachment to him. I would only be hard-pressed if I had to find there a true friend who would love me unconditionally. *Only God loves me sincerely and is solicitous for my welfare...*” He realized that no love, no promise, can surpass what God offers him; that in comparison, the world’s offerings are illusory. He believed this all the more since he also experienced a great joy. Thomas, his first biographer, emphasizes: “*God imparted himself to him, he penetrated him with those powerful lights that even the most skillful masters cannot convey to their disciples...* He made him experience the sweetness and consolations that one tastes when one is open to giving oneself unreservedly to God.” He “tastes” the “sweetness” of giving himself to God. He is no longer afraid. Only God truly loves him and to live in his presence is a source of joy. This retreat, where God overcame him, was lived as a liberation - from the plans of his parents, from his own ambitions, from the illusions and promises of the world. It allowed him to accept himself as he was, to name “his overriding passion” which often lay hidden beneath his actions and decisions: ambition, love of success and glory, vanity.

What he experienced was genuine, for it bore lasting fruit; it marked a turning point in his life. Accessing his true desires unleashed a new power. In a conversation with his spiritual guide, he acknowledged that he was called to be a priest and make decisions that the new direction of his life required. These decisions would no longer be based on his fears, or by going along with what seemed to be the most appealing or comfortable choice, but based on his sole desire to respond to God, to resolutely walk on the path God had prepared for him and to show him gratitude.

Claude thus became the bearer of a personal message. He had a great desire to share the joy he felt: he wanted everyone to taste of the same forgiveness, the same liberation he experienced. “*I will make you known to hearts who no longer know you;* I will proclaim what your divine goodness has made me hear today. I will use the powerful means of your grace to convert them.” This passage has often been invoked to represent Poullart des Places’s missionary vocation. What is certain is that every person is responsible for the gift he has been given. What Claude “heard” during his retreat, what was revealed to him, determined the path that he followed. For him, the Gospel was that new word which resonated with his story, which spoke to him personally and invited him to respond freely. He became a witness. How could he make such a claim without that personal encounter with Christ? Why go if I have nothing to say? Only those who have “been with him” and who have “seen and heard” were considered Apostles.

His discoveries from this retreat brought about a certain “manner” of responding. We often use the expression “in the manner of Poullart des Places.” What do we mean by it? Aware of having been liberated by his Lord’s “extraordinary mercy,” Claude consequently wanted to give himself to this God who alone was worthy of his life’s devotion and who
called him into existence by the grace he was granted. Over the course of the journey that followed, he would come up with a response to events as they unfolded, thus living in faithfulness to God’s call and to himself.

Like many others he bore witness to the Gospel, but in his own way. Because his ambition had often led him away from God, he would fight it at every turn, and preferred instead “the most obscure works, the most neglected works.”13 He would follow Christ in his abasement, and in his preference for the poor and the sinners. This logic explains Claude’s desire for a humble life of poverty and his concern for those who were destitute, the immigrants of his day, the sick, and students without means. Out of gratitude to his “Liberator,” Claude was happy to “be able to comfort him in the person of the poor who are his members.”14 He thus charted an original path that he would propose to the poor students who asked him to assist them in their training for the priesthood.

“My Thoughts and My Desires”

Claude was not a founder when he finished the retreat, but without it he never would have become one. In fact, his spiritual experience guided his entire trajectory and was the source of all his initiatives. During his first year in Paris, the Jesuit seminary environment helped him structure his spiritual life.15 For apostolic engagement he chose to reach out to the young Savoyards who cleaned the chimneys of Paris. This “obscure, neglected work”16 suited him, for he was “convinced their souls were no less precious to Jesus Christ than those of the highest nobles, and that there were as many and even more fruits to hope for.”17

In August 1702, he went on a retreat to prepare himself for tonsure. He then entered an eighteen-month period of great spiritual consolation which stayed with him during the months when he started the work for the poor students. It was there that he found the courage to begin the undertaking. He spoke of it in his Reflections on the Past in late 1704. “It is fitting that I call to mind here those moments of fervor that I had the joy of experiencing in my first returns to God. What were my thoughts and my desires then, what was my way of life, what were my ordinary activities . . . ?”18 He then describes in a few sentences the “thoughts” and “desires” that were occupying him when he became a founder.

I wanted to see myself one day stripped of everything, living only on alms after having given everything away. Of all temporal goods, I professed to keep only my health, which I hoped to sacrifice entirely to God in the work of the missions. I would have been only too happy if, after having set the whole world on fire with the love of God, I could have shed my last drop of blood for him whose blessings were ever before my eyes.19

In his Letter to the Galatians (Gal 1:13-17), Paul describes his vocation as a completely inner revelation of Jesus Christ. God revealed his Son “to him” so that he could proclaim him to the Gentiles. This call gave a new coherence to his life as a whole and made him a free apostle in the service of the Gospel. We could say that “everything sprang from
this event, from this inner knowing of Jesus Christ” (cf. Phil 3, 7-11). We can read the life and work of Poullart des Places in the same way. For him, too, his entire life acquires meaning from the encounter with Christ, which he experiences as a call and a conversion. After much hesitation and struggle, he finally accepts the grace granted to him. He is no longer going to focus on himself for the recognition of others, but will live turned towards him to whom he wants to give his life, and towards those to whom he is sent. In this passage the desires that will mark his life and work are already apparent: the choice of material and spiritual poverty, a desire for mission in order to “set the world on fire with the love of God,” and the wish to give his “last drop of blood” on a path of faithfulness to the end.

Fr. Lécuyer already spoke of it: “attraction to a life of poverty, missionary work, total sacrifice in the service of preaching God’s love, all points that we have noted in Poullart des Places, and whose spirit he would instill in the work he founded and which has endured to our day.”

Spiritual experience was where Claude heard the call, where his desire grew, and where his answer was born.

A Missionary Approach

A spiritual experience is confirmed by the fruit it bears. Claude’s deepened the quality of his relations with others. It pushed him towards an encounter with the “poor students” to the point of becoming one of them by placing himself “as with equals.” His spiritual fervor gave him the enthusiasm for action, and from his engagement with the poor students came the intuition of the work. There he was unified around his project, a sign of the Spirit acting in him.

Poullart des Places never traveled far, but mission is not measured by distances covered but by the ability to “get outside oneself.” In his initiatives for beginning and consolidating his work, we can recognize an authentic missionary approach that remains a source of inspiration for our mission today.

First, in his way of meeting these students, we find again the “manner of Poullart des Places.” He did not come to them as a rich man, but as someone who asks, who sees all that the other has to give. In this encounter, he perceives his particular calling which is to help them in their preparation for the priesthood. His aim is also revealed: not only to provide them with food and lodging, but to “showcase” and “cultivate” their “admirable dispositions” and their “talents” which, “for lack of help,” remain “buried.” He saw what wasn’t visible on the surface, namely their talents and riches that could be developed and put into the service of others. This text clearly shows that from the beginning there was discernment: Claude supported those whom he felt were favorably disposed towards a vocation for the priesthood. He helped them, and they in turn brought their willingness and commitment. A relationship of reciprocity was established in which everyone gave and received.
The relationship was also based on reciprocal hospitality. Claude offered the students hospitality not only in the house he rented for them, but in his heart. At the start of Lent in 1703, he left his comfortable quarters in the College to move in with them. This time it was they who welcomed him among them, just as in Acts 10:33 Peter and Cornelius received each other, reciprocating hospitality, and together were visited by the Spirit. From being the assisted, the students became brothers. This mutual hospitality is a source of life at the birth of a community that will later become a religious congregation.

The mission was a border-crossing. The house Claude moved into was just across the street, but it was a radical change, an exodus from his own world into that of the students. It was a giant step that went beyond accepted norms, which transgressed existing boundaries in the very hierarchical society of the period. That was his charism. The Gospel was proclaimed.

He made a firm choice for a poor lifestyle by renouncing to live off church assets. Prior to his ordination, he would only accept the sixty livres subsistence income required by his bishop. The little he possessed all went to serve the community he founded. He was thus free from his father, and free from any desire for control over the students he took in. His project was built on confidence in God and his Providence; that is why he chose to live on alms. He shared his students’ condition and had no other security than what was available to all of them.

Finally, in 1704, he agreed to share responsibility for the community with others. It was a renunciation, a form of poverty that was a source of life and which gave a future to the community that would no longer be tied to his person.

A Community of the Poor to Evangelize the Poor

Poullart des Places had a strong conviction that was part of his charism: the poor have a right to sound and solid training like everyone else. “Neglected souls” need “educated” priests, because they are just as worthy as those of “high nobles.” The framework he chose to do this was a community of formation.

Intended for the poorest, the seminary provided an education in evangelical poverty. Claude knew how to persuade his students that “selflessness is the beginning of perfection for a soul that wants to follow Jesus Christ.” The objective was to train hardworking, capable and selfless priests who would be willing to serve the church’s mission and the faithful entrusted to them, priests “for the people.”

The mission began with the witness of an evangelical community, where services are shared, where “nothing more is served to the superiors than to the individuals. Everyone must be happy to see themselves as the poor to whom Providence has provided the food they are served in the refectory.”

Even if Claude was the superior with the authority that carried, he acted as one of them, was the first to observe the Rule and did not hesitate to wash the dishes or clean...
dirt off the shoes. To “proclaim the Gospel to the poor” like his Master, nothing was “too low” for him, he made himself the servant of all.

Their evangelical common life took on a prophetic dimension, for it established relations of equality long before the French Revolution (1789), without violence but in the joy that comes from sharing, mutual service, and fraternity.

Moreover this emergent, modest and fragile project constitutes a strong statement in relation to the ills of the church and the world of its time - in the church, a poorly trained clergy concerned with maintaining their advantages, in society, growing inequalities between the different social classes. It is fully in keeping with the reflection and the efforts of the church of Claude's time; according to J. Michel, it is “the best response to the Council of Trent.”

Conclusion

This brief re-reading of the story of our founding demonstrates that for Poullart des Places the mission is more than the vague dream of a young man, rather part of his calling and the high aspirations that were at the origin of his work.

He did not have a predetermined plan. It was by the guidance of the Spirit that he became founder, and it was to the Spirit of Pentecost that he and his companions consecrated themselves on May 27, 1703, in order to become priests willing to be sent where the church had the greatest need. A humble beginning, but one that launched a history in which the missionary dimension would increasingly assert itself.

Indeed, after their training at the Holy Spirit Seminary, some priests went back to their dioceses. But many others joined the missions in France with the Montfortans. In 1734, the mission to the “infidels” was written into the Rule of Life, and a short time later some left for Canada and the Far East. Over time, the faraway mission would become the main responsibility of the Congregation, making the Spiritans a religious congregation primarily of missionaries. All this was not by chance, rather the fruit of the missionary spirit that Claude knew how transmit, the desire to give one’s life to proclaim the Gospel to the poor.

The identity of our congregation does not fit easily into a definition. Rather, it tells its story. It is up to us who are members today “to continue writing this story.”
Endnotes


7 Ibid., 95.


12 Ibid., 65.

Theological studies, retreats, admission to the “Assemblée des Amis” (AA).


Ibid., 268.


Ibid., 133, 135.


Michel, Joseph, “L’ambiance doctrinale d’une fondation,” in Christian de Mare, 134-152, here 145.


It is impossible within the limits of this article—though it would be very important—to fully recreate the historical context of the early nineteenth century that would allow us to understand the positions Libermann took regarding slavery. French slavery, abolished by the French Revolution and reestablished under Napoleon, was only finally abolished on April 27, 1848, after many battles in which ideas and economic and political interests collided. When we reread Libermann’s writings we run a great risk of anachronism, meaning understanding facts and texts with our perspectives of today, in light of what has occurred since, and interpreting them through a colonial or postcolonial studies lens.¹

We are going to explore the life and writings of Francis Libermann in relation to the theme of slavery.² Born Jewish, named Jacob, in Saverne, Alsace in 1802, at his death in 1852 he was superior general of a Catholic missionary congregation dedicated to evangelizing the old French colonies and the African continent. This is not to single him out from his companions, in particular Frederic Levavasseur, Eugene Tisserant, Benoit Truffet, and Claude Chevalier. Even if ours is a slightly different approach, it does not replace the great interest of Paule Brasseur’s pioneering study, “L’esclavage, les campagnes abolitionniste et la naissance de l’oeuvre de Libermann,”³ whose opening comment can surprise us today: “It was in a religious climate profoundly indifferent to the problem of slavery that Libermann’s work emerged beginning in 1836.”⁴ Claude Prudhomme said the same thing: “The relative scarcity of written sources on the abolition of slavery that explicitly reference religious belief as a foundation in the fight against slavery is a fact.”⁵

Frédéric Levavasseur, Who Started it All

Frédéric Levavasseur (1811-1882) initiated the “Work for the Blacks,” along with Eugene Tisserant (1814-1845), though moreso the former. It was the missionary project he submitted to Libermann in late February-early March 1839 that set everything in motion. From a well-off family of slave-owning planters on the Isle of Bourbon, Frédéric was sent to France for his studies and to prepare for the École Polytechnique. Health problems required him to quit and in 1832 his spiritual director sent him to Paris to “mend his worn out head” at the home
of Sister Rosalie, a tireless apostle in the struggle against poverty in the Latin Quarter. For two years he devoted his life to visiting the poor, where he no doubt encountered the young Frederic Ozanam, one of the founders in 1833 of the very new *Conférence de Charité*, who also worked with Sister Rosalie. Levavasseur’s earlier desire to become a priest was affirmed. He then returned on vacation to his native island, where he became aware of something: the poor of the Latin Quarter, he found them again in the black slaves on the Bourbon plantations, and no one was taking care of them! The priests did not set foot on the plantations. When he returned to France and entered the Sulpician seminary at Issy, he spoke of nothing but the Blacks of his island; he did not talk about abolishing slavery but about the urgency of evangelizing the Blacks by becoming close to them. The *Oeuvre des Noirs* was thus born from a double spiritual experience – the contact with the poor in Paris and then the Black slaves of Bourbon. We understand how Frederic could have written, referring to himself: “Levavasseur always considered the time he spent with that Sister [1832-1834] to be one of the greatest blessings God gave him.”

The project that gradually developed, initiated by Levavasseur and Tisserant and continued by Libermann, was an apostolic project presented to Rome in the *Petit Mémoire sur les missions étrangères* on March 27, 1840 as follows: “It consists of giving ourselves and devoting ourselves completely to Our Lord for the salvation of the Blacks, as being the poorest, the furthest from salvation and the most neglected souls in God’s church.”

No direct reference was made as to their condition as slaves or freed slaves.

Skipping over the well-known beginnings of the Missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary, we pick up Libermann and his men in the mid-1840s, when the small society in full expansion extended its project to the coasts of Africa.

**Africa’s Time Has Come: Signs of the Times and the Holy Heart of Mary**

Libermann proved to be an attentive observer of events concerning Africa, insofar as he tried to discern trends that would affect the missionary work. On January 7, 1846 he wrote to his friend Mgr. Luquet in Rome: “There are going to be fifty-two French and British ships that will continually move along the coasts [of Africa], followed by many merchant ships.” He was referring to the treaty concluded on May 29, 1845 between France and England concerning the suppression of the slave trade, a treaty which, in January and February 1846 provoked long debates in the two chambers that were widely reported by the press. It was not the actual event that interested Libermann, but the general movement towards Africa that he had been noticing for several years and with which the mission would have to keep pace.

The newspaper *L’Univers*, was read at Neuville. Libermann must have learned from it that a debate took place in the House of Peers on March 4, 1846 about a petition presented by M. Bissette, a strongly militant abolitionist. Bissette denounced the seizure
ordered by the mayor of St. Pierre (Martinique) in 1844 of three bundles of books he had sent. They contained, among other things, the *Discours prononcé à la Chambre des Pairs* by Count Beugnot on slavery in the colonies, and – it was later learned – the Apostolic Letter of Gregory XVI, *In Supremo Apostolatus*, included in a petition titled *Les Esclaves des Colonies françaises au clergé français* [The Slaves from the French Colonies to the French Clergy]. Outside specialized abolitionist circles, the debate probably did not cause much of a stir in the cottages of the realm, but at the Holy Heart of Mary, it was certainly read as one of the “signs of the times” justifying a Christian action “among the black race so neglected up to now,” as Truffet wrote.

In a commentary on the Rule that Libermann gave each ordinary day from 5:45 pm to 6:15 pm, he spoke then of the congregation’s purpose by reading the will of God in the signs of that moment in history:

Now that God calls us to [the mission of the Blacks], he seems to arrange everything to facilitate their conversion; not only does religion prepare its blessings and the graces in its possession for these poor people, but even politics enters into the plans of divine providence to hasten their conversion by facilitating communications between them and us. All eyes are now turned towards the Blacks; on the one hand, the aim is the abolition of slavery, on the other hand, more than fifty vessels are being sent to the coasts to prevent the slave trade. But we must also hurry.12

1846: On the Way to Rome, the Question of the Abolition of Slavery

In May 1846, with Fr. Blanpin as his companion and secretary, Libermann undertook a grand tour of France and Savoy, that he had to extend to Rome, but which at the time appeared to be a great information campaign on the missions and a quest for vocations. Everywhere he went, he systematically saw the bishops and visited the Major Seminaries.

The welcome given to Libermann both by the ecclesiastical authorities and by the seminarians made it possible to measure the rise of the missionary ideal in the 1840s. Libermann thus learned to know the state of mind of the young men in the different regions of France and Savoy. It seems that it was while he was passing through Savoy (the home of Benoît Truffet who had just returned to the novitiate in La Neuville) at the beginning of June, that among the various things to remember for the trip back to Paris, he had Father Blanpin make a note: “Take out a subscription to the abolitionists’ newspaper.”13 Was this because he had noticed in his meetings the growing interest in this question of slavery and the abolitionist struggle? It was indeed the case in the Jura seminaries, as evidenced by a letter from Claude Chevalier, written from La Neuville, to M. Cornu, priest teacher at the minor seminary of Nozeroy (Jura), dated February 16, 1847.14

The Great Memorandum Presented in Rome on August 15, 1846

We can never emphasize enough the historical importance of Libermann’s Memorandum “on the mission of the Blacks in general and on that of Guinea in particular” presented in Rome on August 15, 1846.15 No one can deprive this
Memorandum of its status as a milestone and landmark in the history of the mission in Africa. It is the first major text of the contemporary era to have presented to the Congregation of Propaganda a plan for the evangelization of Western Africa from Cape Verde to the Orange River. More than its content, what is important is the awareness it manifests, the missionary will it bears witness to, and the positive view of Africans.

Libermann is keenly aware that Africa is making its entry into eurocentric history. He dreads it for the continent, and wants Africans to enter into another story, the story of Christian salvation.

The second part of the Memorandum is devoted to laying out and refuting objections against the work of the missionary society of the Holy Heart of Mary and against Black peoples; here, slavery is the issue. The depravity that Blacks are accused of stems from contact with Europeans or living conditions linked to slavery: “As a result, work and slavery is something synonymous [sic].” “The odious notion of work originates from the fault of Whites.”

Throughout the Memorandum, there is also the Libermannian “little music” that we recognize at the turn of a paragraph, which suddenly reminds us that this text is not an administrative report but the expression of a heart touched by grace, inhabited by the tenderness of the God of the Bible. After reporting everything that had been said to him and his missionaries about the “stupid, incapable, heartless” “negroes” to distract them from their evangelizing, Libermann wrote, “We are happy to be able to affirm to Your Eminences that the Blacks in general in all the countries where our missionaries have seen them, are naturally good, gentle, sensitive and grateful [...]. Blacks are no less intelligent than other peoples.”

“We are happy…” Perhaps Libermann was a clear-sighted thinker of the mission only because he was first and foremost a benevolent heart? Moreover, did he not write at the beginning of 1848, “to Eliman, king of Dakar, to Soleiman, his nephew, and to all the leaders of the people,” after learning of the death of Bishop Truffet: “... I wish you to know that my heart is yours; my heart belongs to Africans, wholly to Africans, wholly to black men whose souls are good and whose hearts are sensitive.”

**Early 1847: “We Are Above All Apostles of Liberty”**

Although public opinion as a whole was not significantly affected by the issue of the suppression of the slave trade and the abolition of slavery, the debates on these topics were increasing in intensity in the Chambers and among interested circles throughout the year 1847. In early January, from La Neuville, Chevalier presented to Abbe Billet what appears to be one of the dominant themes of his correspondence:

Even the abolition of the slave trade contributes to the good of our missions, because slavery is no less opposed to religion than to humanity, and we are
above all apostles of liberty, destined to deliver the final blows [to slavery] by converting the peoples from whom slaves are exclusively drawn.18

Msgr. Truffet, consecrated bishop at Notre-Dame-des-Victoires on January 25th, began a correspondence as head of the mission by making useful or symbolic contacts. The fight against the slave trade comes up constantly: for him, as for Chevalier, Gospel rhymes with freedom. To King Charles Albert, to whom he was subject as a Savoyard, he presented his mission: “Sir, you desire the abolition of the trade in living human flesh. Well! One of your subjects is sent by Pius IX to work patiently and effectively to close these shameful markets. The establishment of the reign of God is the strongest guarantee of human freedom.”19

Although the word has taken on a particular meaning in recent years and it would be anachronistic to transpose today’s usage to the nineteenth century, we can nonetheless speak of a theology of liberation (salvation and liberation) in relation to the thought expressed so forcefully by Truffet and Chevalier. In a letter of February 16, 1847, Chevalier, who was due to leave for Dakar in the company of Bishop Truffet, reminds a friend of their common youthful passion for the abolitionist struggle that his missionary vocation has not dimmed:

Moreover, the Guinea missions will provide me the means to achieve a desire that has long nourished my heart, as you know. By working for the conversion of these peoples, I will work indirectly, it is true, but effectively for the abolition of frightful slavery. Do you remember the toast proposed by the priest of Nozeroy to the death of slaveholding tyrants? I would change only one thing; I will now drink to the death of slavery and the conversion of tyrants. That will be a little bit more apostolic.20

So there were people fired up for the abolitionist cause, including members of the clergy. Moreover, on March 30, 1847, the same day that Msgr. Truffet and his companions left Paris to go to Bordeaux, their port of embarkation, a lively debate opened in the House of Peers, dominated by Montalembert, following the announcement by Count Beugnot that “three thousand petitioners, including bishops and a large number of clergymen, demand an immediate abolition of slavery in the French colonies.”21

Msgr. Truffet met with great success in Bordeaux during Easter week (April 4) when he went from churches to salons, not missing an opportunity to talk about Black peoples and abolition. Invited to a picturesque lunch at the home of Mr. Isaac Louverture, son of the liberator of Haiti, Mgr. Truffet made a toast “to the unfortunate Haiti, where Mr. Louverture’s agent was to travel in a few days. Mgr. took great care to develop his ideas of freedom for Blacks in his presence so that the Haitians would learn through him what they have to fear from Catholic missionaries.”22

Isaac Louverture had known Libermann through another Bordelais, Mr. Germainville (1801-1881), a man of good works who had long been in contact with Libermann. Mr. Germainville had finally convinced the latter to open a community in Bordeaux, and at
the end of July 1847 he came to Amiens to settle the matter. He brought in his luggage a parcel entrusted to him, undoubtedly during his stay in Paris, by Mr. Cyrille Bissette, a Martinican free man of color and radical abolitionist activist who was always promoting petitions for the Chambers. In the package were abolitionist pamphlets intended for the clergy (undoubtedly the famous petition of 1844: *The Slaves of the French Colonies to the French Clergy*, containing the apostolic letters of Gregory XVI on the slave trade) as well as a petition booklet to circulate and collect signatures.

Thus restored, this context lends great interest to the note Libermann sent to Mr. Bissette on August 17, 1847 in response to this dispatch. In fact, it is the only writing of his that allows us to see what his position was towards the abolitionist campaigns of 1845-1847. Bissette must have received positive reports about Libermann (from Mr. Germainville?) to dare to use him as a relay. And indeed, Libermann clearly states his principled position: “I am very grateful to you for the confidence you place in me; you treat me as a friend of the black race and as a man who desires its emancipation and you are right. I glory in it, and my happiness would be great if God were to lend me enough life to see the fulfillment of my wish.”

In practice, Libermann took steps to distribute the pamphlets and even gave some to Mr. Germainville to distribute to the clergy of Bordeaux. As for the petition, that was another matter. He did not mind having it signed by the priests of Amiens who would do so “with pleasure,” but he failed “to put the booklet into the hands of another person” (people ready to commit were therefore not as numerous as that!). Indeed, Libermann considered that in his personal position, he could not sign or make others sign: “Very serious reasons forbid me. On my first trip to Paris, I will explain these reasons to you.” Before writing these last words, he had written a much more detailed paragraph that he had crossed out, presumably fearing that written explanations would not be clear enough to Mr. Bissette (orally, he could respond to objections). This is what he wrote, before scratching it out: “But here prudence forbids me any such step, as someone responsible for a project like the one that occupies me, because such a move would draw too much attention. I would be positioning myself as a harsh and prosecutorial adversary.”

Caught between his personal conviction and the “political” demands as head of a religious Society dealing with the government, Libermann chose caution. Truffet would perhaps have called this more compromised than compromising, but Libermann knew better than Truffet that in the world of men and not ideas, government is the art of the possible at a given moment, even as he knew nonetheless how to keep aiming towards the ideal.

**Late 1847: The Missionary’s Kenosis: “Slave” In Imitation Of Christ**

At the end of the year 1847, in a series of exchanges between Libermann, Bishop Truffet, and the missionaries on the ground, we find a letter from Libermann that we regard as the heart of his missionary theology and thought. It is the letter “to the community..."But here prudence forbids me any such step, as someone responsible for a project like the one that occupies me, because such a move would draw too much attention....
of Dakar and Gabon, Amiens, November 19, 1847.”

We have studied it at length elsewhere; so before addressing what it says concerning the subject of slavery, we will first recap the main points of that analysis.

In this letter, the very structure of Libermann’s thought is of Paulian inspiration: mission, as he conceives it and lives it, is a kenosis, abasement-elevation, death-resurrection, in imitation of Christ as found in Phil 2:5-11. It is within this framework that we must understand his writing of what is one of the most famous missionary instructions of the contemporary period: “Make yourself nègres with the nègres.” The herald of the Gospel is called to become the servant of those whom he evangelizes, the slave of the former slaves. This is the kenosis evoked by St. Paul (Phil 2:5-11). Kénosis refers to the movement of the Word that empties itself to become a servant until death, and death on the cross. The word used by St. Paul (in Greek, doulos) refers to both servant and slave. When Libermann uses this word, he is thinking of this double meaning.

It is indeed necessary to understand all the connotations of Libermann’s phrase: “Make yourself nègres with the nègres.” We believe it can be established that, in Libermann’s writing in 1847, this formulation is not equivalent to “Make yourself Blacks with the Blacks [Noirs].” The charge of meaning is not the same in both cases, nor are the value judgments implied. As Serge Daget has indeed shown, in the abolitionist struggle that goes from the Revolution to the mid-nineteenth century, the word Black [Noir] can be used in opposition to the words slave [esclave] and nègre: “Because Black [Noir] is neither tainted by prejudice nor yet stereotyped, it makes an argument against alienation and contributes to founding abolitionist ideology: it is therefore an innovation.”

Serge Daget does not reach any clear conclusions from his quantitative survey of abolitionist literature. Historical fluctuations govern the use of the three words, esclave, nègre and noir among abolitionists. In 1847, they continue to speak of “la traite des nègres,” a word immediately perceived by the public as referring to the reality of slavery and the slave trade.” Thus, far from insisting on the word supposedly charged with innovative value, [the abolitionist literature] preferred words that were guaranteed immediate perception, even if it meant reinforcing stereotypes. No unanimous agreement or concerted policy is apparent regarding the use of vocabulary; it remains an act of personal decision, never integrated into a collective and uniform discipline.”

Libermann’s evolution in his use of vocabulary is precisely such an example: “an individual decision” arising from a personal sensibility and commitment. In what follows, we make an effort to trace the evolution of Libermann’s vocabulary in his key documents.

In the Petit Mémoire sur les missions étrangères of 1840, the word nègres is used four times, while the word Noir [Black] is not used once. It should be noted that in this memorandum, Libermann does not speak of Africa at all, but only of Haiti and the Isle of Bourbon, and therefore the word nègres in both these cases refers to black populations originally victims of the slave trade and subjected to slavery.

On the other hand, the earliest version we have of the Provisional Rule of the Missionaries of the Most Holy Heart of Mary, written during the same Roman year, uses
both the term *Noirs* and *nègres*. Thus in Chapter III of the first part we can read in two successive articles: “Art. VII. The mission which our Lord now gives us is a mission among the Blacks [Noirs] […]. Art. VIII. Although all our designs must now be turned towards the *nègres* [Negroes]…”

However, four years later, when Libermann sends Cardinal Fransoni his *Project for the Salvation of the Peoples of the Coasts of Africa* (1844), only the single word Black [Noir] is used (16 times) to designate both Africans and island peoples, distinguishing between “savage blacks” [les Noirs sauvages] and “the Blacks of civilized colonies” [les Noirs des colonies civilisées].

This shift seems to be the result of a determined desire to eliminate the word *nègre*, no doubt considered pejorative, and to replace it with a more noble word. Proof is provided by the 1845 printed version of the Provisional Rule mentioned above: a comparison with Arragon’s 1844 handwritten copy shows that wherever the word *nègres* appeared in the earlier version, it was replaced by the word *Noirs*. Thus, in the example given above, Article VII remains unchanged since it already used the word *Noirs*, while in Article VIII the word *nègres* is twice deleted: “Although all our designs must now be turned towards the Blacks [Noirs] […]; […] provided, however, that the spiritual interest of the Blacks [Noirs] will not suffer any damage.”

The great *Memorandum on the Missions of the Blacks* of 1846 provides even clearer proof that Libermann’s use of the word *Noir* as more positive, in preference to the word *nègre* with its pejorative tone, is indeed intentional. We found 36 uses of the word *Noirs* (Noirs or populations noires) against 2 occurrences of the word *nègres*. These two exceptions are particularly interesting because they both take place in a context that connotes a negative value judgment on Blacks or a reference to the slave system: “These people,” one would say speaking of *nègres*, “will never know to conduct themselves […] They are stupid, incapable, without heart, they are thieves, etc.” “In the colonies, work is made so odious and so revolting for the wretched *nègres* that they abandon it as soon as the rod no longer forces them.”

Thus, at the end of an evolution of vocabulary that stretches from 1840 to 1846, it seems that the word *nègre*, in Libermann’s mind, designates not only the Black [le Noir] but the Black considered as subhuman and as slave; hence the disappearance of the word *nègre* from his writing, except when he wants precisely to refer to the negative and tragic aspect of their historical situation marked by the slave trade and slavery.

Now, in the Greek text of Phil 2:6-11, something of the same kind must be noted. When it is said of Christ Jesus that he took “the form of the servant,” the Greek word used - *doulos* - also carries a similar ambiguity: it means both servant and slave. Jesus became a servant by taking on the traits of the slave. The slave is the one who does not belong to himself, who belongs to someone else: Jesus gave himself into
our hands, Jesus washed our feet."42 “Make yourself nègres with the nègres,” mirroring Phil 2: 6-11 as we have seen, thus means: “Make yourself slaves with the slaves, belong to the Blacks, surrender yourself into the hands of Blacks like the Suffering Servant when He gave His life.” The expression is stronger in its linguistic and emotional implications than “Make yourself Blacks with the Blacks” could ever have been.

In the letter of November 19, 1847, the counsel, “Make yourselves nègres with the nègres,” is preceded by another piece of advice: “Divest yourselves of Europe, its customs, its spirit.” In this we can see that Libermann means to define not only a purely internal spiritual attitude with no bearing on behavior; rather he aims at an overall phenomenon that we would call today the concrete cultural adaptation of the missionary. We could even speak of the inculturation of faith in the fundamental (and general) sense that the Jesuit, Michel Sales, speaks of when he writes: “This term *inculturation* evokes, by analogy, implicitly or explicitly, the theological concept and the theological reality [théologale] of the *Incarnation*, by which the uncreated Word of God, the Son of the Father, took flesh through the Virgin Mary, became man, lived, died and rose again for the salvation of all men.”43 It is exactly this movement of incarnation and “annihilation” of the Christ-Servant that Libermann intends to propose to his missionaries, as we saw in the analysis of the November 18, 1847 letter to the communities of Dakar and Gabon.

We would like to carry further the demonstration with a text hitherto virtually unknown, which we published among the source texts of our work Libermann (1988): *Instructions missionaires aux premières Soeurs de l’Immaculée Conception de Castres en partance pour l’Afrique* [Missionary Instructions to the First Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of Castres departing for Africa]. They have the distinction of having been written just after the letter of November 19, 1847.44

What does Libermann say to the Sisters of Castres? That they must do everything to abolish the distance between themselves and the Blacks: “I regard everywhere, even in Europe, as a bad system opposed to the spirit of the Gospel, making people feel the distance between them and us by our dress, our conduct, our manner of speaking and acting.”45 And he added: “Our system must be that of our Lord... “ Is the system of our Lord anything other than the Incarnation of the Word whose *kenosis* “abolishes distance” in a sense between God and man? And, moreover, Libermann invites the Sisters to a true kenotic “stripping down”:

The Sisters must have the intimate conviction that they have no idea what they will have to do and the manner in which they must proceed to do good... The reason is that coming from Europe, we are too used to European conditions, we want to establish them in places where the customs and ways of being are quite radically different.46

The power of this text must be appreciated! And Libermann continued by proposing a method to the Sisters that is in keeping with the great missionary tradition: a
program of incarnation of the missionary in the other, to let faith become inculturated in him, that is, to invest him from within and transform him: “you must,” Libermann writes to the Sisters, “leave to the natives the customs and habits which are natural to them, perfecting them by imparting to them the principles of faith and Christian virtue and correcting those that are unsound. We must rather take on their manners and customs than want to shape them to ours.”

1848, Abolition: “Is This Not a Wonder that God Has Worked?”

The revolution of 1848 in France took place from February 22 to 25. On March 4, F. Arago, Provisional Minister of the Navy and the Colonies, “appointed Citizen Victor Schoelcher, Undersecretary of State, with special responsibility for the colonies and measures relating to the abolition of slavery” and President of the commission charged with preparing, as soon as possible, the act of immediate emancipation in all the colonies of the Republic. On April 27, a decree abolished slavery. Approximately 250,000 slaves were affected and had to be effectively emancipated two months after the promulgation of the decree in each of the colonies.

What is striking is the speed of Libermann’s reaction to the announcement of abolition, since we have a letter he wrote to Mr. Blanpin and the community of the Isle of Bourbon dating from early March, as well as the joy he expresses on this occasion:

My letter will probably arrive too late to tell you the good news. The slaves will very soon be delivered from their captivity, and they will immediately participate in all the rights of citizens. They will elect their deputies for the National Assembly. Is this not a wonder that God has worked? The poor people, what joy they are going to have. You have a very important role to play at the moment, and if you pull it off, you’ll make yourselves as useful to the Whites as to our poor Blacks. The unfortunate Whites must feel bitterly the perhaps irreparable harm they have done in opposing the education of the Blacks, though I still doubt it: a large number of them will not be able to understand it.

He wrote a second time on this subject before the April 27 decree; this time to his alter ego, Frederic Levavasseur, also on the Isle of Bourbon, on March 16, 1848. It is not possible within the scope of this article to study what happened on the ground after abolition, but it is clear in this letter that Libermann is concerned, and, to the suggestions he had already made to Mr. Blanpin, he adds new ones for Levavasseur. What is remarkable in the two letters is the modesty and humility of the one who is nevertheless the superior general of all these missionaries, and the confidence that he gives them to find the right solutions for themselves in the field. A last quote from the letter to Levavasseur will serve to conclude:

I do not know if these are utopias that I am proposing to you, or if this project is feasible. Whenever I suggest these things, I do it with a certain timidity, not knowing enough about the state of the country. You will examine before
God, you will judge, you will make your decisions and you will execute them, according to the good pleasure of the divine Master.\textsuperscript{50}

\textit{Paul Coulon C.S.Sp.}

\textit{Chevilly-Larue, France}

\section*{Endnotes}


\textsuperscript{2} We consider it sufficiently well known to not have to specify everything about places, dates, and people.


