

# NTR

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### JOURNAL INFORMATION

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# Editorial

by the Co-Editors

In her incisive and imaginative book *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'*, University of Cambridge professor Sarah Coakley proposes a *theologie totale*, an approach that expands the *loci* and method of systematic theology—conventionally, academic theological exposition, church teaching, and preaching—to encompass liturgy, poetry, music, and the arts. She writes:

Through these mediums, the realm of the senses can be sharpened, intensified, and then purged and re-directed; and through these mediums also, dimensions of divine truth are evoked which can be found in no other way.<sup>1</sup>

This issue of *New Theology Review* opens with an essay that meaningfully dovetails with Coakley's *theologie totale*. In "Exploring the Aesthetics of Mexican-American Popular Ritual," Christopher D. Tirres theologizes within the frame of Latino/a culture's *Viernes Santo* (Good Friday) liturgy, and draws attention to the lesser-known ritual known as *Pésame*. Here, members of the community offer their condolences to the grieving Mary, who performs a moving liturgical dance. Beyond a visceral aesthetic of sense, Tirres widens the aperture as he explores an aesthetics of the moral imagination.

Also sharing the trajectory of *theologie totale*, Victor Abimbola Amole examines the way by which the environment of Online Social Networks (OSN), now increasingly gaining a virtual omnipresence in his home region of Africa, has developed into an undeniable *locus* for the construction of moral discourse. Drawing from visionary conciliar and African synodal teachings, Amole emphasized the necessity of "value parameters" for the African church, with special attention to African youth, who, like their counterparts around the globe, consider OSN's a given in daily life. Bringing theology to a U.S. context but still within the option for culture evinced in the previous two essays, John Markey's "Notes from the Road More Traveled: Doing Theology in a US Cultural Context" treasure-hunts for liberative insights for the forward-looking task of inculturation and contextualization within a Euro-American church.

Consistent with the Theological-Pastoral commitment of *New Theology Review*, the assemblage of essays that comprise the rest of our current issue represents insights for a relevant understanding of church, as well as life-giving recommendations for ministry. With a focus on theological anthropology and ecclesiology, Kristin Heyer explores the legacy of *Gaudium et Spes* and its resonances in the areas of dialogue, conscience, and contemporary church life in "An Echo in their Hearts': The Church in Our Modern World." Kevin B. Mannara examines the renewed relevance of the life and teachings of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin in light of the papacy of Pope Francis in "Bernardin and Bergoglio: What the Cardinal's Legacy Offers to a Church Led by Pope Francis." Susan Bigelow Reynolds, in facing prenatal loss, finds theological-pastoral wisdom from a retrieval of the Johannine Mary Magdalene "empty tomb" tradition in "From the Site of the Empty Tomb: Approaching the Hidden Grief of Prenatal Loss." Finally,

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 91.

Arthur David Canales looks into LGBTQ youth from a descriptive and prescriptive approach as he investigates cogent theological and pastoral issues in “Ministry to Catholic LGBTQ Youth: A Call for openness and Affirmation.”

Representing a diversity of perspectives, our columns also offer insights and recommendations for current lived theology.

It’s been a productive period for our NTR editors, their latest works include:

Robin Ryan’s *Jesus and Salvation: Soundings in the Christian Tradition and Contemporary Theology* (Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 2015)

Antonio D. Sison’s *The Sacred Foodways of Film: Theological Servings in 11 Food Films* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016)

Melody Layton McMahon’s *Enthusiasm for the Word: The Life and Work of Father Simeon Daly, OSB* (Chicago: American Theological Library Association, 2016).

Dawn M. Nothwehr’s “Bonaventure of Bagnoregio’s *Imitatio Christi* as an Agapistic Virtue Ethics,” in *On Earth as It Is in Heaven* ed. David Vincent Meconi S.J. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, upcoming April 2016).

#### Cover Image:

“Our Privilege to Shine” (2015, acrylic on canvas) by Alberto Alaniz.

Alberto Alaniz is a resident art instructor at the Precious Blood Center (PBMR) where he teaches at-risk youth the art of self expression and skills for drawing and painting. He donated the painting as an auction item for the 2015 PBMR annual fund-raiser. Inspired by the event’s theme—“Ignite the Light—Alberto used his unique style of painting to depict the blessing each of us has to be a light in the life of others. For more information on the work of PBMR, visit [pbmr.org](http://pbmr.org).

# Exploring the Aesthetics of Mexican-American Popular Ritual

by Christopher D. Tirres

For many years now, I have been crisscrossing the disciplines of religious studies and theology. As an undergraduate in a department of religion, I was exposed to the approaches and methods of *Religionswissenschaft*, or “the scientific study of religion,” yet I also fell in love with liberation theology, which I discovered through two courses in politics. I was drawn to liberation theology’s critique of structural sin and its attention to the fullness of life in the here-and-now. Under the mentorship of a philosopher (Cornel West) and an historian of religion (David Carrasco), I wrote an undergraduate senior thesis on the realized eschatology of Archbishop Oscar Romero. All of this goes to say that my early engagement with liberation theology was colored by the insights of a variety of scholarly disciplines (namely, religious studies, politics, and philosophy) that are not, properly speaking, theology.

Nevertheless, my interest in Latin American liberation theology has remained steadfast, though I have made some valuable side journeys along the way. Upon entering a doctoral program in religious studies, I was relatively certain that I would write a dissertation on some aspect of liberation methodology. But along the way, I discovered two other complementary discourses that gave me new insight into questions of methodology. These two discourses were US Latino/a theology, a younger cousin of Latin American liberation theology, and US pragmatism. To make a long story short, I ended up writing a dissertation on John Dewey’s philosophy of religion and its connection to his aesthetic theory and theory of education. But my interest in liberation theology never waned. Indeed, this sustained interest is evident in my first book, which crafts a dialogue between US pragmatism and liberation theology, as it is articulated both in Latin America and in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

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One of my ongoing questions is this: How can liberation theology and pragmatism, when put in critical conversation, shed light not only on the aesthetic dimensions of ritual, which are often so readily apparent, but also on

the ethical dimensions of ritual, which tend to be more implicit? How does ritual intensify both “an aesthetics of sense,” as well as “an aesthetics of the moral imagination”?

In what follows, I will look at this question in light of a liturgy that takes place on Good Friday at the San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio, Texas. San Fernando Cathedral is a flagship church for a number of reasons. It is one of the oldest churches in the country and one of the most dynamic. Over the years, its leaders have included vi-

<sup>1</sup> Christopher D. Tirres, *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Faith: A Dialogue between Liberationist and Pragmatic Thought* (Oxford University Press, 2014). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199352531.001.0001>

sionaries who see great value in the lived faith expressions of the people.<sup>2</sup> For these pastoral leaders, the lived faith of the people helps to preserve cultural dignity, and it may serve as a springboard for individual and communal transformation.

San Fernando Cathedral is well known for its Good Friday processions, in particular, for its dramatic *Via Crucis*, or reenactment of Christ's trial and crucifixion, which draws upwards of fifteen to twenty thousand people to downtown San Antonio every year. For several hours, people literally walk alongside Jesus through the streets of San Antonio, accompanying him in his final hours of life.

As gripping as the *Via Crucis* is, I would like to focus on a lesser-known liturgy that happens at the end of the day on Good Friday, a traditional Mexican service called the *Pésame*.<sup>3</sup> In this solemn service, congregants come to pay their condolences to the grieving Mary, who, in a powerful part of the service, performs a liturgical dance. I will focus my comments on the ways that Mary's dance ignites not only a visceral aesthetics of sense but also a more encompassing aesthetics of the moral imagination. In offering this interpretation, I will draw on insights from both ritual studies and practical theology, showing how both may address similar concerns.

### **The Aesthetics of *Viernes Santo***

Across the country, Good Friday is an important day among Latino/a communities of faith. Although Easter is, theologically speaking, the high point of the liturgical year, in many parishes it is not uncommon for more Latino/as to attend services on Good Friday than on Easter Sunday. How does one account for this phenomenon?

One reason is that many Good Friday liturgies are performed in open, public spaces. Accordingly, these liturgies can accommodate hundreds, if not thousands, more people than a traditional church service. In Chicago's largely Mexican-American Pilsen area, for example, more than ten thousand ritual participants process down 18<sup>th</sup> Street, Pilsen's main thoroughfare.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, thousands of Hispanics publicly commemorate the *Via Crucis* in New York City's Lower East Side.<sup>5</sup> Given the steady influx of immigrants from Latin America, one can find similar events in countless urban and rural areas throughout the country.<sup>6</sup>

For many Hispanics, the *Via Crucis* also proves meaningful because it is a liturgy that is guided by lay parishioners themselves. Although official church leaders like priests and deacons participate in it, everyday parishioners are often the ones who assume the lion's share of responsibility for the reenactment. Months in advance of Good Friday, parishioners organize tryouts, lead practices, and, in some cases, organize religious retreats for all those involved in the liturgies.

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2 These visionaries include Virgilio Elizondo, James Empereur, SJ, David García, and Sally T. Gomez-Jung. For a closer look at their pastoral work, see Tirres, *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Faith*, 14–41 and 160–73.

3 According to Miguel Arias, the *Pésame* began in what we now call Guatemala. It was introduced by Pedro José de Betancourt, who was canonized a saint in 2002. Arias takes special note of the indigenous elements of the *Pésame*: "Around 1670 Betancourt began processions with the *Nazareno* (an image of the suffering Christ) through the streets of old Guatemala City. Christ's body was extremely scourged, with no place for even one more wound. The people were impressed with this image because according to their story of the creation of the world, Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent, had to pierce himself to water the earth. As a result of this watering, human beings were born. This wounded Jesus, the new God introduced to them, really knew their pain and suffering." Miguel Arias, "Stay with Me," *U.S. Catholic* 72 (2007): 48, <http://www.uscatholic.org/church/2012/03/stay-me>.

4 In 2009, it snowed in Chicago on Good Friday, yet thousands of people still participated.

5 Wayne Ashley, "Stations of the Cross: Christ, Politics, and Processions on New York City's Lower East Side" in *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape*, ed. Robert A. Orsi (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 341–64; Alyshia Gálvez, *Guadalupe in New York: Devotion and the Struggle for Citizenship Rights among Mexican Immigrants* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 107–39.

6 For a look at the most ambitious annual passion play in the world, which takes place in Mexico, see Richard C. Trexler, *Reliving Golgotha: The Passion Play of Iztapalapa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

Perhaps most significantly, Latino/as are drawn to Good Friday because of the aesthetic charge that it holds. This aesthetic charge alludes not only to ritual's physical and sensorial qualities—or what we could refer to as an “aesthetics of sense”—but also to its epistemic and imaginative qualities—its “aesthetics of the moral imagination.”<sup>7</sup> The aesthetics of sense is experienced through the embodied, tactile, and sensorial encounters one has on Good Friday. Participants walk with Jesus for hours. Over the course of the day, they also see and hear the agony that Christ endures, they smell incense, they taste the Eucharist, and they touch and kiss the statue of Jesus on the cross. Through these kinds of bodily encounters, participants “sense” ritual in a very real way.

At the same time, these liturgies also prove aesthetic insofar as they engage participants at the level of the moral imagination. Through their ritual actions, participants forge new epistemic connections between realities that may seem, at first glance, to be disconnected. As I will elaborate further momentarily, ritual allows participants to engage multiple identities simultaneously, to merge past and present, to straddle universal and enculturated meanings of the *Via Crucis*. Ritual action creates a subjunctive, ludic, and liminal space that allows participants to imaginatively conjoin what may, at first, appear to be discrete and independent aspects of experience.

As a participant–observer, I found that it was fairly easy to see an aesthetics of sense manifested in the many ritual practices of the day. Clearly, the San Fernando Good Friday liturgies heightened and intensified experience in myriad ways. What was less apparent, though, and therefore worthy of further study, was how these liturgies also prove ethically significant. In what ways do the aesthetics of sense give rise to an aesthetics of the moral imagination, and how far does the latter extend? How is the aesthetic charge of Good Friday tied to God's kingdom here-and-now? How is the feeling of ritual experience connected to the action of living out one's life beyond Good Friday?

Such questions, I soon came to realize, are best answered in light of particular cases. In what follows, I share my experience of the *Pésame* service.

### **The *Pésame* and the Power of Liturgical Dance**

On Good Friday, there are four liturgies at San Fernando—an ecumenical prayer service that begins the day, the *Via Crucis*, the *Siete Palabras* service (which commemorates the seven last phrases of Jesus), and the *Pésame*. Of all the services on Good Friday, the *Pésame* perhaps best engages what I am calling here the “aesthetics of the moral imagination.” This simple twilight service begins at 7:00 p.m. The entire church is dark, except for the main altar area located in the center of the church. Congregants hold lit candles in the pews. Three male parishioners, who are dressed as disciples, come forward to take down the life-size statue of Jesus from the cross. The men gently disengage the Christ figure from the cross and fold his movable arms down to the sides of his torso. This detail, which is a trait common to the processional art of Golden Age Spain, adds a certain realism to the ritual.<sup>8</sup>

The repositioning of the body from the cross to the funeral bed is a touching moment, for Jesus, who has suffered high upon the cross, is now brought down to be with the people. The men carefully secure Jesus's body to the funeral bed with rope. They exit the cathedral. With candles in hand, parishioners follow. It is now dark. Everyone processes slowly across the street and around the city plaza directly in front of the church. People sing as cars pass by. The warm, yellow lights from the candles overlap with the more industrial white lights emanating from the

7 I am drawing here, in part, on Alexander Baumgarten's broad understanding of aesthetics as the “science of (all) sensory knowledge.” Unfortunately, Baumgarten's wide-reaching definition, which he offered in 1735, was soon limited to a more circumscribed discussion of exceptional pieces of fine art, as seen in the shift from Immanuel Kant's wide-ranging discussion of the transcendental aesthetic in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) to G. W. F. Hegel's more limited ruminations of the fine arts in his *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* (1835).

8 Susan Verdi Webster, *Art and Ritual in Golden-Age Spain: Sevillian Confraternities and the Processional Sculpture of Holy Week* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

plaza's streetlamps and car headlights. After slowly processing around the plaza, the parishioners solemnly return to the church and fill the pews once again.

When everyone has returned and the body of Jesus has once again been laid at the altar platform, three older women approach the body and tenderly rub the statue with burial oil. As they do so, a solo baritone from the choir begins singing the heart-wrenching refrains of the American folk hymn "What Wondrous Love Is This?," and twelve female liturgical dancers in black dresses and shawls circle the altar area. Their movements and facial gestures signal pain and loss. The three older women finish generously slathering the body with oils. They cover Jesus's body and limbs with a white cloth, leaving his face exposed, and they place some rose petals on the cloth. They leave the platform. About this time, another dancer enters the sanctuary. Her black shawl is distinctively marked by a thin piece of white cloth at the brow, distinguishing her from the others. She assumes a central role within the dance, and it quickly becomes apparent that she is playing the role of Jesus's mother, Mary. Mary runs across the area in front of the altar, stops, folds her hands together, pauses, and faces upward with a pained and sorrowful look. She bows her head. She runs in desperation to the other side of the church and does the same. Alone she stands, in agony.



Liturgical Dance, *Pésame* Service.  
Photo taken by author.

Then, in an unexpected turn of events, a family of four who are seated near the front of the church rise from the pews. The father, mother, and two adolescent girls move toward Mary. At this point, it is not clear what is happening. Are they part of the liturgy? The family members approach Mary and embrace her, one by one. This is repeated twice more. Their movements are expressive and intentional. Perhaps more than any other gesture of the day, this embrace embodies how the audience is one with the actors, how they are connected to the Passion in a real way. It reminds parishioners that they have come to this church service with an express purpose—to console a grieving mother at her son's funeral.

The family sits down and Mary then goes up to each of the twelve dancers who are standing in a wide semicircle around the altar area. Mary consoles the dancers and is consoled by them. The reciprocity seems to suggest that there are many "Marys" in need of consolation. Another group of parishioners rises from the pews. This time, it is a family of three older women. They approach Mary and take turns embracing her multiple times. The effect is again powerful. Through ritual, the congregation is, in a very real way, sharing Mary's suffering.

Finally, after these ritual gestures of consolation, the dancers exit. In silence, ushers guide parishioners out of their pews and direct them toward the altar, giving each parishioner a single-stemmed flower. In two lines, congregants slowly walk up to the altar platform and place their flower atop the body. Almost everyone makes some kind of physical contact with the body, either kissing or touching it. Soon, the pile of flowers is so substantial that several fall to the floor. After having paid their tribute to Jesus, the parishioners solemnly exit the church in silence. The *Pésame* and Good Friday have come to an end.

## Ritual Theory, Practical Theology, and Actual Experience

At San Fernando, ritual clearly engages participants in an embodied and visceral way. On Good Friday, participants hear, smell, touch, taste, and see; they move their bodies through a variety of spaces, often becoming part of the ritual itself. But in addition to involving participants at the level of an aesthetics of sense, ritual at San Fernando also engrosses participants at the level of the aesthetics of the moral imagination, wherein ritual practices structure and shape a larger outlook on life. In so many words, the felt quality of ritual experience gives rise to a larger *Weltanschauung*, or cosmivision, with all of the ethical implications that this implies.

What do I mean here by the “moral imagination”? To begin with, I understand morality not in terms of moral law or even a system of rules for living, but rather as a continuous, reflective response to a life that is inevitably unstable, precarious, and tragic. Morality, in this sense, begins with an actual, real-life situation of instability; it involves some form of deliberation to deal with this situation of instability; and it leads to some form of judgment, which itself is always unstable and contingent.<sup>9</sup>

Ritual, I believe, can be a powerful mode for engaging moral dilemmas. This is especially true if we take to heart John Dewey’s insight that moral deliberation can take the form of “dramatic rehearsal” wherein, through processes like ritual performance, we can imaginatively engage precarious situations and consider our possible courses of action, without the threat of direct harm. Victor Turner, the noted cultural anthropologist and ritual theorist, understands this point well, underscoring how stage dramas serve as mirrors to larger social dramas, and vice versa.<sup>10</sup> As Turner makes clear, stage drama is not simply a powerful form of entertainment. In a more profound sense, it is a means to deal with various forms of social instability, ruptures, friction, and pain. It is for this reason, writes Turner, that “society has always had to make efforts, through both social dramas and esthetic dramas, to restabilize and actually *produce* cosmos.”<sup>11</sup>

In producing cosmos, ritual performance proves moral in the sense I have described it. Through structured gestures and actions, ritual confronts social instability and reestablishes a sense of order. Almost by definition, then, we could say that ritual serves an important ethical function.

But how else may ritual performance—and, in particular, the *Pésame* service at San Fernando—prove ethical? Ritual theory offers us a range of helpful concepts for understanding how the moral imagination can be enlarged through ritual. Most crucially, perhaps, the *Pésame*’s liturgical dance during the *Pésame* functions to create a liminal experience where concepts of time and identity collapse. In the liturgical dance, we see a figure of the past—the grieving Mary—come into direct physical contact with figures from the present—the grieving families of San Fernando—through the intentional embraces that they exchange. In an embodied and symbolic way, the past meets the present, giving way to a wider sense of *communitas*, or liminality experienced socially.

This liminal experience is further reinforced by the fact that the liturgical dance blurs the line between actors and audience. This happens when select families leave the pews to console the grieving Mary. When I first witnessed

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9 I am following here John Dewey’s situationalist and pragmatic understanding of morality. For a compelling example of how a pragmatic hermeneutic may be applied to a truly precarious and tragic situation, see Eddie S. Glaude Jr.’s “Tragedy and Moral Experience: John Dewey and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*” in *In A Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 17–46.

10 Victor Turner, “Are There Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual, and Drama?” in *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual*, ed. Richard Schechner and Willa Appel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 8–18. It is instructive to note that Turner turns to Dewey’s philosophy at several junctures in his essay to elaborate several key themes, including the meaning of experience (8, 13), the instability of social life (as captured by the “doings and sufferings” of the present community) (9), and the connection of aesthetic drama to sociocultural life (12).

11 Turner, “Are There Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual, and Drama?” 18.



this part of the liturgy, my first reaction was confusion. Why are these people getting up from the pews and embracing the dancers?, I asked myself. What is going on? I felt as if a social norm were being broken. Soon, however, I realized that this was indeed part of the liturgy. I was moved deeply. The moment dissolved the boundaries between actors and onlookers, between “us” and “them.” The ritual gestures reminded participants that the drama did not only take place in Jerusalem two thousand years ago, but continues in a real way in our own time and within our own communities. Even more significantly, as I discovered later, both sets of parishioners who console Mary were selected for a very a particular reason: they, too, had lost loved ones in their own families during the year. Many in the congregation would have no doubt been aware of this fact, adding significantly to the meaning of their gestures.

All told, the *Pésame* creates liminal experiences that are both sensual and epistemic. As we have seen, the liturgical dance creates new configurations of space, time, and identities, and, in doing so, it expands the moral imagination of participants. Congregants come away from this liturgy with a wider sense of community and a heightened sense of their own capacity to accompany those who suffer, whether this be the grieving Mary of two thousand years ago or grieving fellow congregants who have lost loved ones in their own immediate families. By entering into the ritual experience of the *Pésame*, congregants affirm life, even in the face of tremendous difficulty and loss. As Virgilio Elizondo, one of San Fernando’s most influential pastoral leaders, puts it, the *Pésame* is “in a way, already resurrection” because it assumes “the most incredible suffering of that day.” Through ritual, parishioners can identify with Jesus and say, “I have gone through [the suffering], but it has not destroyed me. I have gone through it, but it has not diminished my hope and my enthusiasm. I have not run away from it, I have not denied it. I have faced it.” This is “Good Friday in the Latino world,” continues Elizondo. It is “the radical acceptance of life as it is, but you don’t let it destroy you.”<sup>12</sup>

As I have argued, interpreting the *Pésame* through the categories of liminality and *communitas* helps to shed light on the ethical dimensions of the ritual. The *Pésame*’s liturgical dance opens up a liminal space where many usual distinctions—such as past and present, us and them, and official presider and everyday layperson—merge together. When this happens, one’s sense of community significantly broadens. At the same time, a qualitatively new experience emerges through the performance itself, through gestures, movement, embrace, re-appropriation of space, and role reversals. It is for this reason that a performance-based approach to ritual, as exemplified in the work of Turner, may be especially illuminating for better understanding a fluid liturgy like the *Pésame*.<sup>13</sup>

I would now like to consider how a similar set of insights might emerge from within particular strains of theology itself. Part of the irony here, as I fully recognize, is that I am using interpretive categories often associated with religious studies to shed light on a ritual that emerges from a context that is clearly theological. I am, after all, talking about a liturgy centered on Mary, the mother of Jesus, that takes place on Good Friday within a Catholic Church.

As someone who has been trained in religious studies yet who is drawn to contextual and liberation theologies, I have found much value in bringing new interpretive resources to bear on theological symbols and rituals. Indeed, I think that theology has much to learn from religious studies. But I also have become increasingly aware that religious

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12 *Soul of the City: Alma del Pueblo*, videocassette, directed by Gerardo Rueda (Houston, TX: JM Communications, 1996).

13 As Walter Capps notes, for Turner, the very occurrence of performative action “effects changes in the environment within which it occurs, and it effects changes in the identities (both collective and individual) of those who participate in such action.” It is for this reason that Turner urged his colleagues in anthropology to take theater studies seriously. Walter H. Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 197.

studies has much to learn from theology, especially from theologies that emerge from the underside of history, or what noted historian of religion Charles Long refers to as “theologies of the opaque.”<sup>14</sup> Such theologies not only ground their reflection in concrete forms of human suffering, but they also indict theology at large for assuming certain normativity in its claims to knowledge. This is the kind of theology that can be found at San Fernando.

In my work at San Fernando, I have explored the theological and pedagogical insights that inform its ritual practice. While an explication of their influences is beyond the scope of the present essay, suffice it to say that the theology espoused at San Fernando is highly contextual and liberationist, and some of the pastoral leaders are familiar with and borrow from the field of ritual theory.<sup>15</sup>

A lot can more can be said here, but let me probe the question from another angle. I recently came across Ruth Illman and W. Alan Smith’s book *Theology and the Arts: Engaging Faith* (2013). I was surprised by it. Usually, when one sees a title with the words “theology,” “arts,” and “faith” one can expect a book that presupposes a certain Christian normativity in terms of its approach and basic commitments. While the language of this book does at times fall back on Christian categories, its overall aim is to subvert some of the more traditional ways that theology has tried to make sense of the arts. It attempts to articulate a practical theology of the arts that is not limited to “the conceptual and systematic claims of theology.”<sup>16</sup> Rather, it takes ritual experience as both its methodological starting and ending point.

One of the striking features of this book is the attention it gives to the centrality of praxis. In the book’s core chapter, “Outlining a Practical Approach to Theology and the Arts,” Illman and Smith underscore the importance of praxis to their methodological approach. Following the work of Robert Schreiter, Rebecca Chopp, Thomas Groome, and others, the authors present praxis as a process “in which agent subjects reflect critically on their social/historical situation and present action therein.”<sup>17</sup> Praxis, they explain, is the “ensemble of social relationships that include and determine the structure of social consciousness.”<sup>18</sup> This “ensemble of social relationships” may be understood in terms of three dimensions: an active dimension that includes and engages intentional historical activities, a reflective dimension that uses critical and social reasoning to reflect critically on individual and social action, and a creative dimension that leads to concrete forms of individual and social transformation.<sup>19</sup>

Just as Gustavo Gutiérrez, the father of liberation theology, has underscored the central role that orthopraxis, or “right action” (and not just orthodoxy, or “right belief”) must play in one’s expression of faith,<sup>20</sup> so too do Illman

14 Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 185–99. Along these lines, I resonate with Michael Hogue’s pragmatic understanding of theology as “not limited to critical reflection on the symbol ‘God.’” Instead, the objects of theology can be conceived of “those diverse constellations of symbols and practices and institutions that orient us ultimately by formatting (i.e., giving shape to, stylizing, embedding) the religious meanings, purposes, and desires through which we negotiate the hazards and graces of vulnerable life in an ambiguous world.” As Hogue notes, this conception of theology is made possible by drawing on a particular philosophy of religion, one that takes quite seriously Charles Long’s conception of “orientation in the ultimate sense,” Paul Tillich’s understanding of “ultimate concern,” and Charles Sanders Peirce’s understanding “that religion is a life, and can be identified with a belief only provided that belief be a living belief—a thing to be lived rather than said or thought.” See Michael S. Hogue, “Toward a Pragmatic Political Theology,” *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 34, no. 3 (2013): 274–75.

15 This is especially true of the work of Elizondo and Empereur.

16 Ruth Illman and Alan Smith, *Theology and the Arts: Engaging Faith* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 10.

17 Illman and Smith, 54, quoting Thomas Groome, “A Religious Educator’s Response,” in *The Education of the Practical Theologian*, eds. Don Browning, David Polk, and Ian Evison (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 88. In addition to the three authors mentioned above, Illman and Smith also draw generously from the work of Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, especially their *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society* (London: SPCK, 2006).

18 Illman and Smith, 51, quoting Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985), 91.

19 Illman and Smith, 51. See Rebecca Chopp, “When the Center Cannot Contain the Margins” in *The Education of the Practical Theologian*, 85.

20 Gutiérrez explains that in underscoring the importance of orthopraxis, his “intention, however, is not to deny the meaning of *orthodoxy*, understood as a proclamation of and reflection on statements considered to be true. Rather, the goal is to balance and even to reject the primacy and almost exclusiveness which doctrine has enjoyed in Christian life and above all to modify the emphasis, often obsessive, upon the attainment of an orthodoxy

and Smith maintain that a practical theology “does not consist in propositional claims or positivistic statements of doctrine as much as it does in critical reflection on living as persons of faith...”<sup>21</sup> For all of these authors, faith, at its best, demands critical reflection and actually “doing the truth.”<sup>22</sup>

Though *Theology and the Arts* can certainly be read as a contribution to contemporary debates in Christian practical theology, it can also be understood as pointing toward a much larger horizon. The book seeks to move not only “beyond the bias of modern systematic and constructive theology,” but also, and perhaps even more significantly, beyond narrow understandings of “theology” at large. Toward this end, the book focuses on series of discrete

projects around the world that serve as concrete sites of transformation and healing, many of which do not seem to have a formal connection to theology at all. These case studies, all of which embody praxis, include the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, a set of Peruvian women’s cooperatives that create fabric arts, a short story collection, improvisation theater, a documentary film about a heart transplant that bridges the separation between Palestinians and Israelis, an interreligious and intercultural music project, and a dance company that incorporates dancers with and without disabilities. As the range of these cases makes clear, the form of practical theology espoused in this book moves well beyond discussions of church-based or even faith-based activities. Rather, the book seems to reverse the “hermeneutical flow” between the arts and theology.<sup>23</sup> Or, in the words of theologian and film critic Antonio Sison, such an inductive and contextual approach emancipates the art form from “being a mere handmaid of a given theological proposition and agenda.” Instead, the art form is “offered prior leave to speak on its own terms as a condition for a respectful and honest dialogue with theology.”<sup>24</sup>

Methodologically speaking, Illman and Smith’s book draws eclectically upon a number of discourses—including feminist, postmodern, liberationist, and dialogical/dialectical discourses—with the aim of decentering a narrow and modern emphasis on reason and the scientific method, which traditional forms of theology often uncritically accept. Drawing on the anti-foundationalist discourses just mentioned, the authors outline seven guiding characteristics of their approach, each one of which might well describe the ritual experience of the *Pésame*. First, a practical theology of the arts is embodied and not just reflected upon. Second, it has a “face” in the Levinasian sense of the term. Its truth emerges through the encounter of real-life, flesh-and-blood persons. Third, it gives pride of place to the voices of these who have been silenced. Fourth, it is accomplished through dialogue that need not be restricted to the spoken word, but instead, may emerge through various forms of intense and intentional listening. Fifth, a practical theology of the arts proceeds from and is characterized by the actual practices of the arts. Sixth, it clears a space for the emergence of the voices and concerns of the community. And seventh, it is committed to transformative praxis and social change.