\textsuperscript{4} Article cited, 325.

\textsuperscript{5} Article cited, 58.


\textsuperscript{7} ND, II, 69. Coulon-Brasseur, 199.

\textsuperscript{8} ND, Compléments 1, 70.

\textsuperscript{9} Cf. Coulon-Brasseur, 408-409, with notes 36-38.

\textsuperscript{10} Cf. Pame, Stella, \textit{Cyrille Bissette, un martyr de la liberté} [Cyril Bissette, A Martyr for Liberty], Le Lamentin (Martinique), Désormeaux, 1999 and all references in note 43, in Coulon-Brasseur, 411.

\textsuperscript{11} At the end of 1847, Count Beugnot lucidly stated that “in France, the cause of the abolition of slavery in the colonies is not placed [...] under the aegis of a popular sentiment powerful enough to dictate its will to legislators and the government” (\textit{Le Correspondant}, t.20, December 10, 1847, 641).

\textsuperscript{12} Nicolas, François, (Ed. and Introd.), \textit{La Naissance d’un code de spiritualité missionnaire : Règle provisoire des missionnaires de Libermann, Texte et commentaire} [The Birth of a Code of Missionary Spirituality: Provisional Rule of the Missionaries of Libermann, Text and Commentary], Mortain, 1967, 25. These are the notes taken by the novice (1844-1845), then the young priest (1845-1846) Louis Marie Lannurien, at La Neuville.

\textsuperscript{13} Blanpin notebook (Archives CSSp: old no. 24-B-I, new no. 4A1.4.1). At the end of the notebook that has been turned over to start the other way, under the heading “Notes for the return.”

\textsuperscript{14} Copy in the Archives CSSp: old no. 22-A-V; new no. 4A1.1a5.

16 Mémoire, 4; ND, VIII, 226-227.

17 Letter transmitted by Mr. Arragon; written on January 26 and antedated to January 1, 1848, ND, X, 24.

18 Cl.-D. Chevalier to M. Billet, priest of Rahon (Jura): La Neuville-les-Amiens, January 16, 1847. Arch. CSSp: old no. 22-A-V; new no. 4A1.1a5.

19 Draft preserved in Archives CSSp: old no. 153-A-III; new no. 31 1.4a3.

20 Mr. Chevalier, novice deacon of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary, to Mr. Cornu, professor at the seminary of Nozeroy (Jura), February 16, 1847. Copy, Archives CSSp; old no. 22-A-V; new no. 4A1.1a5.

21 L’Ami de la religion, tome 133, Thursday (April 1, 1847) 18. The debate is reported on pages 18-20.

22 In Chevalier’s long letter-journal, begun in France on April 9 and completed in Dakar on May 17, 1847 (Archives CSSp: old no. 153-A-III, new no. 31 1.4a3)

23 See Coulon-Brasseur, 408-413, with nos. 43-44.

24 It is reproduced in ND, IX, 253-254.

25 This quote and the following are from ND, IX, 253-254.

26 Mr. Germainville returned to Bordeaux from Amiens on August 7, 1847, taking with him Mr. Boulanger, priest, and Brother Thomas Mabit, soon joined by Mr. Clair, for the founding of the community of Bordeaux.

27 ND, IX (1847), 324-331.


30 Ibid., p. 518.

31 Ibid., p. 544.

32 See Coulon-Brasseur, Source 1, 197-205.

33 This is written by P. Arragon during his novitiate in 1844 (Archives CSSp: old numbering 16-A-V, new numbering 3A1.11.5).

34 See Provisional Rule of Father Libermann. Text and Commentary. Translated by Walter van der Putte, C.S.Sp. Duquesne University, Pittsburgh: Center for Spiritan Studies, 2015, 68-69 [Editor].

35 See Coulon-Brasseur, Source 3, 211-220.

36 Ibid., 216.

Règle provisoire des missionnaires du Très Saint Cœur de Marie, Amiens, Imprimerie Duval et Herment, 1845.


38 See Coulon-Brasseur, Source 4, p. 221-270.

39 Mémoire . . . (original printed text), 3; ND, VIII, 225; Coulon-Brasseur, 232.

40 Mémoire . . . (original printed text), p. 9; ND, VIII, p. 233; Coulon-Brasseur, p. 238.

« Esclave ».


44 See Coulon-Brasseur, Source 6, 281-287.


46 Ibid., 286.

47 Ibid., 286.

48 ND. X, 125-127.

49 ND. X, 141-143.

50 Ibid., 143.
Learning to Answer God’s Call Starts with the Family

Jacques Désiré Laval was born on September 18, 1803. His father was a rich peasant and mayor of the village. The father was not easy to get along with, while his wife was all tenderness and deep devotion. Welcoming vagabonds and helping the poor was part of the family custom. It was not rare to have ten vagabonds at the family table, and Jacques learned very young to serve them without judgment. His mother’s piety and charity would influence Jacques Désiré’s entire young life; undoubtedly his mother’s death when he was only seven and a half years old left a beautiful legacy that he would faithfully uphold.

Since Jacques Désiré was in poor health as a child, his father encouraged him to study. He was sent to stay with his uncle, a priest who prepared young people to enter the minor seminary. He was not a bright student, but due to his devotion he was admitted to the minor seminary at Evreux. That was a failure, and he announced that he was going to quit his studies. Over summer vacation, his father made him do the heaviest and most difficult farm work: “If Latin breaks your head, I’m going to break your arms.” It was a hard lesson but it worked: Jacques went to study at College Stanislas in Paris, where he enjoyed learning. With his Baccalauréat diploma under his belt, it was assumed he would pursue preparation for the priesthood, but he chose to take another year of study in order to enter medical school. His uncle was a bit disappointed, but told him: “We need holy priests, but a Christian doctor can do a lot of good.”

God Calls Sinners and Leads them on His Path

Returning to Normandy in 1830, he practiced as a doctor in Saint-André, then in Ivry-la-Bataille until 1835. His concern for the underprivileged was already apparent in his not requiring the poorest patients to pay for his visits. However, he also manifested a taste for parties and fine living and neglected Sunday mass. That only lasted a short time. Helped by his boarder and a local priest, he became a pillar of the church, to the point of conducting the “Month of Mary” in place of the village priest. Always generous to the poor, he continued his medical career and thought of getting...
married and buying the house he was then renting. It was a fall from a horse, one that should have been fatal, that decided him to finally answer the Lord’s call.

He was 32 years old when he entered the Saint-Sulpice Seminary in Paris. He wanted to become a Lazariste because of their mission to China. His spiritual director oriented him instead towards his diocese. He was ordained in December 1838 and his bishop entrusted him with the small dechristianized village of Pinterville. In the space of two years he worked wonders there. No need to look for him in the rectory; if you wanted to see him, it was in the church he would be found. There he would pray for hours, kneeling on the altar steps, then behind the altar.

Some visiting seminarians spoke to him about plans for an order of priests devoted to taking care of slaves who would soon be liberated; he expressed interest, but said he would not force the Lord’s hand. The sign from God that he was waiting for arrived one day in 1841. It happened through a call from the new Apostolic Vicar of Mauritius, Msgr. Collier. He needed a priest, and this potential congregation interested Fr. Laval because there the slaves were already liberated and no priest was tending to them. Fr. Libermann, who had not yet started the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary, proposed to Fr. Laval that he follow Msgr. Collier. Without having done his novitiate and without really knowing the congregation that was sending him, he left on June 2, 1841 for Mauritius, where the slaves had been left to their fate.

The Mission is not Theory, but Living at the Rhythm of the People

Arriving in Port-Louis on September 14, 1841, Fr. Laval had to confront two forms of opposition. First, the English Governor hoped to transform the francophile and thus resolutely Catholic Mauricians into faithful subjects of His Majesty; thus, he favored Protestantism. Second, the former masters saw Fr. Laval as a priest not to their liking, because he wanted to care only for the Blacks. In addition, as his evangelizing caused the Blacks to discover their dignity, he deprived some former masters of their mistresses and others of profits from selling alcohol. Heckling in the church, blows and even death threats – nothing could deter Fr. Laval from his mission.

The Mission is Everyone’s Business

While he remained alone during five years of service to former slaves, the secret of his success was based on six main elements. He had not planned them out but they were impressed upon his pastor’s heart before the immensity of the task.

First, in the image of Christ, he viewed each person without judgment. He loved these people as they were, even if he did not approve of sin. Second, on his own taking care of the 70,000 liberated slaves, he was not going to waste his time traveling the island; he remained available by staying in the capital. His first encounters were with the employees of the parish house; they brought others, telling them simply, “there is a priest...
here for us.” Third, because he was alone, and knowing it might be for a long time, Fr. Laval surrounded himself with couples that he trained in order to form catechists and community leaders. These “Lay Auxiliaries,” as Fr. Joseph Michael called them, would also bring their former masters back to church. Fourth, after not managing to learn a word of English in three and half months of travel, Fr. Laval succeeded in learning enough Creole in six months to become chaplain of the prison.3 Morning and evening, he prayed with the men, then with the women. He had no chapel, but he said Sunday Mass for them. Over the course of 15 years, he devoted close to 4,000 hours to them. He emptied the prisons of Creoles, for on their release from prison they were welcomed by his Lay Auxiliaries who helped them find work. Also, by formalizing their marriages, he helped them become responsible persons. Fifth, a tireless catechist, Fr. Laval also spent 15 hours a week in the confessional, from where he steered emerging communities, encouraging the most dynamic of them to construct their own chapels. He also received in the confessional catechumens who, in non-sacramental encounters, he was able to prepare for a true conversion of life. Sixth, and finally, almost all the Blacks were dying without the sacraments of the church. They had been so unwelcome at church or the parish house that they no longer dared even put in an appearance there. A group of women called the “counselors” would go visit the sick after working all day. People summoned them and they would prepare the sick person to receive the priest. One of them, “Ma Celeste,” often led the missionary to the homes of three, sometimes six sick people. Despite her own frail health and exhausting work as a laundress, Ma Celeste opened the way to heaven for thousands of dying people.

Joseph Michael highlighted Fr. Laval’s originality in surrounding himself with responsible lay persons: it would be another twenty years before Africa would have any catechists and most of those would be men. Among the “Lay Auxiliaries of Fr. Laval” and counting only those known with certainty, 30 of the 70 were women. An Irish priest, Fr. O’Dwyer, who had benefited from the services of Fr. Lambert and “the good Saint-Louis” wrote a report to the Propagation of the Faith regarding the importance of the auxiliaries:

the catechists exercise a salutary watch on the neighborhood and never fail to warn the priest or missionary of budding scandals or dangers to which faith or virtue might be exposed. They act openly as part of their duty and the people don’t view this surveillance as spying. In this way the priest knows everything that is happening in his parish and can even prevent many troubles that he would only have learned of too late without the catechist’s intervention. The catechists render an immense service . . . I am convinced that one priest assisted by a group of catechists would do more good than two priests with no catechists.”

The Mission is First and Foremost the Work of God

He extended himself so much that a missionary passing through on his way to Bourbon, Fr. Marcellin Colin C.S.Sp.,5 wrote to Fr. Libermann that Fr. Laval was an
excellent missionary, but that he complained of not having enough time to pray and suffered because of it. What Fr. Collin did not know, since he rose at 8 a.m., was that Fr. Laval had already been in church since 4:30 a.m. With breviary, prayer, mass and thanksgiving, he was giving himself the spiritual means for a full day of being available for others.

An unexpected treasure, believed to have been lost forever, was found: the draft of Fr. Laval’s evening lectures on the austere catechism of the Council of Trent. This “Great Catechism,” alas incomplete, teaches of course that hell must be avoided, that hell that the church brandishes on practically every page. But speaking as a father to his children, Fr. Laval shows them above all that holiness is also made for them, that Christ saved them, too. He knows just how to reach them. For many of them, work is synonymous with slavery. He shows them that Jesus did penance for thirty years by laboring in Joseph’s workshop.6

Fr. Laval, an “Incendiary Saint” as Fr. Libermann Wished

Fr. Laval, being modest, felt he was not doing enough. He dreamed of going to the island of Madagascar which was closed to missionaries. It was his superior, Fr. Levavasseur, visiting from the Isle of Bourbon, who expressed his astonishment to Fr. Libermann:

Anything I could tell you about Fr. Laval’s mission would be a gross understatement. Oh! My dear Father, how powerful is a holy priest completely surrendered to Our Lord! What great things he does! Nowhere have I seen grace poured forth more abundantly as on the children of Fr. Laval in this country. Here we see realized all those descriptions found in the Annals of the Propagation, which are often only half true; here we rediscover the early church, what spirit of penance! What spirit of faith and prayer, what courage in these Christians of Fr. Laval’s.7

Fr. Levavasseur also had the opportunity to visit some of Fr. Laval’s catechists; there, too, he could not praise him enough: “Recently Fr. Laval introduced me to a poor Malagasy woman who holds a proper catechism in her home every day for 70 to 80 Blacks. And she makes saints of all those she instructs.”8

Fr. Laval’s best catechist, Emilien Pierre, was shaped by Fr. Laval’s example; he in turn had the charisma to choose and train other catechists, which extended the work of the too few missionaries: “Humble apostle of charity . . . instrument of the mercies of Mary granted to the poorest and most abandoned souls . . . Poor child of the Virgin, spurned by all except those who share his humble condition . . . Humble catechist who so many times helped us in our apostolique ministry.” The occasion of this praise was the story of an initiative by Emilien that gives a measure of his zeal. In 1856, in the Mozambique Canal, a British ship had boarded another ship engaged in the slave trade. They found and seized 200 Africans, between the ages of 18 and 30, destined...

for plantations in America and took them ashore in Port-Louis. Two years later, many of them were living in the capital where they were forced into long and arduous work. They languished in huts that were nothing more than sordid bunkhouses. Emilien was moved by their poverty and by the ignorance and neglect in which they lived as all but slaves. Helped by Fr. Laval’s advice, he went door-to-door speaking of God to these Africans with such conviction that they expressed desire to be prepared for baptism. Forty of them were chosen to receive baptism. That meant eighty godmothers and godfathers had to be found. As was Fr. Laval’s custom, only the most steadfast were chosen to take charge of the catechumens, ideally couples or at least friends. Several meetings helped the godmothers and godfathers become aware of the seriousness of the commitment they would be making before God and the church. The baptism ceremony was held in Sainte Croix on July 10, 1859. No newspaper reported it, but the godmothers and godfathers cherished their godchildren.” Emilien Pierre died two years after Fr. Laval. The Bishop, Msgr. Haninson, celebrated Emilien Pierre’s funeral mass himself, and in an extraordinary act, two priests accompanied the casket to the cemetery . . . but it’s not known which one. “Happy are the poor in spirit.” The same is true of all the others: the location of only three of their tombs is known.

Mission is a Community Project

The first missionaries of the Immaculate Heart of Mary began trickling in starting in 1846. Fr. Laval was named superior of the Mauritius community, then provincial superior of the Indian Ocean from the end of 1852 to 1859. His confreres were awed by Fr. Laval’s evangelization methods and adopted them, spreading good to all four corners of Mauritius, as well as the outer island of Rodrigues. Consequently, Fr. Thiersé had only one church for the entire south of island. In order to live in community as their superior in Paris wished, he would only go there eight days a month. He was preceded by Emilien Pierre, who chose a good family in each of five villages who would provide a room for the evening. Three families would join them to hear the priest; the following month they had to meet outside because the group had grown so large. Soon, they themselves erected makeshift chapels that had to be rebuilt after every cyclone, before constructing more solid structures - some even built from stone. In 23 years of Fr. Laval’s presence on Mauritius, Msgr. Nagapen counted no fewer than 50 chapels. Many no longer exist, but a number of them became the forerunners of our parish churches.

In 1850 Fr. Laval became the first priest to stay on Rodrigues for six months. It was another six years before Fr. Francis came for six months in turn. He found such well-structured communities formed around their catechist that he brought the Bishop back with him the following year to celebrate a confirmation. The Bishop promised he would try to send them priests to stay on Rodrigues—but when?

When an outbreak of deadly epidemics spread throughout the island, Fr. Laval, his missionaries, and lay auxiliaries were there. People were dying by the thousands. Fr. Laval ensured that his missionaries could respond to calls without succumbing to illness themselves; he improved their nutrition and made them drink wine at every meal as a preventive measure. He prohibited them from going out at night so as not to exhaust
themselves, and he prevented them from responding chaotically to every call; an auxiliary grouped the requests by neighborhood and Fr. Laval would assign each one his tasks for the day. Fr. Laval himself went to the hospital which was packed with the dying; he did not give sacraments to all the sick, but as a former doctor, was able to sense who would die during the night and ministered to them. In the evening, he would go pray for those who had been buried in mass graves without sacraments.

During Fr. Laval’s beatification process, he was faulted for not having acted in his capacity as a doctor. It should be noted that to do so would have been grounds to expel him for illegal practice of medicine. Also, while writing the book on Fr. Laval’s letters, I was happy to receive an excerpt of a book which had appeared shortly before on the great doctor, Brown-Séquard. The author claimed that the two people who rose to the occasion in those dramatic times were Fr. Laval on the spiritual plane and Dr. Brown-Séquard on the medical.11

Fr. Laval Feels Useless As “An Unarmed Soldier”

Fr. Laval spent 23 years in Mauritius, but he remained a true Norman in the practical sense. Fr. Schwindenhammer was aware of his reputation for holiness and wanted a photo to put next to the one of Fr. Libermann. Before obeying, Fr. Laval raised many objections dictated by his modesty: “I’m not a good looking enough fellow to have my portrait taken.” Finally, he turned to Fr. Thévaux, the local superior and one of his first companions. Fr. Thévaux encouraged him to let himself be photographed and to distribute his portrait “to finish construction of the Sainte-Croix church”; thus, his heartfelt cry: “For Sainte-Croix, do whatever you want with Fr. Laval, living or dead.”

Another torment from Fr. Schwindenhammer: he ordered Fr. Laval to write his own biography. With typical Norman obedience, “Maybe yes, maybe no,” he wrote a letter that was a work fit for an anthology. He managed to obey without saying anything particularly significant.

“1. My life before entering Saint-Sulpice Seminary was so filled with sin that my director, Father Galais of blessed memory, never wanted me to revisit those wretched years, so much did the memories fill my spirit with turmoil and my heart with despondency and sadness.

Here is what this wise and holy director counseled: ‘My friend,’ he told me several times, ‘before you entered the Seminary you made a general confession of these unfortunate disorders; do not dwell on them, do not stir up that old dungheap, it will only upset and discourage you.’ I followed that advice to this day and found it very rewarding. And I must tell you in confidence that the great cross of my old age is these returns to all those disorders that the demon attempts to paint in my imagination and which I have great difficulty ridding myself of . . . consider whether it would be prudent to stir up this rotten old dungheap.

2. My life at Saint-Sulpice Seminary was truly poor and miserable. I stayed as much as possible in a state of silence and forgetting, working to heal the deep
wounds that sin had left on my soul. Those four years offer nothing edifying or interesting.

3. After the Seminary I was placed in a tiny parish in the diocese of Evreux. I served there for two years. Having very little ministry work to do I spent my time in prayer, study of the Bible and theological study, having had a limited education. I led the life of a genuine monk, and I find the memory of those two years very consoling.

4. In 1840, Fr. Blanpin and another student from Saint-Sulpice came to find me in my solitude and spoke to me of the Very Reverend Fr. Libermann’s project to form a congregation of priests for the colonies and of the ease of establishing God’s reign among the Blacks. I was not doing much in my poor little parish and yet I desired to convert some souls to make amends for those souls I had lost. I felt impelled to join this congregation, especially since it did not require great talent to do good among these poor people. That was when I left for the mission in Mauritius.

I remained alone there five years, then Fr. Lambert arrived, and two years later Fr. Thévaux. Frs. Lambert and Thévaux are better writers than I and can relate what they saw; my only task would then be to try to remember the first five years of the mission, which will be very difficult for me given my weakened memory and my great inability to write and develop my thoughts.

Thus you will see, my Very dear and Reverend Father, that there was neither stubbornness nor disobedience in my delay.

I have the honor to be my Very Reverend Father, of your paternity, your very devoted son,

Laval, miss. S. Esp. S.C. M.”

Fr. Laval suffered a first stroke in the confessional, a second while in the pulpit. During the night of September 8, 1864 he had a more severe stroke, followed by a hemiplegia. He had been a doctor so knew it was the end, but he readied himself for death with confidence: “I am happy to have always worked for the poor.” He closed his eyes on September 9, 1864. He was 61 years old. The priest who had been so poorly received was accompanied by a third of the population the three kilometers from the cathedral to Sainte-Croix, his chosen burial site. All cultures and all religions were united by the one who was rightly called “The Apostle of Unity.”

In the testimonies of healing we can see that the first miracle granted through his intercession took place before his casket was even closed: it involved Caroline Prosper, the daughter of one of his most faithful friends. She was near death and Fr. Laval invited her in a dream to have herself carried near to his body to be cured. The doctor refused to risk it, but at her insistence, the family took the risk. She arrived more dead than alive, but the

"...he readied himself for death with confidence: “I am happy to have always worked for the poor.”"
moment Fr. Laval's hand touched her eye and her hand, she was cured of her infirmity, though one leg remained rigid for some time before also finally being cured.

**Father Laval Continues to Watch Over Mauritius**

Before his death he made a commitment: *“Those who come to pray at my grave, I will carry their prayer to the Lord.”* Beginning the year after he died, more than 4,000 people come to Sainte-Croix on the anniversary of his death. This number has continued to grow, and increasingly the pilgrims come every day of the year. Today, every week from 8,000 to 14,000 come from Mauritius, as well as the Island of Reunion to visit his grave, and in the month of September more than 200,000 visit. Mauritians scattered throughout the world also gather in September.

The many letters of thanks arriving from Mauritius and the Mauritian Diaspora, as well as from those who have heard them tell of Fr. Laval, prove that Fr. Laval kept his word, even if the church has accepted only one miracle for his beatification. On April 29, 1979 Fr. Laval was one of the first two Servants of God to be beatified by the holy Pope John Paul II. Ten years later, on October 15, 1989, the holy Pope visited Fr. Laval’s grave and put his pontificate under his protection.

**Missionaries Today, In the Manner of Father Laval**

Today, to be a missionary in the manner of Fr. Laval means, for lay people, to take their Baptism seriously: to commit as a couple in order to mutually support each other in service and bear witness to the power of the sacrament of marriage they have received. In a world which has lost its social, moral, and religious bearings, it is important to hear the Pope's call to go towards the margins of the church, to be able to have the same view as Jesus who does not judge, but who puts people back on their feet in hope. The poor and the sick are the face of the suffering Christ, but we must also be for them the signs of Christ compassionate and merciful.

**Lay Persons, Cooperators in the Mission in the Name of Their Baptism**

Priests and missionaries, we too readily consider lay people as “fill-ins” who offset our small and aging number. We must see them as people who are also called by our Lord in the name of their Baptism to a mission, different from ours but complementary. Some will take their place in the liturgy, but many others will find their place as witnesses of the Gospel, according to their charism, to drug addicts, alcoholics, people getting out of prison who are in danger of seeing only those who trapped them in their former negative life reach out to them.

**Prayer, Nourishment of the Mission**

There is not only one way to pray, but in order to live a commitment in the name of the Gospel, it must be sustained by the presence of the Lord in our life and our tasks. Charismatics and rosary groups, couple and family spirituality groups, leaders of
neighborhood groups, each in its way keeps the flame of faith burning. Everywhere in Mauritius and surely in many places, lay people are nourished by Ignatian, Franciscan and Carmelite spirituality. We have been surprised to see how much Libermannian spirituality fulfills a need among people who commit themselves. However, are we Spiritans available to promote it? Ten years ago, the Spiritans of Mauritius introduced training in Libermannian spirituality for committed lay persons at the request of secular priests who regretted being offered only Ignatian spirituality. We have a treasure to share, let’s not keep it “under a bushel.”

Port-Louis, Mauritius
Vice-Postulator for the Cause of the Canonization of Fr. Laval

Endnotes

2 Ibid, 16.
3 In 1855, before the combined Chamber of Commerce and Chamber of Agriculture and in the presence of the Governors of Mauritius and Reunion, Sir Célicourt Antelme, who as a young lawyer had been the voice of white pessimism concerning the religious future of the former apprentices, acknowledged that since Fr. Laval began his apostolate, “the number of criminally accused among the emancipated classes had been in continual decline . . . and today everyone, even lawyers, are surprised when they see a former slave in the prison dock.” Excerpt from *La Commercial Gazette*, June 6, 1855.
4 Madam Celeste.
5 *Notes et Documents*, VI, 540.
6 Question: Is it therefore Jesus Christ, Son of God, second person of the Trinity become man like us, who earned forgiveness for our sins?
Answer: Yes.
Q: But what did He do to earn our grace, to earn forgiveness for our sins from God?
A: (He did penance all his life) and then He died on the cross.
Q: What penance did Our Lord Jesus Christ do up to the age of 30?
A: He did penance by working.
Q: Work, therefore, is a good penance to offer to God for forgiveness of our sins?
A: Yes.
7 See Hym, Bernard, *Coeur à coeur avec le Père Laval à travers ses écrits*, Ed. Diocèse de Port-Louis, 91 [Heart to Heart with Fr. Laval through his Writings]
9 Ibid., 86-87.

10 Historian of the diocese, deceased and not replaced.

11 In 2016 on the publication of the book by Emmanuel Richon, Charles-Edouard Brown-Séquard, le Mauricien le plus célèbre, [Charles-Edward Brown-Séquard, The Most Famous Mauritian], it was emphasized that at the time of the cholera epidemic, “only two people were mentioned both by Mayor Gabriel Fropier and the population itself for having taken every risk in order to save large numbers of the sick: Fr. Laval and Charles-Edouard Brown-Séquard, who did not for one second waiver in their vocation.
150 YEARS OF SPIRITAN PRESENCE AND MISSION IN MAINLAND TANZANIA

Introduction

The event of the Jubilee of 150 years of Evangelization and Spiritan presence and mission in mainland Tanzania gives the opportunity to revisit, albeit briefly, the rich history of both the church in Tanzania and that of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. This article focuses on the Spiritan mission in mainland Tanzania. It commemorates the great event, the outcome of which no one could have predicted. Those of us living today are privileged to be part of this wonderful history of the church in this nation.

Raymond Crotty, an Irish economist, said that the study of the past makes us know where we have come from, why things are the way they are, and what the future might be. As we celebrate 150 years of evangelization and education in Tanzania, there is the temptation to glorify the past or vilify those who went before us; neither is intended, rather thanksgiving to God, gratitude to the missionaries, acceptance of the challenges of today.

I begin with a quotation from a pioneer Spiritan missionary, Fr Alexander Le Roy, C.S.Sp., later a bishop and superior general of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost (as Spiritans were then called), who arrived in Zanzibar in 1881. Looking back twenty years after his arrival in mainland Tanzania, he wrote:

If we count the steps taken by a missionary in an un-evangelized land, some are fruitless, some are wasted, but this cannot be said of all of them. He will experience sufferings, sometimes from things, sometimes from beasts, sometimes from human beings, sometimes from all of these together. St. Paul made this point in his own time. But when, later on, he looked back on those unexplored roads which he watered with his sweat, he saw light breaking through the darkness that had reigned there. He forgot the miseries of the past and only remembered the delightful experiences; he has only smiles for his present situation, and steps forward into the future, happy with his lot and profoundly grateful to God.
Zanzibar, the Mother of the Catholic Church in Tanzania

The man who is credited with the beginning of the Holy Spirit Mission in East Africa, and indeed of the Catholic Church there, is the bishop of the Island of Réunion, Bishop Armand Maupoint. In the year 1858, having heard about the atrocities of slavery in East Africa, he sent his vicar general, Fr Armand Fava, on a reconnaissance visit to East Africa. Fava returned with a report in 1860 that opened the doors for the coming of the missionaries.

On December, 22 1860, a French steam corvette carrying three priests, six sisters, a surgeon of the French Navy and some craftsmen, dropped anchor in the placid waters of Zanzibar. Sultan Seyyed Majid, who was approached by the priests for his permission, gladly offered both his protection and his full support to their charitable work … to look after the sick, to nourish the poor, and to teach their converts useful trades …

This marked the beginning of the presence of the Spiritan Congregation in East Africa, particularly in Zanzibar. But things did not really get underway until 1863 when the first Spiritans, Frs. Etienne Baur, C.S.Sp., and Antoine Horner, C.S.Sp., arrived in Zanzibar together with Brother Celestine, C.S.Sp., Brother Felician, C.S.Sp., and two Sisters. In a document written in August 1863 following the visit to Bagamoyo of the First Assistant, Mère Thérèse de Jésus, three nuns are mentioned: Mère du Sacré-Coeur, Mère Maris des Anges, and Sr. Marie Claver.

The Beginning of the Church in mainland Tanzania

On March 4, 1868, the first missionaries of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit landed at the coastal town of Bagamoyo to begin what would be the penetration of the Catholic Church to the Interior. Bagamoyo was the site of a thriving slave market. Thus began the history of the church as well as that of the Spiritan Congregation on the Tanzanian mainland. If we were recalling the armistice, we would say that on the 11th hour, of the 11th day, of the 11th month, the guns fell silent. But for the missionaries, such precision as to the exact time they landed in Bagamoyo is not available. They had come to Bagamoyo not to conquer, but like Simeon to fulfil a dream that had been planned for years. Simeon had intoned: “now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples (Luke 2:29-31). As God cared for Jeremiah, so God must have cared for, carried the Spiritan missionaries, and shown them the way. Indeed, the Spirit of the Lord, who never abandons his church, was with them.

The missionaries were overjoyed to have landed in the interior. They wanted to go forth. The word “go forth” is immensely rich in Scripture right from the beginnings. God said to Abraham, “go forth from your land…to a land that I will show you.” (Gen 12:1). St Paul in his Letter to the Romans has this to say:

But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can
they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “how beautiful are the feet of those who bring [the] good news” (Rom 10:14-16).

Challenges of Evangelization and the Inspiration of the first Missionaries

At the recent Enlarged Provincial Chapter of the Province of Kenya (Nairobi, January 2018), Fr. Sean McGovern, C.S.Sp., reflecting on first evangelization said:

On Mission Sunday, October, 2017, Pope Francis noted the upcoming 100th Anniversary of the Apostolic Letter, Maximum Illud, written by Pope Benedict XV in 1919, in which he sought to give new impetus to the mission of proclaiming the Gospel. Now Pope Francis wrote “what Pope Benedict so earnestly desired 100 years ago, and the Council reiterated some fifty years ago, remains timely today.” Pope Benedict had pointed out in 1919 that despite the fact that there has been admirable missionary effort for centuries, there still remains “an immense multitude of those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.”

In brief, Pope Francis was putting special emphasis on the *missio ad gentes* (the church’s mission to the nations). It is interesting when one compares the number of nonbelievers in the document by Benedict XV and that of the Vatican Council fifty years later. Benedict put the number of nonbelievers in the world in 1919 at a billion people! Fifty years later, the situation seems worse, for the Vatican Council document, *Ad Gentes*, says that, “we are aware that there still remains a gigantic missionary task to be accomplished. For the Good News has not been heard or scarcely so by two billion people.” And, frighteningly, it goes on to say, “and that number is increasing daily.”

No wonder Pope Francis, in one of the first tasks of his pontificate, wrote with contagious enthusiasm and eloquence his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, The Joy of the Gospel. Quoting from St. John Paul II, Pope Francis says, “There must be no lessening of the impetus to preach the Gospel to those who are far from Christ, because this is the first task of the church.” And then, almost by the way, he throws in a very challenging remark: “We cannot passively and calmly wait in our church buildings …we need to move from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry” (no. 15). As we saw above, the missionaries who came to Tanzania were resolute in going forth into the interior, despite the challenges. They wanted to bring the good news to people who had not yet heard the message of the Gospel.

Today we talk of internationality and intercultural living in mission. We recall that one hundred and fifty years ago, the first mission in mainland Tanzania was international, what Koren called, “interracial.” It was composed of the Sisters of the Daughters of Mary (Filles de Marie de St Denis) from the Island of Réunion, together with Spiritans, who
were joined in 1867 by Brother Francis Nassy, C.S.Sp., the first Indian Spiritan, a native of Madras. Brother Francis went to work in Zanzibar where he died in 1878.\textsuperscript{15}

**God's Mission**

The Year of Jubilee is surely an occasion to reflect seriously on these challenging and encouraging words. Where do we stand as the Tanzanian Church in our commitment to proclaiming the Gospel and in our faithfulness to the call to evangelization? The Spiritan Rule of Life says that, “One basic characteristic of the Spiritan calling is availability for the service of the gospel, a readiness to go where we are sent by the Congregation” (SRL 25). In other words, mission is given to you. You do not choose where you want to go, you are sent. The missionaries came or went because they were sent on mission by their founder (Francis Libermann) who told them the work was God’s, not theirs. Pope Francis, in underlining the word, “to go forth,” says:

> Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the “peripheries” in need of the light of the Gospel.\textsuperscript{16}

Another biblical image equally comes to mind as we remember the beginning of the church in mainland Tanzania. Time and again we hear the coming of the missionaries referred to as the planting of the seed, which is the word of God. This seed of the word, no matter where it is sown, sprouts one day. It may take long, but usually it ends up transforming persons. But before this may happen, many may lose their lives. Maybe (or perhaps) the missionaries had to die and be buried before the word of God could spread: “unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat. But if it dies, it produces much fruit” (John 12:24). One of the classical philosophers says this about seed:

> The acorn, he tells us, is an oak tree in the process of becoming. What it is to be an oak is both final and the end formal cause of the acorn’s turning into an oak. The form that the acorn assumes when, through growth, it reaches its full development, is the end that the acorn was destined to reach simply by virtue of its being an acorn. According to Aristotle, the end that is to be achieved and the form that is to be developed in the process of growth are somehow present at the very beginning in the seed that, with proper nurturing, grows into the fully developed plant.\textsuperscript{17}

The missionaries found themselves in a context where the climate was challenging, with unknown and incurable diseases, and poverty widespread. The Bagamoyo cemetery is a testimony to the courage of these missionaries. This one died at 21 years of age, that one at 24 years of age,\textsuperscript{18} and so on. The names include nuns of the Daughters of Mary who came to premature and certain death, all because of God, and because of their faith, hope and charity. These men and women left everything to follow Jesus.\textsuperscript{19}
Place of Sacrifice, Tribute to Missionaries

Bagamoyo is a place of sacrifice in the real sense of the word, of the witness of martyrdom. The image of a seed embraces many mysteries. A seed contains life which has to be nurtured and cared for, and which once it sprouts carries within it other seeds. The missionaries never stopped coming despite the premature deaths. They were willing to sacrifice their lives for the people whom they rescued from slavery and loved so much. This was their contribution to a magnificent history, not a history of the powerful, the rich or the learned, but of the poor and humble who find their joy in meeting other poor people, in serving and protecting them, and sharing their own life-giving faith with them. But one must not be carried away by talk of heroic sacrifice. As Aung San Suu Kyi said, “if we choose to do something, that is not sacrifice; it is a gift.” So we do well to think not only of sacrifices, but of the gift of our vocation, and the gift we make to others through our joyfully dedicated lives.

The missionaries did not stop once the first seeds were planted. They followed the example of Jesus, who said, “let us go elsewhere, to the neighboring county towns, so that I can proclaim the message there too, because that is why I came” (Mark 1:38, Jerusalem Bible). After all this was their sole purpose – to penetrate the interior. Pope Francis in the same Apostolic Exhortation says, “once the seed has been sown in one place, Jesus does not stay behind to explain things or to perform more signs; the Spirit moves him to go forth to other towns.”

This Jubilee Year makes Spiritans and the church in Tanzania more conscious of the work of the Lord in our history and helps us continue the tasks of those who preceded us in the work of evangelization. We should always be mindful of those who lost their lives even at the age of 21 while planting the seed of evangelization. As Albert de Jung wrote:

their lives are examples of unshakeable faith that can move mountains. Their trust in the Lord was boundless. They obeyed his great commission: “go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). To evangelize the Africans, that was their paramount and sole aim.

Fr Versteijnen, C.S.Sp., added:

But, above all, it should be recognized that the action of the missionaries was always disinterested and animated by the charity of the Gospel, and that to help the African peoples, to resolve the complex human and social problems in their countries, they spent themselves generously.

How do we live their single-minded commitment in our work of evangelization? One of the challenges that many congregations face today is the lack of what the Benedictines
call the vow of stability. No sooner do some set one foot in the place of mission than the other foot is out. The first question seems to be, “is there Internet or Wi-Fi?” Our ancestors would put some of us to shame today. Of course, we live in a different time and world, but the call to God’s mission remains the same, and we must identify appropriate means for promoting the apostolate and not simply our own convenience.

The Jubilee Year truly calls for the expression of joy, praise, and thanksgiving, yet it is no time to sit down, rest and relax. It calls for soul-searching. Where is that boldness? Where is that prophetic voice? Where is the courage of breaking new ground? Where is that spirit of sacrifice? The purpose is not to bombard you with questions, but to re-discover and be imbued by the spirit of our ancestors and to go forth to the peripheries, to the marginalized, and the most abandoned of our world today. Pope Francis, in the same exhortation, warns us of individualism, a crisis of identity, and a cooling of fervor. At the same time, we can take comfort from what he says, “let us look upon them as challenges which can help us to grow” (no. 84).

**Bagamoyo: the Cradle of Education in East Africa.**

…many of these missionaries were those who gave the first steps in education, the first medical help, the first friendly contact with the rest of humanity, their first defence of personal rights, the beginning and the deepening of those areas of knowledge which today are considered parts of general culture.23

The role of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit in introducing formal education to Tanzania can never be underestimated. Today in East Africa formal education is taken so much for granted that one may be tempted to think it has been there from time immemorial. This was not the case 150 years ago. Spiritan missionaries were involved in education from the very early days in both Zanzibar and Bagamoyo. For example, one of the first things the missionaries did when they arrived in Zanzibar was not to carry out “direct evangelisation,” but to build schools. “By the end of 1862, they (the missionaries) were running a hospital, three schools and a technical training centre.”24

While it is not the intention to deal with formal education, sociologists make a distinction between education and schooling.

**Education** can be defined as a social institution, which enables and promotes the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and the broadening of personal horizons. **Schooling** on the other hand, refers to the formal process through which certain types of knowledge and skills are delivered, normally via a predesigned curriculum in specialised settings: schools.25

The missionaries introduced both these items to Tanzania. They ran schools, from primary to secondary schools and teacher training colleges. Notable among the secondary
schools are Pugu Secondary School (where the first President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere taught with Spiritan Missionaries) and Umbwe Secondary School, which produced the first Maasai Prime Minister, the late Edward Moringe Sokoine.

Matthew Bender on the development of Spiritan missions on Mount Kilimanjaro wrote:

…They [the Spiritans] founded dozens of mission stations, each featuring not only churches, but also schools, hospitals, and dispensaries.

He continued:

The region [Kilimanjaro] sported the highest ratio of schools to students, the highest school enrolment figures, and the most medical facilities per capita of any part of rural Eastern Africa.26

The Spiritans trained enough teachers for the whole country. They had two famous Teacher Training Colleges: Kigurunyembe Teacher Training College in Morogoro and Singa Chini Teacher Training College in Moshi. “By 1930, there were about 340 teachers serving in the vicariate’s school, who also doubled as catechists.”27 This was how the missionaries began addressing the humanitarian need, taken so much for granted today. People who have been through an education system and emerged literate and reasonably knowledgeable know that education has been beneficial to them.

Today, the grandchildren of Libermann have continued the same tradition. Spiritan-run schools have become centres of excellence, as the country still concentrates on education. Spiritans have educated leaders in this country, for both church and state. The former President of Tanzania, William Mkapa, was educated at Pugu Secondary School. Looking back over one hundred and fifty years of missionary activity, one sees that education has been the strongest foundation in achieving socio-economic and political development.

Importance of Formation of the local Clergy

Spiritan-run schools have become centres of excellence, as the country still concentrates on education. Spiritans have educated leaders in this country, for both church and state. The former President of Tanzania, William Mkapa, was educated at Pugu Secondary School. Looking back over one hundred and fifty years of missionary activity, one sees that education has been the strongest foundation in achieving socio-economic and political development.

The training of the local clergy was for Francis Libermann the best way to consolidate the church in Africa.
there for all to see. When we look back at these achievements, we can surely be proud that Spiritans have played a big role in building up the local church.

Like the first missionaries, we must not ignore going to the periphery, for example, those who cannot receive communion because of marital problems. To be reached are likewise single mothers, the unemployed, the youth, the wandering thousands of street children, those who are deserting our church in droves and joining the mushrooming churches, and so on. We are called today to raise prophetic voices on the horsetops and shout to the dictators who cause pain and suffering to millions of our brothers and sisters in this continent: enough is enough. The church must defend the values of democracy, speak out against the abuse of power, against the disappearance of people in this country, against corruption, and the violation of human rights. Coming together to celebrate 150 years of evangelization, can we ignore the blood of martyrs still bleeding on the continent?

The one unique and decisive thing the church has to offer all societies is the Good News proclaimed by Jesus and the humanizing power of the Kingdom of God which he proclaimed. We cannot keep holding back the humanizing power of God’s Word. Without being impeded by regulations, customs, and jargon, we need to let it reach people who seek new meaning for their lives, people who want to live with hope. St John Paul II many years ago exhorted us to put Christ at the very centre of our evangelizing work. We need to put ourselves in immediate contact with Jesus and his Good News. We need to spend our energies on this. From this will come the renewal and growth the church needs today.

The song (based on Isaiah 6:8 and I Samuel 3) says, “I will go Lord if you send me and I shall hold your people in my heart.” This is one of the most beautiful texts in the Scriptures. We also stand here to ask forgiveness and pardon for not holding God’s people in our hearts as we look back through the 150 years. Indeed, today we have to ask, “What kind of church do we want”? The seeds of evangelization must not be suffocated by forces we can deal with.

What need be done to allow the seed to continue growing? This is part of the challenges of today. Why do Catholics lapse? We want a truly inculturated faith where everyone is able to live their faith authentically, in and through their own culture, and not through purely Western or imposed norms, and theological arguments that are largely irrelevant to contemporary African culture. We should be encouraged to celebrate our unity not in spite of diversity, but in and through our diversity. From the very beginning the missionaries promoted local languages and attempted to understand the deep cultural values of the people. They did this in their limitations and fragility. There has never been anything like a perfect mission. But now it is our responsibility to build on the past and courageously promote an inculturated faith, that is, a faith lived in an authentically African cultural way. We cannot live our faith through someone else’s culture. That would be worse than speaking only foreign languages and acting only as outsiders in our own homes.

We want a truly inculturated faith where everyone is able to live their faith authentically, in and through their own culture....
In conclusion, exhorts Pope Francis:

An evangelizing community gets involved by deed and word in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the “smell of the sheep” and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be (Joy of the Gospel, no. 24).

Conclusion

This article aimed to show, albeit briefly, where we came from, where we are now, and what lies ahead. Another goal was to show how the seeds of evangelization, education, and the formation of the local clergy have enormously transformed the church and the nation.

Like, Simeon, we stand to give thanks to God. The Holy Spirit advanced the efforts of the first missionaries and swept away the doubts and hesitations they had about moving into the interior. And today the church of Tanzania, and indeed of East Africa, is alive, very much alive, and can boast of indigenous clergy (Bishops, priests and religious), thousands of lay faithful, and thousands of educated men and women who are transforming this country and beyond. St John Paul II in his visit to Tanzania in 1990 said:

The Catholic community in Tanzania owes much to the sacrifices and often heroic labors of the Holy Spirit Missionaries (Spiritans), the White Fathers, the Benedictines of Saint Ottilien, and many other missionaries from various countries who first preached the Gospel in this region… Through God’s grace, the apostolate begun by those pioneers is being continued by their successors and by increasing numbers of indigenous priests and religious Sisters and Brothers.32

What joy to see all these developments! Bless the Lord. But then rise to the challenge of building up a truly authentic, indigenous, African Church, that will proudly manifests new growth, is blossoming and fruitful - a church giving glory to God in its diversity, and sharing in the unity of the one faith, yet recognizably different from the Church planted in Europe, America, Asia, and anywhere else.


Bibliography


Pope Benedict XV., Encyclical Letter Maximum Illud, 30th November 1919: AAS 11


Endnotes

1 The Holy Ghost Missionaries first arrived in Zanzibar to officially begin their apostolate in 1863. Zanzibar celebrated its Jubilee of 150 years in 2013.

2 He later travelled to Kilimanjaro and wrote a book in French called Au Kilima-Ndjaro. The 1914 edition of this book has been translated into English by the late Fr. Adrian Edwards, C.S.Sp., and is being prepared for publication by the Center for Spiritan Studies, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh.

3 Le Roy, Au Kilimanjaro. No date. [This Preface did not appear in the 1914 French edition that Father Edwards translated.]

4 Fava studied at the Holy Ghost Seminary in Paris. In 1851 he went to Réunion. Twenty years later, he became Bishop of Martinique. In 1875 he was transferred to the See of Grenoble, where he died in 1899. See Koren, Henry J., To the Ends of the Earth. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1983, 272.


8 It is claimed that the Spiritans chose March as the month for establishing the mission at Bagamoyo to gain the help of St. Joseph, whose feast falls on 19 March. Cf. Kollman, Evangelization of Slaves, 144.

9 Fr Horner, C.S.Sp., the founder of Bagamoyo mission, had an ambition to move to the interior, for he considered Zanzibar too small to accommodate his plans of expanding the work of evangelization.


11 Encyclical of Pope Benedict XV, Maximum Illud, 30 November 1919 AAS 11 (6).

12 Ad Gentes Decree On the Missionary Activity of the Church, no. 10.
15 Ibid.
18 Brother Hughes Heidt, C.S.Sp., who died in Zanzibar of black water fever four months after his arrival, was 24 years of age.
19 On 30 April 1872, the death of Brother Isaac Guillerme, C.S.Sp., recorded the first Spiritan death in East Africa.
20 *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 21.
23 Ibid. p.2
27 Koren, Henry. *East African Memorial*. Pittsburgh: Spiritus Press, 1994, 243 paying tribute to Bishop Henry Gogarty who was known as a “bulldozer” when it came to building schools. Henry Koren remarked: “he set to work with a will and made the others also work “at top speed.”
28 According to the Spiritan Anniversary Diary, on 17 February 1869 a minor seminary was opened at Bagamoyo by the Spiritans. It was later transferred to Zanzibar in 1872 where it dies a natural death.
29 Libermann wrote to his missionaries: “We would choose the more religious and capable amongst them for further studies with a view to eventual ordination to the priesthood… The priests could do much good work and would soon gain the confidence of the people from which they come themselves.” The formation of local clergy was for Libermann a *sine qua non* for the success of the West African Mission.
30 How do we reach out to them? They too are part of the sheep that we must look after, they need the shepherd’s care.
31 Dan Schutte, 1981.
32 Address of His Holiness John Paul II to Priests and Religious of Tanzania, St Peter’s Church, Dar es Salaam, Sunday 2 September 1990, no 2.
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**Amoris Laetitia: Joy of Love or Scandal of Heresy?**

**Introduction**

Pope Francis recognized that challenges facing the family were some of the most important issues in the present life of the Roman Catholic Church. He thus dedicated two sessions of the Synod of Bishops (in 2014 and 2015) to questions and issues impinging on family life. Given the widespread consultation and discussion prior to the Synod, the vigorous debates among the bishops attending, and the open attitude of Pope Francis to encourage forthright exchanges, it is not surprising that the post-Synodal Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia, The Joy of Love*, continues to expose very different attitudes towards, and understandings of, church teaching, pastoral practice, canonical legislation, and doctrinal diversity. Francis is not one to desire or accept an illusionary or perfumed understanding of ecclesial life. He does not live in a world of propositional abstractions. He appears to be a pastor who is a practical theologian and pope.

While some might argue that the controversies surrounding the *Joy of Love* are novel, I would suggest that his exhortation and ongoing statements are exposing some key issues and challenges that have gone basically unresolved in the Roman Catholic tradition for twelve decades. The issues surfaced during the upshot of modernism at the beginning of the twentieth-century, emerged again in the decade prior to Vatican II, endured for fifty years after the Council, and strengthened in the debates of the 1990s among the German bishops crystallized in the Kasper-Ratzinger nexus. Now, they present themselves once again. The debated issues cluster around doctrinal development, authority, and the relationship between concrete practical life and canonical ecclesial life.

Some might argue that the perceived transformation is fueled by Francis’ personal experiences and the life of the Latin American church. This cannot be denied. However, one should not underestimate the radical shift in paradigms and their expression in cultural life and activity as a deep and powerful source of the changes being witnessed during Pope Francis’ papacy.
during Pope Francis’ papacy. Likewise, the resistance to change may have less to do with church teaching and more to do with the demise of the unconscious paradigm from the past that sustained these theological teachings, but no longer has contemporary coinage and persuasive value. Since the paradigm shift is crucial to the argument of this essay, I will address it first. In a second part, I will expose several of the key topics and issues being debated after the appearance of *Amoris Laetitia*.

*Amoris Laetitia* is a biblically-steeped and profoundly rich theological and pastoral text, which is attentive to the present state of marriage in different global contexts. This article primarily addresses the dramatic debate arising from the synodal discussion on the possibility of divorce and re-married Catholics participating in Eucharistic communion – alluded to in a footnote of chapter 8 of the Exhortation:

Because of forms of conditioning and mitigating factors, it is possible that in an objective situation of sin—which may not be subjectively culpable, or fully such—a person can be living in God’s grace, can love and can also grow in the life of grace and charity, while receiving the church’s help to this end. [To this the following footnote 351 is attached]

In certain cases, this can include the help of the sacraments. Hence, “I want to remind priests that the confessional must not be a torture chamber, but rather an encounter with the Lord’s mercy” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* [24 November 2013], 44: AAS 105 [3013], 1038). I would also point out that the Eucharist “is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak” (ibid., 47:1039).

In the end, this argumentative conflict should not distract anyone from attending to the enduring insights that *Amoris Laetitia* offers to families and married couples who are striving to live out their daily lives and can sometimes face very difficult challenges and conflicts.

**Paradigms make all the Difference**

Paradigms are the foundational assumptions upon which the language, thought patterns, and social institutions of every culture rests. They characterize the fundamental way of looking at the world, trying to understand life’s experiences, and norming patterns of behavior by which one can live together with minimized conflict. Paradigms primarily work at an unconscious level and therefore are unquestionably assumed to be true. This significantly accounts for their incredible power. When it does happen that one of these paradigmatic assumptions is called into question, the questioner is usually labeled a heretic. One should never forget that any teaching, doctrine, or interpretation is always sustained by an unconscious paradigm. And this raises an important issue identified by John XXIII in his speech opening the Second Vatican Council, when he distinguished between doctrines of faith and the language and thought patterns in which they are
expressed.

We are presently living in an age of paradigm shifts. When one lives in an era of a paradigm shift, one might be fooled into thinking that they are frequent and common events. The opposite is the case. Paradigm shifts are rare and extraordinary events. In the West, one can identify as examples of paradigm shifts, the change from a Hebraic to Hellenistic Christianity, the medieval retrieval of Aristotelian thought via Averroes, the inclusion of subjectivity in faith during the Reformation, the development of modern science in modernity, and the present emerging paradigm frequently labeled as postmodernity. The postmodern paradigm replaced a single universal master narrative having to do with the legitimization and defense of multiple narratives. Claims to universal truth are replaced by an affirmation of historical meaning systems. Reliance on dogmatic decrees and doctoral uniformity are replaced with a solidarity rooted in a common ethical life.

One might legitimately argue that Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI responded to the post-modern paradigm, for the most part, by negatively critiquing its assumptions and principles. Their reaction might be characterized as resistance, opposition, and negation. They perceived postmodernity as inimical to Christianity.

With Pope Francis, who still can be a severe critic of certain dimensions present in contemporary postmodern culture, a different reaction is apparent. Francis chooses the path of listening, accompanying, and discerning. Herein is witnessed the profound Latin American experience present since the Second Vatican Council which Francis brings to his papal ministry.

It is not surprising that Francis turns to the themes of inculturation and contextuality as powerful forces in which the church engages contemporary society. His Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Gaudium, The Joy of the Gospel (2013) evidences Francis’ view. Evangelii Gaudium (henceforth EG) differs from other recent documents on the church’s missionary activity, for example, Ad Gentes (Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity) of Vatican II, Evangelii Nuntiandi (Evangelization in the Modern World) of Paul VI, or Redemptoris Missio (On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate) of John Paul II. In his Exhortation, pope Francis places more of an emphasis on social and pastoral relevance.

Pope Francis speaks of three settings of evangelization: pastoral care of the baptized, bringing back the strayed (people who have lost the spirit of Baptism), and preaching to those who do not know Christ. Francis challenges the church to leave its buildings and move into society in order to evangelize. This evangelization imperative is essentially a communitarian activity. The mission is accepted by each baptized Christian, but is accomplished in the context of the Christian community. Consequently, mission and communion are interconnected realities.

The communal dimension of mission impels people to be engaged in concrete life, especially among those who are suffering, marginalized, or estranged. In EG no. 49, pope Francis declared
I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a church concerned with being at the center and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures.

In addressing the decennial gathering of the Italian Church Leadership in Florence Italy on November 10, 2015, pope Francis made what may be his clearest assessment of the paradigm shift referenced above. At the convocation, Francis presented a comprehensive vision for the future of the Catholic Church. He spoke of a community that must be deeply merciful and unafraid of change. He affirmed that Catholics must realize that “we are not living in an era of change, but the change of an era.” The pope continued:

addressing the problems facing the church it is not useful to search for solutions in conservatism or fundamentalism and the restoration of obsolete conduct and forms that no longer have the capacity of being significant culturally. Christian doctrine is not a closed system incapable of generating questions, doubts, and interrogatives; rather it is alive, knows being unsettled, and living.

Francis proposes that the Christian community in facing this change of an era should listen, accompany, and discern. He believes this process aligns much better to the challenges posed by the shift to a postmodern paradigm. This process is inductive rather than deductive. It addresses real concrete situations rather than abstractions. It at least recognizes that there are potentially many various life situations that give rise to many narratives and stories rather than one universal, univocal, permanent, and fixed master narrative.

Amoris Laetitia engages the renewal of marriage and the family within the context of a postmodern culture. It overtly recognizes that in the real world marriage and family are rooted in multiple narratives or stories that are varied by and within cultures. The exhortation takes seriously the uniqueness of cultures and this uniqueness counts. Merely returning to old abstract solutions to deep challenges involved with marriage and family is minimally insufficient, if not a dereliction of true pastoral care. Authentic pastoral care is rooted in an encounter with Jesus mediated by the community and the Scriptures. Amoris Laetitia recognizes the unique authority of an individual’s conscience. Pastors must walk with couples and families where they are, listening, accompanying, discerning, and evangelizing, while always proclaiming the mercy of God.

Amoris Laetitia is itself the fruit of a very intensive global listening process. The Extraordinary Synod of 2014 reflected on the challenges of marriage in the family, which then informed the agenda for the 2015 Synod. Pope Francis himself modeled this listening
activity during the synod by his attentive presence in all its sessions and their discussions. In doing this, Francis, showed that listening to the faithful and to his brother bishops was a key part of his own teaching and pastoral ministry.

Amoris Laetitia emphasizes the need for the ecclesial community to accompany families as members in the community of the church. “Accompanying” calls for more than passing on church doctrine and teachings, even though this duty is not to be abandoned. Francis calls for a change in pastoral style - ministers must take on the smell of the sheep. Taking on the smell of the sheep suggests bi-directionality. One direction is the minister going to the flock, being with the poor and estranged among them in a special way. The other direction is the flock mediating to the minister their experience of the Gospel and custodianship of the rich tradition that is alive in their customs, rituals, and cultural traditions.

Amoris Laetitia strongly emphasizes that the ministry to families and married couples must help them grow in the art of discernment. One crucial element in discernment is the formation of conscience. In Amoris Laetitia no. 37, Francis insists that pastors must make room for the conscience of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them.

When addressing new bishops who were completing their training course at the Vatican in 2017, Francis elaborated on his understanding of discernment. He noted:

discernment is a remedy for the immobility of “it has always been so” or “we take time”; it is a creative process that is not limited to the application of methods; it is an antidote against rigidity because the same solutions are not good everywhere.

He urged them not to be imprisoned by the nostalgia of having only one answer to apply in all cases. He warned the bishops that to have an easy one-size-fits-all answer threatens to make our lives dry up. Francis explained that discernment requires humility and obedience:

humility with regard to your own projects, obedience with regard to the Gospel, the ultimate standard, to the magisterium who guards it, to the norms of the universal church which serve it, and to the concrete situation of people.

Francis noted that bishops need to cultivate an attitude of listening, growing in the freedom to give up your point of view (when it is partial and inadequate) to assume that of God’s. A bishop’s listening is a community action. Listening “is necessary because the bishop’s discernment is always a community action”; it does not disregard the richness of the opinion of priests and deacons and of the people of God and of all those who can offer a useful contribution.
Discernment is “born in the heart and mind of the bishop in his prayer, when he meets people and situations entrusted to him with a Divine Word pronounced by the Holy Spirit.” “Only in the silence of prayer can one learn the voice of God, perceive the traces of his language, access his truth.” Francis explained that bishops and leaders in the church must strive to grow in the kind of discernment that dialogues with the faithful in a patient and courageous accompanying process.

As proposed earlier, I believe Pope Francis is the first pope since Paul VI to become positively engaged with the paradigm shift that is a real part of cultural life in many global venues. Francis embraces an inductive rather than deductive method. He explores the concrete cultural context, rather than abstract universal schemas. He understands that there is no one universal invariable story, but multiple stories that are always concretely situated. He gives priority to loving merciful action, rather than doctrine and dogma. In short, Francis understands that the church faces enormous challenge in how to appropriately articulate its faith experience once again, but now in new and possibly pluralistic ways. It is not surprising that conservative church leaders, teachers, and pastors who wish to hold on to the earlier unified system, would find pope Francis’ approach to be minimally challenging and maximally heretical. In some conservative quarters and individuals of the Catholic ecclesial communion, one finds this negative critical reaction expressed explicitly, publicly calling into question and rejecting some of the teaching in pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation.

The Synods of 2014-15 and Amoris Laetitia

The most intense debate among the bishops at the Synod on Marriage and the Family, as well as the post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia, centered on the question of whether divorced and remarried Catholics who lacked annulment could receive communion, even though their marital situation might be canonically irregular. There were clearly divisions on this question among the bishops in attendance, although it was an unequal distribution. Generally on questions concerning divorced and remarried participation, the liberals who favored communion had the two-thirds majority of votes and a little less than one-third negative votes from the conservatives who opposed communion.

Pope Francis tried to temper some of the conservative argument before the synod by empowering local bishops to make judgments concerning an annulment in particular cases. The conservative side also jockeyed for pre-synodal influence when Cardinal Pell and twelve other Cardinals sent a letter to Pope Francis expressing their concern about the process of the synod, about who would be composing the final draft, and about the topics the bishops would address. Nonetheless, the Synod of Bishops carried on its work to the end and produced a final document that
encouraged continuing discussion of how divorced and remarried Catholics could, without an annulment, participate more deeply in the life of the church.

Pope Francis’ final speech during the synod is quite telling. He remarked that discussions, had laid bare the closed hearts which frequently hide even behind the church’s teachings and good intentions, in order to sit in the chair of Moses and judge, sometimes with superiority and superficiality, difficult cases and wounded families.

Francis continued in saying that the synod experience “also made us better realize that the true defenders of doctrine are not those who uphold its letter, but it’s Spirit; not ideas, but people; not formulas, but the free availability of God’s love and forgiveness.”

By focusing on the debate surrounding chapter 8 of *Amoris Laetitia*, specifically on the topics of conscience and discernment, the different paradigms (modern and post-modern) are illustrated and the differing theological conclusions deriving from them become more understandable. Specific theological positions and conclusions actually do flow from the unconscious assumptions upon which they rely. Chapter 8 of *Amoris Laetitia* has become a much-debated question among many Episcopal Conferences around the globe. How is the church to respond to the situation of divorced and remarried Catholics who have not secured a decree of nullity? *Amoris Laetitia* (nos. 298-303) recognizes that discernment and conscience are two crucial dimensions engaged in this complicated and challenging process. Interestingly, in the abstract there is little if no opposition to embracing the ideas of mercy and forgiveness for those who are divorced and remarried. Issues arise when one leaves the world of abstraction and deals with this particular couple and their reality. In the abstract, all bishops agree that accompaniment and understanding are the appropriate Christian reaction. However, when the question of Eucharistic communion for the divorced and remarried is raised, those working out of the modern paradigm are usually vigorously opposed to access to communion and even accuse of heresy those who would allow communion.

*Amoris Laetitia* revisits the unresolved conflict manifested during the synodal sessions of 2014 and 2015. During the synodal sessions and in the Apostolic Exhortation, Francis did not finally settle the question by papal fiat. Rather, he embraced his desire for increased synodality and decision-making at the level of national Bishops’ Conferences as the appropriate decision-making bodies for the actions of the local church. Furthermore, one might argue that the debates themselves at the synod reflect the conflicts and arguments present during the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Furthermore, they continue the issues and conflicts surrounding *Humanae Vitae* (1968), which themselves continue the theological tensions present during the Second Vatican Council. Now, however, Pope Francis seems disinclined to defend the universal, abstract, univocal...
paradigm of modernity, and is challenging the church to look afresh at the questions, now with a heart of mercy. The church is truly facing the change of an era and must live and act within it. Let us now turn to the conscience and objective-subjective ethics conflicts.

The Conscience Debate

The understanding of conscience seemingly underlying Amoris Laetitia reflects a revisiting of the theological vision of conscience formulated by moderately progressive moralists immediately prior to the Second Vatican Council and advanced until the papacy of John Paul II. Some representatives of this interpretation were Louis Janssens in Leuven, Josef Fuchs and Bernard Haring in Rome, and Richard McCormick and Charles Curran in the USA. Some current exemplars of this vision of conscience would be Cardinal Cupich in the USA, Cardinals Kasper and Marx in Germany, as well as Professors Michael Lawler and Todd Saltzman (Creighton); in this current also the bishops of the Buenos Aires Pastoral Region in their September 05, 2016 directive that was tacitly approved in a letter by Pope Francis. Additionally, several German dioceses as well as the diocese of Braga in Portugal have recently endorsed the possibility of communion for the divorced and remarried in certain circumstances.

Alternatively, most of the opposition to Amoris Laetitia's implicit understanding of conscience seems to follow the vision of conscience present throughout the writings of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Some exemplars of this vision of conscience who have reacted to Amoris Laetitia would be the following Americans - Cardinal Burke, Archbishop Chaput of Philadelphia (who has been appointed the head of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee for the Implementation of Amoris Laetitia), Cardinal Pell of Australia, George Weigel (Ethics and Public Policy Center, Washington D.C.), and Matthew Schmitz (editor, First Things). Beyond the US, one might mention Joseph Shaw (Oxford University, England), representative of forty-five Catholics requesting the College of Cardinals to avoid possible heresy in Amoris Laetitia; and let us not forget the thirteen Cardinals who signed a letter addressed to Pope Francis during the synod, and the sixty-two scholars who issued a filial correction to Francis in 2017.

Wherein lies the root conflict in these two apparently conflicting interpretations of conscience? E. Christian Brugger (Catholic World Report, Sept 20, 2016) and Lawler/Saltzman (National Catholic Reporter, Sept 7, 2016) offer accurate summaries of the two differing positions. Brugger endorses the more conservative interpretation in line with John Paul II, Lawler/Saltzman align themselves with Pope Francis' seemingly more liberal understanding. Lawler/Saltzman defend the inviolability of conscience. They argue that this was a central tenet established by Thomas Aquinas and definitively affirmed at Vatican II in Gaudium et Spes (The Church in the Modern World) and Dignitatis Humanae (On the Dignity of the Human Person). They argue that one's understanding of the relationship between the subjective and objective dimensions of morality underpins one's understanding of conscience and its relationship to truth and/or magisterial teaching. Lawler/Saltzman argue in this manner:
is conscience subjective and internal, and truth objective and external, whereby the subjective and internal conscience must obey and conform to the objective and external truth? Or does conscience include both the objective and subjective realms, whereby conscience discerns and interprets its understanding of objective truth and exercises that understanding in the subjective judgment of conscience?

In a certain sense, this characterization expresses the difference in the modern versus post-modern paradigm discussed earlier. Lawler/Saltzman embrace the post-modern position. In so doing, they abandon the modern paradigm which claims to understand universal permanent truth that is always valid apart from any concrete situation. For this view, context is ultimately unimportant, although it might diminish culpability. Lawler/Saltzman reject any proposal or criticism that their position leads to relativism.

In this formulation, truth exists “in myself,” not in a relativist sense that denies objective and universal truth, but in the sense of the intrinsic human dignity of the person and the authority of conscience. Conscience must internalize the values reflected in the norm, see their relevance to the human person in all her particularity, and go through the process of understanding, judgment, decision, and action.

The Lawler/Saltzman position might best be characterized as dynamic relationalism. Conscience lives in the drama of experience, discernible laws and patterns, community relationships, history, tradition et cetera. Lawler/Saltzman do, however, insist that there is an important role for “objective norms.” They refuse to collapse conscience into the objective norm or create an equation of objective norm and conscience.

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The essential point for conscience as object-orientation is the relevance of the objective norm from the perspective of the inquiring subject in light of the understanding of all the circumstances in a particular historical cultural context. The implication of this perspective on the relationship between conscience as object-orientation and objective norms is that conscience should be guided by those norms, but the authority of conscience is not identified with whether or not it obeys the objective norm.

Interestingly, Lawler/Saltzman appeal to Dignitatis Humanae’s horizon on religious liberty to support their claim. They argue that Dignitatis Humanae advocates for religious freedom, where “every man has the duty, and therefore the right, to seek the truth in matters religious in order that he may with prudence form for himself right and true [objective] judgments of conscience, under use of all suitable means.” This claim would be oxymoronic if mere obedience to objective norms was the sole role of conscience, for then a conscience that leads people to follow religious traditions other than the Roman Catholic Church could never be tolerated. The religious pluralism recognized and affirmed in Dignitatis Humanae shifts authority from the objective norm to conscience as object-
orientation. Informed by objective norms, the hermeneutical lens of the conscience as subject-orientation facilitates the process of understanding, judgment, and decision of conscience.

Lawler/Saltzman claim that this hermeneutical perspective resonates with the fundamental perspective expressed earlier in Bernard Häring’s work. In the context of Häring’s overall approach to moral theology, God calls all women and men and each person to a moral life. In the person’s response to this call, their conscience must be free and inviolable, and “the church must affirm the freedom of conscience itself.” Church doctrine is at the service of women and men in their sincere conscience search for goodness, truth, and Christian wholeness. Conscience is not at the service of doctrine. Louis Janssens expressed a concurrent position that conscience was the supreme authority of the human person—properly understood. A different couple might arrive at a different conscience decision. In the above view, the conscience of a divorced and remarried couple after prayer, discernment, attentiveness to church teaching, *et cetera*, may find itself led by the Spirit of God to fully participate in Eucharistic communion. Clearly, there are different concrete narratives and conscience can arrive at different conclusions in each story.

Dr. E. Christian Brugger, the J. Francis Cardinal Stafford Professor of Moral Theology at St. John Vianney Theological Seminary, Denver, argues the perspective flowing from the modern paradigm. He has issued a strong negative critique of Lawler/Saltzman as well as the Argentine Bishops. He argues that any account of conscience that sets it in opposition to freedom (Salzman and Lawler) or makes it indifferent to objective truth (Argentine bishops) has misconceived, not only conscience and moral truth, but human nature, the doctrine of creation, and the Christian moral life. Brugger begins by rejecting proportionalism that he claims is presumed in the Lawler/Saltzman argument. He represents proportionalism this way: “common to all proportionalists is the *insistence* that intending evil as an end or means (what defenders refer to variously as “premoral evil,” “ontic evil,” “disvalue,” *et cetera*) does not by that fact make an action morally wrong. If there are “morally relevant circumstances” justifying the commission of the evil—what they call “proportionate reasons”—then it can rightly be chosen. He continues, “proportionalism denies the existence of intrinsically evil actions, types of behavior that when freely chosen always constitute a disorder of the will. If there are no intrinsically wrongful types of action, then the church, when it has taught that there are intrinsically wrong actions (e.g., adultery), has taught illicitly. And so, whereas according to the church’s teaching, conscience *never* rightly deliberates over whether or not to have sex with someone other than one’s valid spouse, conscience in the proportionalist account may indeed (in fact, sometimes, must) remain open to it. Why? Because if there are proportionate reasons for doing so, then under the circumstances it may be the *right thing for me to do*.

Brugger claims that conscience in the Catholic view does indeed stand in obedience to the moral law. But this obedience is not servile and passive, not the obedience of a slave to the master. It is the obedience of a scientist to the truth, or a famished man to a feast, or the ear to sound and the eye to color, or an explorer to his longed-for destination, or of a hunting dog to his quarry. Conscience is made for moral truth. It searches for, finds,
probes, and understands more deeply, then directs action as best as it can in accord with it. How can this be a threat? Is a hand a threat to the glove, or a key to the lock? A healthy conscience does not close us down and restrict us. It opens us up to the good and ultimately to God. It makes possible the flourishing of the gift of freedom. Brugger is embracing the argument of John Paul II, expressed in his *General Audience*, August 17, 1983, and *Insegnamenti*, VI, 2 (1983), 256. Furthermore, Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World) expresses this same perspective, being wholly rooted in both the truth of sexuality and marriage as taught by the church and the obligation of the laity to obey that truth. Interestingly, almost nowhere in *Familiaris Consortio* does the church’s teaching on the inviolable primacy of individual conscience, even in sexual matters, appear. One might argue that such an absence unjustly ignores the long-standing Catholic tradition fundamentally strengthened at the Second Vatican Council, and that Pope Francis rightly retrieves this long tradition in *Amoris Laetitia*.

When the opponents of Francis and *Amoris Laetitia* issue their *dubia*, filial corrections, and suggestions of heresy, they almost always reference the teachings of John Paul II and notably his teachings in *Veritatis Splendor* (The Splendor of Truth). Not surprisingly, *Veritatis Splendor* is his strongest rejection of post-modernity as inimical to Catholicism, threatening to morality, and a harbinger of ramped up relativism. Within a modern paradigm, this is completely consistent; within a postmodern paradigm, it seems inconsistent and narrow-minded. And, as has happened on the practical level of faith life, it may be ignored as inconsequential. The teachings of the modern church may seem strange and foreign to the faithful living in the postmodern paradigm.

**Concluding Suggestions**

The differences between the postmodern and modern paradigms is irresolvable. There simply is no middle ground. The beliefs and first principles that constitute the basis for a paradigm are non-negotiable, and they are usually uncritically accepted as true. Perhaps it is best not to endeavor an illusionary resolution of this fundamental conflict. It might be much more fruitful to understand how the paradigms operate and why they lead to particular theological conclusions. Time will tell which paradigm survives and thrives and which falls by the wayside within various cultural contexts, because it no longer makes the ambiguity of life’s experiences sensible in that place and time.