Given my description of the San Fernando *Pésame* liturgy, one may note several connections here. The *Pésame* is an embodied ritual that honors the faces of those who grieve. It also gives center stage to voices—and bodies—that are not at the center of most churches, namely, the voices of women and everyday parishioners. Furthermore, its gestures and symbols serve as an implicit, yet powerful, form of dialogue, and the dance itself reconfigures a somewhat conventional church space (the altar) into a new kind of sacred space that allows the voices and sufferings of

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which is often nothing more than fidelity to an obsolete tradition or a debatable interpretation.” Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), 10.

21 Illman and Smith, *Theology and the Arts*, 51.

22 Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 10.

23 This phrase comes from Craig Detweiler, as cited in Antonio D. Sison, *World Cinema, Theology, and the Human: Humanity in Deep Focus* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 5.

24 Sison, *World Cinema, Theology, and the Human*, 5.

the community to take center stage. When one puts all of this together, it is not difficult to see how the *Pésame* may broaden the moral imagination, resulting in significant forms of healing and transformation.

In closing, I believe that a rapprochement between religious studies and theology is, indeed, a worthwhile endeavor, especially for those of us who cross these disciplines regularly.<sup>25</sup> But the real challenge, I believe, is the extent to which these discourses stay true to the ritual experience itself. There is still often a tendency in both scholarly fields to theorize the ritual experience in such a way that ultimately we are talking less about the actual qualities and force of a given ritual itself and more about the interpretive categories we use to understand ritual. Let me, however, be clear. I am not saying that that we need less theory and more descriptions of the practice of ritual. What I am saying, rather, is that when we utilize theory, we need theory that sticks closely to the experience of ritual that people actually undergo. Whether we choose to approach a ritual like the *Pésame* through the lens of religious studies or theology, the real test is how well our theoretical interpretations adhere to both the actual and ideal qualities of ritual. It seems to me that a layered approach, which borrows critically from a variety of disciplinary approaches, is at least a step in the right direction.

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<sup>25</sup> This is a recurring conversation for many in the American Academy of Religion. For a good overview of this ongoing debate, see Michelle A. Gonzalez, *A Critical Introduction to Religion in the Americas: Bridging the Liberation Theology and Religious Studies Divide* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

# Vatican II and the Changing Face of Moral Discourse in Africa

by Victor Abimbola Amole

The event of the Second Vatican Council has been rightly described as the event that “can certainly be considered, from the point of view of the history of salvation, as the cornerstone of the present [twentieth] century.”<sup>1</sup> Its importance therefore commands our attention and merits a frequent revisitation in order to continually appreciate its impact on our *today* in the church, itself an endeavour in charting and envisioning the future of the church.

For the church in Africa, the council would eventually turn out to be a powerful evangelical irrigation, further bifurcated into two streams in the form of the Synod of Bishops’ Special Assemblies for Africa. Along with the Second Vatican Council, these assemblies have become pivotal and defining moments for the church in Africa. Thus, within the purview of evaluating and understanding the impact of the Second Vatican Council in the church in Africa, there is an intricate connection with the aforesaid two synods.

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It has been argued that the desire for a similar event like the Second Vatican Council in the form of an African council that is well suited to the peculiar needs and nature of the growing faith in Africa is what eventually led to what have now become the two Special Assemblies for Africa. It is a desire to “do for Africa what the Second Vatican Council did for the whole Catholic Church.”<sup>2</sup>

## The Emanating Perspectives

Those fresh bursts of the Spirit that birthed from the council also brought new visions and perspectives, even if such “newness” is best seen as a fruition of what has always been in the church from the beginning. Ranging from a novel ecclesiological self-understanding, to a greater emphasis on the universal call to holiness and to a deeper search for communion and dialogue, the council set itself out as an epochal event in the life and meaning of the church.<sup>3</sup>

- 1 John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, on the Church in Africa and Its Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000*, no. 2, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_14091995\\_ecclesia-in-africa.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14091995_ecclesia-in-africa.html).
- 2 Philip Knights, “The African Synod in Rome, 1994: Consequences for Catholicism,” <http://www.afrikaworld.net/synod/knights.htm>.
- 3 For a detailed study of these perspectives emanating from the Second Vatican Council chronicled here, see Richard Lennan, “A Continuing Pilgrimage” *The Australasian Catholic Record* 91, no. 1 (Jan 2014): 21–48; Paulinus Odozor, *Moral Theology in an Age of Renewal, A Study of the Catholic Tradition since Vatican II*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 17–42; Ann Michele Nolan, *A Privileged Moment: Dialogue in the Language of the Second Vatican Council 1962–65* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

The aforementioned renewals that the Second Vatican Council brought in its stride also included renewal in moral theology. The novel ecclesiological self-understanding, for instance, necessitated the growth and fine-tuning of moral theology and moral discourses. If the council now better reveals the church as a sacrament, it is obvious that it must “continue to search for ways to bear effective witness to Christ in the world,” since a sacrament “is both a sign of God’s presence in the world and a cause of salvation.” A revision of moral theology was therefore a necessary follow up to the church’s reflexive vision. Hence, it was inevitable that the quest for more vibrant moral discourses—a movement that had, in fact, already begun in the period prior to the council—would find a more secure footing with the coming of the council. On one count, there came a massive renewal of moral theology, creating a shift from a legalistic adherence to manuals of moral pathology, to a gaze on the human person as a subject of grace.<sup>4</sup> On the other count, the church developed large ears, an *ecclesia audiens*, in order to allow for a more attentive listening, as a mother with several children within her fold would, invariably creating a vision of a church that is now poised more than ever to attend to the call to *aggiornamento*.

While *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement* were crystallizing, the council touched on a particular theme, then accorded “subtle” attention, that would become a salient issue for the future, particularly within the landscape of moral discourse. Social communications and the instruments of media would eventually become pulpits where morality is constructed and adjudicated.

### Means of Social Communication: An Emerging Culture

Living up to the Christian tradition of keeping watch and discerning the spirit of the times, the fathers of the Second Vatican Council recognized the growing importance of the means of social communications, which the church “welcomes and promotes with special interest.”<sup>5</sup>

But the council fathers equally recognized that just as these media, “if properly utilized, can be of great service to mankind, since they greatly contribute to men’s entertainment and instruction as well as to the spread and support of the Kingdom of God,” so also can they be employed “contrary to the plan of the Creator.”<sup>6</sup> To avoid falling into the gully of this treacherous dichotomy, the council had recommended that all who employ the aforesaid media “be acquainted with the norms of morality and conscientiously put them into practice.”<sup>7</sup>

It is important to note that this exhortation to a moral attentiveness in the ambience of the media was issued years before the coming of the Internet and its host of social networks.<sup>8</sup> *Inter Mirifica*, together with the document on the sacred liturgy, were the earliest documents of the council, made available in 1963. If at this time the council fathers already foresaw the undulating pattern of “a great service” and “a loss” in the arrival of modern means of communication, we can imagine the preoccupation that would arise with the deluge of the social media—henceforth Online Social Networks (OSNs)—that were to arise some decades later.<sup>9</sup>

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4 See James Keenan, “Vatican II and Theological Ethics,” *Theological Studies* 74 (2013): 165–67. In Antonio Moser and Bernadino Leers’s words, “Vatican II, not in a few texts but in all its texts, not in its texts alone but in its whole context . . . lent fresh impetus to efforts at surmounting a whole series of characteristics: eternalism— through the principle of historicity; dualist pessimism—through recovering confidence in the human race; terror of sin—through confidence in grace; legalism—through stressing the theme of the covenant; privatism—through assigning value to earthly realities.” See Moser and Leers, *Moral Theology: Dead Ends and Alternatives* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 26–27.

5 Second Vatican Council, *Inter Mirifica: Decree on the Means of Social Communication*, no. 1, in *AAS* 56 (1964): 145–53.

6 *Inter Mirifica*, no. 2.

7 *Inter Mirifica*, no. 4.

8 Hillstrom gives 1969 as the earliest date of the use of what would eventually become the modern Internet. See Laurie Hillstrom, *Online Social Networks* (Farmington Hills: Lucent Books, 2010), 12.

9 See Hillstrom’s Appendix 1 for the debuting dates of the OSNs.

Meanwhile, in 1994, thirty-one years after the promulgation of *Inter Mirifica*, the issue of moral attentiveness to the means of social communication again resurfaced in the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. The assembly, as the apostolic exhortation notes, deliberated on the means of social communication, which are in fact “means of spreading a new culture which [itself] needs to be evangelized.” The august assembly, following the cue of the earlier council, had precisely noted that these means of social communication were frequently becoming “sources of a distorted vision of life and of man, and thus fail to respond to the demands of true development.”<sup>10</sup>

The second Special Assembly for Africa also reiterated these moral concerns that the first assembly and the council had raised. At this time, the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Africae Munus* used a more apt name to describe the fast-developing means of social communication, choosing to describe them as information technologies.<sup>11</sup> These technologies, which were by now fully ingrained in all sectors of livelihood and all over the globe, were fully exhibiting themselves as

capable of being powerful instruments for unity and peace, but also for destruction and division. From a moral standpoint they can offer either a service or a disservice, propagate truth as well as falsehood, propose what is base as well as what is beautiful. . . . The media can be a force for authentic humanization but just as easily prove dehumanizing.<sup>12</sup>

Incontestably, there was growing evidence of the need to pay attention to this new cultural phenomenon that came to be popularly known as “social media.” In hindsight, now that one sees the almost-enchanting stronghold of contemporary information technologies on humanity, it is evident that the abovementioned concerns and cautions of the council fathers and the Synod of Bishops’ Special Assemblies for Africa are well justified. Not only have these potent information technologies gone beyond the sphere of communication; they have since become a mediation and a culture. Not in the least surprising, youth is the group that is most vulnerable to the culture of social media. But whether we identify ourselves as “digital native” or “digital migrant,” the evolution of information technology culture to a morality-construction milieu is a salient issue we face in contemporary times.

### **The Changing Face of Moral Discourse in Africa: Constructing Morality Online**

The fact of an emerging culture of information technology that is increasingly making an incursion into moral life is as true in the global setting as it is in the region of Africa. While it is true that means of social communication have always been sources of moral concerns, as we have indicated above from the teachings of the universal council and the two special assemblies for Africa, the emerging role that information technologies have now taken marks a paradigm shift from the usual incursion of these media instruments. Particularly with the coming of OSNs, the caution is no longer about social media becoming a culture by itself but the way in which it is taking over the arena of moral discourse in its entirety. With the deployment of the Internet and its allied networks, the construction of morality gradually begins to lose its traditional *loci*—namely, the church, both universal and domestic, and the family; it has now waded over to the mediating pulpits of Internet networks. While this development is a global phenomenon, one can argue that it has impacted much more significantly on the African continent, and thus on the church in Africa, as well as on the other so-called traditional cultures, for the reason that these cultures are founded mainly on oral traditions. The emergence and seeming omnipresence of a high-tech tradition, with

<sup>10</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, nos. 52, 71, 76, 124.

<sup>11</sup> Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*, no. 142 ff., [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20111119\\_africae-munus](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20111119_africae-munus).

<sup>12</sup> Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, 143.

its multifaceted moral challenges, creates an imbalance within cultural–social worldviews, and this invariably has reverberations across the moral landscape of such traditional cultures.

Examples are replete here. In the area of human sexuality, for instance, the vigorous debate that has ensued on the issue of sexual orientation and gender in Africa is instructive. These issues would not ordinarily, at least within the African milieu, generate much furor in a culture that is pretty clear about the complementarity of sexes, the few incidents suggesting otherwise notwithstanding. However, with the presence of OSNs, moral debate on such issues has not remained the same. In Nigeria recently, these issues constituted a big trend in discussions on different social networks that have since become versatile means of communication<sup>13</sup> and *loci* for the construction of values. Of course, the merger of mobile phones with the power of the OSNs detonates into countless shades of values and meanings afloat in the moral sky of individual consciences.

Again, from the area of human sexuality comes the allied issues of contraception, abortion, and beginning of life. While in the past the church's teachings and apostolic truths were easily taught and received, in the contemporary African milieu in which the OSNs easily circulate, contrary messages and arguments are becoming much more than a mere inconvenience.<sup>14</sup> Discordant values increasingly barrage the faithful, leaving them less focused than they were prior to the advent of OSNs. Even though such issues seem to be rarely discussed by African Catholics (especially the youth) in contemporary times, this should not be taken to mean that the cacophony of ideas being disseminated online and via OSNs are not creating significant effects. On the contrary, the very fact that such issues are hardly raised by our young ones and middle-aged Catholics is, in and of itself, a cause for concern.