Second, as is frequently the case when ecclesial conflicts are understood, they are less debates about theology and more about philosophy and cultural horizons. And in its own way, the debate about chapter 8 of *Amoris Laetitia* reminds us of the debate surrounding

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real Eucharistic presence with Berengarius of Tours. The philosophical understanding of what constitutes the real presence was not shared in common. Therefore, the parties to the conflict misunderstood each other’s theological position. Today the situation is further complicated by the need to avoid what might be understood as an unconscious theological imperialism. In this case, the beliefs and convictions of one culture are imposed on another, since the imposing culture is considered to be better or higher and in possession of the truth. Western culture must not impose its theological convictions on Asia, Africa, South America, or vice versa, especially when it comes to theological teachings about marriage and family which are always culturally particular and situational.

Third, the church should surrender any idea that unity must have uniformity. And with postmodernity, the church must struggle to learn how to live with pluralism. It may be that practices surrounding marriage in the family will not allow a one-shoe-fits-all mentality. While there has always been legitimate plurality present in the church, in our present cultural times this plurality may be more diverse and normative.

Fourth, conscience should always be thought of in the concrete local practical context. Conscience is the place where any individual is with God within the ambient of the loving merciful Christian community.

Fifth, and finally, church leaders and theologians passionately concerned with the church’s tradition and teaching as well as practical judgments in pastoral ministry would do well to apply the practice of listening, accompanying, and discerning to their own debates and disagreements. While it might be necessary to articulate the errors one finds in another’s argument, it is also beneficial to affirm what is perceived as meaningful and good. *Amoris Laetitia* is a rich theological and pastoral document that strives to support and encourage families who are living in both an era of change and change of an era. As local Episcopal Conferences formulate guidelines for their concrete application, we can all be enriched and stretched, but only if we first listen.

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**Background Material**


2. Cardinal Burke has proposed the possibility of inaugurating a “formal act of correction” to Pope Francis. Cf., [www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2016/11/16/cardinal-burke-we-will-](http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2016/11/16/cardinal-burke-we-will-—)
make-formal-act-of-correction-if-the-pope-doesnt-make-amoris-clarification.


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Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, C.S.Sp.


HUMANAE VITAE FIFTY YEARS LATER

Humanae Vitae, On the Regulation of Birth, the encyclical on contraception that Pope Paul VI issued on July 29, 1968 did not just happen. It was rather the culmination of a long process of debates on birth control that go back into the history of the church. But, Humanae Vitae appeared at a pivotal moment in this history and, when it did, it brought up many other issues that touched on several aspects of the church’s moral tradition and theology in general.

A group of theologians meeting at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, barely one month after the publication of the encyclical captured some of the important questions that the encyclical raised for the theology, history, and life of the church. Here are the questions raised in a communique they issued after their meeting:

1. In the areas of human understanding which are proper to human reasoning, such as natural law, what is the function of the church as the authoritative teacher of revelation?

2. What are the sources for the formulation of binding moral doctrine within the Christian community?

3. What is the precise role of the Pope as authoritative teacher in these areas?

4. What is the role of the bishops, of the body of the faithful, and of the church’s theologians in formulating such moral teaching?

5. What qualifications may be attached to the individual Christian’s assent to admittedly fallible statements of the merely fallible magisterium, especially when this involves practical judgments of grave consequences?

Many of these issues had been simmering, as it were, in other aspects of church life and theology, but now came to a head with the publication of the encyclical. The Pope’s text acted then as a lightening rod that gave focus to these theological concerns. Fifty years after the publication of the encyclical, these questions continue to reverberate in the church. Indeed, we have come full circle on nearly all of them following the publication of Pope Francis’ Post-synodal Exhortation, Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love). In this commemorative article, we
provide a quick overview of the history of birth control in the Catholic Church leading up to the publication of *Humanae Vitae*. Then follows a summary of the main arguments of the encyclical, a brief history of its reception from both its advocates and its detractors, and some of the larger questions the encyclical raised and continues to raise. I also address some of the connections between *Humanae Vitae* and *Amoris Letitia*.

**History**

The first known instances of contraception come from ancient Egypt and India where the ancients, in a bid to maximize the productivity of their farm animals, found ways to insert foreign objects in the wombs of the animals in the understanding that the womb cannot accommodate two disparate objects at once. In this way they ensured that the animal could work all year round or as much as needed. Soon, however, the idea of contraception for use in humans also developed.3 The various types of contraception invented by these ancient peoples were quite impressive.4 There is no explicit mention of contraception in the Bible. The one case which has been used throughout church history to support the prohibition of contraception is the well-known story of Onan in Genesis 38:8-10. Onan was said to have been killed by God for withdrawing his member rather than depositing semen in his late brother’s wife with whom he had sexual intercourse as required by law to raise offspring for his late brother. As John Noonan points out, there have been various exegetical readings of the Onan case. “Most obviously, in the context of a story of the descent of the tribe, Onan had broken a law designed to perpetuate the name of the older son. He had also shown a want of family feeling and at the same time displayed an introverted egotism. Moreover, he had appeared to accept the obligation placed upon him to marry his widowed sister-in-law, but by his act had frustrated the purpose of the obligation. Finally, his contraceptive behavior itself seemed wrong to the narrator. Was Onan punished for his disobedience, for his lack of family feeling, for his egotism, for his evasion of an obligation assumed, for his contraceptive acts, or for a combination of these faults?”5 St. Augustine of Hippo would later emphatically state that the reason God punished Onan was for withdrawing and spilling the seed at the point of orgasm, that is for having contraceptive intercourse. From the time of St. Augustine, therefore, the act of withdrawing from sexual intercourse at the point of orgasm rather than consummating the act, *coitus interruptus* (*Onanism* in the moral manuals), has been considered morally evil and displeasing to God.

Although there was no explicit mention of contraception in the Bible, Christian tradition from earliest times firmly taught that contraception was immoral. This teaching came about on several grounds. The first was via the convergence of ideas based on several New Testament teachings on sex and sexuality. Some of the teachings on sex from the New Testament that influenced the church’s position on contraception include the teaching on the superiority of virginity (Luke 20:34-36); the teaching on the institutional goodness of marriage (Mark
fertility and family are portrayed as great goods, as evidence of faithfulness to God, and as rewards for faithfulness to God…In this context contraception could be seen as a rejection of a gift from God, as an action stunting the growth of God’s chosen people, for which reason to this day, Orthodox Judaism rejects contraception.6

The Christian position on contraception has also been arrived at from the Fathers through *Humanae Vitae* and beyond on conclusions drawn from natural law. The essence of this argument from natural law is that there is a *telos* or finality to the biological processes; this *telos* is discoverable by use of natural reason and is not to be violated. Among the stoics, for example, a thing was natural if it was uncontaminated by human sin or error, or is what animals do or is in conformity with the known structures of the human body. Thus, an eye is for seeing, a mouth for talking or eating, and the human sexual organs are for procreation. In speaking against contraception, Clement of Alexandria, for example, argued that the Christian law is for husbands “to use their wives moderately and only for raising up children.” To indulge in intercourse without intending children is an outrage to nature, that we should take as our instructor. Her wise directions concerning the periods of life are to be obeyed…” For St. Augustine, “husbands and wives who use the poison of sterility to systematically exclude conception are not joined in matrimony but in seduction.” They turn the bridal chamber into a brothel. For whoever makes the procreation of children a greater sin than copulation, fords marriage, and makes the woman not a wife but a mistress, who for some gifts presented to her is joined to the man to gratify his passion. Where there is a wife, there must be marriage. But there is no marriage where motherhood is not in view; therefore, neither is there a wife.8

The position of the Fathers on contraception was solidified in arguments against various Gnostic groups. In opposition to the Manicheans who held that marriage, sex, and children were evil because material and indicative of co-operation with the evil creator principle, Augustine maintains that children were good, and that marriage was not a concession to libido or an afterthought. There are three important values (goods) in marriage - the sacrament, fidelity, and children. Contraception goes directly against one of these goods - children.9 In short, as Brian Clowes10 and many scholars have pointed out:

from the time of its founding, the Catholic Church has universally condemned contraception. Many Church Fathers, such as Athenagoras, St. Ambrose, St Augustine, Barnabas, St Basil the Great, Caesarius, Clement of Alexandria, Ephraem the Syrian, Epiphanius, St Jerome, St John Chrysostom, Hippolytus wrote and spoke a Catholic No to contraception.11

The manuals of moral theology, as well as the official teaching of the church for many
centuries assumed the givenness of this teaching. There were, in any case, some situations where the teaching came up against some hard cases. Two are worth mentioning here. One is the situation where one of the partners in a marriage had a communicable disease that could infect the other and perhaps kill him or her. Was the use of condom in such a situation an incidence of contraception? Another is what to do if there was need to excise in some way parts of the reproductive organs of either a man or a woman thereby impairing the person’s reproductive capacities. The drawn-out debate on direct and indirect sterilization among moral theologians leading up to Vatican II was partly an attempt to find answers to quandaries like these. Despite all the casuistic efforts in individual challenging cases, it was assumed generally that contraception was wrong.

Christian consensus on contraception was sorely tested in modern times by several factors and historical developments, chief among which was the rising concern about population explosion, a concern which was first raised by the British economist and philosopher, Thomas Malthus, who in his famous “Essay on the Principle of Population” that appeared at the end of the eighteenth-century, argued that the world’s population was now growing at an exponential rate every 25 years. Malthus called for moral restraint in matters of population if the world was not going to run out of space and resources due to “overpopulation.” The fear of overpopulation, therefore, gave rise to new technologies and inventions which were all meant to curb human population. These technological advances combined with other social trends, such as the increased emancipation of women who found new status for themselves rather than solely being producers of children, put pressure on the old Christian prohibition of contraception. Christian churches were of course initially critical of these new trends, but soon began to rethink their stance on the matter following the Anglican Church’s decision at the August 1930 Lambeth Conference to approve of methods other than abstinence from sexual intercourse as legitimate means of birth control. From this date in 1930 until 1958, all major Christian bodies, except the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, began, one after the other, to approve as legitimate and morally right the use of various forms of contraception in marital sexual intercourse. This move, ratified in 1959 by all the Protestant Churches at the World Council of Churches in Geneva, meant that the Christian consensus on the immorality of contraception had broken down irretrievably. This fact and the reality of the development of the birth-control pill in the late 1950s put added pressure on the Catholic Church to rethink its age-old thinking on contraception.

The Catholic response to the new developments both in the church and in society came in two waves. The first was the publication of Casti Connubi in late 1930 in which Pope Pius XI, in reaction to the move by the Lambeth Conference, maintained that “any use whatever of marriage, in the exercise of which the act by human effort is deprived...what to do if there was need to excise in some way parts of the reproductive organs of either a man or a woman thereby impairing the person’s reproductive capacities.

The commission eventually returned two reports - a majority and a minority report.
of its natural power of procreating life, violates the law of God and nature, and those who do such a thing are stained by a grave and mortal flaw.”\(^{12}\) The second move by the Catholic Church happened with the coming to the papacy of Pope John XXIII who, in reaction to the furor over contraception in society and in the church, quickly set up the Birth Control Commission, a secret commission that meant to study the issue and advise the Pope accordingly. Following his death a few years later, Pope Paul VI, his successor, reconstituted the Birth Control Commission by enlarging its membership and making its existence known to the whole church. He also took the matter of birth control away from the agenda of the Second Vatican Council that he had reconvened following his predecessor’s death. The mandate remained the same, that is, to study the matter and to advise the Pope whether there was need for change of this ancient doctrine. The commission eventually returned two reports - a majority and a minority report. The majority report, while admitting that contraception could be immoral, argued that there could also be circumstances where it should not be considered so. The minority report, on the other hand, argued that contraception violated the end of marriage and of sexual intercourse in marriage; that it was against a solidly held teaching of the church over the centuries, and that anything to the contrary would amount to saying that the church had been in error on this matter all through its existence and had led people to error through its teachings.

Pope Paul VI deliberated on these two texts for three years, from 1965 to 1968. Meanwhile, the world awaited his response as the supreme pastor of the church. This response came on July 25, 1968 in the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, whose fiftieth anniversary we celebrate this year. *Humanae Vitae* upheld the ancient teaching of the church against contraception by teaching that “each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life” (no. 11). It argued that the basis of this doctrine is “the inseparable connection, established by God, which man on his own may not break, between the unity significance and the procreative significance which are inherent to the marital act” (no. 12). Here the Pope was arguing that when a man and a woman are engaged in the act of sexual intercourse, they are united in one body. In this one act they realize several important goods such as pleasure, intimacy, and the like, and legitimately so. They must also not employ any artificial means to exclude the other essential good of marriage - children. The unity of bodies and the procreative goal cannot be separated from each other because God had willed their inseparability. Pope Paul VI believed that the issue of contraception must not just be viewed merely negatively as one of controlling birth. Rather, it must be considered on a much wider canvas, hence his preferred term, *responsible parenthood*. Responsible parenthood, in his words, “requires that husband and wife keeping a right order of priorities, recognize their own duties toward God, themselves, and human society” by taking into consideration several factors - economic, psychological, social, and personal in their quest to regulate the birth of their children. It means that sometimes they could have more children or they could space the birth of their children or even refrain from having children altogether according to their personal situations. Such a decision must

\[ \text{“all actions before or after sexual intercourse, specifically intended to prevent procreation whether as means or an end”} \]
however be taken in accordance with “moral law.” Thus, husbands and wives “are not free to act as they choose the transmitting of human life, as if it were wholly up to them to decide what is the right course to follow” (no. 10). The Pope suggests various means of birth control. One is abstinence and the other is natural family planning (NFP). In recommending NFP, the Pope stated that “God has wisely ordered the laws of nature and the incidents of fertility in such a way that successive births are already naturally spaced through the inherent operation of these laws” (no. 11). It was left, therefore, to married couples in the exercise of their duty as responsible parents, using their reason to discern “the biological laws that apply to human persons” (no. 10). Part of responsible parenthood is the awareness of these biological processes and the respect for their proper functioning. On the contrary, the Pope also lists various means of birth control that he considered unlawful or immoral. These included direct abortion, even for therapeutic reasons, direct intervention in the “generative process already begun,” direct sterilization, and “all actions before or after sexual intercourse, specifically intended to prevent procreation whether as means or an end” (no. 14). In no. 17 of the encyclical, the Pope speaks of a contraceptive mentality which was a consequence of the widespread availability and use of contraception. He argued that the widespread use and availability of contraception could “lower moral standards, promote lax morals among the young, turn women into objects of sexual gratification, and could be misused by unscrupulous public authority” (no. 17). All this is to say, that there would be little or no moral restraint regarding sexual activity for many unscrupulous persons who would want to exploit others for their own selfish ends.

There are other aspects to Humanae Vitae than the discussion on birth control. For example, the text contains a rich theology of marriage and family. Married love originates from God, is not the chance of blind evolution, is part of God’s loving plan for humanity, offers the couple the vocation of being cooperators in that divine loving plan of humanity, and represents the union of Christ and his church. He lists several characteristics of married love. It is human, total, faithful, and exclusive of all other until death, and fecund in that it “goes beyond the loving exchange of husband and wife to bring new life into being.” Much of the material on this issue is a carry-over from Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes, 48-52). It shows how much the Encyclical aimed to be part of the renewal of doctrine and pastoral life that Vatican II was about in the church. However, it is the teaching on birth control which has rightly given this Encyclical its name recognition.

Reception

The reaction that followed the publication of Humanae Vitae was like an earthquake of the most intense form. Many theologians, in groups or as individuals, reacted with caution or with open hostility to the papal text. One of the most notable reactions came in an op-ed, “The Washington Declaration,” in the New York Times signed by over 600 Catholic theologians who questioned the Pope’s authority to teach authoritatively on a matter of natural law, but especially in this regard, the conclusion he drew based on natural law on the birth control issue. The Washington Declaration all but gave theologians total oversight of magisterial pronouncements by insisting that it was for theologians to evaluate magisterial teachings to ascertain their soundness. It argued
that *Humanae Vitae* does not belong to the infallible magisterium of the church, rather to the noninfallible teaching magisterium and thus was reformable. Perhaps and more importantly, the Washington Declaration considers *Humanae Vitae* erroneous on three grounds: ecclesiology, natural law, and tradition. The encyclical portrays a narrow view of the church whereby the bishops and the pope took a stand that was contrary to the views of most Catholic theologians and a sizeable number of the laity. It was, according to the Washington Declaration, a break with the recent tradition on marriage, family, and sexuality which they believed the Council had initiated, and it read too much into natural law, in a way that ignored “the multiple forms of natural law theory… and the fact that competent philosophers come to different conclusions on this very question…”

Individual theologians, like Charles Curran who had himself even before the publication of *Humanae Vitae* started to orchestrate dissent on the Church’s traditional teaching on birth control, now intensified the dissent on the matter, focusing on the conclusions of *Humane Vitae*. Other notable theologians of the day, such as Richard McCormick, Joseph Fuchs, and Bernard Häring joined in the dissent in various forms. To calm the situation, several Episcopal Conferences issued statements in which they tried to clarify the papal teaching while urging obedience to it from theologians and the lay faithful alike. Paul VI’s birth control encyclical ran head on against a powerful climate of opinion both within and outside of the church, which for various reasons believed it was time to change the church’s teaching on the matter. And because the encyclical did not meet the political and theological litmus test of this theological and secular elite, it seemed dead on arrival. It will always be an open question whether the impact of the encyclical would have been different had it been received with a more open mind than was the case.

**Humane Vitae and Post-Vatican II Moral Theology**

The impact of *Humane Vitae* on Catholic moral theology in the post-Vatican II church has been enormous, and some would say, not all together, salutary. Recall that moral theology, even before the publication of *Humane Vitae*, had come under scrutiny at Vatican II by the Conciliar Fathers who, dissatisfied with the moral theology of the manuals, had urged its renewal. The effort at renewal had barely begun when *Humane Vitae* was published. Its publication hijacked the renewal process in many ways and the questions surrounding the content of the encyclical became the basis for the discussion of moral theology for the next forty years or so. Moral theology became obsessed with questions about objective and non-objective moral norms, the authority of the Pope to teach authoritatively on matters of natural law and his authority to determine moral norms, the extent of these norms in general, the role of circumstances, whether Scripture contained any moral truths that could be found nowhere else, and of course the question of dissent. This latter point, that is, dissent from official church teaching, became, as it were, the default mode from which many moral theologians operated and through which they challenged the credibility of the church as a moral teacher. It was no longer easy in moral theology to know where a legitimate quest for truth and scholarly insight began; the desire...
to become an alternative magisterium in the church took over. Too much pastoral energy was spent on internal squabbles concerning these matters, important as they may be. Meanwhile as the world moved on, new questions were being raised which demanded close attention from the church through its moral theological experts and tradition. At least, this was the feeling of Pope John Paul II that led to his issuing the landmark encyclical on moral theology in 1993. John Paul II’s stated aim in this text was “to set forth …the principles of moral theology based upon Scripture and the living Apostolic Tradition, and at the same time to shed light on the presuppositions and consequences of dissent which that teaching has met” in recent years.\(^\text{17}\) In an article he published soon after the Council, the German theologian, Josef Fuchs, summarized the Council’s injunction for the renewal of moral theology in these words:

The Council requires that moral theology shall be taught not primarily as a code of moral principles. It must be presented as unfolding, a revelation and explanation of the joyful message, the good news of Christ’s call to us, of the vocation of believers in Christ. This means that Christ and our being-in-Christ are to be center and focus; the fundamental characteristic of Christian morality is a call, a vocation, rather than a law. Christian morality is therefore, responsive in character; it is a morality for Christians; its exalted nature must be made clear in the manner of its presentation.\(^\text{18}\)

The debate on *Humanae Vitae*, on the contrary, helped orchestrate a situation in moral theology today where, according to Pope John Paul II, especially in matters sexual, theologians devoted a lot of attention trying to show that Christian revelation contributed nothing new or unique to morality. The quotation above was from Josef Fuchs before he turned his attention to the debates occasioned by *Humanae Vitae* and thus to denying that there was a distinct Christian morality either of sex or anything else. Fuchs seems to suggest that the renewal the Council decreed could have been more theologically and christologically oriented.

**Recent Echoes**

*Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love) the post-synodal Exhortation of Pope Francis on the family, has unwittingly resurrected several of the key contentions generated by *Humanae Vitae*, especially among those within the hierarchy and the theological community who remember the post-*Humanae Vitae* debates and who have followed the impact of these debates on Catholic theology and on Catholic moral discourse. Chief among these are the questions whether there are absolutely binding norms, and whether norms considered binding in the past such as the absolute prohibition of divorce from an otherwise valid marriage are subject to change due to circumstances or the subjective intentions of the moral agent. Put another way, the issue is whether there are settled moral truths which the church in faithfulness to its texts must hold and continue to teach as binding in season...
and out of season and under every circumstance. Some people, while praising *Amoris Laetitia* on many counts, believe it has left this aspect of Catholic moral thought open to unacceptable interpretations and contrary to the teachings of recent magisterium, especially of Pope John Paul II. Some others believe it provides a needed re-assessment of the role of individual consciences and intentions in determining moral rightness or wrongness. The ghost of *Humanae Vitae* lives on.

**Humanae Vitae Fifty Years After: A Reflection**

No one reading this text should make the mistake of thinking that Catholic moral theology after Vatican II and after *Humanae Vitae* has been, in the famous phrase of Paul Ramsey, “a wasteland of moral relativism.” On the contrary, *Humanae Vitae* injected a vibrancy into Catholic moral discourse that was not there before, or at least not as widespread. People got in on the act who had never had a voice or had been inclined to participate very vigorously in matters of moral theological concern in the church. Alasdair McIntyre often spoke of a living tradition as one in which there is continuous debate as to what constitutes the nature and telos of that tradition. In this regard, Catholic moral theology is a vibrant living tradition of moral discourse in which the goods which constitute the tradition are constantly under debate to arrive at a better clarification of truth. In the end, the debate is about how the community is trying to see how best to live up to its foundational ethos in a world which is coming up continuously with new challenges for the faith.

The debate on birth control as more particularly about sex, sexuality, and subjects related to it evoke several hard questions that the Christian community must face regarding the sexual climate of our times. First, does, and can, Christianity teach any normatively binding truths about human sexuality? If so, what are these truths and how do we know them? Secondly, is there a right and wrong use or expression of human sexuality? Again, how do we know these, and on what grounds do we know them? Thirdly, does Scripture have any significance or teach anything authoritatively on these issues? Fourthly, what can human experience in general contribute to the way the church formulates its teaching around human sexuality, especially, in this case, birth control? These are ongoing questions to which there are no easy answers, even fifty years after *Humanae Vitae*.

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**Endnotes**


2 Quoted in Odozor, Paulinus, *Moral Theology in an Age of Renewal, A Study of the Cath-
The ancient Egyptians conceived the first known pregnancy test. As it was explained by the worldwide renowned Egyptologist Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt in her book, *L'heritage fabuleux de l'Egypte (the fabulous Heritage of Egypt)*, women were moistening a sample of barley and emmer wheat with their urine every day. If the barley grew it would mean that the expected child would be a boy; if the emmer wheat grew, it would mean that it is a girl. If none of both grew, it would mean that the woman is not pregnant. The efficiency of the test has been confirmed by modern science. Indeed, the urine of non-pregnant women prevents barley from growing up. Traces of condoms were found around 1350 BCE in Egypt. Condom was composed of colored linen soaked in olive oil. It was used on the mummies by embalmers, but we do not know if it was done for sacred or sexual reasons. We also know about condoms made from intestinal membranes of sheep, especially used to prevent infectious diseases. To prevent a pregnancy, a birth control pill is mostly used. It consists of hormones (estrogens) meant to inhibit one part of the brains (the hypothalamic-pituitary complex), and then prevent the fetus’ growth. The ancient Egyptians seemed to have understood that because they were using hand-made pills. Grinding pomegranate grains to make some powder, they were making small contraceptive cones with the help of wax. Indeed, pomegranate contains natural estrogen! And that is not all! Egyptians were using some creams that we can compare to modern spermicides. Almost 3800 years ago, crocodile or elephant excrements mixed with honey, dates, or other substances were used in the ointments and creams prescribed by Egyptian medical doctors. [shows that] often we have improved already existing techniques instead of inventing new ones. Translated from French to English by Lisapo ya Kama Source : http://leplus.nouvelobs.com/contribution/2227-contraception-les-egyptiens-

See, Susan Raga, Nine forms of birth control used in the ancient world mentalFloss.com/article/83685/9-forms-birth-control-used-ancient-world


See Brian Clowes, “What is Historical Church Teaching on Contraception? in https://
www.hli.org/resources/historical-church-teaching-contraception/.

11 See the exhaustive list of references provided by Brian Clowes, “What is Historical Church teaching on Contraception: https://www.hli.org/resources/historical-church-teaching-contraception/ Accessed August 2, 2018 Origen of Alexandria (185254), Against Heresies; Tertullian, Apology, 9:8 (circa 197); The Soul, 25,27 (circa 210); St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (circa 339397), Hexameron, 5.18.58; Athenagoras of Athens, Letter to Marcus Aurelius in 177, Legatio pro Christianis (Supplication for the Christians), 35; St. Augustine (354-430), De Nuptiis et Concupiscencia (On Marriage and Concupiscence), 1.17; St. Basil the Great, First Canonical Letter, Canon 2 (circa 374); Caesarius, Bishop of Arles (470-543), Sermons, 1.12; Clement of Alexandria (circa 150220), Christ the Educator (Catholic University of America Press, 2010). St. Jerome, Letter to Eustochium, 22.13 (circa 396); St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, 24 (circa 391); Hippolytus, Refutation of All Heresies (circa 228); Lactantius, Divine Institutes 6:20 (circa 307).

12 Pope Pius XI, Casti Connubii. Vatican City: 1930, no. 56.


14 “Washington Declaration” quoted in Odozor, Moral Theology in an Age of Renewal, 58.

15 See a compilation of many of these letters by Phillipe Delhaye, Jan Grootaers and Gustave Thils in Pour Relire Humanae Vitae: Declarations épiscopales du monde entier. Gembloux, Belgium, 1970.

16 See Vatican II, Optatam Totius, 16.


A Leap of Faith. What is Conversion? A Psychologist’s Perspective

Introduction

What is religious conversion? What are the motives that prompt people to convert? And what impact does the process of conversion have on people’s mental health? I have spent many hours reading and reflecting on these questions for the last two decades. Like other people interested in the varieties of religious experience and identity, I had pondered these questions from time to time, but my interest in this issue was really piqued by some of the controversies surrounding the canonization of Edith Stein in October of 1998. That same year, Stephen Dubner published a memoir entitled, Turbulent Souls: A Catholic Son’s Return to His Jewish Family (New York: Harper Collins, 1998) which chronicles the dramatic conversions of Dubner’s Jewish parents to Catholicism (that occurred long before his birth), and his own conversion back to Judaism as an adult.

An additional stimulus to my reflections was provided by the fact that by 2000 I was actively researching the life of Erik Erikson, a famous Jewish psychoanalyst who very nearly converted to Lutheranism. I was struck by the similarities and differences between Erikson’s spiritual journey and that of his younger contemporary, Karl Stern, a prominent Jewish psychiatrist in Montréal who converted to Catholicism and chronicled his spiritual journey in a book entitled, The Pillar of Fire (1951). As a result, my biography of Erikson, entitled Erik Erikson and the American Psyche: Ego, Ethics and Evolution (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007) dwelt at some length on Erikson’s engagement with Lutheran Christianity. And by a happy coincidence, I found that many of Erikson’s ideas about identity and human development were readily applicable to Stern’s lengthy and often anguished conversion process in my next book, A Forgotten Freudian: The Passion of Karl Stern (Karnac, 2016).

What follows, however, is not a meditation on Erikson’s ideas, or a discussion of any one person’s spiritual journey, much less an attempt to summarize all the controversies and complexities that surround the issue of conversion in the psychological literature. Far from it! It is simply an attempt to distill some of the insights and ideas I gleaned from reading many first-person conversion narratives, and sampling large
swaths of the literature on conversion in the fields of psychiatry, the psychology and sociology of religion, comparative religion and European history.

Awakenings

From the standpoint of steadfast believers, conversion is usually defined as a process that leads someone to grasp – or at any rate, to glimpse - an eternal and immutable truth, and conduct their life accordingly, or one that leads the person astray, should they happen to abandon the “right path.” After all, every religion tends to privilege its own belief system as “true,” or nearer the truth than others. But that is a luxury that psychologists who study religion simply cannot afford. Why? Well, consider the following. When believers share their findings or beliefs about the meaning or nature of conversion, they tend to do so with other believers who constitute their primary audience and reference group. Psychologists, by contrast, must share their findings with other psychologists, who may not share their theological frame of reference, or indeed, have any religious convictions at all. Besides, science provides its practitioners with no relevant or plausible criteria by which to adjudicate the rival claims of different religions in this regard, so even if the psychologist is a person of faith, when investigating a phenomenon like conversion, the psychologist (qua psychologist) must place all spiritual and faith traditions on “a level playing field,” irrespective of their personal beliefs or convictions. Otherwise, their methodology will be deemed suspect or biased by their colleagues, and their findings will never be persuasive to other psychologists or to practitioners of other human sciences, like anthropology, sociology, history and so on.

So, bracketing off a religious community’s claims to be in sole possession of the truth is a methodological necessity for psychologists in this field. Once this step has been taken, their next task is to bracket off all local and parochial variations, and to look for overarching themes or “general structures” - commonalities that occur repeatedly across time, place, and religious affiliation, which accurately describe (and may help explain) the phenomenon in question in generic human terms.

Comparative religion is a vast and growing field, but even in psychology alone, the literature on conversion is vast, and often somewhat misleading. Why? Because many authors assume that the act of conversion – the public avowal of a newfound faith, accompanied by solemn ceremonies and celebrations to welcome the “new arrival” - is invariably preceded by an epiphany or “conversion experience,” which the New Testament describes with the Greek word metanoia. The implicit model for such depictions often appears to be Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. One reason that this misconception is so widespread is the popularity of what are commonly called “conversion narratives” – first person accounts of the needs, feelings, and experiences that lead a specific person to embrace a particular faith. People who take the time and trouble to compose memoirs like these generally have had an extraordinary experience prior to their conversion that they wish to share with others, either to bear witness to their faith, or as a
tool of persuasion, or perhaps just to assure themselves and others of the reality of spiritual experience. Their experience of ecstatic illumination may be relatively brief, lasting only an evening (e.g., William James) or longer, lasting several days (e.g., Karl Stern.) Either way, if they are gifted writers – and as it happens, many of them are - narratives like these can be very moving and memorable documents.

However, history demonstrates that this “road to Damascus” template for conversion is oversimplified and misleading. It produces generalizations born of over-reliance on one genre of religious writing, and perhaps a good deal of wishful thinking. In actual fact, people repudiate their ancestral faith and/or embrace a new religious identity for all kinds of reasons, as we shall see.

So, to get a little closer to the issue at hand, we would be wise to differentiate between conversion – which is a very public affair - and a religious awakening, which is usually an “inner” or private experience, sometimes barely communicable in language.

A religious awakening often occurs when an individual reaches an existential impasse or crisis of some kind, and – usually after prolonged reflection – suddenly feels transported out of their normal, everyday way of “being in the world,” elevated, as it were, to a different plane of consciousness. For those inclined toward pantheism, or an immanent conception of the Deity, the transformation they experience and describe entails a heightened sense of the sacred that suffuses the entire world, God in nature, everywhere, in everyone. For those whose concept of the Deity is more transcendent, it usually entails a feeling of suddenly having been called or in some sense claimed by God – a feeling of being personally addressed by God that is utterly compelling. Either way, however, a person who has had a religious awakening of this kind feels liberated, free of doubt and anxiety – at least temporarily - and suddenly in possession of “truths” about human existence that were inaccessible or obscure to them beforehand. Though the ecstasy or fervor of the moment may wear off, in time, a religious awakening like this is usually a transformative and life changing experience, one that gives the person’s life new meaning, purpose and direction.

A third kind of religious awakening, common in Gnosticism, is in some sense the opposite of the pantheist variety. Instead of experiencing God in nature, everywhere, in everyone, the person has what I call a negative epiphany, in which the experience of God’s absence, rather than his presence, envelopes the person with a sudden (and sometimes shattering) intensity. Whereas the first two types of religious experience tend to evoke feelings of awe and reverence, a negative epiphany elicits feelings of revulsion and dread. As Hans Jonas, author of The Gnostic Religion, points out, God, in these scenarios, is either a deus absconditus, a hidden God who is indifferent to human suffering, or worse yet, a malevolent “archōn” (often equated with the biblical Jehovah!) who imposes his laws arbitrarily on human subjects on the material plane, while masquerading as the Supreme Deity, who goes by an entirely different (Greek or Latin) name, like Abraxas or Pleroma, etc. In Gnostic lore, the task of the newly awakened soul is to hearken to an “alien voice” that alerts him (or her) to their fallen and degraded estate, and summons them from
spiritual captivity to their true spiritual destiny and home, by extricating the soul from the body and the evil realm of matter, that is governed by an arrogant and arbitrary demiurge who is hostile to their spiritual quest.

Obviously, negative epiphanies are rarer than the first two varieties, and a fuller exploration of their roots and ramifications is beyond the scope of this essay. But with all that said, it is also important to note that not all religious awakenings of a theistic or pantheistic nature lead to conversions, or to the public embrace of a new religious identity. In some instances, the person who has had an experience of this (positive) kind may embrace the religion that they (or their parents) abandoned in their childhood with renewed commitment and fervor - a very common occurrence in Orthodox Jewish communities, for example. Or alternatively, they may feel called upon to create a new religion, one which may – and often does – draw inspiration from more than one earlier faith tradition, for example, Mani, Mohammad, Guru Nanak, Bahá’u’lláh. Or again, they may become religious reformers, dissidents or innovators, who are critical of the reigning religious “establishment,” for one reason or another, and are determined to renew or revive their religious communities. In the process, they may end up creating new communities or denominations, and new modes of piety, albeit still within the parameters of their ancestral faith, for example, Martin Luther, the Ba’al Shem Tov, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Tolstoy, Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi.

Finally, the least common outcome of a religious awakening - one which may be a purely twentieth century European variant - is a strange kind of religious stalemate, in which the person feels a strong temptation to convert to a new faith, yet deliberately refrains from doing so. Though they are the least common of all, perhaps, cases like these are among the most interesting and least understood. Good examples of this before World War II were Jews like Henri Bergson, Franz Werfel and Simone Weil who made an “inner migration” from Judaism to Christianity, but refused to convert publicly lest they betray their families, neighbors and many innocent brethren whose very lives were threatened by anti-Semitic persecution. After the war, psychoanalyst Erik Erikson found himself in a very similar position – having embraced Jesus, but refusing to be baptized out of respect for the dead. Hugh Schonfield, author of *The Passover Plot*, was even more unusual than his contemporaries. In 1938, when he had his moment of ecstatic illumination, he was convinced that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, but like the elderly Tolstoy, he still did not believe in the divinity of Jesus, and so was never tempted to convert to Christianity.

In *The Pillar of Fire* (1951), Karl Stern, a convert from Judaism himself, devoted several pages to exploring the dilemma of Jews like these, albeit from a theological, rather than a psychological perspective (Stern, 1951). While not minimizing the poignancy of their inner conflicts, he gently scolded them for their lack of clarity or conviction. Unlike Stern, I believe that these poor souls had enormous integrity, and are entirely worthy of our respect, whether we are Jewish, Christian, or something else entirely. When you ponder the horrors they anticipated, experienced, or narrowly escaped themselves, and the anguish...
they endured for the sake of their convictions, it dawns on you that theirs was not the easy path. Yes, they courted ostracism and disapproval from both religious communities, but they were no less spiritual, sincere, or honorable people for living patiently with these divided loyalties.