Taking our attention off the impact of OSNs on views of human sexuality, one notices a similar trend with regard to moral discourses in the area of human dignity. It might sound preposterous and unbelievable, but even though the war against the onslaught of the dreaded Boko Haram in Nigeria has been somewhat waged via the OSNs, there have been indications of a latent support on the very same networks by some who think the scourge happened because of the insensitivity of the government to the festering poverty and ignorance among the people, particularly those of the northeast. Such people opine that Boko Haram is an ideology of a group driven to the wall and having no other options, blindly and wrongly appropriating the Kennedy-attributed maxim, “those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable.” One needs only to review the piles of comments and posts on these networks to notice such a latent but dangerous position. Again, the remote possibility of such a glib position receiving even the least assent turns up the dark underbelly of OSNs as a contemporary “pot” where African ethics or otherwise are being brewed and where morality is being construed.<sup>15</sup> Of course, on the other count and as one would expect, the terrorists themselves were also alleged to have made use of the far-reaching power of the OSNs for communication, raising anew the twin problems of security versus privacy. It is a whole

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13 In 2013, the Nigerian government signed into law the same-sex marriage prohibition. While some see the unanimous vote on the bill as a sign of the single voice of the people, the very fact that the issue gained so much attention as to require a law on the same already makes a point. However, the discussion of the appropriateness of the law that criminalizes such a marriage within a climate that Orobator refers to as a “culture of silence” is itself worthy of a separate discourse. Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, SJ, “Ethics Brewed in an African Pot,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 31 (2011): 10.

14 It is interesting to note that the 1994 United Nations Cairo Conference, which had population and development as its focus, and suggested a link between poverty and a moral stance against contraception/abortion, came shortly before the OSNs debuted and became major sources of *trading* moralities. From thence, debate on contraception, abortion, etc., have been on the rise in the continent.

15 In hindsight, the case of the notorious Detroit-bound, would-be bomber, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, a Nigerian who lived in London from where he got in touch with those who radicalized him, speaks volumes. *Terrorism Monitor* argues that his recruitment was sought through online private chats. His birth into this dangerous life was fueled by a “psychological and intellectual dilemma” that found a perfect nursery in the OSNs, which birthed him into the community of the “cyber ummah.” See Murad Batal Al-Shishani, “How I joined Jihad: Nigerian Bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab in His Own Words (Part Two),” *Terrorism Monitor* 9, issue 9 (March 3, 2011).



imbroglio of moral complications showing moral discourses in contemporary time could not possibly be limited to their usual locales anymore.

Looking to the south of the continent, the recent exacerbation of xenophobia in South Africa lends another insight into how the locales of moral discourse in Africa are quickly shifting to the OSNs as popular platforms. There are several reports of how, virtually overnight, the wildfire of OSNs stoked the tension that has always reared its head in Durban and other South African cities.<sup>16</sup> Allegedly tied to an incendiary statement by the Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini (which he has since denied), foreign nationals came under violent attacks, many losing their properties and some losing their lives. As is customary with such news, the OSNs spread it abroad, sometimes painting a picture that the average South African hates the foreigner, whereas in actual fact, there were many South Africans equally rising in defense of foreigners.<sup>17</sup>

Whatever be the case, online “ethicists” were already constructing their own values for and against the unfolding event, significantly relying on the news-making waves on the social networks and other social media.

Of course, when such moral constructions come from the pulpit of the Internet, where there is a place for each person and for all opinions, it becomes apparent that there is no real authority, properly speaking, upon which to base a determination of what is right or not, or what is true or false, and this is a cause for serious moral concern.<sup>18</sup> Oftentimes, the effort needed to create one’s own moral discourse online is relegated to just a profile, essentially turning the Cartesian *cogito, ergo sum* to something like “I am online, therefore I am.”

Thinking of how these individual, disparate moral constructions and their immediate, unreflected values are exported onto the online grid to spawn a new definition of agenda-setting within moral discourses in Africa compels a focusing on the environment of social media. The unreflected moral contours in discourses that have to do with HIV/AIDS, the Ebola pandemic, the Boko Haram/Al-Shabaab terrorism, and xenophobia only work to increase the sense of urgency.

Another major sector in which the construction of values and morality online is becoming a source of worry and should indeed be a source of concern for the church in Africa is the unprecedented level of religious proselytism that OSNs and their lifeblood, the Internet, have promoted in Africa. Sure, the human person is religious, and the African person, much more so, as Mbiti would argue. The concern, however, is not so much the myriad churches and religious centers springing up and dotting the landscape of Africa but their teachings and tenets that compete for the attention of Christians who make use of these OSNs. The Catholic Church, once the principal voice in the promotion of values in Christian circles, is just one voice among many in the church in Africa today.

With a scenario such as this, one can understand why moral theology necessarily has to pay greater attention to the environment of the social media where the dialectic of morality and the question of rectitude in OSNs is an evident reality facing the cyber community. As Avery Dulles argues, “the Church cannot wall itself up in a cultural ghetto at a time when humanity as a whole is passing into the electronic age.”<sup>19</sup>

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16 The claim of Loren Landau as far back as 2005 that “South Africa is a highly xenophobic society” shows that the issue of xenophobia is not new in South Africa. See Loren Landau, *Xenophobia in South Africa and Problems Related to It* (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 2004), 3. The post-synodal apostolic exhortation as far back as 1995 named xenophobic attitudes as part of the ravages that the supposed “global village” still suffers. See *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 79.

17 BBC reports the same trend of gross disinformation and unhealthy morals in the fracas that erupted in Egypt in 2013, where OSNs were major sources of disinformation. <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-23469516>. Cf. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32432205>.

18 See Giuseppe Zito, “The Social Network,” in *La Civiltà Cattolica* (15 gennaio 2011): 168.

19 Avery Dulles, “The Church Is Communications,” *Catholic Mind* 69 (1971):13.

## Some Practical Ways Forward

What we have attempted to indicate in this paper is not just a Luddite exclusion of the goods that OSNs represent and the possibility of their use for an authentic contribution to moral discourses in Africa. Rather, we have simply indicated that the construction of moral discourses, in Africa particularly, is undergoing a significant influence from the least expected sector—the social media. Since the Second Vatican Council event that gave ample reasons to take a critical look into the means of social communication, these media have now developed even beyond the imagination of the sacred council, expanding their frontiers into moral constructions. What we are witnessing is a classic case of our collective *Gaudium et spes, luctus et angor*.<sup>20</sup> OSNs have proved useful in engendering moral constructions in Africa, but they have also had a negative impact. The question remains: Where do we go from here? How can the truths of apostolic moral teaching be further advanced and protected in and through these media?

Here I would be drawing insights from three of the major categories I propose in my doctoral dissertation, *Moral Authenticity in Online Social Networks: Nigerian Youths in Perspective* (Rome: Accademia Alfonsiana, 2014).<sup>21</sup>

### The Family

To initiate a fitting answer to these questions above we suggest a visit to the illuminating thoughts of Benedict XVI in *Africae Munus*, his post-synodal apostolic exhortation on the church in Africa (2011). The Holy Father, aware that the family is the basic fabric of human society, an ambience in which “the features of a people take shape” and “members acquire basic teachings,”<sup>22</sup> but also particularly aware of the special position of the family in the African setting, called for families to “make a real contribution to the human and Christian upbringing of their children.”<sup>23</sup> The papal exhortation is important not merely because of the moral authority behind it, but because of the exigency that characterizes its tone. At a time of rapid change that presents real challenges for the traditional cultures in Africa and the entire globe, the Holy Father calls for a recognition once again of the primal position of the family as an institution of formation and an agency of introduction of the human person into the society. Thus, even if the Internet culture and the myriad OSNs are bringing in a novelty and having an effect thus far unknown in the lives of growing youth, the obligation still falls on this incipient unit of life—the family, which is described as the “domestic church”—to stand up to this culture. It is the family’s obligation to protect the young from the subtle and sometimes not too subtle relativism of a new ethics that such a culture proposes.<sup>24</sup>

It is not without a reason that the church is paying much attention to the family, particularly as history is playing out in the reality in Africa today. Let us bear in mind the turbulence that the traditional setting of the family in African cultures is going through in the wake of postmodernity and the advent of a “global village.” The youth of

20 Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, (December 7, 1965), no. 1, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html). The second phrase of the constitution is *luctus et angor* (“griefs and anxieties”).

21 This study is essentially a confluence of theological–anthropological insights, making an in-depth use of the empirical methods of the social sciences to back up theological studies and analysis. A merger of these methodologies fittingly puts into vision the call that the Second Vatican Council had made about an employment of “humanistic and scientific training” in order to appreciate ecclesiastical studies. See *Optatam Totius, Decree on Priestly Training* (October 28, 1965), no. 13, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651028\\_optatam-totius\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_optatam-totius_en.html). Drawing from this resource is appropriate in this case since the issue of moral construction online, even though most popular among the youth, is an increasing reality even for the less young. By the day, the African continent continues to pass from the oral tradition to the technology-inclined tradition. See also my dissertation’s Appendix II for an insight into the usage of OSNs by age group.

22 Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, no. 42.

23 Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, no. 52.

24 Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, no. 43. The Pontifical Council for the Family actually published an excellent guide and help for families in going about this all-important obligation. See “The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality, Guidelines for Education within the Family,” *Origins* 25 (February 1, 1966): 529–52.

Africa are constantly exposed to values that are foreign to their home culture, consequently becoming uncritical recipients and imitators of such cultures. What is unfortunate is that, while imitation of some “imported” values may be useful since there is a uniqueness to each culture that is gift, not everything that is offered by these cultures is helpful or useful.<sup>25</sup> To emulate the practices of other cultures is not necessarily something to be viewed as a negative; in fact, this may enrich the human person since no particular culture has the wholeness of truth. But again, looking at it from the other angle, no particular culture is devoid of human frailties. Thus, oftentimes, the problem is that a number of African youth import practices of other cultures from the Western world without the requisite “cultural-sieving” that ought to accompany such an importation. Being formed in the anthropological values of one’s own culture, a direct importation of “foreign” practices often leave the youth disillusioned and affected by ways of life that they have never been used to and that they have largely misunderstood.<sup>26</sup>

There is therefore the need in Africa for an exaltation of the position of the family to its traditional setting, playing its major role as the first *domestic church* and working steadfastly to revive its role as the cradle of the initial values of life to be learned. Parents cannot afford to fall into the postmodern temptation of disconnection in which the day-to-day exigencies of life make youth who are still in need of proper family formation bereft of consistent guidance. Whatever the youth become in life has a lot to do with the level of formation they have received in the family while growing up. And inasmuch as peer pressure in schools and elsewhere does affect the moral stance of adolescents, a correlation is always manifest between the level of fidelity of the youth and the authenticity and sturdiness of moral formation they receive while growing up. The family as the domestic church is never a mere appellation but the most important institution for introducing the younger generation into the rugged and unbalanced moral turf of society.

## The Church

In an African context, the position of the church is of no small significance. We have argued that generally speaking, religiosity is a key value for the African person. It thus means that the church has the potential to take the lead in offering fruitful direction to the African person for whom religiosity is essential. Formation of conscience, which brings true development of the human person, and conscious efforts that impact on the development of these young ones through various formation programs, need to be intensified at different levels. Catechetical formation, symposiums, seminars, and workshops are additional ongoing formation tools that need to be increasingly used in order to help the youth chart their path toward healthy development in life. A good number of these initiatives are already in place, but such efforts need to be intensified and should never be seen as superfluous or excessive. Just as themes of faith are gazetted and worked into our curriculum of catechesis, so the issue of online moral construction has to be given a central place in the church if such a catechesis is to remain relevant in an age when Facebook has become the city center and OSNs have replaced the erstwhile traditional play square. Of course, this direction is not entirely novel; it is a development of the sound of caution the fathers of the Second Vatican Council made five decades ago.

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25 Pope Francis already warned of this issue, taking Africa as a specific example. He notes that “the encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* pointed out years ago that there have been frequent attempts to make the African countries ‘parts of a machine, cogs on a gigantic wheel. This is often true also in the field of social communications which, being run by centres mostly in the northern hemisphere, do not always give due consideration to the priorities and problems of such countries or respect their cultural make-up.’” See *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 62.

26 Babatunde Longe et al. have argued that the African traditional setting is undergoing a rapid breakdown of its traditional values. The need to make strenuous efforts against an enculturation into the new culture that the contemporary technologized world has brought to the life of Nigerian youths is most evident. The world of technology appears thrust upon the average Nigerian youth, who finds such a world intriguing, a complete revolt against the world of restriction and order in which he had grown up. The youth is able to circumvent the usual cultural support, guidance, and limitations of society, easily disappearing into the whirlwind of the cyber. Babatunde Longe et al., “Exposure of Children and Teenagers to Internet Pornography in South Western Nigeria: Concerns, Trends & Implications,” *Journal of Information Technology Impact* 7, no. 3 (2007): 196 ff.

## Schools and Formal Centers of Learning

Special programs specifically dedicated to the theme of the ongoing construction of moral discourses online, and the overall import of the use of OSNs, should be encouraged in schools. School curricula need to be developed in such a way that they take cognizance of this fact. It appears though that such an awareness and focus are taken for granted, perhaps due to an understanding of the OSN's ambit to be private, a virtual personal postal address that is left to the wishes and caprices of the user.

This is, however, a mistake. Much more than mere personal communication, OSNs represent a world that can involve millions of crystallizing ideas at a single point in time. Evidently, the OSN phenomenon merits attention and serious study; it cannot be taken for granted. To reiterate, we need to formulate and include courses, seminars, and discussion fora within the programs offered by schools and other formal education agencies.

With the arguments advanced above, this necessity is even more pressing in an African context, which, true to the papal caution, is increasingly becoming one of the "cogs on a gigantic wheel of the world . . . which, being run by centers mostly in the northern hemisphere, do not always give due consideration to the priorities and problems of such countries or respect their cultural make-up."<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

The environment of the OSNs, as locus for moral construction, is at times devoid of necessary value parameters. However, this should not create a panic reaction that discourages the usage of such media. In spite of the challenges that exist, a more human and Christian path to follow in confronting the challenges is to take up the gauntlet of John Paul II to "enter this new forum, armed with the Gospel of Christ, the Prince of Peace."<sup>28</sup> This also takes into perspective the call of the post-synodal exhortation to foray more into this environment in order to evangelize it.<sup>29</sup> The consideration of this issue should not, therefore, take the usual line of dichotomizing polemics: to make wise use of these technologies, conscious of the moral challenges that they present, or to keep away from them in order to ensure human life is lived in authenticity.

That the construction of moral discourses in Africa has now found a contemporary altar in the Internet and the OSNs is indubitable. But that the purity of such moral discourses can be better enhanced by the contributions of institutions such as the family, the church, and the schools is an argument with roots that reach back to the future-envisioning fathers of the Second Vatican Council.

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27 John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, *On the Social Concerns of the Church*, no. 22, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30121987\\_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html).