A Leap of Faith? Conversion in Social and Historical Perspective

Just as a religious awakening can lead a person down several different paths, the motives that prompt people to convert, or embrace a new religious identity, are extremely diverse. Many are not even religious, really. One example, which is rare nowadays, but was commonplace in medieval Christendom and the Muslim umma, are forced conversions, where the convert is faced with a choice of embracing the religion of his (or her) captors or overlords, or embracing martyrdom, should they refuse. In such instances, the motive to convert is inextricably intertwined with the person's will to live. Reluctant converts like these often hold onto as much of their ancestral faith as they can in secret, and often end up blending the beliefs and rituals of their ancestral faith with their new publicly avowed religion, like the semi-pagan inhabitants of Britain and Europe in the “Dark Ages,” or the Jewish/Christian conversos of Spain, Portugal, and Holland, who were hounded by the Inquisition, many of whom fled to the “New World” in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Another common motive for conversion is the desire to marry someone of another faith. If an interfaith marriage is out of the question, one party may seek admittance into their beloved's religious community. It is difficult to generalize about cases like these. Sometimes, they are motivated by love, pure and simple. But often other, opportunistic motives enter into the picture, consciously or otherwise – for example, the desire to distance oneself from one’s original community, or the hope that one’s offspring will enjoy more freedom, greater status and have greater economic opportunities than they might otherwise enjoy, or both.

Another motive for conversion, which is still fairly common in East Asia, is prevalent among the Dalits in India, who embrace Buddhism, Islam, or Christianity because these religions do not regard them, their families, and their ancestors as sub-human or “untouchable.” They believe that their present social status is not the result of “bad karma” or some hereditary taint or degeneracy. Conversions like these are seldom prompted by a religious awakening - which is, by all accounts, an involuntary experience – but are usually the result of a deliberate choice, and a perfectly intelligible (and eminently healthy) desire to improve one’s mental health by affiliating with a community that treats one with greater dignity and respect.

Another motive for conversion that was commonplace in late eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe and America concerns people whose choice of a new religious affiliation or identity was facilitated precisely by their lack of faith, and their simultaneous
desire to gain acceptance into the cultural mainstream. The most famous example of this kind of conversion is probably that of the celebrated poet, playwright, and essayist Heinrich Heine (1797-1856). Heine was born in Düsseldorf to parents who were Jewish, but not particularly observant. Though he attended Hebrew school, learning a smattering of Hebrew, most of his early education was in Catholic schools. Düsseldorf was under French occupation from the time of his birth until 1815, so he spent his formative years under French influence, and was eternally grateful for the Napoleonic Code, which permitted Jews to participate fully in civil society and the professions. Later on, the Prussian government restored anti-Semitic restrictions on the Jewish community, so he converted to Lutheranism in 1825 as “the ticket for admission to European culture.”

Heine was an extremely gifted poet and a brilliant satirist, and perhaps, on the whole, quite a decent human being. But he did not possess a shred of piety, Jewish, Christian, or otherwise, and his motives for conversion were purely secular - the desire to avoid discrimination and Jew-baiting. Lacking the consolations of faith, he eventually regretted his decision to convert, because as he later discovered, this empty gesture did little or nothing to deter the anti-Semitic taunts and abuse directed at him by his critics as he became more famous and successful.

At the other extreme from converts like Heine are converts like Karl Stern (1906-1975) who converted from what one of Stern’s critics called “a raging hunger to believe” – a trait that he shared with his younger contemporary, Cardinal Jean Marie (Aaron) Lustiger (1926 -2007). Like Heine, Stern was born Jewish and suffered through a lax and indifferent religious education as a child, only to come under a good deal of Catholic influence. (He was born in rural Bavaria, a Catholic enclave, at the time.) Having experimented with Orthodox Judaism, Marxism, and Zionism as a youth and young adult, Stern finally converted to Catholicism in 1943, but only after dithering on the doorstep of the church for more than a decade. Unlike Heine, however, Stern’s piety was deep and genuine. He had an epiphany in 1938, while living in London, and privately embraced Jesus long before he identified publicly as a Christian.

But Stern is not “typical” of this type of convert. On the contrary, most people who convert to another faith because of unrequited spiritual longings are not fortunate enough to have an ecstatic religious experience of this kind. Sadly, however, I cannot discern why some people in this category have experiences of this nature, while others do not. The ones I am intimately familiar with - all from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries - were all sensitive, spiritually anguished, highly intelligent and accomplished people - mostly adult males, ranging in age from their twenties to their fifties. But the farther back you go in history, the more variability you find. Male and female, educated and uneducated, rich and poor, young and old. It is difficult to discern a clear pattern here, that is, one that covers the whole gamut of human history and experience.

Nevertheless, even in the absence of a compelling or transformative religious awakening, many converts in this category are acutely disappointed in the religious communities they were born into, which have failed to meet their spiritual needs in one way or another. They may have undergone a religious education that was too harsh, too
lax, or utterly uninspiring, and found out later, as adults, that their religion – be it Judaism, Christianity, or the Church of Latter Day Saints – “makes no sense” to them. In short, rightly or wrongly, they see their newfound faith – and the people who share it – as more rational, or as less irrational, hypocritical, or intolerant than the faith they abandoned. People like these are in search of a theological perspective that gives them a feeling of cosmological coherence, a moral universe that “makes sense.”

Another, more troubling motive for conversion is hatred and self-hatred. Obviously, converts who opt for a faith that “makes more sense” may harbor ambivalent feelings toward the faith or denomination they were born into. But they seldom vilify or condemn it outright. Though cases like these are comparatively rare nowadays, there is also a certain type of convert whose main motive for converting is prompted by deep disappointment and/or disgust with his (or her) previous religious community. He (or she) is less motivated by the desire to live, to improve their mental health or to thrive in the cultural mainstream – all of which are defensible motives, even in the absence of deep religious conviction - than by a desire for revenge on those who reared them, a desire that may or may not be conscious. The hidden injuries of childhood and adolescence often play a very large role in their motivation. Among Jews in this category, the internalization of prevailing anti-Semitic prejudices usually plays a significant role as well. Suddenly, all those hateful stereotypes and taunts about Jews that haunted one’s childhood and adolescence seem fitting and necessary, even (or especially) when applied to one’s own family and former friends, as adults.

Alternatively, there are also instances where the convert’s newfound “faith” apparently gives them license to unleash the hateful side of their natures on a wide range of potential targets – Muslims, Jews, Catholics, Masons, Blacks, Whites, sexual and gender minorities, communists, humanists, et cetera. Though it may masquerade as genuine piety or religious fervor, a conversion rooted in hatred or self-hatred is always morbid. It should be greeted with the utmost suspicion by all concerned. Indeed, conversions like these should be vigorously deplored and discouraged, because they can do nothing to improve the person’s mental health or to elevate or deepen their spiritual life.

Finally, there is another category of converts whose motives for conversion are primarily unconscious. In other words, they have a “hidden agenda,” one that is hidden from themselves, as well as from others. Converts like these can be found among all of the types already listed above. For example, a man whose life is threatened may persuade himself (temporarily) that he believes Jesus is the Messiah, or Mohammad the last of the Prophets, only to recant later, when the danger has vanished or subsided. Why? Because his life was at stake, and in order to convince his persecutors of his sincerity, he had to persuade himself first! Similarly, a woman who wishes to convert to relieve her unborn children from social stigma, or to enhance their educational and economic opportunities, may insist that these desires are irrelevant to her newfound faith, because this risks arousing...
feelings of mistrust and disapproval from members of the community she wishes to join, and because she cannot tolerate thinking of herself as a hypocrite. Along slightly different lines, a person who consciously craves a deeper sense of cosmological coherence or a theological frame of reference that “makes sense” may also be motivated by a measure of unconscious grandiosity, or a desire to demonstrate and assert their spiritual superiority over their parents, and their parents’ family and friends.

In fairness, of course, most people who convert have “mixed motives,” that is, are motivated by more than one desire or consideration, some of which they seldom admit to themselves, for a variety of reasons. Indeed, I am convinced that if we eliminated people like these from the field entirely, there would hardly be anyone left standing! But I am not talking about cases like that. At this juncture, I am referring only to cases where the dominant motive for conversion is unconscious, even when it is quite evident to others. Unless they have clinical training and/or extant supervision, clergy should refrain from probing too deeply in cases like these. On the contrary, they would be well advised to refer the potential convert for counselling or psychotherapy before the conversion process gets well underway.

Conclusion

So, to summarize the preceding, a religious awakening need not necessarily result in conversion. Nor must the public embrace of a new faith be preceded by the kind of ecstatic religious experience celebrated in conversion narratives. On the contrary, cases like these, while not uncommon, are not the norm, despite the moving testimonials of many converts. Unfortunately, we lack the data to ascertain how often these different phenomena – religious awakenings, on the one hand, and actual conversions on the other - are correlated in any given period of history, including our own. And though we can document the emergence or disappearance of certain types of conversion in different cultural settings, we cannot reliably ascertain how often all converts are motivated primarily by one reason or another, or by some combination of motives. We can only offer educated guesses, because the data that would enable us to quantify any of this are completely lacking. But in the absence of such information, we do know that people who have religious awakenings (of one sort or another) often take paths that do not result in conversion (as people commonly understand that term.) And conversely, we know that many people who do convert do so for a variety of reasons, even in the absence of a compelling religious experience or of deep religious conviction. Of course, this does not mean that their motives, whether conscious or unconscious, are necessarily trivial or reprehensible, unless they are rooted in hatred or self-hatred masquerading as piety.

Finally, and in light of the preceding, we are now in a position to address the question “Is conversion good for people’s mental health?” That depends on the individual and the kind of spiritual counsel and support they encounter along their way. If the process
of conversion makes the convert into a better person – someone less fearful, conflicted, confused, and ashamed, someone who is kinder, more patient and generous, more hopeful, helpful and connected to others, then answer is “yes.” If not, then the answer is simply “no,” irrespective of the church they join, the rituals they perform, or the doctrines they profess to believe.

Recommended Reading


Based on a dissertation supervised by Rudolph Bultmann long before the discovery and translation of the Nag Hammadi Library, this book remains the best introduction to a rare kind of religious awakening and its cultural-historical repercussions.


Fr. David Neuhaus, SJ, currently the Patriarchal Vicar of Hebrew-speaking Catholics in Jerusalem, himself a convert from Judaism, compares the conversions of Edith Stein, Eugenio Zolli and Karl Stern, and reflects on the conflicts and controversies that accompanied them.


Concordia University Professor Sherry Simon compares Karl Stern’s conversion to Catholicism (and its impact on Montreal’s Jewish community) with author A. M. Klein’s attitude toward conversion, embodied in his book The Second Scroll, whose hero, Melech Davidson, develops a profound admiration for Christian art, and flirts with the idea of conversion, only to reject it, finally.


An intellectual biography of an influential psychoanalyst and developmental psychologist whose leanings toward Christianity and rumored abandonment of Judaism precipitated a firestorm of controversy in the mid-1970s.

**Introduction**

The twist in history from Origen’s universal salvation in Christ\(^1\) to the popular belief, “*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*” (outside the church, there is no salvation) that held sway as a standard Catholic soteriological argument\(^2\) for centuries, is perplexing. Origen arrived at the doctrine of universal salvation from his theology of the common origin of all people in God and the possibility of all people to attain salvation\(^3\) because God became human, thereby making it possible for all people to aspire toward God for eternal redemption. Origen is credited as the original proponent of the doctrine of *apokatastasis*, which teaches “the final restoration of all intelligent creatures to friendship with God.”\(^4\) Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa are also known to have subscribed to similar views as Origen on this doctrine. All these patristic theologians applied 1 Cor 15:24-28\(^5\) scriptural text in support of their doctrine of universal salvation or *apokatastasis*. While Origen believed and taught that redemption is thanks to the redemptive work of Jesus, the Logos of God, he equally held and taught that this salvation in Christ is not restricted to certain people or people in a certain age. Therefore, he held firmly that the redemptive mission of Christ was active even in Moses and to people outside the reach of Christianity.\(^6\)

The nineteenth century presents Christianity, especially the Catholic religion, as deeply challenged by theological, social, political, economic, and philosophical ideologies and upheavals. Those challenges shook the foundation of the Catholic Church’s teaching of “*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.” The church initially responded with a strong exclusive theological position, which not only rejected the idea of religious freedom but also reaffirmed the church’s
age-long exclusivism and denial of the salvific merits of all non-Christian religious faith traditions. However, a relieving development has emerged from most mainline Christian churches today, including the Catholic Church, as they have become less exclusive in their interpretation of salvation. But many of them are still having issues with accepting religious pluralism as a de jure of God’s relationship with all peoples.7

This article will extrapolate Emmanuel Levinas’ philosophy of being to construct an acceptable Christian theology of inclusive religious pluralism, providing an authentic platform for successful interreligious encounter between Christians and people of other faith traditions. Levinas (1998) basically identifies two broad categories of beings: the “living being” and the “thinking being.” According to him, the “living being” conducts his or her affairs completely focused on his or herself with no recognition of the exterior, that is, others sharing the same space and domain with him or her. The “thinking being,” on the other hand, carries on with full recognition of the exterior. Levinas (1998a, pp. 25f)8 goes on to argue that the “living being” has a tendency of totalizing life in his or herself. For the “thinking being,” he writes, “In thinking, a being which situates itself in the totality is not absorbed into it. It exists in relationship with a totality, but remains here…” (Levinas, 1998a, 26). Down the stretch, this article will succinctly analyze the development of the theology of universal salvation, especially from the point of view of the Catholic Church, from the exclusivist position of the nineteenth century to the Second Vatican Council’s inclusivist position. This analysis ultimately intends to articulate the growing call by theologians for the acceptance of inclusive religious pluralism as a valid theological assumption, especially in support of ongoing interreligious dialogue between Christians and people of other faith traditions.

It is certainly logical to conclude that the paradigm of theological exclusivism, especially of the Catholic Church from the nineteenth century until the dawn of Second Vatican Council,9 fits into the category of a “living being” in Levinas’ philosophy of being. This conclusion is further amplified by the tendency of the church articulating herself as a totalizing institution, using terms like, the only ark of God, or subsistence of the one church of Christ in the Catholic Church, and “a single Catholic and apostolic church.”10 The totalizing tendency of Christianity and the Catholic Church in particular, however, faced lots of test and challenges with developments in the twentieth century.

After the end of World War II, Christians began to make considerable adjustments in their approach and understanding of the human society. A number of ecclesial historians attribute these adjustments as necessitated by the events of the time, namely, the Jewish Holocaust, the horror and devastation of World Wars I and II, the emergence of new nations who secured political independence from their previous colonial masters (Weigel & Royal, 1993, 51f and Gonzalez, 1987, 428f), and continued appreciation of the religious and theological relevance of non-Christian religions. Therefore, Christians were compelled to consider a different approach to the question of religious differences, religious freedom, and the social and soteriological importance of non-Christian religions. In the light of the new openness among Christians to review issues on the above subjects, it is only fair to prognosticate that Christians began to assume a new category of being, namely the “thinking being” of Levinas.
With epochal documents like the “Declaration of Religious Liberty” (coming out of World Council of Churches’ (WCC) Assembly in August 1948), the United Nations Bill of Rights in the fall of 1948, Pope John XXIII’s 1963 *Pacem in Terris* encyclical that endorsed universal freedom of religion, and Vatican II *Dignitatis Humanae* of 1965 on freedom of religion, the world witnessed a major paradigmatic shift in dialectic and theological assumption by Christians in favor of religious freedom as well as the eternal salvation of all God’s children.

It is certainly accurate to conclude that since the publishing of Paul VI’s Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* in 1964, the Catholic Church has pursued matters of interreligious dialogue with a sense of mission, vocation, and commitment. Subsequently, a number of official publications came out to further address the question of interreligious dialogue. Three such documents are: “The Attitude of the Catholic Church towards the Followers of Other Religious Traditions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission” (1984), *Redemptoris Missio* of John Paul II (1990), and “Dialogue and Proclamation” (1991). These three documents were issued during the pontificate of John Paul II. They are not simply accidental publications that emerged with time, but strong testimonies of the significance and value John Paul II attached to the issue of interreligious dialogue. He advocated better harmony and cordial engagements among world religions in search of a more peaceable world and he firmly believed in advancing the propagation of the Gospel by engaging other religions of the world in healthy interreligious dialogue.

**Postmodern Challenges and the Arguments for Inclusive Religious Pluralism in Christian Theology**

The impacts of globalization, postmodernism, and immigration have unquestionably expanded human communities beyond the confines of their original territorial and ideological frameworks. The advocacy and drift toward effective interreligious dialogue going on across the globe between major religions have intensified. It has become somewhat anachronistic to validate mono-culturalism and exclusivism as the acceptable order in diverse societies today. It is also becoming increasingly unacceptable to ignore, deny, or demean the existence of the other in many postmodern societies today. It appears that global communities are shifting from “living beings” to “thinking beings,” hence minimizing exclusive and totalizing tendency toward a more inclusive mentality as well as deeper understanding of the existence of all in “relationship with a totality” (Levinas, 1998a, 27).

As socially conscious and responsible beings, we humans have to consistently and consciously poke ourselves with the “unpleasant” presence of, interaction with, and knowledge of the other, as well as allow the other into our own worlds, with the hope that the more familiar we get with each other’s worldviews, idiosyncrasies, mannerisms, belief systems and cultural orientations, the less we feel unpleasant about each other and the better we get toward more harmony and collaboration in tackling common human
problems of hate, poverty, crime, war, racism, corruption, homelessness, ecological disasters, etc. Phan (2004, xx) asserts that effective dialogue is indispensable for attaining the kind of human knowledge of things that really matter for order, peace, and elimination of social evils in our current postmodern world. Such knowledge, according to him, is achieved “in a serious and thoughtful give-and-take of mutual learning and teaching, in a respectful and humble conversation with the tradition and the community of fellow seekers, in a word, in a genuine dialogue with the other, in which one’s own insights are humbly offered, the other’s wisdom gratefully appropriated, and the quest for truth is undertaken together in mutual respect and love.”

According to Ecclesiam Suam, no. 78 (Paul VI, 1964), interreligious dialogue is justifiable in the contemporary age because “It is demanded by the pluralism of society, and by the maturity man [and woman] has reached in this day and age.” It is in the light of this reasoning that the call for the acceptance of de jure religious pluralism is relevant and necessary for continued success in interreligious dialogue between Christians and people of other faith traditions. Most importantly, the tone of Ecclesiam Suam in the quote above calls for continued incarnational theology - a dynamic theological reflection, which embodies the reality of our times and expounds on the long-standing theology of universal salvation in Christ. In the current world of diversity and religious plurality, Christian theology has to avoid anachronism or failure to make its theology alive and relevant to its world and time.

However, for effective dialogue between Christians and people of different faith traditions to occur, it is imperative that Christians adopt appropriate worldviews that will most accommodate and promote dialogue among religions. There are typically three different worldviews: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.15 The recommendation of this study is for Christians to adopt a worldview of inclusive pluralism as the most effective worldview for promoting and advancing interreligious dialogue. Inclusive pluralism seeks to blend the best of inclusivism and pluralism. It is recommended because it honors and highlights the commonalities of religions as well as appreciates their differences.16 Adopting inclusive pluralism as a religious worldview puts Christians in the best position to harness the benefits of both inclusivism and pluralism, hence minimizing the reasons people reject either of the two standing alone as a worldview. Typically, inclusivism is criticized for being imperialistic and condescending toward the other, while pluralism is often rejected because it is likely to promote relativism.

The question of whether religious pluralism should be considered only as de facto (a
fact of life) or also as *de jure* (in principle) reality has been central to the debate on religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue. Many pluralist theologians, like Jacques Dupuis and Gerard O’Collins, have strongly weighed in on the question of *de jure* religious pluralism. Being a theologically charged question, Dupuis responds to it with a thorough theological focus and insight. According to Dupuis (2001, 254), the primary theological point that argues in favor of a *de jure* religious pluralism is that “it is not human beings who have first set out in search of God through their history; rather God has set out first to approach them and to trace for them the ‘ways’ over which they may find him.” A scriptural support for his argument comes from the text of the Letter to the Hebrews: “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and varied ways” (Heb. 1:1). Using this text, Dupuis argues that the covenant in Jesus Christ is not the only means God has used to communicate with his people. He affirms what is a common truth in theological history, namely, “God has made various covenants with humankind in history, before making a ‘new covenant’ with them in Jesus Christ.” Dupuis is of the opinion that the non-Christian religions are “gifts of God to the peoples of the world” (ibid.), since it was God who initiated those covenants in the first place. Therefore, Dupuis maintains that since these religions are products of God’s covenant with people in different cultures and at various times, the proper way to respond to the reality of religious pluralism in the world is not to reject it or question if it is part of God’s principle of communicating with his people, but to receive it gratefully as a positive factor that at the same time attests to the sovereign generosity with which God has manifested himself in many ways to humankind and to the manifold response that human beings have made to God’s self-revelation in different cultures.”

O’Collins, on his part, firmly maintains that the church does not exhaust the Kingdom of God, since the Kingdom of God encompasses all and is open to all humanity, including those outside the boundaries of Christianity (2008, 249-250). He further argues that in the New Testament “the incarnate, exalted, and omnipresent Christ was more or less equated with the Kingdom of God,” suggesting therefore, that Christ is as all-encompassing as the Kingdom of God. O’Collins, like Dupuis, is theologically convinced that Christ and his Spirit are intrinsically part of the lives of all people of faith, even if we cannot empirically substantiate it.

For any Christian who has come to appreciate the theological significance of *de jure* religious pluralism, it becomes theologically synchronic to contextualize the role of Christ and his divinity in the life and salvation of non-Christians. According to the Johannine account, Jesus said, “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). How then is Christ to be conceived as being part of the religious fulfillment or eternal salvation of peoples of non-Christian faith traditions? It is normative in the Christian theological concept of most mainline Christianity that Christ is the savior of all humankind, not only of Christians. The Second Vatican Council by its inclusive soteriology has already addressed and affirmed that people of non-Christian faith traditions do and will make it to heaven if they live godly lives, hence are beneficiaries of the same salvation Christians benefit by their faith orientation (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 16).
Addressing the role of Christ in the salvation of non-Christians, religious pluralists, like Dupuis and O’Collins, arrived at the conclusion of the theological assumption of “Pluralistic Inclusivism” or “Inclusive Religious Pluralism.” Dupuis assiduously held that Christians should approach *de jure* religious pluralism with the mindset of inclusivity. O’Collins, on his part, maintains that “innumerable people are drawn to God through Jesus, even though they may remain unaware of this role of Jesus” (2008, 259). Further on, O’Collins alludes to the impact of Christ and the Spirit in the lives of people of other faith traditions when he wrote of “the personal presence and power of Jesus and the Spirit, a presence and power that shapes the lives of millions of people who may never in their lifetime become aware of this invisible influence” (2008, p. 259). Suffice it to say, at this juncture, that Dupuis and O’Collins hinge their concept of inclusive religious pluralism primarily on the person and mystery of Christ. And their inclusive approach comes from their Christological theology which understands the Christic event as universally applicable, of cosmic dimensions, and absolutely divine (Dupuis, 1997, 18 and O’Collins 2008). This understanding and position is not meant to demean or minimize the importance of the prominent religious personality of other faith traditions. Rather it is a Christian way of affirming and validating the religious traditions of the other. It is similar to a Hindu’s appreciation of the Christian doctrine of Jesus Christ as God incarnate by equiparating that doctrine to Hindu’s understanding of the avatars of deities in the forms of Rama and Krishna. Hindus who reverence the importance of other faith traditions’ revered personalities convince themselves of the significance of such personalities by associating them with parallel ideas and personalities in their faith traditions. Therefore, inclusive religious pluralism for a Christian is a self-prescribed medication for validating the importance and significance of the living traditions of people of other faith traditions, using a model or parallel totally comprehensible to a Christian. For the most part, inclusive pluralist theologians from the Christian tradition (especially those I have referenced in this article), are not stating their position as an arrogant or smug attitude against people of other faith traditions, but an honest demonstration of their appreciation and recognition of the value of people of other faith traditions.

**Conclusion**

The old empires and absolute institutions either have disappeared or are merely shadows of their old selves. The philosophical underpinnings of freedom of religion and advocacy for dialogue in societies are among other things predicated on the understanding of free speech and honest articulation of one’s beliefs and religious practices. In the light of these, it is imperative for the existence of common forums, where different faith traditions are able to proudly and with integrity share the phenomenological foundations and principles of their religions.

The postmodern world challenges every religious philosophy to see itself no longer as a superior exclusive self, but a self that is more holistic in the summation of all. The
other becomes relevant not as an opponent to be defeated but as a collaborator toward the common good. The other gets meaning no longer as the undesirable enemy that must be eliminated but as an indispensable companion on life’s challenging journey, with whom to walk to find the best path to world peace. The new ethos is for every religious institution to work toward solidarity with the other in the interest of the society and to promote the good and beauty of the world of the Creator, to whom we are all accountable. In the spirit of the new ethos and vocation of all human societies, foundational philosophies of different religions of the world need to be re-drafted or modified with an inclusive pluralistic mindset. Philosophical ideologies need to reflect the other as deserving of dignity and respect that are intrinsically theirs by nature.

The postmodern world normatively challenges religions to be more pluralistically inclusive and yet authentic to the tenets of their faith. It is a development that requires profound, thorough, and ingenious theological and phenomenological development in the religions, such that religion continues to be a social asset for human nature rather than a weapon for human annihilation. In a reflection on postmodernism, Peter Phan (2004, xviii) summarizes its epistemology as: “respect for and celebration of particularity and “otherness” in all dimensions of human life, from race and ethnicity to gender to religion to culture.” He goes on to say that

Diversity and plurality, which otherness implies, are seen not as curses to human flourishing to be exorcised or as threats to human unity to be suppressed. Rather, they are to be vigorously promoted and joyously celebrated as natural endowments necessary for genuine peace and justice (ibid.).

Indeed any religious identity that is oriented toward rejection of the other and is disrespectful of the Creator’s given right for everyone to choose her or his religious faith sets itself against the ethos of a postmodern society.

Dialogue among faith traditions is one of the major effective and meaningful ways of breaking the doldrums of hate and heinous acts promoted by exclusivism and rejection of the other so prevalent historically between many dominant religions of the world. A common forum of such dialogue is necessary so people of diverse religious traditions can in one forum hear or read the authentic voices of the others, with whom they live side by side in communities and societies. A dialogue pursued from the point of view of inclusive religious pluralism further elevates the “thinking being” in each of us. This is because an inclusive pluralist mentality enables us to identify our commonalities, our complementarities as well as appreciate and respect uniqueness or differences of the other.

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Bibliography:


Endnotes

1 Origen (185- c. 254) is one of the respected pre-Nicene Church Fathers. Besides running the catechetical School of Alexandria from age eighteen, Origen’s teachings and writings have contributed significantly to the dogmatic teachings of the church. Origen was such a leading authority that during the Nicaean Christological debates, he was quoted by both pro-Nicaea and Arius groups. See Armstrong, A History of God: The 4000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1993, 108. He was the first to use the term “Θεάνθρωπος” (theandric/human-divine) as well as coining the Nicaea term “ὁμοούσιος” (of same substance) in reference to the divine and human natures of Christ (See Henrich Kraft, Early Christian Thinkers. London: Lutterworth Press, 1964, 74, and Baus, History of the Church. Vol. 1, 1986, 239). Baus, 234 described Origen as, “the greatest of the Alexandrian teachers and the most important theologian of Eastern Christianity.”

2 This doctrine originated from Cyprian of Carthage as a response to heretics, schismatics, and others perceived within the church as the enemies of the church. These heretics and schismatics threatened the unity of Christians and challenged the authority of the church’s hierarchy. Therefore, it was the position of Cyprian of Carthage, which became an official position of the church by the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.


5 The text of that scriptural citation according to the English Standard Version is as follows: “Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.”

6 “By the words of Christ we do not mean only those which formed his teaching when he was made man and dwelt in the flesh, since even before that Christ the Word of God was in Moses and the prophets. For without the Word of God how could they have prophesied about Christ?” See Origen, On First Principles, Book 1, Preface. Translated by G. W. Butterworth. Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1973, 1.
Religious pluralism is by general definition an understanding that all religions are authentic. However, from the point of view of Christian theology, religious pluralism presupposes that all religions originate from the one God, hence that every religion has divine origin, period.

Maurice (1998b) extensively discusses the value of the other and the indispensability of critically appreciating the other in his work: *On Thinking-of-the-Other, Entre Nous*.

In some cases, the same idea is reflected in post-Second Vatican Council documents, like *Dominus Iesus*, a document produced by then Cardinal Ratzinger, the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.


While this document is not exclusively a Christian document, it is a product of largely a Western-influenced ideology, which has had significant Christian orientation. The League of Nations which gave birth to United Nations, was largely a collection of North American and European countries, who are de facto Christian countries.

This encyclical, which was published just as the Second Vatican Council was underway, focused significantly on the need for Christians and particularly Catholics to seriously engage in interreligious dialogue with people of all faith or even of no faith traditions. See Paul VI (August 6, 1964). “Ecclesiam Suam – Encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the Church” in *Encyclicals*. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paulvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_pvi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paulvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_pvi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html). Retrieved September 13, 2018.

These three documents are particularly relevant to moving forward the question of interreligious dialogue, which had been initiated and encouraged by both *Ecclesiam Suam* and the documents of the Vatican II (*Gaudium et Spes, Dignitatis Humanae, Ad Gentes, Lumen Gentium,* and *Nostra Aetate*). Other post-Vatican Council documents hinted at and referred to the need for ongoing interreligious dialogue, but did not focus on stating the modus operandi and techniques of engaging in successful interreligious dialogue. Conversely, these three documents have significantly been appreciated as setting the blueprint for active and empirical development of dialogue between Christians or the Catholic Church and other religious traditions.

It is therefore of interest to note that there is a strong concern that the current growing political rhetoric of “America First,” “America Only,” “Make America Great Again,” “Build that wall,” “Brexit,” and the alt right wing agenda in the United States and Europe are attempts to push back the progress made by globalization and ending with mono-culturalism and imperialism. In his 2018 New Year message, the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, warned against the growing “nationalism and xenophobia” as dangers to the unity of peoples of the world as he calls the nations to “red alert” against threats to human unity across the globe. See Video Highlights. “2018 New Year Message.” [United Nations Secretary-General](https://www.un.org). Retrieved 1/2/2018.


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My Hope as an African

Introduction

The logic of the Incarnation, the Son of God who took flesh and became human like us in all things except sin, tells me so much about the importance of context in the history of my salvation. It announces to me that my faith, mission, and destiny are definitively shaped by the fact of being an African. I did not choose to be an African. It is a gift that I received from the Creator of all things, who in his total benevolence put me into existence in this continent for a purpose. I was placed in Africa in the same way as every human being is put wherever they find themselves. I was not only born, but also brought up in the continent. All the basic fabrics of my human, intellectual, religious, spiritual and pastoral formation took place in Africa.

While already an African, I became a Christian, which introduced me into another broad family united by faith, hope, and charity. I happen to be one of those who became Christian so early in life. I was born into a Christian family but officially, I became a Christian only through Baptism which took place two weeks after my birth. So, I was first an African before I became Christian. At birth, I was named “Ikenna” (the power of God), but during Baptism, I received another name, “Bonaventure” (Good Venture/Future), which was either meant to replace or add to the African name that was given to me by my family. I have had these names that keep reminding me that I am truly African and truly Christian.

Being a Christian means for me a total commitment to the faith epitomized in the Christian Creed. Scripture defines this faith in relation to hope and teaches that faith, hope, and love are three fundamental cords that hold together the life of a Christian. Together, they constitute the theological virtues that bind every Christian to God, to other believers, and to humanity as a whole.

In this article, I wish to reflect on my hope as an African. I mean to critically examine my hope in terms of its content and implications for my faith and love, as well as my entire life as an African today. This reflection focuses on the future that I see for myself, the church, and the people
of Africa. I would like to know if there is a future at all and what direction it will take, if there is any. If there are reasons for hope, our reflection will try to shed light on what should be done now to make the expected future a reality. This looking forward into my future and those who are related to me by faith, biology, and culture presupposes the importance of hope for faith and human existence in general. There will be no real commitment to any meaningful task in the present without hope.

Since we cannot venture into the future without standing firm in the present to remember the past, this reflection kicks off by examining my experience of life in Africa today. Our attention will be on the experiences of our struggles and challenges, both as believers and as Africans, especially the ones that pose serious threats to hope. Against the background of these experiences, a consideration of some signs of hope will be made. Proposals will also be made in view of possible steps to sustain hope.

**Challenges and Struggles**

Right from the start, it is important to note that Africa is a continent, vast and with variety of differences in culture, climate, worldviews, political systems, economies, and religions. This makes it highly impossible for generalized claims in matters pertaining to Africa and its people. It is also true that there are certain characteristics that run like threads through the continent, threads that permit affirmations that are to some degree generalizing. Moreover, thanks to research and the modern means of communication and information technology, events that take place in the remotest parts of Africa can easily be accessed without one necessarily being there physically. The country of my immediate experience is Nigeria and I will be drawing many of my concrete inferences from it.

**A Continent Haunted by Its Past**

Here I shed some light on my experiences of struggles and challenges. I experience my continent as a people heavily weighed down by some past events, such as slavery and colonialism. Sometimes, the picture presented is that Africa had no problems until slave trade and colonialism, but the truth is that Africa never had a glorious past without problems. Like every human society populated by the descendants of Adam and Eve, candidates of Original Sin, Africans at all times have had to struggle with the ups and downs, good and bad, beautiful and ugly sides of existence. Slavery was in operation in Africa before the slave trade. Inter-community and tribal wars were common and there were obnoxious customs and traditions that militated against general human development.5

Nevertheless, the slave trade and colonialism devasted Africa in many ways. If these did not take place, it was expected that the different nations and peoples of Africa would have struggled through challenges to form societies bound by common laws and rules. Unfortunately, this sociological process was frustrated by slave trade and colonialism. The system of slavery that existed in Africa did not affect the population of the continent in any
significant way. That a man or woman captured during war from one community was kept or sold to another village did not in any way decrease the total number of persons in the enlarged group. On the contrary, the slave trade took away able-bodied men and women from Africa to a totally different continent, usually America. This left families without enough hands to farm, which in turn resulted in shortage of productivity and lack of food. In addition, the trade created fear, insecurity, and distrust among the people and this has been the case even centuries after the abolition of the trade.

The Europeans who came as traders, saw the abounding riches flowing in Africa and felt that the best way to take full advantage of it was to wield political power over the indigenous people. With this political interest in mind, they came up with a plan to maximize the opportunity of milking the continent. Africa was therefore partitioned at the Berlin Conference of 1885 and different nations of Europe took over the rulership of different countries of Africa. There were different styles of ruling the African people as there were colonial nations. The logic of partitioning and the different styles of governance helped to disintegrate Africa and to disconnect Africans from one another. Each African nation turned its loyalty and focus of association towards its colonial master. To keep a permanent hold on the colonized Africans, each colonizing country set in motion policies that ultimately worked against unification among the people of the countries, and ultimately among the different nations of Africa. So, at the end of colonialism, the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda as well as the Igbos, Yorubas and Hausas of Nigeria became enemies to one another. Political independence was not able to erase or heal the wounds of division and enmity created and sustained over a long time.

What bothers me is not that there was slave trade or that we were colonized, but that we are still living in bondage of these past events. We are crippled and unable to get up from the point where these episodes left us. Why can we not break through this past? This bondage to the past has powerful impact on our political life.