28 John Paul II, *Internet: A New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel*, Message of the Holy Father for the 36<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, 12 May 2002, no. 5, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/communications/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_20020122\\_world-communications-day.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_20020122_world-communications-day.html).

29 John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 122.

# Notes from the Road More Traveled: Doing Theology in a US Cultural Context

by John J. Markey, OP

One of the most significant consequences of Vatican II has been the worldwide effort at inculturation and contextualization of the Christian tradition, particularly at the level of foundational theology and method. This process implies drawing on the unique patterns of thought, social structures, cultural narratives, and rituals to develop new theological and pastoral sensibilities. This process, termed “prophetic dialogue” by Steve Bevens and Roger Schroeder,<sup>1</sup> seems to be dramatically underway practically everywhere in the Roman Catholic world except, most notably, in the United States. While Hispanics/Latin@s, African Americans, Asian Americans, feminists, etc., have continuously served with an awareness of the need for contextualization, Euro-American academic and ecclesial theology has largely failed to analyze, articulate, and critique its own US cultural context and to engage it in a serious evangelical and theological dialogue.

In this article, I propose to offer what I believe are four significant insights about the task of inculturation/contextualization as it relates particularly to Euro-American theology in the church and academy in the coming decade.

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## Liberating the USA

Although Euro-American theologians often greatly appreciate and are deeply conversant in liberation theology and its many global variations they seem to be virtually unaware of the ways in which the cultural context of the United States needs to be liberated. Liberation theology began as a response of the economically poor and politically oppressed peoples to their condition, and as a reaction to the ideology that supported and enabled the institutional structures of those conditions. Any theology of liberation is inherently rooted in the experience of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people and their struggle to interpret theologically their struggle and their desire for new life in the midst of suffering and death. Liberation theology, while

beginning in Latin America, has come to represent all those who find themselves in a “scandalous condition” in history—the victims of institutional oppression, violence, injustice, and inequity that permeate the world in which we live. Liberation theology finds its deepest yearnings and hope in the biblical story of a God who hears the cry of the enslaved Hebrew people and demands that they be set free (Ex 3–15).

<sup>1</sup> Stephen B. Bevens and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 385–95. See also Bevens and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

What I am proposing, on the other hand, is a theology for those living in “Pharaoh’s house.”<sup>2</sup> What I mean by this is that I believe we need a liberating theology for those who find themselves on the “inside” of the oppressive structures of the wealthiest countries, much like Moses in the Exodus story initially found himself inside the walls of Pharaoh’s house. Most people of course have no intention whatsoever of being oppressors. But that is precisely the problem; we live very confined and ultimately unreflective lives where we take much for granted about the way things are. The gospel imperative of the option for the poor requires us instead to see the way things ought to be. An important part of breaking the cycle of oppression is simply to try to envision the world according to the reign of God and begin to desire to live in and that world here and now.

The question must arise then, what kind of theology needs to be done by and for those who do not suffer from institutional injustice, but in fact are the beneficiaries of it? I propose that we do not need a theology of liberation as much as a theology of conversion. The majority of citizens of the United States primarily need to be converted from a cultural ethos that leads them to believe that self-centered individualism, unfettered free market capitalism, and fundamentalistic religious piety are not only morally acceptable, but are actually the only morally acceptable alternatives necessary for achieving the common good. Members of the entitled beneficiaries of injustice need “new eyes” and “new ears” so that they can see, hear, and experience the world in a radically different way: the way that the majority of outsiders (social, political, and, almost always, economic) experience it on a daily and routine basis. This task requires, first of all, a process of holistic and integral personal spirituality that enables this new and radical reorientation of life. This spirituality can be characterized as a process of personal and social conversion that liberates Americans from an entire false value system that calls good evil and evil good, that enmeshes them in lives where they often are oppressing and violating the rights of entire parts of the world without even realizing it.

In the North American church many theologians are only slowly coming to realize that the two-thousand-year-old tradition of Christianity developed almost completely outside of the relatively new and still emerging US cultural milieu. To engage the American culture with the gospel is acutely challenging and complicated precisely because most people, including many theologians and church leaders, are unaware that there is a problem. US culture is not simply continuous with or a variation of European culture; it has in fact been largely disconnected from the continent and its ethos for over one hundred fifty years. Grasping the subtlety and complexity of US culture is a difficult and almost unending task. Inculturation in the US context will require that theologians understand its unique traditions, the rich intercultural context of most US communities, and a myriad of both contradictions and variations in the forms of cultural expression. The predominant mainstream ethos of American life has emerged out of a unique set of historical, social, economic, and geographic circumstances that creates this culture even as it is in the process of being transformed by it. Awareness of this dynamic process is critical for any theology that truly wants to penetrate and evangelize persons living at the heart, and even the peripheries, of the United States.

But where should we begin this process? Christian theology has often sought to initially understand and interpret a society through an engagement with its philosophical sources. This could be a particularly fruitful entry point in the case of US culture because of the role philosophy played in the early history of American life. Until the first quarter of the twentieth century philosophy and theology were considered to be vital topics of American public life, and philosophers in particular played an active role in shaping public opinion on a whole range of issues. Thomas Jefferson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, and John Dewey were among a handful nationally known public thinkers who shaped the American’s intellectual landscape and helped to create a unique American interpretation of reality. Many lesser known scholars (in the academy and outside of it) reflected deeply on the emerging American ethos and tried also to shape and define it, or at least critique it to those who had the power

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2 John J. Markey, *Moses in Pharaoh’s House: A Liberating Spirituality for North America* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2014).

to affect such change. Many of these early American intellectuals intuitively grasped the “American experiment” and understood its deeper and more serious implications for both the future of this nation and humankind. Furthermore, the US intellectual tradition also is comprised of unique and indigenous modes of theology, literature, poetry, political commentary, legal history, and social theory stretching back 250 years that it would seem wise to acknowledge and understand.

I am suggesting then what Bevans refers to as the synthetic model of contextualization as a major starting point for work by theologians in the US cultural context.<sup>3</sup> I believe that this is in fact one significant approach that is already being used in Hispanic/Latin@ and African American theology and it offers rich potential in other contexts. The synthetic model, which Bevans also refers to as the dialogical or analogical method, envisions a kind of creative dialogue between sources within the culture that resonate with the gospel message as well as with parts of and places in the culture that have already analyzed and offered critical reflection on certain aspects of the culture or have been continuously nurturing dynamic alternatives to the prevalent and often dominant ethos. This model of contextualization has already been attempted on some small scales by various theologians and cultural critics over the last fifty years. I myself was part of a movement working out of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley between 1980 and 2009. Although its founder and most prolific proponent was Don Gelpi, its members also included such interesting and important theologians as Bill Spohn, Alex Garcia-Rivera, Robert Lasalle-Klein, and Nancy Pineda-Madrid.<sup>4</sup>

### **The US Culture as Hypermodern rather than Postmodern**

The constitution on the Church in the World promulgated at Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, describes the modern world largely in terms of change<sup>5</sup>—change primarily from a stable social order through dynamic growth in industry and technology that has literally created a much more fluid and unstable social, political, and economic environment as a normative condition of this new era. There was also a dramatic change at the roots of the society in terms of the role of the church and religion in the social ethos. With the dawn of the Enlightenment in Europe, European society became relatively secular and fundamentally reoriented toward the ideals and thought-forms of scientific theory as the foundational patterns for viewing the world. Modernity connotes the experience of a society that believes in the positive value of change itself and sees in it the hope of progress, growth, and the development of a higher standard of living for everyone. Modernity, as a type of culture in itself, values change for its own sake, understanding both the immense possibilities and the dangers inherent in this phenomenon. Nevertheless, modern culture accepts the inevitability of change in light of the technological, social, and political forces that science and economics demand.

I contend that, in many ways, *Gaudium et Spes* remains extremely relevant as a guide to the US cultural context. I believe that at its core the US milieu is still struggling to come to terms with its own unique form of modernity. In many parts of Europe most scholars and commentators feel that they are no longer experiencing modernity in a strict sense. They have described this new reality as postmodernity.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, I would argue that while the United States is not really modern, neither is it postmodern, but it is experiencing its own new variation on this foundational cultural pattern that I will call “hypermodern.”

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3 Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 88–102.

4 For example, see Donald L. Gelpi, SJ, ed., *Beyond Individualism: Toward a Retrieval of Moral Discourse in America*, afterword by Robert N. Bellah (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

5 I wrote at length on this topic in my book *Creating Communion: The Theology of the Constitutions of the Church* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2003), 174–84.

6 See especially Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age*, Guides to Theological Inquiry series (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), ix–xiv.

European commentators/philosophers almost inevitably describe postmodernism as a radical break with the Enlightenment sense that there is order, purpose, and direction to the world that can be known and controlled through human intelligence and cooperation. For Europeans, the twentieth century first created a crisis for this worldview and then shattered it altogether with the tragedies of the rise of totalitarian states, two world wars, and an ideological Cold War that plunged an already exhausted ethos into forty-year period of standing on the edge of the nuclear abyss. Postmodernism connotes the attempt to pick up the pieces and shape a new, and less ambitious, view of reality. Postmodernism rejects the naïve optimism of modernism that uncritically accepted the notion that progress and growth were necessarily implied in change and that science and economics were basically positive forces underlying and guiding change itself. Postmodernism is skeptical not just of religion and the other dimensions of the stable world order that modernism supplanted, it is skeptical of modernism itself and has not found any worldview or foundational way of thinking that can fill the void—indeed it doubts whether such a foundational worldview exists at all.

In many ways, American culture, though rooted in many different and competing varieties of European cultures, did not emerge as fully cohesive and “modern” until the early to mid-nineteenth century. Somewhat owing to the work of American philosopher Albert Borgmann,<sup>7</sup> I would propose three foundational sources of modern American culture: the adoption of the US Constitution and especially the ratification of the Bill of Rights in 1791, the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and the massive territorial expansion that it enabled, and the development of large-scale national industrial corporations in all sectors of economic production between 1800 and 1850 in the northeastern and midwestern parts of the country, along with the massive agricultural production in the southern United States made possible by the extensive dependence on slavery. These three sources combined to create a uniquely American culture that represented the dawn of a new epoch in Western history. A great deal has been written on the unique character of the culture in the last twenty years and yet it was recognized as new moment in history as early as 1840 by Alexis de Tocqueville. While it would be impossible to adequately describe the scope and breadth of this culture here, I would generally characterize it as prizing three dominant values: individuality, growth, and efficiency.

I would argue that these three cultural values in the US historical context create a unique type of modernity that was always connected with but distinct from European modernity. Like its other European counterparts, however, I think that America is experiencing a cultural crisis, but one that is actually quite different than that being experienced as “postmodern.” I believe that it is more adequate to describe US culture as being “hypermodern” rather than postmodern. First of all, by hypermodernism I do not mean that the American form of modernism has somehow broken down or failed. On the contrary, hypermodernism asserts that American modernism has succeeded all too well. Its very success has in fact created the crisis that American culture now confronts. With the development of newer and more refined levels of technology, the speed of growth has begun to outstrip the human ability to adapt to the environmental, biological, and psychological changes that it brings. As this new world yielded increasingly efficient systems of economic success, efficiency itself morphed into an ideology that now serves as the measure of all things from government to education, medical care, and even religion. The US “triumph” in the decades-long Cold War led not to the dissolution of metanarratives but actually cemented a naïve trust in the myth of free-market capitalism as the default foundation of the larger US metanarrative that we often refer to as US exceptionalism.

Similarly, the increasingly fierce emphasis on individuality has led to an ideological individualism that has severed the person from his or her various communities during a period in the late twentieth century when individuals

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7 Albert Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 20–37.



were discovering more than ever the vital need for other people in their lives. American hypermodern culture has also led to an important and very precarious new phenomenon in this society: hyperindividualism. Let me try to explain what I mean by hyperindividualism.

Americans are fascinated with the idea of community and the term “community” serves as a very significant buzzword in American culture. Research conducted in the last decades of the twentieth century showed that community represented the single most urgent longing of Americans and also, importantly, the one goal that seemed most elusive and difficult to attain.<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, Americans yearn to be socially connected and united at a very fundamental level in their lives. On the other hand, Americans embrace a type of radical individualism that seems to negate the possibility of achieving the genuine social bonds that they desire. In many ways this ongoing dialectic between individual and community has defined the cultural development of American society. From the beginning, the ideals of individuality and community have existed in a creative tension that has driven the development of dual, and often competing, social foci. The Constitution of the country itself tried to put forth a model of government that would safeguard the sanctity of the individual, individual free choice, and the search for personal autonomy, while also insuring that some level of unity and social identity be maintained to protect the common good of all citizens. Striking and maintaining a working balance between personal freedom and social order for the advancement of the whole country became the task of the government that developed in the aftermath of the American Revolution.

The primary consequence of this exaltation of the individual (hyperindividualism) is that it creates an ongoing competition between individuals and their need for personal self-fulfillment even at the expense of other people and significant social bonds. This competition takes a significant toll on both those who succeed at this process and those who fail. The ideology of hyperindividualism tends to isolate the individual and create a sense of loneliness and alienation at deep levels in the human psyche. This means that the society not only nurtures individualism, but must also try to ameliorate the negative effects of this project. The hypermodern society, and the individual communities within it, must inevitably take on what I refer to as a “palliative therapeutic function” offering care, support, and refuge for lonely, emotionally battered individuals. Furthermore, the need and desire for community, while not lost, becomes subordinated to the emphasis on the individual. Community, as a matter of fact, actually becomes an important means for individual self-expression and personal growth. The problem then develops as to whether genuine community can be achieved or maintained by individuals who participate in it as a means of personal growth and self-advancement. In other words, the quandary in contemporary hypermodern America is that individuals seek and need communal and social experiences to overcome the isolation and loneliness that often accompany the quest for personal ambition and self-fulfillment, but the bonds necessary to create community itself cannot exist if all its potential members remain primarily motivated by self-interest. Furthermore, the hypermodern myth of growth and efficiency locates the solution to these deep and perennial personal and social problems in the realm of free-market capitalism with hopes that it can ameliorate and solve any problem. The three cultural values of individuality, growth, and efficiency both create a cultural crisis and offer false hope of some kind of resolution to this crisis, implying that these values and their broad acceptance need to be challenged and mitigated. This presents a unique opportunity to Christians who believe that the gospel always offers a way of reinterpreting a culture in ways that both challenge and enhance it.

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<sup>8</sup> See especially Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Markey, *Moses in Pharaoh's House*, 31–35.

## The “Problem” of Secularism in the United States

Often Christians presume that the challenge to truly inculcating the gospel in the US context is the prevalence of secularism and some kind of antireligious and anti-Christian bias that must be overcome before any genuine evangelization can take place. The United States is one of the most religious countries on earth. Most surveys routinely find that 90 to 95 percent of Americans believe in a God and nearly that many pray at least once a week. Almost 90 percent of Americans align themselves with some religious denomination and more than half of those people attend religious services at least once a month. But if 96 percent of people in our culture already believe in God and even pray, then there doesn't seem to be much need to prove that God exists because most people in this culture take that for granted. The question in our culture is not whether God exists, but which God exists—which God exists because, although most of us believe in God, it is not clear that we all believe in the same God.<sup>10</sup>

As the Baylor Religion Survey observes,

American religion seems monolithic. In fact, under the surface American religion is startlingly complex and diverse. American may agree that God exists. They do not agree about what God is like, what God wants for the world, or how God feels about politics. Most Americans pray. They differ widely on to whom they pray, what they pray about, and whether or not they say grace. A vast majority of Americans are Christians, but attitudes amongst those Christians regarding the salvation of others, the role of religion in government, the reality of the paranormal, and their consumption of the media are surprisingly diverse.<sup>11</sup>

These numbers imply that most Americans have undergone a religious conversion in Bernhard Lonergan's sense of the term.<sup>12</sup> They similarly imply that Americans give widely divergent accounts of the manner and consequences of their religious conversion. At the heart of the American problem of God then lies the central issue of mediating between multiple and often incommensurable understandings of the nature and character of the God in whom people believe. How do we even communicate about, let alone reconcile, such diverse interpretations of God, and particularly of the Christian God? This issue in turn yields two other critical areas of US cultural expression that contextual theologians must address: the unique nature of US secularism and fundamentalism.

In a nation where almost everyone believes in God, prays, and talks publicly about spiritual and religious aspirations and consciousness, terms such as secular, secularism, and secularity have uncertain meanings. In a US cultural context secularism certainly has an entirely different meaning than it would in a Canadian, European, South American, or Asian context. In the United States, for instance, almost all people on all sides of any contentious or complicated moral, ethical, or political debate proclaim to be either acting directly out of their religious beliefs or acting in line with their conscience as it is informed by their spirituality and religious practice. This means that the competing sides in any public debate are unlikely to be easily characterized as believers versus nonbelievers or the religiously faithful versus secularists. Most polarizing social and political disputes in this country are actually between diverse and often competing accounts of the demands of religious faith or varying interpretations of religious (and mostly Christian) beliefs.

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<sup>10</sup> Markey, *Moses in Pharaoh's House*, 102–3.

<sup>11</sup> “American Piety in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: New Insights into the Depth and Complexity of Religion in the US,” Baylor Religion Survey (Waco, TX: Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion, 2006), 4–5.

<sup>12</sup> Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 57–100.

Charles Taylor in his landmark book *The Secular Age* describes basically three types of contemporary secularism.<sup>13</sup> First, he refers a type of secularism in which “you can fully engage in politics without ever encountering God.”<sup>14</sup> In this type religion is understood to be totally private and the society actually needs to protect the state from the negative influence of religion and religious beliefs. Secondly, Taylor describes a mode of secularism that understands secularity in terms of public spaces. These public spaces have been allegedly emptied of God or of any reference to ultimate reality.<sup>15</sup> In this type of secularism religious belief and faith have simply fallen off so dramatically that there is little social interest in participating in them. Finally, he contends that there is a third type of secularity that exists in societies in which belief is an option and a significant one, but not one in which it is mandatory, and it is viable to conceive of it as one possibility among others.<sup>16</sup> Taylor puts the United States in the third category. I would agree with Taylor but add that in this type of society religion and religious belief is seen to be so important that it actually has to be protected by intrusions from the government or other public institutions. Furthermore, in the United States, while there is technically some kind of “wall” between church and state, public and private discourse, the fact is that almost no major political or social force is antireligious or ideologically secular along the lines of the first two types of secularity that Taylor outlines.

In my opinion, the real crisis in the US cultural context is not secularity but religious fundamentalism. In Lonergan’s terms, and developed by Don Gelpi and others, religious fundamentalism occurs when individuals or communities have undergone religious conversion but have not advanced simultaneously in intellectual conversion, affective conversion, moral conversion, and sociopolitical conversion. Especially visible in religious believers who have not learned to interpret reality through multiple perspectives or contextualize their own experience in a wider understanding of reality, religion and religious belief become an ideology and a particularly potent ideology in that most believers hold that their views are not simply their own but those that God has revealed to them. In this sense, religious fundamentalism denotes a serious problem not just for advancing political and social discourse in the country, but it becomes an obstacle for authentic religious belief and Christian orthodoxy.<sup>17</sup> If the Christian tradition is anything it is intellectually sophisticated and culturally complex. In the Catholic tradition especially, interpreting the will of God requires a long-term and ongoing dedication to the intellectual and rational processes that only international institutions steeped in “deep wells” of the theological tradition can provide. In authentic Christianity one must approach the daunting intellectual task of interpreting the Tradition and traditions not just with an openness to collaboration and dialogue with other believers and even nonbelievers, but also with a deep sense of humility about the ultimate fallibilism/limitations of all types of human knowing.

### The Countercultural Model of Contextualization

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

—Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken”

13 Charles Taylor, *The Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 2–3.

14 Taylor, *Secular Age*, 2–3.

15 Taylor, *Secular Age*, 2.

16 Taylor, *Secular Age*, 2–3.

17 See further Thomas F. O’Meara, OP, *Fundamentalism: A Catholic Perspective* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990) and Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 1–37.

I have no empirical evidence for this, but I believe that if you did a survey most US citizens would identify themselves in this poem, probably seeing themselves as being on the road “less traveled by.” We are all Emersonians now. As countless studies by the likes of Bellah, Putnam, Lasch, and Wuthnow<sup>18</sup> have consistently shown, the US cultural context is suffused with the sense that each individual constitutes a unique spiritual and moral universe in which all of us have the capacity to transcend the limits imposed by history and define our own distinct and special place in the cosmos. Because of our uniqueness as individuals we actually transcend the simple labels and categories that history and society impose upon us. In this worldview, society serves as either a kind of void that the person must fill with meaning, or merely a stage where the person acts a part but is not really involved at some profoundly authentic level. In either case, life is seen to be empty, disconnected, futile, and boring if the individual person does not infuse it with purpose.

Christopher Lasch described this as a culture of narcissism.<sup>19</sup> At the heart of narcissism lies a genuine lack of a sense of historical time. The narcissist lives in the eternal present: neither constrained by the past, nor responsible for the future. The credo of the narcissist is to “live for the moment.” In this context, the past is devalued and dismissed as irrelevant, and the future is ignored under the pretext that no one has control over it. So, meaning and purpose can only be understood in terms of immediate experience. Narcissists live neither for their predecessors nor for posterity, but only for themselves here and now. In the United States this often leads to the somewhat ironic American tradition that in the United States each person is free to choose her/his own tradition.

Regardless of past affiliations and ancestral heritage, each individual is free to identify with any tradition or way of life that he or she finds most appealing. So, for instance, in the area of religion, every person can become a Christian, a Buddhist, a Muslim, a Mormon, a Native American, or some combination of traditions, or a person may decide to simply create his/her own religious tradition. In a sense, nothing is predetermined, except that nothing is predetermined. This cultural motif implies individuals have no necessary and important connection to the past and that tradition is something that we actually need to be freed from or can take on without any necessary predispositions. At its extreme this notion, when coupled with a blithe disregard for the future, creates a culture in which the immediate present and its needs are the only things for which individuals feel any logical, emotional, and moral responsibility.

The question then emerges for those interested in contextual theology: what would it mean to be countercultural in the cultural context that I have just been describing? Bevans defines the countercultural not as anticultural but as presuming that if the gospel is truly to take root in a culture it must be able to challenge and “purify” the cultural context.<sup>20</sup> It does this primarily by “call[ing] radically into question that way of understanding embodied in the language it uses” and fundamentally contradicting and embodying an alternative cultural praxis to the cultural presuppositions in which it finds itself.<sup>21</sup> Being countercultural in an ethos in which the members already see themselves as traveling on a different road than the mainstream and as searching for some new form of personal identity and distinction means that many “countercultural” movements may end up playing into the very cultural dynamic that they seek to undermine. In fact, in a fairly wealthy milieu making oneself distinguishable and different from others is one of the primary aspects of the culture driving consumerism. In this context, religion, reli-

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18 Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985); Putnam, *Bowling Alone*; Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979); Robert Wuthnow, *American Myths: Why Our Best Efforts to be a Better Nation Fall Short* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

19 Lasch, *Culture of Narcissism*.

20 Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 117–37.

21 Bevans; here he is quoting Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (London: SPCK, 1986), 5–6.

gious beliefs, and practices themselves can easily become commodities that are developed, marketed, and sold to individuals seeking a way to improve their lives with greater meaning and purpose.<sup>22</sup>

In this culture, I believe that the most significant countercultural statement that a person can make is to commit oneself to a cause greater than one's own personal well-being, the success of which cannot or probably will not be known in one's lifetime. This cause commits me to a past that I did not myself create, but for which I take full responsibility, and simultaneously commits me a future that I cannot now know or even necessarily comprehend. I commit myself to work toward ends of such great universal value that I will not live to see them achieved in my lifetime, nor is any such success even reasonable to expect. This type of radical commitment necessarily includes a community of members to whom I am fully committed as sisters and brothers equal in work for a worthy cause. True individuals, therefore, cannot be separated from a radical commitment to a cause greater than the individual, nor from a community of people who are bound together in a unity that transcends self-interest. The fullest and most authentic expression of the basic human desire for freedom, autonomy, and fulfillment is centered not in an internal, self-centered discovery process, but in the conscious decision to discover oneself precisely through commitment and community.

The road less traveled by in this culture then will necessarily pass through forms of commitment, community, and communion that may seem to be less countercultural than boring at first glance. And the very premise of this countercultural community will seem for many to lack the boldness, distinctiveness, and self-affirmation that they seek. In my own experience the most compelling and vivid example of this type of countercultural model is represented by Catholic women's religious communities of the type that, particularly in the Vatican II era and under immense pressure from both declining membership and the Vatican hierarchy, found deep and common cause in fidelity to their own charisms and in their shared mission to live out the gospel in very particular modes and circumstances. This long, unwavering, persistent, and largely unheralded dedication to a cause to which many of them committed themselves in their youth and under radically altered conditions speaks more highly of the power of the gospel and the providential care of a loving God than even the most dramatic forms of short-term religious and sociopolitical theater.

## Conclusion

Bevans and Schroeder have likened prophetic dialogue to joining into a dance—"a great Conga Line that has moved through the world since the beginning of time and that is also the heartbeat of God's deepest self."<sup>23</sup> In this sense, doing theology in a US cultural context requires that we open ourselves to an experience much wider than our own milieu and even our own particular Christian theological and spiritual traditions. Dancing requires that we be open to being led into some deeper and richer experience of beauty and grace than we could ever experience on our own. For Christian communities that want to evangelically engage the remarkably complex and intriguing US cultural context, the first step will be to engage this context with openness and to trust that it has something unique and distinctive to offer and that genuinely deep and penetrating dialogue will lead both the US and the wider Christian community to some richer and more profound experience of the divine life than either could experience on their own.

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<sup>22</sup> See Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 17.

# “An Echo in their Hearts”: The Church in Our Modern World<sup>1</sup>

by Kristin E. Heyer

A month before opening the Second Vatican Council Pope John XXIII broadcast an address to the world, expressing his hope that in response to the needs of the underdeveloped countries, the church “wishes to be the Church of all, and especially the Church of the poor.”<sup>2</sup> Just over fifty years later during his first week as pope, Pope Francis echoed, “How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor.”<sup>3</sup> The world has witnessed many examples of the new pontiff’s commitment to the poor in word and deed. I would like to recall one example in particular that reflects my focus herein: During his first official trip outside Rome since his election that March, Pope Francis celebrated mass on Lampedusa, an Italian island that has become a safe haven for African migrants seeking passage to Europe. He chose this site after the suffering of migrants who had recently died at sea while attempting to cross from North Africa revisited him like “a thorn in the heart.”<sup>4</sup>

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Prior to making any public statement, Pope Francis made the sign of the cross and tossed a wreath of white and yellow flowers into the sea, commemorating the estimated twenty thousand African immigrants who have died over the past twenty-five years trying to reach a new life in Europe (another three hundred went missing there in February 2013, fleeing conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Mali).<sup>5</sup> The pope celebrated Mass within sight of the “graveyard of wrecks,” where fishing boats carrying migrants and asylum seekers end up after they drift ashore.<sup>6</sup> Other reminders that Lampedusa is synonymous with dangerous attempts to reach Europe abounded: “the altar was built over a small boat”; the pastoral staff, the lectern and even the chalice were carved from the wood of shipwrecked boats.<sup>7</sup> He lamented in his homily our disorientation in sin and indifference to the plight of these vulnerable brothers and sisters: recalling immemorial temptations to power and its consequences,

1 This essay was first presented at the University of Notre Dame’s “Joy and Hope: Celebrating 50 Years since *Gaudium et Spes*” conference on March 21, 2015. Portions are adapted from “Building a Just World: Resources from Vatican II” (with Bryan Massingale), in *Beyond Vatican II: Charting a Catholic Future*, ed. Paul G. Crowley (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2014).

2 John XXIII, radio message, September 11, 1962, AAS 54 (1962): 682.

3 Francis, audience to representatives of the communications media, “Address of the Holy Father Pope Francis,” March 16, 2013, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/march/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130316\\_rappresentanti-media.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/march/documents/papa-francesco_20130316_rappresentanti-media.html).

4 Francis, homily on visit to Lampedusa, July 8 2013, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130708\\_omelia-lampedusa.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa.html).

5 Cindy Wooden, “Pope Calls for Repentance over Treatment of Migrants,” *Catholic News Service*, July 8, 2013, <http://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2013/pope-calls-for-repentance-over-treatment-of-migrants.cfm>.

6 John Hooper, “Pope Francis Condemns Global Indifference to Suffering,” *The Guardian*, July 8, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/08/pope-francis-condemns-indifference-suffering>.