Our Political Systems

Instability is a common feature of all the political systems in Africa today. Electoral processes are marked by violence, thuggery, rigging and high-level corruptions. Votes hardly count because offices are allotted to persons prior to the actual elections. People hold political offices for as long as they want, and the ruling classes keep changing the laws of the land to enable them do this. Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Egypt, Cameroon, Sudan and many others are living witnesses of some of these political ills. Political parties are only names because they have no clear agenda and their members do not belong to them for the sake of any desire to make positive impacts on society. Selfish interests form the basis of operation of the State machinery and of the appointment of persons to public offices. Every election period seems to pose for the existence of the nation the serious question of “to be or not to be.” Oftentimes, the democratic system
is piloted by military men in civilian attire or by men and women who were born and brought up under military regimes. To this set of people, democracy is so strange. Political instability gives rise to insecurity, corruption, mismanagement of public funds, and all sorts of crimes. The sense of nationhood and patriotism is very low because people’s loyalties go more to their ethnic groups than the nation. Ethnicity is a big obstacle to political stability.

**Ethnicity**

Ethnicity is strong in the lives of Africans. It was there before the coming of the colonial rulers, but the colonial masters helped to fan it into flames. Ethnicity is not a negative element in itself and it is not peculiar to Africa. Almost every people in the world once existed as ethnic groups. The formation of most nations took place by either a gradual or a forced merging of different groups. Different ethnic groups in Africa were forced into unions by the colonial governments to become what we know today as nations. Unfortunately, the same colonial masters did not understand the dynamics of the groups and there was also not enough time for the groups to coalesce into unified nations. In the end, many people in Africa see themselves more as members of particular ethnic groups than of their nation. At critical moments, one finds that their loyalties go to their groups and not to the nation. This has given rise to a very weak sense of nationhood in Africa, and thus patriotism of people in relation to their countries is very low. We are finding it extremely hard to rise above the bonds of ethnicity to become nation-states, and this has contributed so much to making us dependent.

**Dependency**

Dependency is a very big challenge faced by almost all the nations of Africa today. We are politically, economically, culturally, religiously, scientifically, technologically, and academically dependent.

There is no African nation that practices a system of government that is indigenous to the continent. In the first place, we have been made to believe that Africa never had a system of governance. All we have and practice today as political systems is borrowed - the Presidential or Parliamentary systems of government, Socialism, or Communism. No wonder, what most Africans call political independence is in most cases a stepping aside but not a departure of the colonial rulers. The West has continued to play decisive roles in matters of the policies of governments in Africa. In some countries, they directly put persons of their choice in offices and remove them when they no longer serve their needs. African political leaders seem to be largely extended stewards of one foreign country or another.

Economic dependency seems to be the worst of all. Weighed in economic scale, Africa is found wanting and this is the bane of all dependencies. We are gifted with all kinds of human and natural resources and yet we produce very little. For almost everything we need for survival in Africa, we turn to the West. We are the consumers of their goods including dangerous ones—arms. The vehicles, computers, aircrafts, electrical and electronic gadgets
and generators, and clothes used in Africa are products of the West. The economic situation in Africa gives rise to the dearth of local initiatives and to the mass exodus of both young and old men and women from the continent to other places. Africans love Africa but challenging situations force them to leave in search of greener pastures. We know that this sort of behavior did not begin yesterday, but the effect of this migration on Africa is devastating. I think of the number of people from Africa who die on the high seas in an attempt to cross over to Europe and I feel the pain of the humiliation and pain which thousands of us suffer at the embassies of various countries where we go for visas.

African dependency looms largely also in the area of science and technology. I was first introduced to the study of science and technology in the secondary school. We began with Integrated Sciences and later went into Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Agriculture and others. There was never a time we were told of any scientific law, theory, or breakthrough that came through an African. So, I grew up to believe that science and technology is exclusively not for us. This culture of dependency is made worse by the type of education system and programs we run in many African nations. The books we use and the ideas we are fed with are largely borrowed. A University in Nigeria, for example, requires its academic staff who want to be promoted, to have published articles in journals in Europe or North America. Conferences attended in such places are scored higher than those held in Africa. Does any University in United State require something similar from its faculty? Certainly, not. This is academic dependency.

Religious dependency is one of the glaring marks of the African continent. Christianity and Islam came into Africa at different points in time and gradually succeeded in weakening or almost wiping out the African indigenous religions. Today, when we think of religion in Africa, we think of these two foreign religions. In each case, Africa is made to see her salvation as what comes from outside its continent. We are either turned towards the West or towards the Arabian worlds for our religious authentication. Whether it is in Islam or Christianity, Africa has to look outside her territory to be told what right or wrong conduct is, what is sin or virtue, who is in heaven or not. In recent times, Africans are moving towards the East for their religious quest.

Breakthrough in the areas of mass media, communication, and information technology is one of major marks of our age. Here again, Africa and Africans are dependent. The West controls the media and, to a large extent, uses it to impact negatively on Africa. It creates and disseminates horrible pictures of Africa such that what people associate with us are heavily negative: diseases, poverty, misery, war, or at best wild animals. We are flooded with obscene movies.

The cumulative effect on Africa of the experiences of the slave trade, colonialism, political instability and extended dependency is that most Africans suffer from inferiority complex. This “illness” shows itself in different forms: feeling of inadequacy or of not being good enough, low self-esteem, loss of faith in ourselves as individuals or as a people,
preferring people and products of other continents to our own, and even self-hatred.

In the face of all these, hope seems to disappear and despair appears a better option. Is there really any hope of a better Africa for me and my brothers and sisters in the continent? In what follows, I will focus attention on my reasons for hope.

Why Hope?

In one of his writings, Gerald O’ Collins observed that “looking back on our theological past is to see how much Christian theologians and philosophers have neglected the exploration of hope.” I agree that sufficient attention has not yet been given to the place and role of hope in human existence in general and in the Christian life in particular. The twentieth-century will be remembered, among other things, for engineering the rediscovery of hope in Christian faith. Christianity is a religion built on hope, this is a character it inherited from Judaism. The God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David is a God of promises and fulfilment; he makes promises and is out to fulfil them. This character of the God of Israel finds profound expression in the prophetic tradition that culminated in Jesus. The central message of Jesus Christ was the kingdom of God — a reality which has dawned in history and yet whose ultimate fulfilment is expected in the future. Therefore, the future is the key for understanding the actions of the God of Jesus Christ in the past and now. The early Church lived in hope of the Parousia and prayed that Jesus should return without delay, Maranatha. However, on account of many factors which includes the delay of the coming back of Jesus, believers were forced to make adjustments in terms of interpretations to explain and accommodate their experience. Over time, the eschatological dimension of the Christian faith started to wane, until it reached a point where it became eclipsed.

Thanks to theologians like Johannes B. Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, hope was rediscovered, restored, and assigned its rightful place in the history of God’s pilgrim people. For Moltmann, the human being is one who hopes, and people are always seeking something that lies in the future. Thus, the future is the only problem of the human being. Therefore, theology is not faith seeking understanding, as St. Anselm said, but hope seeking understanding. Moltmann states that “the eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith…” The Second Vatican Council, in the opening words of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes speaks of the joys and hopes of God’s people in time and goes even further to shed light on the hope for perfection of happiness for humanity that transcends the progress of the present world. In November 20, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI published his second encyclical titled, Spe Salvi, Saved by Hope. This title was taken from Rom 8:24 which states: “For in hope we were saved…” In this encyclical, the Pope sheds light on the connection between hope and human redemption.

My hope as an African is founded on this understanding of the foundational nature and role of hope in human existence, as well as in Christian faith. In the face of all the
challenges and struggles which the African Christian faces today, do I really have any hope or reason for hope as an African Christian? This is the major question which my reflection wants to address now. In what follows, I would like to establish some of what I see in Africa today as basis for hope.

Beacons of Hope

Scripture has it that “faith of itself, if it does not have good works, is dead.” One would also say that hope without concrete beacons is both deceptive and utopic. My hope as an African has a number of positive guiding lights which I now present.

It is said that charity begins at home, and I would say that hope too does the same. The Spiritan International School of Theology (SIST), Attakwu, my mission place at present, is one of the great beacons of hope I see in Africa today. This is a seminary and a school of theology and religion established in 1987 by the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and run by the Spiritan Circumscriptions of Anglophone West Africa. It was primarily erected to train future missionaries, but also to provide quality theological education to men and women of the consecrated life and the laity who wish to deepen their understanding of faith or to prepare to play various roles in the church as pastoral agents. Right from its inception, it was clear that SIST was an experiment in many ways. It set out to provide Africa with a place for doing theology in context and for the meeting of peoples and cultures. It is an experiment on the promotion of the values of internationality and interculturality within the African Continent. The students and staff of SIST are usually from over ten different African nations, more than twenty-five different language groups, and fifty ethnic and cultural areas. These people live, work, celebrate, and suffer together. Consecrated and lay men and women constitute part of the teaching staff, and except for things that are specifically designed for the clerical state, the consecrated and lay men and women students study side by side with the seminarians. Masses are celebrated in different languages every week and differences are not only accepted but appreciated and celebrated in ways that contribute to the growth of the entire community. SIST is a family. SIST gives me the hope that African men and women, priests and laity, the young and old from different cultures, languages, nationalities, and religious congregations can live and work together to achieve a common project. The successful experiment of internationality and interculturality taking place in Africa (SIST) offers a model worthy of emulation even by people from other continents. We are capable of creating and sustaining fellowship for productive existence in Africa.

Secondly, history tells me that Africa and its people played and have continued to play important roles in the church and the world. We do not have to go far to speak of Jacob and his household who were saved from extinction by migrating into Egypt (Genesis 46), or how Moses was born and brought up in the same country (Exodus 2), or how Jesus was not only saved but got his early formation in Africa (Matt 2:13ff). The contributions of Tertullian, Athanasius, and Augustine to the development of Christian faith are worthy of
note. Today, we have the likes of Cardinals Francis Arinze, Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, and Robert Sarah who play very important roles in the church. While I was writing this paper, the World Cup 2018 in Russia eventually came to an end. France took the golden cup with a team overwhelmingly constituted of players of African origin. This performance of the French team tells me that given favourable environment, Africans would do even better than their Western counterparts. We have a number of Africans who are star medical doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, accountants, and computer scientists in different places in the world. One would not fail to mention the appearance of President Obama on the political scene of the United States of America to become the number one citizen in the nation.

Furthermore, the vibrancy of the Christian faith in Africa today gives me hope. There are obvious visible expressions of faith in Africa. Vocation to the priesthood and the consecrated life keeps rising in many African countries. In Nigeria, for example, there are over twelve major seminaries and a number of them have over four hundred seminarians in them. This gives rise to the ordination of many priests every year. Africa is feeding the world with missionaries; dioceses and missionary congregations send out priests and religious to different places. Gradually, the church gets even financial support locally. The number of dioceses, parishes, ministries, and services is all increasing. These are signs of hope. They, however, require that every effort is made to keep weeding out elements of corruption of Christian symbols from our expression of faith in the continent, and that inculturation is pursued as a common project by all.

The conviction that increased religiosity in Africa is a sign of hope is supported by what I know to be the contributions of Christian religion to human history. I know that Karl Marx, Friedrech Feuerbach, and people in their school of thought will not agree with me because for them religion has no real value in society. On the contrary, history reveals that without Christianity it would have been difficult to talk about Western civilization, or things like the equality of human beings, human and religious freedom, the abolition of slavery, the promotion of family life and marriage, and of positive attitude to work. Even to-date, the church has continued through its social teachings to shape the minds, policies, and actions of people and governments in the world. In most African societies, the church has been at the forefront of the development of peoples and their cultures particularly through education, medical services, and the option for the poor.

The emergence of acts of indigenous creativity in the wider African society gives me hope. In Nigeria, for example, one can see signs of hope in the levels of creative ingenuity taking place in cities like Aba, Onitsha, Nnewi and Lagos. These are places of indigenous productivity in the country. Shoes and dresses produced in Aba compete favorably with those manufactured in Europe and America. Motor parts fashioned in Nnewi stand the test of the standards of imported ones. These are signs of hope.

Ultimately, my hope as an African is strengthened by the faith that God is with us. Sometimes, when I think of Africa, the story of the journey of Jesus with his disciples...
across the sea (Mark 4:35-41) comes to my mind. It was in the evening, and Jesus wanted them to go across to the other side of the lake. On their way, a strong storm of wind came against the boat to the point where the disciples feared they were going to drown. In the meantime, Jesus was sleeping, with his head on a cushion. They woke him up and he calmed the storm. He, however, reprimanded them for their lack of faith which was the cause of their fear. How would they be frightened when they had the lord of the universe with them? Jesus promised that he will be with us until the end of time (Matt 28:20); again, he sent us the Holy Spirit to be with us forever (John 14:16). The presence of God with us through Christ (Emmanuel, that is, God is with us) and the Holy Spirit is the rock on which my hope as an African is built.

While these beacons are my guiding light of hope, I strongly feel that much more should be done to enable Africa get to the Promised Land. Below are some of the steps and directions or things to do to secure what I see as the hope for Africa.

Which Way?

I see my hope as an African in a church and continent that are more self-reliant, more self-supporting, and more interdependent. We cannot keep leaning on the West as if we were disabled, handicapped, or crippled. My hope also directs me towards African nations that provide enabling environment for inculturation and the growth of indigenous technology, and whose citizens are more patriotic, detribalized and holding to nation building as their common project. I see my future in Africans that believe in themselves and do not rely on outsiders to solve their problems. Interdependence calls every African person and nation to develop herself to the fullest and then to get connected to other persons and nations. Here, emphasis is on development, communion, fellowship, and the sharing of resources, skills, talents, and values with one another. Thus, selfishness, individualism, and egocentrism are enemies to the future of Africa.

Communion in the African Church means that the diocesan clergy and the religious, bishops and priests, the lay and the clergy, men and women, the young and the old would join hands, heads, and hearts together to work and witness to the gospel. In society at large, the logic of communion demands that different nations, ethnic groups, religions, cultures, and ideologies come together to pursue and uphold common goals for the good of all in the continent. Beyond the continent, communion demands pooling resources together, networking, diplomacy and dialoguing with people and organizations that can contribute meaningfully to our growth. Jürgen Moltmann rightly observes that “to be alive means existing in relationship with other people and things. Life is communication in communion. And conversely, isolation and lack of relationship means death for all living things, and dissolution even for elementary particles.”
Most importantly, Africans should find in the Holy Spirit a speedy road and vehicle towards the attainment of its dreams and goals. Everything that Africa needs for a positive transformation can be located in the Christian belief, understanding, and doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Among these are life, the power to be and do, courage to embark on transformative agendas, communion, creative skills, good leadership, comfort, and restoration. The Holy Spirit is the source of all these. Moreover, the Holy Spirit can serve as a symbol that can bring together all the various religions found in Africa today. There is hardly any known religion in Africa that does not have belief in spirits or the Spirit. So, using it as point of entry, effective inter-religious dialogue can take place.

Finally, my hope is that the green pastures of Africa which are already germinating like a mustard, would mature and grow abundantly great so that, like in the days of Jacob and his children, or of Joseph, Mary and Jesus, all the nations of the world will troop to our continent in search of greener pastures.

Conclusion

I really do not know for certain what my future as an African will be or what the future holds for me, for the church, or for our continent. Sometimes, I feel scared and tempted to give up or to migrate to another continent. I have not yielded to this temptation because I see credible guiding lights of hope in Africa. These guiding lights sustain my faith and empower me to commit myself unconditionally to the mission of charity which, I believe to be my call as a human being, a Christian, a religious missionary and a priest. While my heart is gladdened by these beacons of hope, I am convinced that certain concrete steps have to be taken now for the good of Africa’s tomorrow. Above all, my hope is rooted on God who is with us through his Son Jesus Christ and in us by the Holy Spirit. I hope that we shall work together with God and among ourselves to overcome our present challenges and build up a continent according to his will and of our desire. In the same way, my hope is that, our Lady, Queen of Africa, the Blessed Virgin Mary, who believed that the promises made to her by the Lord will be fulfilled (Luke 1:45), will mentor and intercede for us, and that under her patronage we shall reach our goal. This is my hope as an African.

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Endnotes

1 I was over thirty years old when I first left the continent of Africa for Europe.

2 Cf. Hebrews 11:1 where it is said that “faith is the realization of things hoped for and evidence of things not seen.”

3 1 Cor 13:13.

4 This theme comes close to one of the major works of Jean-Marc Ela, My Faith as an African, first published in French in 1985 under the title Ma foi d’Africain. The English
edition was published in 1988 by Orbis Books. Ela, a post-colonial Cameroonian theologian and sociologist, decided to question his Christian faith as an African. This is close to what I intend to do here but using hope as my compass.

5 The killing of twins, the subjugation of women, and different kinds of caste systems are good examples.

6 It was famine that drove Jacob and his family to Egypt where they lived for about four hundred and thirty years.


9 Note that scholars like Ernst Bloch, a German Marxist philosopher born in 1885, influenced Metz and Moltmann and thus should be acknowledged for his contribution to laying the foundation for the renewal of interest in the Christian theology of hope.


11 Cf. Gaudium et Spes, no. 1.

12 Cf. Gaudium et Spes, no. 39.

13 Spe Salvi is epochal, because for so long a time there has not been such papal teaching on Christian eschatology.

14 Jas 2:17.

15 Bishop Gabriel Mendy has a good summary of the contributions of these three African Church Fathers in his article, “The Contributions of the African Fathers of the Church to Pneumatology” in the African Journal of Contextual Theology, 6 (2016) 5-44.

16 This position does not support some of the aberrations that go on in Africa in the name of religion or the understanding of religion that deemphasizes the value of human creativity, effort, and productivity. This is what gives rise to superstition and occultism and the craze for miracles.

Dr. Ken Gormley

Dr. Ken Gormley, President and Professor of Law at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, was previously Dean of Duquesne University School of Law. Gormley earned his B.A. from the University of Pittsburgh, summa cum laude, and received his J.D. from Harvard Law School in 1980, serving as a teaching assistant to Professor Archibald Cox in Constitutional Law. Gormley is a highly-respected Constitutional scholar; his books have won multiple awards and include a New York Times bestseller. He joined the Duquesne faculty in 1994, after teaching at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law and engaging in private practice. He had served as President of the Allegheny County Bar Association, and Mayor of Forest Hills, Pennsylvania, where he lives with his wife Laura and their four children.

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY’S STRATEGIC PLAN, 2018-2023: AN EXERCISE IN NEW EVANGELIZATION

Our globalized, multi-cultural and, at times, secularized world creates fresh challenges for mission. It calls us to renew our methods of evangelization . . . We (Spiritans) want to give special attention to first evangelization and to the new evangelization, as well as working with and promoting reconciliation among groups of people who are marginalized with a view to their integral human development.”

There is an ever-growing popular phenomenon in the United States, aptly titled, “Word on Fire” (www.wordonfire.org). Founded by Bishop Robert Barron, prior to his ordination as auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese of Los Angeles, Word on Fire describes itself as a “global media ministry . . . utilizing the tools of new media to draw people into or back to the Catholic Faith.” Word on Fire is evangelical. It “proclaims Jesus Christ as the source of conversion and new life.” It is Catholic. It utilizes the resources of the Roman Catholic Tradition – art, architecture, poetry, philosophy, theology, and the lives of the saints – to explain and interpret the event of Jesus Christ. It places an emphasis and urgency on the use of contemporary forms of media and innovative communication technologies, such as blog feeds, YouTube clips, on-line study programs, topical discussions of current controversies, and film series. Described by Cardinal Francis George as “one of the church’s best messengers,” Bishop Barron, from his ministry in California, reaches millions of people each year. In addition to world-wide gatherings of Catholics throughout the world (2016 World Youth Day, the 2015 World Meeting Families, for example), he was invited to speak on religion to employees at Facebook’s headquarters in 2017.

Bishop Barron is an unapologetic evangelist. He preaches the word of God, in forms that are appealing and effective, to” those who have never heard the Gospel . . . or who have barely heard it.” He uses methods, and addresses topics, that are urgent in the contemporary age: science and religion, atheism, sexuality and faith, the power

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Ordained in 1980, he completed
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has served as Vice President
for Mission and Identity at
Duquesne University and Vice
President for External Relations.
In 2003, he was elected
provincial superior of the US
East Province, and in 2004, at
the general chapter in Torre de
Aguila, he was elected a member
of the General Council, with
special responsibility in the area
of education. He has also served
as a member of the Spiritan
international team in Paraguay.

of the media, and the plight of the “nones” (those who
identify themselves as having no religious affiliation at all).
The number of those in this last category continues to grow
exponentially in the United States.

Why has Bishop Barron
become so increasingly popular
(and deeply unpopular for
many non-believers) among
Americans today, both Catholic
and not Catholic? Because, in
part, the bishop has tapped into
a profoundly effective medium:
digital communications. He is preaching an ancient message
using a contemporary platform that reaches hundreds of
millions of persons today, and addressing matters of truly
serious import for them. He is “listening” on three fronts: his “proclamation” is centered on the Word of God, his
topics are meaningful to his hearers, and his “means of
evangelization,” his primary tools of communication, are
current and widely employed.

The case will be made in this article that Spiritan efforts
at “new evangelization” take many forms: effective preaching
and teaching, simple presence among those searching for
meaning in their lives, dialogue with men and women of
other faith traditions, and radical witness to the Gospel.
If Spiritan educational ministry, in itself, provides a “New
Evangelization in cultures that have forgotten their Christian
roots,” then a new and vital expression of this evangelization
can be found in an institutional commitment to a “direction”
that is profoundly Spiritan. That direction certainly finds
expression in Duquesne University’s new Strategic Plan that
is premised upon Spiritan principles and ideals. And that
Strategic Plan, in turn, can facilitate a proclamation of the
Gospel, in innovative and effective ways, for men and women
of the twenty-first century.

Strategic Plan – Phase One

In a recent opinion piece published by the Pittsburgh
Post-Gazette (January, 14 2018), the newly endorsed
Strategic Plan for Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit
was unveiled to a wide audience. The product of years of
discussion and deliberation, countless drafts and revisions,
the first draft of the Strategic Plan was produced through
a collaborative effort of university faculty members, staff, students, board members, and Spiritans. From the perspective of scientists, psychologists, legal scholars, student life personnel, student leaders, business experts, and theologians, we asked, what is the “Spiritan mission” of Duquesne University today? “What do we do that makes us different from our secular counterparts in higher level education?” “What are the critical needs of young people today and how can we address those needs?” “What role do we play in the landscape of Catholic higher education in the United States, as uniquely Spiritan?” And, importantly, “What role do we play in our own city and region?” “What is our Spiritan contribution to the city of Pittsburgh, to all of its residents, but in the Spiritan tradition, particularly to those in most need: the poor and the most vulnerable?”

This first phase of the evolving strategic plan was an exercise in true “listening.” Father Adrian van Kaam, C.S.Sp. (1913-2007), founder of the Institute of Formative Spirituality at Duquesne University and author of numerous books on spirituality and spiritual care, wrote frequently about the spiritual art of “listening.” His former colleague, Dr. Susan Muto, put it this way:

From the days of listening to the stories of those huddled with him in hiding in Holland during the Hunger Winter, through the writing of his dissertation, “The Experience of Really Feeling Understood by a Person,” to the eleven-volume series he wrote articulating his theory of formation spirituality, Adrian van Kaam exuded a passion to help individuals and groups to understand themselves and each other. Most of all, he wanted people to know that they were understood and loved by God. He did this first and foremost by listening to people, to Christian history and scriptural wisdom, and to fields of study from neuroscience and medicine to physics, from film and art to anthropology, and from music to psychology. Van Kaam’s joyful interest in humanity and creation was endless.

Our first “strategic exercise” in listening, as we put together an ambitious new Strategic Plan for Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit, was not without focus or intent. We, the participants of the planning process, arrived at the process with questions: how could we listen carefully to our own treasured past? How could we be guided by our founding history as an institution of service for immigrants and refugees? Listening to our own particular history of academic and extracurricular strengths over the course of 140 years, what wisdom could we glean? Acknowledging our contributions to the political and social life of our city and region, what lessons could we “hear?”

This listening exercise then spread to the important object of our concern. “If we truly listened,” we said, “what would we hear our students saying to us . . . about their personal lives, their emotional and social needs, their struggles and intellectual challenges?” “How are these different now from those of past generations?” “How can we listen to
developments in technology, business, and the arts?” “What do Duquesne University alumni tell us about their experience at the university and their preparation at Duquesne for professional careers and personal decision-making?” If we truly listened, what would we hear?

The characteristic of profound listening holds a unique position within the Spiritan Congregation. In his letter to Father Jean-Rémy Bessieux (May 4, 1845), Father Francis Libermann, Second Founder of the Spiritan Congregation, advised the apostolic missionary in Gabon to be gentle and respectful, showing concern and deference to everyone. Initially convinced that Bessieux had died accidentally, Libermann expressed his “joy” at the discovery that Bessieux was, in fact, alive. Libermann communicated his intention for Bessieux to prepare the young in Gabon for advancement in education; he then encouraged Bessieux to “listen” to those in his care. “Follow the habits and conventions of all and do not expect others to adapt themselves to your own particular tastes and inclinations.” “Support their plans and give them your help, as long as these plans are not contrary to justice and truth, nor opposed to the spread of the faith and good morality.” Libermann’s approach to missiology and enculturation was just beginning to take shape. He later instructed his missionaries to “forget about Europe . . . be African with the Africans.” This missionary principle of “listening” and divesting, shedding (kenosis) one’s own culture in an effort to become acculturated to the lives of local people, languages, cultures, and pastoral practices is a core Spiritan principle, and one that serves as a precious compass as we carry out our own mission of Catholic, Spiritan higher education at Duquesne University.

A Signature Focus: Listening to the Local Community

“In envisioning the future of Duquesne, I ask myself: What would the Holy Ghost priests who arrived on the Bluff in 1878 do if they arrived here today? If the Spiritan priests were transported to Pittsburgh today, they would see minority communities in the Hill District and Uptown, in our own backyard, that are severely underserved. They would peer down the river into the Mon Valley and see neighborhoods filled with elderly, needy individuals whose lives were decimated when the steel mills collapsed, trying to survive with little support . . . The answer seems obvious: They would stare down the challenges of our time and help a new generation of students build something fresh and miraculous. . . We have a duty to help re-invent Western Pennsylvania”

Duquesne University has a long, storied history of service to the local community. Founded by the Holy Ghost Congregation in 1878, to assist recent immigrants working in the steel mills—and their families—to advance themselves through education, Duquesne’s essence for the past 140 years has been one of service to others. That service has taken many forms, from volunteer activity through social agencies to faith-based programs and academic initiatives, partnering Duquesne University students and faculty with members of the Uptown, Hill District, and Hazelwood neighborhoods. In recent years,
the Duquesne University Mylan School of Pharmacy established a pharmacy in the Hill District, as a “mission-based, state-of-the-art, comprehensive clinical pharmaceutical center designed to serve the University community, as well as the underinsured and uninsured in the Pittsburgh area” (web site reference). The Duquesne University Law School’s Tribune Center for Clinical Legal Education serves the community and its students, by combining education and public service through counseling and defense in civil rights, family law, unemployment compensation, advocacy for children in delinquency cases, and for veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injuries and other mental health disorders and addictions. Community-oriented academic programs abound. The University has a broad array of community-serving Centers and Institutes, including its Center for Community-Engaged Teaching and Research (CETR), which has re-energized itself with its own new strategic plan. All these activities are undertaken in the spirit of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the Apostolic Constitution on Higher Education (Pope John Paul II): “The Christian spirit of service to others for the promotion of social justice is of particular importance for each Catholic university, to be shared by its teachers and developed in its students.” And “in its service to society, a Catholic University will relate especially to the academic, cultural, and scientific world of the region in which it is located.”

Addressing unmet needs in the local community, however, must take a different form in a Spiritan institution. The focus of service must be on the person or community being served and not upon the needs of the one serving. Too often, “service programs” or volunteer opportunities, have centered upon the needs and desires of the volunteers, and not upon the real needs of a community. At Duquesne, that focus has shifted from an orientation of “community service” to a truer form of “community engagement.” The chief difference lies in the act of listening and reciprocity.

The Carnegie Foundation (2012) has defined community engagement as “the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.” Partnerships of all kinds require on-going face-to-face conversation, a shared plan, shared resources, and sustained communication. It is paramount that institutions of higher education approach the institutionalization process by building understanding, relationships, and trust with members of the community. This can occur only by talking to, and getting to know, community members. According to J. C. Votruba (2004), community partners “want us [in higher education] to treat them as partners, not supplicants. They want us to seek first to understand and then be understood. They want us to recognize that they have the capacity to teach us as well as learn from us. And they want us to appreciate that our future, as well as theirs, is dependent upon our work together.”

This unique form of community engagement, from a service paradigm to one of
effective engagement, is a clear priority of the University’s new Strategic Plan. Indeed, a strong network of community partner organizations, many located in neighborhoods near the campus, already exists. Talented new faculty who demonstrate interest in community engaged teaching and research are continually attracted to Duquesne. Most recently, Duquesne’s Center for Engaged Teaching and Research supported 43 faculty, 1,600 students, and 120 community-based organizations working together on community-oriented projects and services. (McCune Foundation Report). Consciously aligning the needs, and strengths, of local communities with the needs and strengths of the university opens up new teaching and research possibilities. And from a Spiritan perspective, it is an exercise in “authentic listening” that results in transformative action, for both the local communities and ourselves. As David Hollenbach, S.J., has noted:

A university that aspires to be Catholic and to serve the common good must do more than include nods to the importance of social solidarity in its mission statement. It must translate this into teaching and research priorities, and actualize these priorities in day-to-day activities in classroom and library. This will take both the courage and the humility that the privileged learn only when they encounter the reality of poverty and other forms of suffering.”

Enhancing the University’s community engagement initiatives, to develop “. . . authentic, mutually beneficial alliances with governmental, faith-based and community organizations (Strategic Plan, number 2) will serve to strengthen both the University and its neighbors from a truly Spiritan perspective.” In the spirit of the 2012 General Chapter at Bagamoyo, “we must be ready to learn from those to whom we are sent.”

Global and Ecclesial Concern: Listening to the Church and the World

“Every Catholic University is to maintain communion with the universal Church and the Holy See; it is to be in close communion with the local Church and in particular with the Diocesan bishops of the region or nation in which it is located. In ways consistent with its nature as a University, a Catholic University will contribute to the Church’s work of evangelization.”

Over the course of more than a century, Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit and the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh have enjoyed a vibrant and fruitful relationship. In part because the seminarians for the Pittsburgh Diocese have pursued their undergraduate degrees from Duquesne for decades, many members of the ordained clergy (including the present Ordinary) are Duquesne graduates. Indeed, the current (12th) Bishop of Pittsburgh, Very Reverend David A. Zubik, holds two degrees—an undergraduate degree and a master’s degree in education administration—from Duquesne. As well, Duquesne graduates include Bishops, and now Cardinals, serving in other areas of the United States and around the world. This fact is a point of pride for Duquesne and the Spiritan Congregation.
Additionally, graduates of the University’s School of Education have served, and continue to serve, in leadership positions throughout the Diocese. As superintendents, principals and directors of Catholic elementary and secondary schools, the influence of the University in the faith formation and education of young persons in the Pittsburgh Diocese has been formidable. With graduates of the University’s Pastoral Ministry Program and Masters of Theology Program serving as directors and instructors of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine Programs (CCD) and Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) in the Diocese, the partnership between the University and the Catholic Diocese has been further solidified. Its work with Catholic Charities and its various programs, the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, the Pittsburgh Catholic press, and other agencies has been rich and beneficial to both the local Church and the University.

But the University intends to accomplish more in this regard. In its new Strategic Plan, we have proposed an effort to collaborate with the Diocese of Pittsburgh and other dioceses “to assist in the development of their lay associates and clergy as these dioceses reconfigure themselves for the 21st century.” One aspect of the new Diocesan program entitled “On Mission for the Church Alive” is the creation of hundreds of lay ecclesial ministers in service to newly configured parishes. Administrative and pastoral needs will be great. The University, through its Schools of Business, Education, and Liberal Arts, is committed to serve as a transformative influence and resource in this period of challenge and change.

A particularly creative project in the new Strategic Plan, proposed in collaboration with the Pittsburgh Catholic Diocese, is the concept of a Catholic Leadership Program for high school students that will be housed at Duquesne. Currently in an active planning stage, the program will form young Catholic leaders, both academically and spiritually, in a way that brings their faith alive and allows them—as their lives unfold—to serve the Church and the community. Designed for aspiring high school juniors and seniors from regional Catholic high schools, the program will combine specialized academic formation, including science education, with community engagement projects, led by faculty and staff of the University. It is hoped that the project will become a national model of its kind for the United States Church.

We draw inspiration for these new initiatives from the Spiritan Rule of Life, which states that “in local Churches the following are our principal activities: fostering Christian communities and the education and training of a committed and responsible laity; engaging in social and educational work in line with our Spiritan calling.”

The global outreach of the university has witnessed a renewed energy and vitality in recent years, especially with the creation of the Center for African and Global Studies at Duquesne. This outreach has existed for many years – and positive effects in healthcare programs in Africa, academic alliances with international Spiritan institutions, and community engagement efforts in the Caribbean have been noteworthy. An interest in
the expansion of these programs informs the spirit of the new University Strategic Plan. As stated in *The Heartbeat of Spiritan Education in the U.S.*: “The missionary outlook introduced to the Congregation in the eighteenth century and reinforced by Libermann has given the Congregation a global vision. . . . In education, it means working for the empowerment of peoples and their liberation from injustice, poverty, and ignorance.” In practice, this means exposing our students to “languages, cultures, and religions that differ from their own in order to encourage them to respond to the needs of others.” (Strategic Plan 2) That response, consistent with a truly Spiritan vision, is both liberating and hope-filled.

**The Polestar of All Decision-Making: Listening to our Students**

If there is a singular theme that runs throughout the entirety of the University’s new Strategic Plan, it is that of concern for our students. It appears in each of the individual objectives. It manifests itself as a concern for their well-being, an attention to career preparation, and a focus upon individual attention to students’ needs and aspirations. It manifests itself in enrollment and recruitment efforts, climate cultivation initiatives, and teaching excellence objectives aimed at true and effective learning. It is the reason that we plan new construction, recruit, hire, and retain the best of faculty, and advance interdisciplinary education. It even shows itself in marketing and assessment protocols, with an emphasis upon maximizing the experience of our students for learning and personal development.

Who are these students who attend Duquesne University today? They are an increasingly diverse, sophisticated group of young men and women, living and studying in an environment that prizes diversity and has committed itself, in the new strategic plan, to actively cultivating that diversity on its campus. This effort reflects, unquestionably, a Spiritan value of enormous richness and importance.

While the Spirit is the source of our unity, we relish diversity: cultural, human, spiritual, ecumenical, interreligious, and the distribution of charismata for the building up of the People of God and the world. Variety and complementarity are commonly characteristic of our [Spiritan] community. The Spirit is the giver and the shaper of the gifts that each person receives for the building up of the Body of Christ and the human family. Spiritan educators are Spirit-linking leaders who appreciate the diverse ways the Spirit works in person in community.

Are the students who attend Duquesne and similar Catholic institutions prepared to grapple with questions of faith and their roles in the Church today? Sociologist Robert Wuthnow argues that “unless religious leaders take younger adults more seriously, the future of American religion is in doubt.” As the church prepares for a Synod of Young People in the fall of 2018, some troublesome statistics have emerged. An examination of reports from two national surveys – The Pew Forum Survey on Religion and Public...
Life (2015) and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA, 2017) – have given rise to serious concern about the faith of young persons today. According to Catholic World Report, the Pew Survey – an adult focused instrument – indicated a sharp rise in the population of “nones,” those identifying as atheist, agnostic, or nothing in particular. The growth of this unaffiliated group is significant, rising from just over 16% of the U.S. adult population in 2007 to 22.8% in 2014. As Catholic World Report notes:

Most of the ‘nones’ have roots in organized religion. Nearly 80% reported having been raised within a particular religious tradition. It comes as little surprise then, that the increase in ‘nones’ paralleled a nearly eight percentage point decline in the number of Christians over the same period. The Pew Survey reported that Catholics were among segments of the Christian population that suffered the largest loss in numbers.