7 Wooden, “Pope Calls for Repentance.”

“Adam where are you?” and then “Cain, where is your brother?” These are questions addressed to each of us, “How many times do those who seek [a better place for their families] not find understanding, . . . not find welcome, . . . not find solidarity!” He concluded petitioning the Lord for the grace to weep over our indifference, to weep over the cruelty in the world, in ourselves, and even in those who anonymously make socioeconomic decisions that open the way to tragedies like this.

There in the southern Mediterranean Pope Francis shared in the grief and anguish marking one of the key signs of our times—forced migration—moved by the humanity of the Eritreans he met and provoked by the inhumanity of those numb to their plight. *Gaudium et Spes* similarly engages the church and world in reflection on what it means to be human—flawed and fragile yet called to share in divine life, and bound in solidarity. Given its theological anthropology and ecclesiological charge, living out the call of *Gaudium et Spes* at least demands Christians appreciate that “Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in our hearts,” indeed sometimes a thorn in our hearts. Here I present some of the key themes and legacies of *Gaudium et Spes* in light of this focus, and then return to several elements of its “echo” in areas of dialogue, conscience, and resonance for the church today.

### Legacies of *Gaudium et Spes*: a Public Church

As historian John O’Malley aptly puts it, the spirit of Vatican II was marked by shifts that signaled a different way of being church: from “commands to invitations, from coercion to conscience, from monologue to dialogue, from ruling to serving, from exclusion to inclusion, from hostility to friendship, and from behavior-modification to inner appropriation of values.”<sup>8</sup> It is fair to say that the substance and tone of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World exemplifies this transformation. The council’s articulation of its social mission in solidarity with all of humankind in this, its final and longest document (promulgated on December 7, 1965, the last day of the council), marks a dramatic departure from the church’s traditionally defensive, reactionary stance toward the world. *Gaudium et Spes* ushers in an open stance that takes seriously the struggles of those “in any way afflicted.”

Among the council’s four constitutions, two focus on the church itself: *Lumen Gentium* looks inward, to the renewal of the church’s self-understanding and structures, and *Gaudium et Spes* addresses the relationship between church and contemporary world in all its pluralism and complexity. In the latter we encounter the council’s shift away from conceiving of church and world (or the sacred and secular realms) in opposition to each other, and toward engaging social questions as central to the church’s very mission and identity. This dialogical style signaled a clear departure from the defensive siege mentality the church adopted following the felt impact of movements of modern society and culture deemed threatening to the church: the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the rise of liberal democracies.

With the wealthy European elites seen to be the church’s allies, the pre-Vatican II church denounced human rights, labor unions, and religious toleration as dangerous. Whereas the council “did not want to change the church into a democracy,” it did “redefine how authority was to function, for instance, with a respect for conscience that transformed the members of the church from ‘subjects’ into ‘participants.’”<sup>9</sup> Whereas the church would remain privileged teacher of the gospel, the council “insisted that like all good teachers, [the church] needed to learn as it taught.”

8 John O’Malley, “The Council’s Spirit: Vatican II: The Time for Reconciliation,” *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* 42 (Fall 2012): 6.

9 John O’Malley, “The Style of Vatican II,” *America*, February 24, 2003, <http://americamagazine.org/issue/423/article/style-vatican-ii>.

The initial lines of *Gaudium et Spes* signal these major changes in posture, mission and methodology:

The joys and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community of people united in age towards the Father's kingdom, bearers of a message of salvation for all of humanity. That is why they cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history.<sup>10</sup>

*Gaudium et Spes* thus puts into the forefront its call for dialogue with the world and an examination of social, cultural, and political realities in the light of the gospel. No other Vatican decree is addressed so explicitly to the wider Christian community and people outside the church, noting in paragraph three, "The Council can provide no more eloquent proof of its solidarity with the entire human family with which it is bound up, as well as its respect and love for that family, than by engaging with it in conversation about these various problems."

Thus the church's social teaching becomes bolstered with ecclesiological grounding; no longer was its social teaching considered only as a narrow category within moral theology, but rather a means of fulfilling the church's very mission.<sup>11</sup> In *Gaudium et Spes* the council urges Christians, as "citizens of two cities," to attend to earthly duties in light of the spirit of the gospel. The document grants the ambivalent nature of worldly concerns, yet warns against total rejection of worldly activity as a substitute for discernment and selective engagement. It condemns an attitude of otherworldliness that deemphasizes earthly duties on the view that our only abiding city is that which is to come.<sup>12</sup> The document calls the church to political engagement to protect human dignity, without conflating the Catholic faith with particular political systems. While this indirect role for the church's engagement in the political order entails endless distinctions and decisions, the effort must be made precisely because the alternatives to an indirect engagement are equally unacceptable: a politicized church or a church in retreat from human affairs. The first erodes the transcendence of the gospel; the second betrays the incarnational dimension of Christian faith. I was struck that several of the tributes to Richard McBrien after his death recalled his emphasis on a similar eschatologically informed ecclesiology that tempers the perennial Catholic temptation to triumphalism: he insisted, "the church is not the reign of God. It is 'the seed and beginning' of that reign, and always at its service."<sup>13</sup>

The council's shift away from suspicion of worldly engagement rests upon on its understanding of the human person as the bond between the church and the world. The council affirms the church's duty to safeguard human dignity, promote human rights, and cultivate the unity of the human family.<sup>14</sup> By the later sessions of the council, concern had shifted to justice throughout the world and the social questions taken up became more global in scope. This marked a significant move beyond the European-dominated concerns of the pre-Vatican II church. For example, in *Gaudium et Spes*, the council makes clear the interrelated nature of questions of international economics and peace.<sup>15</sup> With the proliferation of new kinds of weapons the council recommends a fresh scrutiny of longstanding just war teachings given new threats to civilians and the harms posed by the arms race. It emphasizes

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10 See *Gaudium et Spes*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

11 Richard McBrien, "Catholic Social Action," *National Catholic Reporter*, March 3, 1978, 7–8, as cited in Timothy G. McCarthy, *The Catholic Tradition: The Church in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 1998), 260.

12 *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 43.

13 Edward P. Hannenberg quotes McBrien in "History and Mystery: Two Themes That Guided the Late Father Richard McBrien," *National Catholic Reporter*, January 28, 2015. <http://ncronline.org/news/people/history-and-mystery-two-themes-guided-late-fr-richard-mcbrrien>.

14 *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 40–42.

15 Judith A. Merkle, SNDdeN, *From the Heart of the Church: The Catholic Social Tradition* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 120.



the detrimental impact of the commodification of labor, and insists the right to private property must yield to the cry of the poor in light of the common purpose of the goods of creation.<sup>16</sup>

Many have noted the document's torturous development, from its origins in spontaneous interventions from the council floor through numerous drafts and thousands of amendments. Expressing his encouragement for its development and the urgency of addressing the church's mission *ad extra*, the Brazilian archbishop Dom Helder Camara asked, "Are we to spend our whole time discussing internal church problems while two-thirds of human kind is dying of hunger?"<sup>17</sup> Some found it too Western, too European, too optimistic; along the way significant disagreements reflected tensions between more Augustinian and more Thomistic perspectives on the world and its redemption. In the final session one bishop described it as the "Magna Carta of modern paganism" while another called it the "Magna Carta for humanity today."<sup>18</sup> In the end, both theological traditions can be found in the constitution, although the more Thomistic perspective granting the limited but still positive potential of humans and society predominates.

Thus the legacy of Vatican II regarding the church's social mission is one of freedom, transcendence, and independence for the church from political systems but also one of legitimate engagement with the world.<sup>19</sup> Whereas the particular challenges of negotiating how and when the church should involve itself while remaining independent are matters for ongoing discernment in the Christian community, the post-Vatican II church has joined its personal and sacramental ministry to a social and public presence, thereby legitimizing a "public church" on the whole.

### **Nothing That Is Truly Human Fails to Resonate with Christian Concern**

In method and substance, *Gaudium et Spes* places the human condition at the center of its reflections: "It is the human person, therefore, which is key to this discussion, each individual human person in her or his totality, body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will" (no. 3). Employing biblical and personalist language the council invites all people of good will to collaborate to create social conditions consonant with the dignity of every person.<sup>20</sup> Rooted in accounts of creation and incarnation, the heart of *Gaudium et Spes* takes up what constitutes the truly human—loved into being by God and made for relationship yet caught in sin—presenting a dynamic vision of the person that stresses authentic freedom. God's revelation in Christ is the central norm for what it means to be human: "it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of humanity truly becomes clear" (no. 22). Walter Kasper highlights three elements of the relationship between Christology and anthropology here: "As an affirmation of everything that is right, true, good and lovely about human beings; as a prophetic criticism of all forms of alienation in human beings; and finally as the creative surpassing of everything that is possible in purely human terms, and thus as the completion and fulfillment of human beings in God."<sup>21</sup>

This personalism grounds the connections the document forges between the church and the world, the origins and development of culture, its covenantal portrayal of marriage that emphasizes conjugal love, and its provisions for conscientious objection as an alternative to the just war tradition. Whereas Pope John XXIII in his 1963 encyclical *Pacem in terris* had moved the church from "opposition to modern rights and freedoms to active engagement in

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16 Merkle, *From the Heart*, 121.

17 Richard Gallardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2012), 90.

18 Norman P. Tanner, *The Church and the World: Gaudium et Spes, Inter Mirifica* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2005), 14.

19 As Edward Schillebeeckx has suggested, this commitment to engagement to the world was the most lasting and significant change of the council. In his words, the implication was that there was to be "no salvation outside the world." See Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 5.

20 Christine Firer Hinze, "Straining toward Solidarity in a Suffering World: *Gaudium et Spes* 'After Forty Years,'" in *Vatican II: Forty Years Later*, ed. William Madges, College Theology Society Annual Volume 51, 2005 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 167.

21 Cited in Hinze, "Straining toward Solidarity," 171.

the global struggle for human rights,” the council develops the church’s approach to human rights further, spelling out at length the universal rights and duties that flow from the dignity of having been created in the divine image and places them within the context of human interdependence.<sup>22</sup> Hence the council’s integration of explicitly scriptural and theological arguments with appeals based on natural law evidenced its confidence that “a Christian humanism is possible—a hope that one can articulate a vision that is both faithfully Christian and also intelligible to those outside the Christian community.”<sup>23</sup> A hope that nothing that is genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. I would like to elaborate three dimensions of this echo: its condition upon deep and wide listening; its manifestation in the sanctuary of conscience; and its reverberations that summon the church today.

### Deep Listening and Dialogue: To Detect Echoes of the Truly Human

First, in order to have “all that is truly human [echo] in our hearts,” it is imperative that the church genuinely listen, seeking voices welcome and dissonant, from far corners of the world, lay and ordained, insiders and outsiders. The dialogue invited and legitimated by *Gaudium et Spes* offers a crucial avenue to its ongoing witness in service of human dignity.

Engaging the “signs of the times” and seeking to detect the meaning of emerging history, while at the same time sharing the aspirations of all those who want to build a more human world: this is the dialogical charge issued in *Gaudium et Spes*. This emphasis recurs throughout the pastoral constitution, reflecting a methodological shift from a classicist to a historically conscious approach.<sup>24</sup> Catholic engagement with the world and its transformation by the penetration of gospel values should be marked by a spirit of dialogue and service and by what some have called a “confident modesty,” mindful that the church both teaches and learns from the world.<sup>25</sup> It is not insignificant, then, that theologians who had been previously banned were invited to the council and bishops and theologians were learning from each other there, exemplifying to some degree this spirit of reciprocity and humility. In the language of the document, laity are explicitly empowered to be active participants in such dialogue: “Let the [laity] not imagine that [their] pastors are always such experts that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can give him a concrete solution, or event that such is their mission. . . . Let the laity take their distinctive role” (no. 43).

The dialogical engagement with wider society central to *Gaudium et Spes* is evident in theological, pastoral, and social movements in subsequent decades across the globe—from liberation and feminist theologies to renewed commitments to justice on the part of Catholic educational institutions and Catholic involvement in the civil rights movement. The US bishops’ conference engaged political and economic concerns in consultation with lay experts with their landmark pastoral letters in the 1980s on war and the economy. Women religious in the United States interpreted the “vision of solidarity” central to *Gaudium et Spes* as a mandate to serve disfranchised members of US society and address pressing social needs of their day. In the 1970s and 1980s they began to work in a wide variety of social programs beyond those administered by Catholic institutions alone: in domestic violence shelters, educational programs for incarcerated women, addiction counseling centers, food banks, and ecological justice programs. Beyond marching at Selma they witnessed in solidarity with striking farmworkers and against nuclear

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22 David Hollenbach, SJ, “Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*,” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, eds. Kenneth Himes, OFM, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 280–81.

23 *Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 273, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651207\\_dignitatis-humanae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html).

24 Lois Lorentzen, “*Gaudium et spes*,” essay for *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, ed. Judith Dwyer (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 407.

25 William J. Gould, “Fr. J. Bryan Hehir: Priest, Policy Analyst, and Theologian of Dialogue,” in *Religious Leaders and Faith-Based Politics: Ten Profiles*, eds. Jo Renee Formicola and Hubert Morken (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 201.

proliferation. As Elizabeth Johnson recounts, “implementing [the] council’s mandate, women religious vigorously renewed their lives in accord with the gospel and the spirit of their founders. Consequently they moved toward the periphery, away from a cramped ecclesiastical center.”<sup>26</sup>

In the subsequent decades different interpretations of Vatican II yielded different ecclesial emphases at times, as well. Just as council participants differed over perceptions of “the world,” postconciliar appraisals of the world as primarily marked by a “culture of death” or “dictatorship of relativism” reconfigured the scope or mode of dialogue invited by *Gaudium et Spes*. Under the most recent papacy we may detect a renewed emphasis on the inclusively communal nature of the search for truth in a conciliar vein, whether in Pope Francis’s emphases on a culture of accompaniment, his desire that shepherds take on the smell of sheep, and his own example (whether in dialogue with Rabbi Skorka or atheists, or boundary-crossing in Holy Thursday rites, or more mundane encounters). In terms of the reach of dialogue partners *ad intra*, Pope Francis’s appointments to the college of cardinals—hailing most recently from Cape Verde, Tonga, Myanmar, and Mozambique—further signal his commitment to engaging global voices reflective of the global church.