The CARA survey supports the findings of the Pew Survey, but with particular attention to young people, and especially young Catholics. Half of the surveyed group, according to Catholic World, “now self-identify as atheist, agnostic, or without religious affiliation – each a segment of the religious ‘nones’ highlighted in the Pew studies.” One of the principal reasons attributed by these young people for their departure from organized religion is the incompatibility of faith with science. Both surveys coalesce in their findings regarding a way forward, underscoring that “a renewed emphasis on the complementarity of science and religion . . . would be a worthwhile endeavor.” (Catholic World Report). The goal is that these young men and women can find at Duquesne University role models whose faith is so transparent that it becomes infectious. The goal is, additionally, that our efforts at evangelization will reveal to our students a life of faith and service that is truly authentic and meaningful.

Conclusion: Listening to the Gospel

As Pope John Paul II expressed so eloquently in Ex Corde Ecclesiae:

Evangelization means ‘bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new . . . It is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and, as it were, upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, humanity’s criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration, and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation.’ By its very nature, each Catholic university makes an important contribution to the church’s work of evangelization. It is a living institutional witness to Christ and his message, so vitally important in cultures marked by secularism, or where Christ and his message are still virtually unknown.”
Bishop Robert Barron is able to evangelize effectively because his message is rooted in the Gospel, his method of communication is contemporary and creative, his stance is credibly and intelligently linked to the church, and his personal witness is authentic and engaging. If the enterprise of Spiritan education is, itself, an evangelical act, then a Strategic Plan for a Spiritan work of education must employ that same roadmap. It must take into consideration the needs and gifts of its students, their means of communicating, their aspirations, both professional and personal, and their many challenges. It is a message, a plan, that must be in sync with the church, both universal and local. It is a plan that must be based upon love for the poor, and marginalized, and service of the poor and marginalized in reciprocity and true engagement. Ultimately, it is strategy for an institution that must be rooted, clearly, in the words and spirit of the Gospel. This is precisely the Strategic Plan recently adopted by Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit. And it is our hope that the Spiritan Founders would be proud of the abundant fruits that it yields—because they planted the seeds 140 years ago on this Bluff overlooking a city and community that now bears their imprint, which is poised to make even more shining contributions for a new era.

Dr. Ken Gormley, President, Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit
James McCloskey, C.S.Sp., Senior Advisor to the President for Strategic Initiatives

Endnote

1 Congregation of the Holy Spirit, XX General Chapter, Bagamoyo, 2012, 1.7
2 http://wordonfire.org/about/wordonfire, 2018
3 Spiritan Rule of Life, #4
5 http://post-gazette.com/ (Duquesne University is Embracing the Future, Ken Gormley, January 14, 2018).
8 Letter to the Community of Dakar and Gabon, November 19, 1847. In Spiritan Anthology, 281-287, here 287.
9 Congregation of the Holy Spirit, XX General Chapter, Bagamoyo, 2012, Part I, A, 1.8
11 Pope John Paul II. Ex Corde Ecclesiae (1990), in Catholic Identity in Our Colleges and
12 Ibid., Part I, B. 37
14 Ibid., 82
18 Pope John Paul II, Ex Corde Ecclesiae, Part II, Article 5.1
19 Spiritan Rule of Life, #18
21 , 28-29.
23 /www.catholicworldreport.com/ Catholicism and “Nones:” The Data on Youth and Young Adults, February 23, 2017.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Pope John Paul II, Ex Corde Ecclesiae, Part I, B, 48, 49
TOLERANCE FOR AMBIGUITY: THE CATHOLIC MISSION OFFICER

In the dining room of the residence for religious on campus, there is an informal but pre-determined seating arrangement. Beneath a fresco of the Last Supper, with faces of the apostles drawn to resemble those of the religious in residence at the time, senior members of the community sit together predictably. Graduate students arrive late each evening and gravitate to the same adjacent seats. But at the very center of the large table, a vacant space between two veteran religious is always left empty. On one side of the gaping hole is seated a senior faculty member, retired but active in the university community. On the other side is a seasoned administrator of many decades. Both have spent their entire professional careers at the university. And the place between them is vacant for a reason. They speak together, with evident formality, only when necessary. They frequently spar at community meetings with either thinly veiled invective or an occasional frontal assault. The member seated nearest the window is the voice of Catholic social justice for the university community. The one across the divide is the popular advocate for prayer and return to more traditional forms of piety on campus. This middle position between the two is both symbol and shape of the ministry of mission and ministry at the university. At best a bridge, on occasion a referee, but always at the critical center of debate, the mission officer is the fulcrum between competing definitions of the meaning of Catholic at a Catholic university.

The Shape of the Problem

Among lay colleagues, the cues regarding difference of perspective and definition of the meaning of Catholic are often more subtle, but nonetheless clear: an eye-roll at a board meeting (for the benefit of the mission officer) directed at a colleague who questions the existence of the Gay-Straight Alliance on campus, a complaint about the cacophony at Mass when some congregants re-phrase traditional responses with inclusive language. On occasion, a sly test is administered by a staff member who wants

to know if the officer has read a certain article in the NCR, leaning closer to hear if the response is National Catholic Register or National Catholic Reporter. Is he left or right, conservative, or liberal, of their church or mine?

The compelling and complex challenges, however, are neither politically motivated nor extremist. They are the more formal, structural ones. And this is especially so in the academic life of the university – in areas of curriculum development, faculty hiring, matters of academic freedom, and other critical programming. The essential question is not Catholic or non-Catholic – but the meaning and interpretation of Catholic thought by Catholics themselves in the policy and programs of the university.

Two cases involving both faculty and administrative decision-making will serve to illustrate this question – a pointed example of the public face of Catholicism in university life.

The Failed Search

Upon the retirement of the chairperson of the theology department, a national search was launched from the college of liberal arts for a replacement. One of the largest academic units at the university, the department rightly boasts of its rich cultural, ethnic, academic, and religious diversity, theologians who contribute to a wide range of scholarship and teaching expertise. Following published university procedure, the search committee recommended a slate of finalists for the position of chairperson. Several finalists had published controversial works in support of moral positions not quite in consonance with the magisterium – and several finalists were not, themselves, Catholic.

Those who disagreed with the list of finalists made appeal at once to the mission office. Should this critical position of department chairperson – a public voice for theological studies at a Catholic university – not be automatically assumed by a Catholic? Other voices claimed that scholarship not compatible with the magisterium of the church, especially when published by an institutional leader, constitutes a violation of core mission principles of the university. Still others felt that a department of theology at a Catholic university necessarily must seek and hire the best minds and voices in contemporary theology, even if those voices lead to controversial ideas and conclusions. Perhaps, they stated, necessarily so!

Seated in the middle position between divergent and sometimes hostile camps, the mission officer becomes the arbiter of the “authentically Catholic” voice of a Catholic university. And this is so among Catholics in particular. Juggling issues of academic freedom, sound scholarship, relationship with the official church, and the public face of Catholic mission, clarity on the subject is critical. Further complicating the matter are issues of gender,
sexual orientation, and organizational culture. What is the measure of a truly Catholic appointment? Sometimes clarity seems almost impossible to achieve.

**Political Activism and the Bishop’s Letter**

Shortly after the publication of a strong and passionate letter from the local bishop on the question of religious liberty and healthcare provisions at Catholic institutions, a faculty member decided, in good faith, to duplicate the letter and submit it to colleagues in the particular department, both faculty and staff. University protocol prohibits the distribution of political materials on campus. The content of the letter was interpreted by some to include overt political references and suggestions. The dean of the school, an observant Catholic, agreed with the interpretation of the letter as a political statement, meeting the requirements of the prohibition, and withdrew the letter from faculty and staff mailboxes. The faculty member initiating the activity filed complaint to both the dean and the mission officer. Is the letter, this faculty member maintained, not a pastoral privilege of the bishop? Surely so, responded the dean, but the letter had been published in the local Catholic newspaper and distributed on campus through approved campus ministry venues. Its pointed distribution to specific members of faculty and staff, by a person with a history of partisan political activism, constituted, in his estimation, a political action, violating the university mandate towards non-partisan political activity on campus.

Both faculty member and dean appealed to the mission office of the university for clarification and resolution. Not simply the content of the letter (endorsed by both parties) nor the author (esteemed by both), but the meaning of the letter, its form of distribution, and its association with a political activist, became the issues at hand.

**Conclusion**

Ambiguity about the meaning and interpretation of Catholic thought is nothing new to Catholic institutions, especially to Catholic colleges and universities. American Catholic higher education has struggled with the issue from the Land O’Lakes Conference, Wisconsin, in 1967 (a gathering of Catholic university presidents and other church leaders who set out to describe the nature and mission of a Catholic university in the modern world) to the controversies surrounding the mandatum for theologians after Pope John Paul II’s Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 1990. While describing the distinctive characteristics that make a university Catholic, the Land O’Lakes Conference also sought to align Catholic universities with their secular peers, affirming the importance of academic freedom and true autonomy “in the face of authority of whatever kind, lay or clerical, external to the academic community itself.” Given these tensions about the meaning of Catholic identity in the academy, there remains a strong consensus among many in the field of Catholic higher education that the mission and identity of Catholic universities is more vibrant than ever. Why, then, such tortured and complicated disagreements about the meaning of Catholic thought at a Catholic university? And what is a path to resolution on the matter?

For many mission officers, the focus of efforts in mission and identity lies in the contemporary interpretation of the charism of the founding religious congregation. For
others, a chief goal is the achievement of a “critical mass” of Catholics; namely, the number of committed Catholics on campus as a signal of strength in mission. But the question of the meaning of Catholic itself, for and among the Catholics at a Catholic university, is an even more pressing and urgent concern. The role of the mission officer is to stand faithfully at the center of debate, pressing the conversation, sifting through the political and expedient towards a discussion of the heart of Catholic teaching and spirit. Symbolically, it is taking the seat between the two religious at the table who simply disagree about the meaning of Catholic at the school and locating the essential with them that will make Christ the center of the enterprise.

More than anything, it requires profound tolerance for ambiguity – a trust in prayer, the good will of faculty, staff, and administrators, and belief in the power of God to act, not always comfortably but surely.

Duquesne University, Pittsburgh
A COUPLE LIVING THE DIALOGUE OF CATHOLIC AND METHODIST FAITHS

Our Backgrounds

Rev. Kimberly Greway and Kenneth Hendrata are a married couple who shares their Christian faith but comes from two different traditions – United Methodist and Roman Catholic, respectively. Though we each have strongly held beliefs, we navigate our differences and focus on the similarities of our traditions while also allowing the other to express the uniqueness of their tradition.

A note before we continue. We use the word, “tradition,” purposefully when referring to our United Methodism and Roman Catholicism heritages because we belong to one faith – the Christian faith. We are Christians who find a home in the expressions of Catholicism and Methodism. While we have both experienced various traditions of Christianity and find our primary expression in different traditions, we share the one faith that guides our lives.

We do a lot of talking. As we are an interracial, intercultural, interdenominational couple, there is much to discuss, and more than one language to do it in. The negotiation tactics that we have developed in our shared life help us navigate our religious traditions as well.

Kimberly grew up in Pittsburgh in a family that attended Forest Avenue Presbyterian Church in Bellevue. Though her father was Catholic, her parents had decided to attend solely at the Presbyterian Church in part because of family ties. Just prior to Kimberly’s Confirmation, the family moved its membership to St. Paul’s United Methodist Church to be part of a church that had a vibrant and well-attended youth program. Providentially, this move and the accompanying youth programs had a significant impact on the Kimberly’s discernment of a vocation in the ordained ministry. After participating, during college, in the multi-year discernment process for vocations in the United Methodist Church, Kimberly spent two and a half years in the Peace Corps in Zimbabwe and returned to enroll in the Divinity School at Duke University. Upon completion of all academic and ecclesial requirements, she was ordained. In the Methodist Church, bishops appoint clergy to congregations, as is the case in the Catholic Church.
Kimberly first served five small churches in the Poole and Swanage Circuit of the British Methodist Church in England, then Mount Lebanon United Methodist Church (MLUMC); she is presently the Director of Chaplaincy at the Allegheny County Jail.

Kenneth, who recently became an American citizen, grew up in Indonesia where Christianity is a minor religion comprising only around 10% of the population. Only two major Christian denominations existed in Indonesia when Kenneth grew up, namely, Roman Catholic and Protestant (a fused religion of different Protestant branches, but predominantly Lutheran). Kenneth’s parents are both of Chinese descent, with a Confucian background. They attended Catholic schools, because the Catholic schools provided the best education in Indonesia at the time, and they converted to Catholicism. Kenneth attended a Protestant elementary school; he was baptized when he was eight years old in a Maria Bunda Karmel Catholic Church. He then attended a Catholic school from age twelve to eighteen. He practiced Catholicism throughout college, and has been practicing ever since, singing in multiple church choirs for some sixteen years.

Kenneth is Asian, immigrant, native Indonesian speaker, and Catholic; Kimberly is White, American, native-born English speaker, and Methodist. Kenneth’s profession emphasizes cold logic (software development and business), while Kimberly’s emphasizes empathy (ministry). We have found that these different techniques for coming together across cultures and professions also work wonders when navigating and negotiating our faith traditions.

We observe our Asian values, as well as American values. We shed bad habits entrenched in our cultures and strengthen good ones. We use our strengths from each profession to help each other in everyday tasks - Kenneth handles airline ticket purchases and taxes, while Kimberly manages bills and navigates social expectations for the couple, for example. We choose to grow stronger in our faith by having open minds.

We observe our Asian values, as well as American values. We shed bad habits entrenched in our cultures and strengthen good ones.
and an open dialogue about our different denominations, and to dive deeper into theology to understand and experience God’s love for humankind.

Music as Metaphor for Shared Religious Life

For us, a great expression of our faith and an important part of our “work of the people” (*leitourgia*) is music – both vocal and instrumental. We sing everywhere – at rehearsals, in church, in the car, at home, with friends. We sound out our soprano and bass voices wherever possible. We go caroling, sing for inmates at the jail, and lead worship through choral music. We both find expression of our faith and inspiration from God in the religious and secular music that we sing, play, and listen too.

Similar to a choir made up of people singing different vocal parts, a traditional Indonesian orchestra called *gamelan* is made up of varied instruments played together. Made up primarily of percussion instruments, such as xylophones and gongs, *gamelan* sometimes includes stringed instruments, flutes, or singing. Unlike a western orchestra which is understood to be made up of various instruments, a *gamelan* is considered almost to be one instrument, though it is made up of various individual instruments. These images of both vocal, part-based music, and *gamelan*, one instrument made up of many parts, are helpful in our understanding of our shared religious life. Kenneth comes from an Asian Catholic perspective with heavy doses of Confucian influences; Kimberly harkens from a WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) perspective with a deep appreciation of high liturgy and high Christology. Just as different instruments and voices combine to make complex and interesting music, we view our different denominations as an opportunity to enrich each other. We like to think of our relationship and our shared faith like fused music, East meets West, string meets percussion, soprano meets bass. Without the other parts, a single voice or instrument can be thin and uninspired. Together with instruments and voices both young and old, of differing histories and traditions, music is deeper, richer, and more sonorous. So, too, our faith is enriched by our understanding, appreciation, and celebration of the other’s religious traditions.

How Does it Work: Negotiating, Compromising, Learning

Some interdenominational couples may choose to worship and participate in the life of their respective congregations separately. We have not chosen to do so. We place a high priority on worshiping together, even if sitting in separate sections of the choirs in which we sing. We alternate churches on Sundays, and are active in the choirs of both Duquesne University Chapel and Mount Lebanon United Methodist Church. While we try to rotate weekly, there are occasions on which Kimberly is preaching, teaching, or leading worship in various churches. If we have two “Methodist Sundays” in a row, we try to spend the next two in the Catholic Church. Even our sacramental/ritual celebrations, such as Confirmation and Marriage are joy-filled exercises in ecumenism. Our marriage celebrations encompassed both Methodism and Catholicism, as we shared our vows at Mount Lebanon United Methodist Church and received a Catholic blessing at Saint Bernard’s the year after. Kenneth was confirmed as an adult, having changed schools at the age of confirmation and thus missing his opportunity. Upon his confirmation at Saint
Bernard’s and our marriage, our Methodist and Catholic friends celebrated these holy sacramental events together as one community.

We also deliberately choose to engage in Christian ministries outside of worship together. We have volunteered in Haiti as part of a United Methodist mission team, and have served on several inter-denominational Thanksgiving meal preparation and delivery teams. Music plays an important role in our life of Christian service; we sing in various Catholic and inter-denominational worship services, and have facilitated the Duquesne University Chapel choir coming to the Allegheny County Jail to perform concerts for inmates.

We spend a lot of time talking, discussing, and negotiating. We talk about practical things, like where to spend particular holidays as well as our presumptions about our Christian faith. Kimberly’s profession as a pastor makes for rich discussion, as she is well versed in theology, and as scholars know, few things can be as exhilarating as an exchange of thoughts between two different philosophies, if done respectfully. Being married to a pastor has other benefits as well. On one Ash Wednesday, Kenneth realized at around 10:30 pm that he had forgotten to go to church to receive ashes. Kimberly quickly sprang into action. She had palms from Palm Sunday the year before, burned them, mixed them with oil, blessed them, and made a cross with the ashes on Kenneth’s forehead. Disaster avoided.

Just as singing in both the Catholic and Methodist churches has expanded our horizons to music ranging from Latin chant to camp meeting hymns, so has practicing different traditions of Christianity enriched our palate with different spiritual flavors.

The Necessary Ingredients

We reap the benefits of standing on the shoulders of those that have gone before us in the faith and observing how varied people live out their Christian faith. Our histories and traditions inform our understandings of how varied Christians live out their faith today; they greatly help our shared life. Several factors assist us in living our individual traditions while respecting each other.

A better Understanding of between Catholicism and Protestantism

Through the grace of God, Kimberly and I live in an era where Catholicism and Protestantism have had time to learn from their experiences, contemplate their practices, and mature in their theologies. Much dialogue, discussion, and reconciliation have occurred between Protestantism and Catholicism since the split five hundred years ago. Kimberly: “I in particular am pleased to live in an era where much of the hard work of ecumenism and reconciliation has been done – both on a denominational scale and on a personal level. No longer are little Protestant children told to cross the street to avoid walking in front of a Catholic household as my mother was told in her childhood.”
Being open-minded and validating Each Other.

Kenneth and I love to travel and when we do, we visit nearly every church we see. I have worshiped in churches of all kinds: rural Mennonite, Hungarian Protestant, Haitian Methodist, and Indonesian Catholic, among others. An understanding of the praxis of faith in many contexts helps us at home to accept and even appreciate the other’s practices. Being well traveled, we “have been here before.” We have been exposed to people doing things differently and acknowledge that these different approaches can be a faithful expression of our traditions. When bridging different approaches, we are naturally excited to teach our approach, and must be careful not to turn this enthusiasm into enforcement. As Stephen Covey pointed out in his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Habit 5 is to “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” This rings true in many aspects of social interactions, and certainly in our religious conversations with those of other beliefs.

Valuing spirituality

Our theologies and practices have so much in common. We believe in God and the importance of nourishing one’s spirit. Being Christians, we believe in Christ’s salvation and the need to express our individual relationship with him. Our shared Christianity makes it possible for us to attend each other’s church and still relate to the liturgy and receive spiritual nourishment from the worship.

Sparing the details

As evident in many aspects of life, the details are an area fraught with contention - we can always find something to disagree with. Instead, Kimberly and I take a more pragmatic approach to differences in the details. Do they matter? Do they matter for us in this situation? We endeavor to look at the spirit behind the teaching and to reconcile the differences to enable communion. We follow the other’s lead at times, but we focus on the big picture, and do not let the details distract and divide us. We focus on love - Jesus’ love and our love to each other, as husband and wife, as human beings, and as God’s children.

An example of how we reconcile differences is how we recite standard prayers, responses, and the Nicene Creed. Catholics and Methodists have slightly different versions when reciting The Lord’s Prayer. The Methodists add, “for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and glory forever,” directly after “but deliver us from evil.” Responding to “The Lord be with you,” Catholics now say, “And with your spirit,” while the Methodists say the original, “And also with you.” Yes, there may be some theological differences between the two, but the point is that we also want to reflect the peace to the other person as a whole, including the spirit. So, we just follow the response of the “church of the week” and we believe what we say. A similar approach goes with the Catholic adoption of the new translation of the Nicene Creed. Again, there may be some theological differences, but we focus on the spirit, follow the lead, and believe what we say.
What Is Distinctive about Each Tradition? What have We Learned from Each Other’s Denomination?

Age

Roman Catholicism is an ancient tradition, while Methodism grew out of Anglicanism as a reform movement led by John and Charles Wesley almost 250 years ago. Just as our old and young generations can learn from each other (think quilting and smart phones), these two denominations stand to benefit from learning about each other’s journey and collective wisdom.

Methodists have experienced a liturgical revival in the last few decades, re-establishing some of the traditions that were thrown out in reforms made in the 1700s and 1800s. Methodism has grown out of its heritage of self-definition as anti-Anglican, and reintroduced much of the liturgical elements that had been rejected. Kimberly: “When I was a pastor serving in the British Methodist Church, I encountered resistance to what were fairly standard Christian traditions which the British Methodists felt were solely Anglican. Candles, a beautiful reminder of the light of Christ offered to the world, seemed “too Anglican” to these faithful Christians until they understood the history of the use of candles, and that they were widely accepted in many forms of Christianity aside from Anglicanism.”

Methodist pastors have greater liturgical freedom and thus are able to more flexibly experiment. Recent liturgical innovations combined with liturgical traditions can provide worship that is both relevant and deeply rooted in tradition. One example of this “ancient-future” worship that we have experienced together is a “U2charist” service, using hymns taken directly from U2 songs. It drew a younger and more liberal crowd. All are welcome in the church of Christ and having this diversity can certainly help spread the good news.

On the other hand, sweeping new concepts without regard for the old ones - time tested and stable - is not wisdom either. We have attended a number of weddings in our six years of marriage. The ones that deliberately veered from tradition undoubtedly have some intriguing elements, some for the better and some for the worse. We both cringed as a presider once uttered the words, “by the power vested in me from the Internet…” Yes, scrapping the old for the new can foster innovative approaches, but to truly improve, would it not be better to evaluate the old with the new?

While evaluating old tradition, it is up to us to challenge the reason for its existence and validate it for our own time. What was logical in the past may not be logical now. The reason for Daylight Savings Time to save energy was very logical when first introduced in the early 1900s, before widespread use of Air Conditioning systems and flexible work hours. (Daylight Savings Time means more daylight for people after work and decreased use of electricity for light before bedtime.) In recent times, people have questioned the rationale to keep Daylight Savings Time and they should. Situations have changed.

It would be prudent for us to learn from both old and new. The old has concepts that have evolved over tens and perhaps hundreds of years, making them very stable. The new
has new ideas that can reform old ideas. Methodists can learn from Catholics an appreciation of traditions that are centuries long, while Catholics can gain from Methodists an appreciation of changing with the times. Catholicism certainly has evolved over its lifetime (indulgences is one case in point) and it is important for us to continue to have an open mind and open dialogue. It certainly is no easy task to lead those dialogues, and we are thankful to have Pope Francis and our Catholic leaders lead the charge.

On the other hand, I have found that Catholicism has a deeper mastery in drawing the congregation’s mindset and spirit towards union with God and communion with one another. The evolution of the Catholic liturgy over hundreds of years has beautifully narrated the Mass into the culmination of the Holy Consecration and the following Communion. This is one example of where Methodism can learn from the older Catholicism. A deep look into Catholic liturgy may bring in a new dimension to Methodist services.

I am sure there are lots of other examples where each denomination can learn from the other; once again, the key is open minds and open dialogues. I feel blessed that I live in communities that exemplify this. A couple of times every year, the Mount Lebanon United Methodist Church joins Saint Bernard’s Roman Catholic Church in lessons in carols. MLUMC also has several joint activities (Thanksgiving meals and Good Friday services) with other Protestant denominations (local Lutheran and Presbyterian churches).

Size

There are about 70 million Catholics in the US and 1.2 billion in the world. In comparison, United Methodism has about 7 million members in the US and 12 million worldwide. In the US, the average Catholic parish size is about 4,000 people, while the average Methodist church size is about 200 people. Different sizes have different benefits, challenges, and outcomes. Being bigger usually means more resources are available to you (both manpower and finances), which also means you can probably find any type of ministry you fancy (that you can help with or that can help you). On the other hand, when faced with the same challenge, smaller entities can choose to rise up to it and strive to do as much with less. MLUMC is one such entity, resulting in a higher per capita engagement rate. When you step into that church, you can see it buzzing continuously on Sunday mornings.

People in smaller communities also tend to know each other better because they see the same people more frequently. There are other downstream effects to this: we are more likely to listen to people who we perceive to care about us, and any call-to-action from those people (such as for events and activities) gets more of our attention. More attention to calls-to-action means higher likelihood of actually acting on them.

Kenneth: “Indeed, I do feel like everyone knows everyone else when I go to the United Methodist Church. It has a homey feel to it. I am lucky enough that Duquesne University
Chapel has a homey feel for me too, but that is because I am part of the ministry there and the ministry itself is a small community.” “Before being active in church choirs, I was also fortunate enough to have family and friends who also went to church regularly. My social circle encouraged me to attend church; going to church became both a religious and social event.” “When I moved to Danbury, Connecticut, right after college graduation, I was without friends or family, and it was a pivotal moment in my life where I could have chosen to not continue going to church. I went to several Catholic churches in the area and was a little discouraged at first, but ended up attending one that I was more hopeful about. I felt it had more “energy.” After mass, I talked to a churchgoer I ran into in the parking lot and ended up having a good conversation with her about my situation for about an hour. I went back the next week, and the next, and became a choir member for the next seven years before I packed my bags for graduate school in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In retrospect, part of the reason that I was drawn into that church was a prospect of belonging. I could see there was community, there was activity.”

If community, particularly a tight-knit community, and activity are important, and smaller communities tend to accentuate these, how do we have the best of both worlds, what aspects can we learn from both worlds? Indeed, many organizations have realized this and are actively pursuing inroads to combine them. I used to work at UPMC Enterprises, an investing arm of UPMC (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center). UPMC is a large institution with around $5 billion in revenue. UPMC Enterprises, on the other hand, is an attempt to spur innovation by injecting “startup” elements using the large pool of resources. (Startup companies are well known for their ability to do more with less.) PNC Bank, with $16 billion in revenue, is another example. It launched NUMO, an equivalent to UPMC Enterprises, less than 2 years ago. Kenneth: “This is not to say that neither the Roman Catholic Church nor the United Methodist Church has realized this. The lesson I have learned by being part of both worlds is that it is not enough to just make the size smaller to reap its benefits, but it is more important to remove barriers to action (such as bureaucracy) and promote interaction among the group members. One concrete way we can leverage our strengths is to foster collaboration. Each denomination has strengths that can complement the other.”

Church Structure and Liturgy

Roman Catholicism has a uniform structure of the Mass throughout the world, with uniform responses, prayers, and creeds. This uniformity serves as an anchor for its members as they transition throughout their lives, where a disruption in one part of life can cause discontinuity in another. In Kenneth’s own experience, this uniformity is one reason of his continuing practice of Catholicism while transitioning from Jakarta to Austin to Danbury to Pittsburgh. Kenneth: “Something that I learned about change management is that change can breed anxiety and one way we can minimize this anxiety is by being able to hold onto things that stayed the same. When everything else changes, the constant provides refuge.”

Another side effect of the uniformity of the Catholic liturgy is that the audience’s mind is freed up to focus on aspects that are different. In Catholicism’s case, these are the
readings, petitions, homily, and announcements, among others.

Methodist pastors have a lot of freedom in planning liturgy. They can insert and delete certain liturgical elements as they see fit to accommodate the congregation’s worship needs and the issues of the day. This flexibility allows for a wide variety of worship styles. Such flexibility in the service structure for each congregation certainly enables the individual churches to cater to its local needs and its members’ age distribution. For example, MLUMC has a number of young children and it dedicates part of the service for the pastor to gather the children and speak directly to them as a group. It can also direct the messages and responses to issues that are pertinent to the day’s issues. MLUMC also has a number of mentally disabled members and has established a Sunday school class that caters to their needs and interests.

Hymnody and Communion

Each religious tradition prioritizes certain elements over others. Unless congregants were willing to attend four-hour services, certain liturgical elements must be prioritized over others. Methodism celebrates a long and vaunted history of hymnody. Catholicism cherishes tried and tested traditions of frequent (if not daily) Eucharist. Each tradition can learn from the other in these four areas.

In Methodism, the hymnal with its ancient and modern hymns, psalms, and prayers is a book of theology as well as liturgy. Hymn writing and singing formed an integral part of the development of Methodist thought. Clergy taught both theology and Bible to parishioners through hymns. John and Charles Wesley combined wrote over 6,000 hymns, which elucidated Scripture, served as a sung catechism, and assisted believers in memorizing Scripture. Methodists have been a singing people since the beginning.

Kenneth: “Often in a Catholic Mass, only the first two verses of a hymn are sung. There are wonderful scriptural illustrations and rousing lyrics that are missed if we never sing beyond verse two. Catholics can learn from Methodists that the music is not just there to have some background music while we wait for the next part of the liturgy to begin. Rather, hymnody is a rich tradition that can teach, inspire, and challenge. We ought not restrict ourselves to two perfunctory verses, but sing heartily and enthusiastically through the entire hymn on occasion.”

Catholicism has long emphasized frequent, if not daily, Eucharist. Methodism’s practice of periodic Eucharist was shaped by its shortage of clergy in the New World more than its theology. John Wesley advocated frequent communion, certainly each Sunday, but the Methodists were unable to maintain this frequency in the New World. Clergy in early America were circuit riders who traveled far distances between parishes. They would arrive at a parish and spend a week or two and then travel on horseback to the next parish hundreds of miles away. This shortage of clergy led to the practice of quarterly communion. Once more clergy were educated and ordained, the tradition of quarterly
communion remained. In the liturgical revival, most Methodist churches shifted to monthly communion.

Kimberly: “Methodist churches no longer have to wait several months before seeing their pastors again. We can learn from Catholicism that frequent communion can be sustaining and life-giving. The weekly celebration of the Eucharist in the Mass can maintain our focus on Jesus’ sacrifice and his salvific acts for us in ways that monthly communion does not. Gone are the clergy shortages that prevented us from celebrating the Eucharist at each Sunday worship service. We ought to invite our congregations into an exploration of how more frequent communion would sustain them and enrich their faith.”

Conclusion

An orchestra contains many different instruments and a choir many different voice parts. They each have different tunes, but play their own part in contributing to the one vibrant body to make beautiful music. And so, a well-tuned interfaith relationship can make for a richer relationship with God. In our reflection, we highlight that communication, an open mind, respect, understanding, a focus on the big picture, and spirituality enable this journey. There are certainly differences between Catholicism and Methodism - age, size, church structure, and liturgy among other things - but we choose to view the differences as strengths and learn from them.

Rev. Kimberly Greway and Kenneth Hendrata, Pittsburgh

Endnotes

Experiences of Creole Workers in Catholic Parishes of the Diocese of Port Louis, Mauritius

Roman Catholics account for 17.7% of the global population, or about 1.285 billion people (The Pontifical Yearbook, 2017). The sheer size of the Catholic Church and its over 2,000-year history suggest the expansive nature of its influence, particularly in the area of moral doctrine and social teachings. Less often considered, however, are workplace conditions within Catholic institutions. In this investigation, we were interested in knowing what it is like to be employed by Catholic organizations, particularly in the increasingly Catholic African region about which little is known. Specifically, we examined the experiences and perceptions of ethnically Creole, parish-based employees on the island of Mauritius.

Catholic Social Teaching on Work

Beyer (2017:248) aptly stated, “Beleaguered workers in the United States and across the globe need more scholars of all faiths to turn to their traditions and place them at the service of labor justice.” In line with his observation, and given that the context for this investigation was the labor experiences of workers in Catholic parishes, we chose to ground the theoretical framework in Catholic social teaching, and especially the principles related to human dignity, the meaning of work in the human experience, workers’ rights, and solidarity.

The church’s position on work and its role in human experience is grounded in its teaching about human worth and dignity. Every person, made in the image and likeness of the Creator, bears the living image of God and thus possesses inalienable dignity. Because Catholic social teaching views men and women as made in God’s image, work and everything the person does can serve to make him or her more human. Through work, people have the opportunity to build up their lives and live a dignified existence.
Dr. Christin Jungers

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The specifically human (and not simply economic) purpose of work is viewed in social teaching as a way to foster the cultural and moral formation of individuals, families, and societies (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004). Pope Leo XIII in his prolific work *Rerum Novarum* (1891), stated that people labor for the sake of self-preservation. Ninety years later, Pope John Paul II (1981) extended the meaning of this human element of work by affirming that work corresponds to a person’s dignity and helps one to achieve a sense of fulfillment. Fundamentally, work provides an avenue through which people can advance their identity, be innovative, and reflect the image of God in the world (Pope Francis, 2015). Social teaching is clear that the value of work is not principally in its outcomes but in the persons who offer services or create products through their labor efforts. Simply stated, “work is for man and not man for work” (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, para. 272). When the activities or products of work are treated as more important than the person, therein lies a foundation for injustice (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004).

While the personal aspect of work is privileged in the Catholic worldview, work also is inherently social (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004). The social nature of work signifies the responsibility people have to labor for their own development and for the good of others. This outward aim of work is important, as each person is a part of the human race to which he or she owes something, having inherited the fruits of the labor of past generations (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004). As much as people have a duty to work, social teaching is unwavering in its stance for the protection of workers’ rights. People are obliged to work, but they also must be ensured rights so that their personhood is not diminished through harmful working conditions (Pope Leo XIII, 1891; Pope Francis, 2015).

Finally, the principle of solidarity and the church’s understanding of conflict enhance our understanding of work. Pope John Paul II (1981) described solidarity as genuine support and a decided and firm commitment to the preservation of the common good. The dedicated togetherness implied in this understanding of solidarity does not exclude conflict. Indeed, conflict aimed at seeking
justice can become a unifying process between workers and employers. The pursuit of justice from two groups holding opposing perspectives can contribute to a more complete understanding of each other’s positions. Catholic social teaching does not endorse a “cheap solidarity” in which workers are forced to accept unjust working conditions simply to maintain a peaceful relationship between themselves and management (Beyer, 2017:239).

Method
The primary research question in this study was: What are the lived experiences and perceptions of Creole, parish-based employees of the Catholic diocese of Mauritius about their treatment as workers? To answer this question, we used an ethnographic (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2003), phenomenologically-oriented (van Manen, 1997), and participatory action-informed methodology (MacDonald, 2012). An ethnographic framework was fitting due to our interest in the church as a cultural institution within Mauritian society. A phenomenologically-oriented approach grounded our interest in knowing about the meaning of work for the participants and how their work environments influenced their relationships with priests and administrators. Finally, the participatory-action stance intentionally attempted to empower participants. This was important to us given the Creole community’s documented struggles with racism and discrimination that has had the effect of limiting workers’ job possibilities (Boswell, 2014) and because participants all were part of a low-wage strata, which could be disempowering.

Setting and Participants
The co-researchers in this study included the first two authors and ten participants. The first author is a Creole Mauritian Catholic priest and a counselor educator at a university in the United States. The second author is also a counseling professor at an American university. We recruited ten participants from Catholic parishes in the diocese of Port Louis, Mauritius. The purposeful sample included workers who were: (a) ethnically Mauritian Creole; (b) employed in a Roman Catholic parish; (c) holding a full-time, low-skill position such as cook, handyman, secretary, or sacristan; and (d) educated at no higher than a high school level. The sample was drawn from diverse locations on the island, including five different parishes in five different cities. By targeting parishes in both rural and urban settings, we sampled participants from parishes that were poor and those that were more financially stable. In addition, by seeking participants from multiple parishes we ensured that our data was not limited to participants’ perceptions about a single parish priest or administrative board (i.e., fabrique).

The participants included six men and four women aged 33 to 63 (M=51). All participants were married except one who was single and one who was divorced; all of them except two had children. Participants’ years of service ranged from 9 to 32 (M=18 years). We interviewed two secretaries, five sacristans, one handyman, one cleaning staff, and one person who was a cook and a maid. With regard to salary, the participants reported their starting and current salaries in Mauritian rupees (at the time of data collection in August of 2017, the conversion rate from dollars to rupees was 1:34). The current monthly salary ranged from 6,978 to 14,250 rupees (roughly 205 to 419 US
dollars), with an average monthly salary among participants at 10,098 rupees or 297 US dollars.

Instrumentation

The primary instrument of data collection in this study was a semi-structured interview guide informed by literature that framed the inquiry's theoretical and methodological grounding. Examples of questions from the interview guide include the following: (a) What does it mean to you to be an employee at this parish; (b) Describe your interactions and relationship with the parish priest(s) and parish fabrique (administrative board); (c) Catholic social teaching suggests that through work people should have an opportunity to be creative, find meaning, and become “more a human being.” What are your thoughts about this statement in light of your daily work? (d) Do you believe you are fairly compensated for your work, including monetarily and in terms of time off for sickness and vacation? Please describe; and (e) What does the parish administration need to know that would contribute to the betterment of your experiences as a worker?

Data Collection

We conducted and audio-recorded 10 individual interviews, each of which lasted between an hour and an hour and a half. During the process of interviewing participants, we discussed our researcher-observations after each interview and recorded these in our field notes. Our observations included impressions about the interviewees and reflections on our theoretical and methodological grounding (Patton, 2003). Prior to beginning each interview, we discussed with the participants the purpose of the study and informed them of their right to withdraw at any time. We transcribed all of the interviews, as well as our audio-recorded researcher observations, which served as the data for analysis.

Analysis

Data analysis co-occurred with the process of data collection. We listened to and then transcribed the interviews throughout data collection, which allowed us to begin to shape our understanding of emerging themes and to corroborate these tentative findings with other interviewees, as well as to refine some of the questions we were asking (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Checking out with interviewees our emerging understandings added trustworthiness to the analysis process (Silverman, 2005). As we read the transcriptions, we started to look for themes related to the workers’ lived human experiences (van Manen, 1997) that seemed to recur throughout the interviews. As a further check on the accuracy of the emergent themes, we (the first two authors) invited two doctoral-level research assistants to review the transcriptions, along with our proposed themes and subthemes, in order to provide feedback for refinement about the themes. Finally, we compared the findings across all of the individual cases. The constant comparative work of analysis also allowed us to come up with thick descriptions of participants’ experiences and perceptions and to identify main themes and subthemes. By the end of analysis, we identified three main themes and 11 sub-themes.
Results

Personal Meaning of Work and Workplace Relationships. The first main theme related to the personal meaning of work and workplace relationships. We identified three sub-themes related to this main theme that point to the satisfying spiritual aspects of the co-researchers’ jobs and the inconsistent relationships with priests and members of the administrative boards or fabrique.

Work as spiritual fulfillment and vocation. When asked about the personal meaning they derived from their jobs, participants talked about spiritual aspects of their jobs. Several of the participants described their job as a calling or a vocation. For instance, one sacristan stated, “When I was asked to work here, I saw it as a call and not as a job.” A secretary noted that the most meaningful part of her job was to prepare the names of people who came to the church asking for prayer intentions or to give thanks for blessings in their lives and then to offer those prayers at a Friday service. Among the participants, there was a strong sense that working at the parish was a special job that gave them a connection to God.

Relationship with parish priests: From supportive to disrespectful. Characterizing the style and type of relationship the participants had with the parish priests with whom they worked is complex. Less than half of the participants described positive relationships with the priests. For those that did, they talked about being understood or supported by the priests. For example, one participant mentioned that the priest at the parish provided him a loan to help build his house; another woman said, “I’m very attached to Fr. [name]!” as she described how he seemed to understand her life difficulties, talked to her regularly, and was interested in her family. Conversely, participants also described their relationship with priests in a way that suggested disrespect. One woman described how the parish priest worked with the fabrique to increase her work duties and then create a contract requiring the new duties. He further told her that if she did not sign, she would lose her job. Others described being spoken to by priests in ways that were humiliating or hurtful. One sacristan relayed an experience of apologizing to the priest after a mass because he had forgotten to put out the paten on the altar. In turn, the priest reproached him, “You, [name], if I have to forgive you, I have to do that every day.”

Unrecognizing, distant, and demanding fabrique. In the Mauritian Catholic Church, each parish is administrated by a board of lay persons called the fabrique. This board has the authority to hire and release workers, to create and adjust contracts, and to evaluate employees. The interviewees generally recognized the fabrique as their boss, though the relationship between the parish priest and the fabrique in terms of power and authority did vary across parishes, with a couple of parish boards taking their direction from the priest. Additionally, the membership of the fabrique changes on an ongoing basis. Although two participants stated that their interactions with the fabrique were positive, the rest characterized their relationship to the fabrique as unrecognizing of their work, distant, and even demanding or exploitative. For example, one man stated, “The fabrique keeps...
changing. Some are very friendly and they want to talk, but others keep their distance—maybe because they think they are better than us. They say we need to be a team, but they do not act like a team.” In response to a query about whether or not he knew if the board was satisfied with his work, another participant stated simply, “There has not been any reproach.” Pressing further, we asked if any gratitude or interest had been expressed in his work and the participant exclaimed, “No! Never.” Speaking to the exploitative relationship he perceived, one handyman said, “They exploit me. If I am around, they will order me to do things that are not part of my job. Sometimes I react against that, but they do not like it, and there are repercussions…Like the priests, the fabrique changes, but the mentality stays the same.”

Striving for More: Dignity of Work and Workers’ Rights

A central goal of this study was to understand how parish workers viewed their treatment from the perspective of core church teachings on the meaning of work and workers’ rights. Findings from this theme highlight participants’ perceptions about their wages, the personal and emotional impact of often paradoxically informal yet demanding job structures, and barriers to being creative and innovative in their jobs.

Compensation not in keeping with cost of living. Catholic social teaching describes the rights of workers to a just wage. Therefore, we were interested in what the co-researchers thought about their financial compensation (all of the participants worked full-time and the average hours worked per week was 40). Almost unanimously, the participants agreed that their salaries (averaging $297 U.S. per month) were insufficient to meet the costs of living in Mauritius. The only participant to state that he was satisfied with his salary also was the only person never to be married or have children; he noted that had he had a family his perception about his salary might be different. All other interviewees described their salaries as “unjust,” or stated, “you cannot do much with that [salary].” As a way to supplement their salary, half of the interviewees engaged in other work to make ends meet. One woman who made sacramentals noted, “My salary is not enough to make ends meet, and I cannot progress unless I do my small business of selling medals – this alone has helped me.” As a follow-up to our inquiry about the sufficiency of pay, we asked all of the participants if they had an opportunity for a raise or a promotion. Every participant stated that the only raise they received was the cost-of-living wage sanctioned by the Mauritian government.

“All will be credited in heaven.” When talking to the interviewees about their compensation, we noticed that for at least half of them, it was difficult to articulate either a desire for or a justification for a higher salary. It appeared that participants were inhibited in articulating their own financial needs due to beliefs about their jobs being vocations or because they were protective of a parish that they believed was too poor to pay them more. For example, when asked what he believed a fair salary would be, one sacristan stated instead, “I count the money and know that the parish doesn’t make much money, so I would not think I should ask for more money.” Exampling the blurring between working a job that one sees as a call and accepting an insufficient wage, one secretary who had just confirmed that she sees her work as a vocation stated, “You see this salary—it doesn’t
compensate for what we are doing. What I am doing has no price. My reward will be given there [in heaven]. If I worked elsewhere I would have not done it for this salary. Not at all.”

**Informal job structures that engender angst and frustration.** To learn about structures that might be in place to protect workers’ rights, we inquired about contracts, employee handbooks, systems of evaluation, and sick and vacation leave. The majority of participants had no meaningful contract; none of the participants had ever seen an employee handbook; none received regular evaluations; and every participant was aware of his or her right to sick and vacation leave, primarily because leave time is regulated by the Mauritian government.

With regard to the contracts, seven of the ten participants either had no written contract or a contract they considered not meaningful because it did not outline their job duties, salary, and other compensation. One secretary said she had a contract, but “there is nothing in it. The only thing it says is that I have to uphold confidentiality, but it has nothing about my duties or pay.” Those who had no written contract learned about their job responsibilities through word of mouth and by doing what they were told to do by the parish priest or fabrique. The lack of a clear job description caused concern for participants because they experienced their job duties being changed when new priests or members of the fabrique took over. One participant who was a sacristan for ten years talked about how a new priest and fabrique wanted to add the washing of altar linens to her workload. She was aware that another parishioner was doing this washing to earn extra money. When she refused to do the washing, the fabrique drafted a contract for her including the washing as part of her duties. She reported being upset, and she refused to sign. She stated, “I wanted to go to a law office, but I thought I should not because I’m Catholic and don’t want to cause a scandal. I feel desperate because there is no one to talk to about this.” Others similarly feared being told that their job duties would be increased with the advent of new leadership. They recognized that they were in a vulnerable position because they did not have a contract or professional advocate that could represent their position. We also specifically inquired with participants about whether or not they had an employee handbook or had awareness of workplace policies. None of the participants knew of such documents.

**Barriers to being creative, innovative, and becoming more human through work.** When asked about opportunities to be innovative or creative in their work and to talk about instances in which they believed work helped to dignify them, the participants largely struggled to respond. The general sense was that participants experienced barriers to being innovative in their work. For instance, one secretary stated about her ability to be creative, “People come to talk to me, and my compassion makes me want to help, but I refrain because I think this will lead to problems because people see this as not my job.” She explained further that the only thing she feels free to do is modify her duties within the context of what is expected of her. A female sacristan similarly said, “I feel I am ill-
treated and am not being dignified through my work even though the priests will preach about it on Labor Day.”

Call to Action: Recommendations for Enhancing Workplace Conditions

The third main theme relates to the participatory action-oriented method of the study. We were interested in knowing how the participants believed their workplace conditions could be enhanced. This theme has four sub-themes, all of which take the form of recommendations for enhancing workplace conditions.

Union or workplace advocate. The majority of participants expressed a general sentiment that they did not have anyone with whom to speak about their concerns related to workplace issues. The majority also expressed interest either in seeing a union be formed or having some impartial person outside of the parish to whom they could go as an advocate. One participant said that he would like to see a union formed “not as a way to fight against the church, but because it is the right of the workers to be able to come together.” A handyman supported the general idea of a workers’ advocate, saying, “We don’t have anyone to whom we can go when we have work problems. I think we need a team who will speak out for us.”

Interest in professional training and development. There was almost unanimous interest among the participants for having access to professional training that could be useful in their jobs and help them grow professionally. Just as noteworthy, when the participants discussed the idea of training, they became animated and excited. One participant talked about wanting to get his driver’s license, which he could use to help run errands for the parish. Another said she would like to take a course in flower arranging to be able to create arrangements for the church altar; a third person talked about being trained to use sound equipment so that he would be able to solve problems with the sound system. Two sacristans proposed a variation on the theme of outside training with the suggestion that all of the sacristans get together on a regular basis to discuss how to do their work effectively and efficiently.

Sensitization of priests and fabrique to life and work conditions. This theme had to do with the intersection of work with the participants’ personal lives. Several participants recommended that the priests and fabrique develop more compassion for them as they believed the administration did not necessarily understand how difficult it was to make a living on the small salaries they received. Additionally, some participants suggested that empathy be extended to personal life difficulties, especially when they had health problems that interfered with their ability to do their jobs. These participants were disappointed at the harsh and discompassionate responses they received when they needed time off due to sickness.
Regular evaluation and administrative interest about work conditions. Participants described the fabrique as being distant and uninvolved with them as workers. A final recommendation, which we called regular evaluation and interest in work conditions, seemed to address this concern of the workers. Participants talked about wanting regular conversations with the administration about their work and simply being noticed for the job they were doing rather than being taken for granted. One man said, “We need a regular conversation between the priests, fabrique, and the workers. This doesn’t happen now unless I initiate the conversation. But, others are afraid of losing their job if they speak up the way I do.” Another participant stated, “It has always been my dream that someone would be interested in what I am doing, but there has been no one.”

Discussion

Spiritually Meaningful Work

Our first theme, which focused on the personal meaning of work, clearly evidenced that participants viewed their work as more than a mundane job. While a few people said their job was meaningful because it allowed them to generate income, all participants spoke about a spiritual aspect of work that gave them a sense of purpose. Being an employee of a religious institution offered the interviewees a chance to see their work as more than mere mechanistic acts aimed at productivity (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004). Indeed, having jobs that involved a spiritual component and viewing work from a spiritual perspective seemed to engage participants’ whole selves: body and soul; heart and mind; conscience and will (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004). Participants’ experiences suggest that they perceived their work as a way to craft a purposeful existence.

Objectification of the Parish Worker

Catholic social teaching recognizes that with work can come a measure of toil and suffering, even injustice in a variety of forms. Pope Leo XIII (1891) affirmed that the working class has the right to a just wage, time for rest, private property, and, most importantly, the right not to be used as instruments for others’ gain. Pope John Paul II (1981) re-affirmed the subjective or personal dimension of work over the objective. This insight is worth considering in light of findings that suggested interviewees often were treated more as the means to accomplish tasks than as people with dignity. Perhaps the best example of objectification was interviewees’ sense that they were not noticed. Participants did not have an opportunity to discuss their work with the parish fabrique; others said the only evidence they had of doing a satisfactory job was in not being reproached. More striking, some participants felt exploited by those in authority. There was a sense among participants that they were taken for granted, which is one way the human person can begin to be treated as a means to an end. Notably, participants recommended two actions that offered remedies to the erosion of human subjectivity they
felt. First, the workers wanted some form of regular evaluation by superiors. Second, many participants also endorsed the idea that priests and the *fabrique* appreciate their whole life, including financial challenges and family obligations. Both of these actions require that the *fabrique* and priests treat parish workers as the persons they are more than the work they produce.

### Constrained Ability to Become “More a Human Being”

Work is a fundamental dimension of the human experience that the church sees as a way for people to develop their human capacity (Tablan, 2015). John Paul II (1981, p. 13) wrote, “[T]hrough work man not only transforms nature…but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes more a human being.” In this inquiry, participants struggled to identify how their work helped them advance their development as persons. Rather, they described how they were not able to be creative within their jobs. Our sense was that those in authority might have lacked an inspired view on the low-wage, generally low-skill positions participants held. This, coupled with poor and sometimes disrespectful treatment from priests and the *fabrique*, seemed to act as barriers to the interviewees’ ability to develop their talents. It was striking that participants were interested in training that could expand their skills, transform their duties, and give them a new sense of joy in their work, thus potentially helping them tap into the fulfillment after which people strive in work.

### Environment Lacking in Some Basic Workers’ Rights

Catholic social teaching is replete with the affirmation of workers’ rights. Tablan (2015) observed that it is a challenge for employers to satisfy all workers’ rights, but he also contended that employers have a moral obligation to create environments in which rights can be achieved. Not only were participants lacking in some key labor rights, the conditions that would enable them to achieve those rights also were not consistently present. One right seriously lacking was the right to a living wage. According to the most recent poverty analysis by the Republic of Mauritius Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (2015), the poverty line in 2012 was set at a monthly salary of 5,652 rupees for a family of one adult and 13,310 rupees for a family of two adults and two children. Six of the ten participants had two or more children; of these five earned a salary below the 2012 poverty line (the salary range of those with two or more children was 6,985-10,000 rupees). The median monthly salary of all participants was 10,098 rupees. These figures confirm participants’ perceptions that their salaries were not in keeping with the cost of living in Mauritius. Moreover, the finding that at least half of the participants sought other sources of income speaks to the lack of a just wage.

Other concerning findings related to lack of written contracts, fear around requesting a contract, and feelings of disempowerment to self-advocate in instances when job duties expanded upon demand. Achieving improved workplace conditions or job enrichment is always the result of ongoing dialogue between those in management positions and employees (Tablan, 2015). Unfortunately, the conditions for dialogue generally were not experienced by the co-researchers. When asked about how to enhance their work
conditions, participants described wanting regular evaluation by priests and the fabrique and the installation of workplace advocates, possibly including a union. Regular evaluation could be an opportunity for forging meaningful relationships among the co-researchers and those in administrative roles that seemed to be lacking. More importantly, forging relationships of genuine interest could be the foundation for enhancing solidarity, or the firm commitment of administrators to addressing parish workers’ rights (John Paul II, 1981). Beyer (2017:249) observed, however, that Catholic social teaching does not endorse “cheap solidarity” or a false commitment to workers’ rights marked by a prohibition on conflict between employees and management. He further observed that in Catholic workplaces, administrators can endorse the notion of workplace-as-family, only to mask a paternalistic attitude that is used to prevent conflict and convince employees to accept unjust working conditions. Findings indicated that participants held mindsets protective of their church parishes and at times even found it difficult to vocalize their rights as workers. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that they were contending with issues such as limited education and low-skill work that could be perceived negatively by others and be personally disempowering. Together, these factors suggest the importance of interviewees’ observation that a workplace advocate or union might be beneficial to ushering in change.

Conclusion

In sum, we found that participants brought a spiritual outlook to their work experiences for which they were overwhelmingly grateful. Concurrently, parish employees lived an existence as workers that was calling out for reform in several key areas of labor rights. The Catholic Church has an expansive, well-developed, and person-centered understanding of the meaning and place of work in the human life. Social teachings can and should be used to further reflection on how to better make the work experience of the most vulnerable workers the church employs congruent with the philosophies it espouses.

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Pope Francis encourages all Christians, by virtue of their baptism, to answer the God-given call to holiness. This exhortation consists of five chapters. The first (nos. 3–34) outlines its purpose: to speak of holiness in a practical way. Personal weakness is not to discourage us – even the saints had faults – but rather, we rely on the Spirit of the risen Lord who empowers each one to fulfill their unique mission for the realization of God’s kingdom in the world.

The second chapter (nos. 35–62) confronts two false ideas of holiness: Gnosticism and Pelagianism. The first is a heresy that idolizes the intellect and promotes the illusion that all of faith’s mysteries are ultimately intelligible. It turns “the Christian experience into a set of intellectual exercises” (46). The second exaggerates the role of personal effort and undermines the primacy of grace. Growth in holiness is a progressive transformation with God’s free gift growing and developing within us (56).

The third chapter (nos. 63–109) presents the Beatitudes, as recounted in Matthew’s gospel (5:3–12), and reflects on each of them in turn. As each human being is “infinitely loved by the Father” (98) so we are to express that love by being merciful to each other. The Lord judges us by this one clear criterion (Matthew 25:31–46). True holiness is a personal relationship with Christ that recognizes him in the poor and the suffering and works for a just society.

The fourth chapter (nos. 110–157) proposes five signs of Christian holiness. First, a strong confidence in the abiding love of God that enables perseverance through life’s humiliations and humble patience in constantly doing what is right. Second, joy and good humor that witnesses to an “inner hope and a spiritual fulfilment that the world cannot understand or appreciate” (125). Third, a fervor and apostolic courage that comes from within to share the Gospel with others. Fourth, a common life with regular sharing of word and Eucharist and a cherishing of “the little details of love” (145) that guards against an isolating individualism. Fifth, a commitment to personal prayer as times “spent alone with God are also necessary” (149).

The fifth chapter (nos. 158–177) acknowledges that the Christian life is a constant battle not only against a worldly mentality and against human weakness, but also, as Scripture attests, against the malign power of the evil one. We pray for deliverance from the power of this “personal being who assails us” (160). This is a spiritual combat best engaged by actively choosing the good and giving oneself generously to the Lord. We combat the tendency towards self-deception by praying for the spiritual gift of discernment to distinguish what is evil from what is good and to choose the good. It is through such discernment, attentive to the Gospel and the Magisterium, that “we can better accomplish the mission entrusted to us at our baptism” (174).

This conversation, reported in ten chapters, brings the reader into the soul of a pilgrim of faith, Robert Sarah, son of the small country village of Ourous in the north of Guinea Conakry, West Africa. This village boy was born in 1945, into the culture of the Coniagui people, animist farmers and livestock breeders. He is the only son of his parents and speaks affectionately of his early family life from which he would depart at 11 years of age to study at St. Augustine Minor Seminary, Bingerville, Ivory Coast. He strongly attributes his vocation to the missionary priests of his home village. “I might never have left my village if the Holy Ghost Fathers had not spoken about Christ to some poor villagers.” (148).

That first journey beyond the village and his country was one of many journeys that would lead him to priestly ordination for the Archdiocese of Conakry in 1969. Ten years later, he became its archbishop. In 2001, Pope John Paul II called Archbishop Sarah to Rome and appointed him as Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. In 2010, Pope Benedict XVI appointed him as President of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum and made him a Cardinal. In 2014, Pope Francis named Cardinal Sarah as Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. In this conversation Cardinal Sarah offers strident criticism on such issues within the church as “the botched preparation for liturgical reform” following Vatican II’s renewal of the liturgy (84); the heresy of activism among priests (108); the dictatorship of relativism (115, 183); gender ideology (130); the dangers of interreligious dialogue (139).

Diat, a French journalist and author who wrote Benedict XVI : L’Homme qui ne voulait pas être pape : Histoire secrète d’un règne, 2014, explains in his introduction that he sought out the inner truth of the man. The truth he found became clear to him. Cardinal Sarah is “a friend of God, a merciful and forgiving man, a man of silence, a good man” (12). He is also a controversial figure with his analysis of Western civilization as secularized and individualistic. He is ill at ease in an increasingly secular Europe lamenting a loss of Christian faith and culture, source of the faith he received. “How can we Africans comprehend the fact that Europeans no longer believe what they gave us so joyfully, in the worst possible conditions?” (148). He interprets efforts by some bishops’ conferences to find pastoral solutions to the situation of Catholics who are divorced or divorced and civilly remarried as a “rebellion against the teaching of Jesus and of the magisterium” (277) to which he, and the Church in Africa are firmly opposed.

The reader easily detects the sense of loss for a golden age now past. Cardinal Sarah is disappointed but not disillusioned at the way the church in the West is moving. It is as if the diverse sounds of the market place have displaced the silence of God. The reverence the Cardinal expresses for sacred worship and the solace he finds in it originates from his early years (50) and continues to hold central place in his life. “The most important moments in life are the hours of prayer and adoration” (70). The worship of God in silence is a theme

Diat acknowledges that faith is everything for Cardinal Sarah. Hence the title of this biography, “God or Nothing,” which echoes the dying words of the second founder of the Holy Ghost Fathers, Venerable Francis Libermann, “God is all, man is nothing.” The sons of Libermann in Ourous continued the spirit of abandonment to God’s will so characteristic of Libermann. “They had totally abandoned themselves into God’s hands and considered themselves merely clumsy, inadequate instruments of his Son. They were certain that evangelization remains essentially the work of God” (146).

For the Cardinal the missionaries of his childhood and youth remain the yardstick with which he measures the church in the west and finds it wanting. “The Holy Ghost Fathers in my little village were part of that remarkable tradition of priests magnetized by the breath of God to such an extent that they were capable of things that were humanly impossible” (257). The spirit of martyrdom they then exemplified continues in many parts of the world, while, “in the West, men of the church are trying to reduce the requirements of the Gospel to a minimum” (280). Cardinal Sarah is opposed to this dilution of gospel values and church teaching. A godless West needs to once again “set its sights on God and the Crucified Lord” (282).

*William Cleary, C.S.Sp.*
“Throw open the windows of the church and let the fresh air of the Holy Spirit blow through” were the prophetic words spoken by Pope St. John XXIII at the opening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962. Vatican II brought about a new understanding of what it is to be church and what it is to be on mission. This new understanding called for the renewal and adaptation of religious life. William Cleary, in *Spiritan Life and Mission since Vatican II*, provides a detailed narrative of how the Congregation of the Holy Spirit responded to this call and found its path to renewal through a re-discovery of its founding charism, faithfulness to the teaching of the church, and attentiveness to the Holy Spirit. St. Paul’s teaching on charisms as gifts of grace given through the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Christian community; the theology of Vatican II; and careful study of its founders; provide the key points of reference for Cleary’s interpretation of the congregation’s renewal. This narrative of renewal is in three parts.

Part 1, *Archbishop Lefebvre as superior general and Vatican II*. Archbishop Lefebvre, as superior general, interpreted Vatican II through a conservative lens and resisted significant change. Consequently, from 1962 to 1968, the congregation’s leadership sought to live more in the familiar past than embrace the future with its many challenges. Lefebvre saw his role as holding to the *status quo* by “emphasising with firmness that Spiritans must maintain the fundamental and absolute principles which make up the very life of the congregation, that is, faith in the Lord, in Peter and in the church” (54). Lefebvre’s resistance to change was troubling to many who could quote Scripture, “no one puts new wine in old wineskins” (Matt 9:17). Aware of this discontent, Lefebvre offered his resignation at the Extraordinary General Chapter of Renewal of 1968, but only after the election of his successor. Until then he proposed to preside, as was his right. The majority of capitulants saw the danger in this and rejected his proposal. Lefebvre took leave of the chapter and the congregation (73).

Part 2, *The “ad experimentum” period from General Chapter XIII to General Chapter XVI (1968-1986) culminating in a new Rule of Life in 1986*. GC XIII was uncompromising in asserting the primacy of the missionary aspect of the Spiritan vocation, with religious life lived in community as the means by which this vocation is realised. It declared that the specific end of the congregation was “missionary activity among peoples and groups whose material and spiritual needs are greatest and who are the most neglected” (91). The many changes of GC XIII proved too radical for some and the unity of the congregation was threatened.

The general chapter of 1974 (GC XIV) “refocused attention on membership and the building up of community” (113) and called for animation of the membership. From 1974 to 1980, the focus was on new foundations in the southern hemisphere, which marked a new era of international and intercultural community living in the congregation. GC XV (1980) recognized the action of the Spirit in the development of new ministries,
particularly in the area of justice and peace. GC XVI in 1986 finalized the *Spiritan Rule of Life* (SRL): an authoritative point of reference for all future discernment in the congregation.

Part 3, *The Implementation of the SRL as interpreted through intra-congregational Discourse, particularly from GC XVII to GC XIX.* Cleary attaches great importance to general chapters as “moments when the entire congregation meets through representation to reflect, evaluate, and decide on the apostolic and religious vitality of the membership and its missionary activity” (176). Beginning with the general chapter at Itaici, Brazil, 1992 (GC XVII), a new way of reflecting on Spiritan life and mission emerged. The sharing of lived experiences by confreres from different parts of the world and discernment of current world affairs provided the context for the interpretation of SRL. Enlarged general councils, held midway between general chapters, both followed up on previous chapter decisions and prepared for the next.

Vatican II spoke of a church on pilgrimage in the world. Spiritans cannot do otherwise but be part of that pilgrimage. They have already experienced, what Cleary describes as, a “metamorphosis: from law to Spirit; from missions to Mission; from institutions to Community; from an aggregation of provinces to an International Congregation” (244). The journey continues as Spiritans, led by the Spirit, strive to embody the Gospel message among the poorest and most abandoned in creative fidelity to its founding charism. The journey that began at Vatican II is an unending process as “change is not merely necessary for life. It is life” (31).

*Cycus Kabecha Chungu, C.S.Sp.*

*Harare, Zimbabwe*
I picked up this book with three questions in mind. First, what is the current theology of death? Second, what is it really that is resurrected? Third, is the world set for destruction or redemption, and how imagine this? Lohfink grapples with these questions especially in Part Four, “What Will Happen to Us” (129-230), that he calls “the central part of this book...a theological interpretation of our statements of faith” (131). What goes before is necessary introduction, what comes after teases out the lapidary assertions.

On the first question, death is the culminating point when we must let go and hand ourselves over completely. It is an encounter with God (visio beatifica) in the risen or rising Christ. It is God who is our “place” after this life (St. Augustine on Ps 31:21). Earthly time ends with death. “Therefore the end of the world is present to the dying, ‘with death’; the return of Christ takes place ‘in’ death, the resurrection happens ‘in’ death, and so does the judgment of the world” (219). Resurrection and the encounter with the Christ of the Parousia take place “in” death (220). Lohfink’s valiant efforts to explain all this still leaves one in mystery. That encounter is both judgment and mercy. Only God can ultimately create justice, therefore, there must be judgment that reveals human history in all its dimensions. Sin and evil come to light, so does resistance to evil.

The church believes not in the immortality of the soul, but resurrection of the body/flesh. “Body” means the whole person – resurrection means that the whole person comes to God. To say that the “immortal” soul separates from the body at death seems to imply that the soul remains alive through its own power. This would suggest that one does not die altogether and is not altogether raised by God. To avoid this problem of the endurance of the soul in death, some invoke God’s memory – the dead live in God’s memory until the resurrection. But that would leave us with the problem of the continuity of the person dead and risen. Continuity is the function of the soul, “the epitome of what makes the individual person” (216), but soul as ever loved and sustained by God. Immortal soul is “dialogical existence with God” (Ratzinger, Introduction to Christianity, 355). In transition, soul is guarantor of identity, and is purified (purgatory simply means “cleansing,” or “purification”). Judgment in death means the complete laying open and clarification of everything in the human person (160). Solidarity with the dead includes, beyond prayers, limiting, even eliminating, consequences of what they did wrong or unresolved issues in the family, forwarding what they left unfinished… Such acting against the consequences of sin by the grace of Christ, in the communion of the church used to be called “indulgences,” a term that has rightly fallen into desuetude. And what about hell (166-171)? Biblical talk about God’s vengeance and “eternal fire” merely invoke God’s power of restoring right order in the world. Not to be forgotten are the many texts that invoke God’s will and desire that all be saved, 1 Tim 2:4, through Christ to reconcile all things, Col 1:20, Christ gave himself a ransom for all, 1 Tim 2:6 et cetera. If a person decides to be his/her own meaning, live only for self, desire only self, will and do evil because it is evil, such
a person creates his/her hell; it is not imposed by God. Even then, God who requires of us a will to reconciliation, will he not do everything to win such a one? There is also what is called fundamental option/decision in which one’s major and minor choices consolidate into a basic direction. This option, if towards God, keeps one open to God’s grace.

On the third question, Lohfink answers with the notion of “participation” (chapter 12: 219-230). The principle is, “nothing can rise unless it was part of the history of the life in question” (225). The Trinity and creation are in one dance of sharing. The Incarnate shares in the glory of the Father. Humans are conformed to his glorified body (Phil 3:21). “The sub-human and pre-human creation shares in the glorification of believers…” (227). Put another way, “the world is created for resurrection because it is created for human beings—and human beings for Christ” (193). Non-human creation groans and sighs like a human being “for the revelation of the children of God” (Rom 8:19). We are not redeemed “from this earth” but “with it” (191).

Refreshing and provoking stuff, delightfully presented. Lohfink began with a historical and cultural overview of the matter and an examination of the doctrines and beliefs of the world religions.

A narrative approach means that the commentary is on the level of the final form of the text. However, wherever there is need to enlighten the meaning or explain “gaps,” the so-called “sources” are invoked. The commentary is theological in the sense that the question of meaning for life and our relationship with God and fellow humans is foremost. “The New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New” (Augustine). However, the Christian spiritual sense need not be imposed on the text for non-Christian readers. Ecumenically conscious, this commentary isolates two movements of the literal meaning and the spiritual sense as handed on in Christianity and Judaism. **Commentary** is thus separated from **Tradition**. The author stands in the Catholic tradition.

There are four movements in the interpretation. Ancient Mesopotamian myths underlying some of the tradition are confronted with the biblical text to show how the biblical writer articulates his faith using the material of the culture – a model for our theologizing today. The text itself is considered in its use of language and how it uses language to achieve certain effects (poetics). In service of this, intertexts within the Old Testament itself are sometimes considered. There follows the section on **Tradition**, in which the ongoing life of the text in the Christian and Jewish communities are considered, especially in the period of the early fathers of the church and earlier rabbis. To be borne in mind is that until mid-second century, “Scripture” for the church meant the Old Testament. Christ was preached from the Old Testament. Hence, the theology of the New Testament grew from the Old Testament. Jewish-Christian debates on the text of the Old Testament highlight the ongoing dialogue between Christianity and Judaism.

My hope is that this commentary will not only aid Christian and Jew to see how current doctrines grew from the Old Testament, but also facilitate ongoing dialogue between the two brother faiths. Patristic and rabbinic hermeneutics of the Old Testament within their times and culture challenge us to today to theological hermeneutics for the life of our own generation.

I have in mind particularly the needs of seminarians and graduates, pastors and preachers, who sow the Word. Fellow scholars may even gain some insight here and there, although my aim has been theological and pastoral than advancing the science as such.

*James Chukwuma Okoye, C.S.Sp.*
The study studies why millennials (ages 18-25) leave the Catholic Church. A total of 3,450 of them were sampled, and 1,435 completed the screening process. 1,071 adult parents were sampled, with 479 completing the screening process.

The term “disaffiliation” includes the range of “sorta Catholic,” “almost-done,” “done,” and “none” (no religious affiliation), atheist, and “anti-theist.” The median age at disaffiliation is 13 years old. “Of those who have left, 35 per cent no longer belong to any religion, while 46 percent have joined another religion. An additional 14 percent report being atheists or agnostics” (page 6).

Three categories of disaffiliation were studied. First, the injured. The trigger could be the death of an uncle at 40, family disruptions, and particularly a judgmental and holier-than-thou attitude that excludes people, for example, the LGBT, and denies them their rights. Or, that despite prayers, people died, parents divorced and the sick did not heal. Some felt forced to participate in the church.

Second, the drifters. What difference does the faith make? The church seems to emphasize meaningless rules and rituals encased in confusing structures without any connection to their real world. Some stopped identifying when no longer forced to go to Mass. And in the anchorless period, they lacked companions on the spiritual journey. One notices a growing culture of personal autonomy and “choice.” Faith practice or identification is no longer considered essential to happiness or to provide a sense of meaning and purpose in life.

Then, the dissenters. These disagreed with the church, particularly on same-sex marriage, abortion and birth control. In fact, some may oppose abortion, but support an individual’s right to choose that option. The problem may stem from teachings about the Bible, salvation, heaven, and life after death. Many felt their questions were not being answered or even countenanced. One read the Bible cover to cover only to find the pastor belittling his questions. The discrepancy between science and religion troubled quite a few.

Pastors and pastoral workers need ask themselves: do we know who these people are—the depth of their life stories—do we know them by name? Do we miss these individuals? (page 8). What does it say that many report feeling happier, freer, and more moral without the baggage and burden of a religious practice they believe has been forced on them? (page 12). Thirteen percent said certain things would make them consider returning to the Catholic faith in the future. Pastors may well reflect on how to provide religious formation that takes personal autonomy seriously while addressing youth’s important issues and questions. Increasingly what it means to be “Catholic” surfaces – does belonging entail assent to all teachings, including on socio-political and cultural issues?

Spiritan Horizons seeks to further research into the history, spirituality, and tradition of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. In line with the aims of the Center for Spiritan Studies at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, its overall goal is to promote creative fidelity to the Spiritan charism in the contemporary world. The journal includes articles of a scholarly nature as well as others related to the praxis of the Spiritan charism in a wide variety of cultural contexts. Special attention is given in each issue to the Spiritan education ethos, in view of the university setting in which the journal is published.

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