Moving forward, if we are to be leaven safeguarding against threats to human dignity and probing more deeply the truly human, Pope Francis’s charge to engage the existential extremities may set the global church on a path toward dialogue essential to that task and reflective of council. His recent remarks about theologians make clear that we too must “smell of the people and of the road and . . . pour oil and wine on the wounds of humankind.” On this model the locus for our academic reflection and our pastoral care must remain at the boundaries lest, as he puts it, they risk collapsing into ideologies that seek to tame the mystery. Deep listening then requires freedom of theological inquiry and courage to genuinely engage outside of not only safe ivory towers but also tempting echo chambers. Commemorating *Gaudium et Spes* calls us to reexamine what practices of broad and deep dialogue our ecclesial and educational institutions foster and whether our own habits sufficiently attune us to the varied echoes of “human.”

### **Conciliar Understanding of Conscience: To Discern God’s Echo**

Beyond its call for genuine dialogue, *Gaudium et Spes* summons the people of God to discernment in light of deep listening, a discernment that likewise requires attending to the echo of God’s voice. The understanding of conscience articulated in *Gaudium et Spes* illuminates precisely this encounter.<sup>27</sup> The primacy of the human person is evident in the document’s treatment of conscience, particularly in contrast to earlier emphases on moral norms as objective sources of morality. Moral manuals guided priests in the confessional where matters of conscience were assessed, resolved, and absolved from the sixteenth century to roughly the 1960s. As James Keenan has traced, the focus of concern was conforming to rigors of church (fasting, abstinence) more often than facing challenges of world, and confessors functioned as physicians of the soul or psychiatric caregivers of sinners ill able to discern and execute right moral conduct. For Bernard Haring (secretary of the editorial committee that drafted *Gaudium et Spes*), conscience is rooted in freedom as the possibility of responding to God’s call to do God’s will, the power to do good.<sup>28</sup>

This conciliar understanding of conscience entails the capacity and willingness to pursue the truth about doing the right thing in concrete, complicated circumstances, rather than having all the answers.<sup>29</sup> Understanding conscien

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, CSJ, “An Ecclesiological Framework,” acceptance speech for LCWR Outstanding Leadership Award, August 15, 2014, <https://lcrw.org/calendar/lcwr-assembly-2014>.

<sup>27</sup> See Linda Hogan, *Confronting the Truth: Conscience in the Catholic Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> James F. Keenan, SJ, “Vatican II and Theological Ethics,” *Theological Studies* 74 (2013): 165–66.

<sup>29</sup> According to the Catholic tradition, conscience entails a three-part structure entailing conscience as innate capacity, process, and judgment.

tious discernment as inclusive of multiple sources of moral wisdom—including the riches of scripture, the wisdom of the Catholic community over the centuries, natural law, insights of church officials and theologians, and moral exemplars, as well as the reflective experiences of those immersed in *on the ground* ministries or the details of legislative analysis—calls for a more complex and proactive endeavor than assumptions that restrict such sources to the teaching authority of the hierarchy alone.<sup>30</sup> That said, as one observer notes, “Vatican II’s agenda was not to absolutize conscience [it remains a ‘stern monitor’], but to accord it its proper dignity, within a healthy moral ecology.”<sup>31</sup>

Whereas an understanding of the church hierarchy as the only the reliable interpreter of moral law remains in tension with the shift to this more personalist model of conscience at Vatican II, the Pastoral Constitution issues a call to discern responsibility in light of the gift and challenge of God’s law of love. For conscience is characterized as that “secret core and sanctuary of a person, where they are alone with God whose voice echoes in their depths.” This “encounter with the divine basis of moral obligation is mediated through [a person’s] agency, and hence through the spirit, reason, affections and relationships that constitute human agency.”<sup>32</sup> The conciliar recognition that “God’s Spirit is given to all the faithful and not only to those in positions of hierarchical office” also impacts an understanding of conscience and authority. In many corridors, the decades following the council have been marked by reservations that a personalist approach risks error, confusion, or scandal. Some rightly warn that appeals to conscience may too readily offer Catholics an easy “entrance to the cafeteria,” or serve as conversation stoppers; yet genuinely wrestling with the tradition and its demands seems more reflective of the conciliar invitation than are impositions of control via litmus tests or loyalty oaths. The council explicitly calls the church “to be a sign of that kinship which makes genuine dialogue possible and vigorous” (no. 92).

Further, disproportionate focus on avoiding scandal can occlude the primary call to pursue the good, to love. *By contrast* the scandal emphasized in *Gaudium et Spes* concerns polarizing economic and social differences: “For excessive economic and social differences between the members of the one human family or population groups cause scandal, and militate against social justice, equity, the dignity of the human person, as well as social and international peace.”<sup>33</sup> Attuning our attention to the presence and call of God amid the world’s complex realities requires assiduous discernment to be certain, yet discernment undertaken in a spirit of courage and hope rather than fear or cynicism.

On the personalist model of conscience, dialogue and discernment go hand in hand. Ensuring we remain open to both the wisdom of the church’s received tradition and God’s ongoing communication in the world demands we remain ever more thoroughly informed by mutual dialogue at various margins. Again we have several signals to this effect from Pope Francis in these initial years of his papacy, from his primary identification of those on the periphery with the gospel (those destitute, addicted, trafficked)<sup>34</sup> to his preference for a street-bound over a risk-averse and “self-referential” church. He has struck chords of “dialogue, discernment, and frontier,” suggesting that our gaze should remain “well fixed upon Christ, always . . . prophetic and dynamic towards the future,” lowering defenses and building bridges to heal the rift between gospel and culture.<sup>35</sup> In his interview with a noted

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30 David DeCosse, “Conscience Issue Separates Catholic Moral Camps,” *National Catholic Reporter*, November 10, 2009.

31 Tom Massaro, SJ, “The Role of Conscience in Catholic Participation in Politics since Vatican II,” in Erin Brigham, ed., *The Church in the Modern World: Fifty Years after Gaudium et Spes* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 71.

32 DeCosse, “Conscience Issue.”

33 *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 29.

34 On June 6, 2013, the pope received the presiding board of the CLAR (the Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Religious Men and Women/*Confederación Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Religiosos y Religiosas*). A transcript of the pope’s words was made by those present and given to the Chilean ultraprogressive journal *Reflexión y Liberación* (*Reflection and Liberation*) for exclusive publication. <http://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2013/06/pope-to-latin-american-religious-full.html>.

35 The pope suggested this to the personnel of the Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica* (*Catholic Civilization*), which is published in Italian from Rome. Available at <http://www.news.va/en/news/francis-lower-defences-and-open-doors>.

Italian atheist, the pope articulated anew the doctrine of the primacy of conscience, indicating that “the question for those who do not believe in God is to abide by their own conscience.” While this revived concerns regarding his promotion of a “subjective definition of conscience,” his more recent interview with Jesuit journals signals his recovery of the relational and transcendent context for conscience in sync with a person’s sanctuary where God’s voice echoes. There he indicated: “One must affirm Christ, the church, the moral law, what is immediately before us to be done. But one must always hold those goods in tension with the *Deus semper maior*, the always-greater God, and the pursuit of the ever-greater glory of God.”<sup>36</sup> The conciliar understanding of conscience reflected here prompts reflections about where and how our church encourages and facilitates lay discernment. Is conscientious discernment in this vein perceived as a threat or as a gift and call? How do different conceptions of conscience reflect divergent understandings of the nature of the truth and of the church?

### Reverberations Today: To Awaken to the Echo and Respond

Hence it is already apparent that dimensions of Francis’s papacy resonate with the ecclesiological and moral vision of *Gaudium et Spes*. In my final reflections I wish to briefly suggest ways in which his words and actions not only reflect conciliar themes but also draw our attention to forces that muffle the echo and blunt our conscience. Pope Francis is the first pope in fifty years not to have participated in Vatican II: Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI were all still fighting the battles of the council as it were. Francis was ordained as the council was finishing and assimilated it such that it is a part of him. In his first major interview with Fr. Antonio Spadaro in 2013, the pope was asked about the council’s meaning. Fr. Spadaro reflects, “In light of his previous affirmations, I imagine that he will deliver a long and articulate response. Instead I get the impression that the pope simply considers the council an event that is not up for debate and that, as if to stress its fundamental importance, is not worth discussing at too great a length.” Pope Francis replied, “Vatican II was a re-reading of the Gospel in light of contemporary culture. Vatican II produced a renewal movement that simply comes from the same gospel. Its fruits are enormous. . . . Yes, there are hermeneutics of continuity and discontinuity, but one thing is clear: the dynamic of reading the Gospel, actualizing its message for today—which was typical of Vatican II—is absolutely irreversible.”<sup>37</sup>

As many observers have noted, in words and example Pope Francis has “signaled a turn away from the doctrinal and institutional concerns of his immediate predecessors and pointed instead to his passionate insistence on the church’s loving engagement with the poor who make up most of the world’s population.”<sup>38</sup> Francis’s initial embrace of a poor church for the poor has become a continuous refrain, reverberating in his charge to the church as field hospital, and summons, rooted in the gospel, to a revolution of tenderness. His young papacy’s emphases on collegiality, the local church, and empowerment of the laity also embrace of conciliar themes. If, as O’Malley suggests, the council was more concerned with *how* the church is than with *what* it is (despite their inseparability), Francis’s posture suggests more of a “loving mother” than “world’s moral policeman.”<sup>39</sup> In his first major appointment in the United States, the pope named a bridge-builder to lead the Archdiocese of Chicago—a man more prone to dialogue than culture war rhetoric. More recently, he named Bishop Robert McElroy to lead the Diocese of San Diego, a bishop who has argued that Pope Francis’s emphasis on poverty and inequality “demand a transformation of the existing political conversation in our nation.”

36 David DeCosse, “The Primacy of Conscience, Vatican II, and Pope Francis: The Opportunity to Renew a Tradition,” in *From Vatican II to Pope Francis: Charting a Catholic Future*, ed. Paul Crowley, 168–69.

37 Interview with Pope Francis by Fr. Antonio Spadaro, editor-in-chief of the Italian Jesuit magazine *La Civiltà Cattolica*, August 19, 2013. See [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130921\\_intervista-spadaro.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html).

38 Eamon Duffy, “Who Is the Pope?,” *The New York Review of Books*, February 19, 2015, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/02/19/who-is-pope-francis/>.

39 John W. O’Malley, “A Vatican II Pope,” *America*, September 24, 2013, <http://americamagazine.org/issue/vatican-ii-pope>.

The pope's apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* likewise reflects with the tone and approach of *Gaudium et Spes* in significant ways. Together with his emphases on evangelization and poverty as exclusion, he warns against the danger of dwelling in the realm of ideas and rhetoric alone, insisting on the priority of reality: "We want to enter fully into the fabric of society, sharing the lives of all, listening to their concerns, helping them materially and spiritually in their needs, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep; arm in arm with others, we are committed to building a new world" (no. 269). Pope Francis's subsequent call for broader consultation of the faithful regarding their attitudes toward and reception of a range of church teachings and issues in preparation for the recent synod on the family manifests consultation, dialogue, and a vision of the church as the entire People of God. There he encouraged the bishops both to express their views candidly and boldly, and to listen with humility: "With these two attitudes, synodality is achieved." Some observers characterized the debates that ensued as "the most openly contentious since the closure of Vatican II."<sup>40</sup> Whereas "past synods tended to start with church teaching and talk about how it could be applied to the world," here a more inductive way of reflecting was sought, beginning with lived experiences. In terms of deep and wide listening, the modes of survey (accessibility, range of questions, and data collection methods alike) may not comprehensively capture the experiences and struggles of the laity, but the endeavor on the whole represents a step in a more consultative direction to be certain. Discernment *ad intra* also demands an examination of not only how external realities pose challenges to familial flourishing but also where assumptions enshrined within church teaching (whether about the nature of women or caregiving labor) may also require reconsideration.

One area where Pope Francis extends the emphases in *Gaudium et Spes* is in his attention to the attitudes and structures that muffle the echo of God's call. Whereas the document gives brief mention to the impact of social environments that turn people away from the good, on the whole its analysis of structural injustice and social sin remains weak. Observers note that "Whereas the European church may have felt Christianity had drifted too far from the modern world and sought a reconciliation between church and world (and had most influence upon *Gaudium et Spes*), the Latin American Church felt Christendom had become too identified with the modern world and its structural injustices and sought rather to break away from it."<sup>41</sup> Latin American liberation theology has also been instrumental in developing concepts of institutional violence and social sin out of such contexts.

Francis has repeatedly demonstrated how "healing the wounds" must extend beyond encountering those in need with compassion and justice to healing global indifference. In his homily on Lampedusa, for example, he emphasized the pervasive idolatry that facilitates migrants' deaths and robs us of the ability to weep (a theme he recently revisited in Manila). Amid his admission that even he remains "disoriented," and his plea for the grace to weep, he did not merely condemn "the world" for this indifference and its consequences, but repented: "Forgive us Lord!" whether for being closed in on our own well-being in a way that leads to anesthesia of the heart, or for making global decisions creating situations that lead to these tragedies.<sup>42</sup> The pope's reflections and symbolism underscore our need for ecclesial and civic repentance from complicity in injustice. He reminds us that naming the reality of sin helps shed light on the structures and attitudes that harm immigrants—and so many other victims of "a throw-away culture." Eliciting conversion from patterns of unjust complicity calls communities beyond intermittent outreach or legislative campaigns. Yet many Christians resist a deeper ethic of solidarity, susceptible as we remain to various (dis)values.

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40 Duffy, "Who Is the Pope?"

41 Tanner, *The Church and the World*, 79.

42 "Pope on Lampedusa: 'The Globalization of Indifference,'" Vatican Radio (July 8, 2013), <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-on-lampedusa-the-globalization-of-indifferenc>.

Different elements of social sin—dehumanizing trends, unjust structures, and harmful ideologies—shape complex dynamics at play in such resistance. To continue the immigration example, the primacy of deterrence has institutionalized security concerns rather than concerns for human rights or family unity in US immigration laws; the nation's economic interests have been institutionalized in uneven free trade agreements.<sup>43</sup> When concerns about our identity get distorted by xenophobia and fear, anti-immigrant sentiment and ethnic-based hate crimes surge. At a more subtle level, a consumerist ideology shapes citizens' willingness to underpay or mistreat migrant laborers either directly or through indirect demand for inexpensive goods and services. These interconnected attitudes and institutions then produce the blindness that lulls us into equating "law-abiding" with "just" or into apathetic acquiescence.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis warns that our "economy of exclusion and inequality kills." He rightly challenges not only the reductive market ethos dominating trade and migration policies that casts migrants as "pawns on a chessboard," but also its desensitizing effects: "The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase; and in the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us."<sup>44</sup> The elevation of wealth and influence to absolute status can become an authentic bondage. Idolatries focused on having over being can impede global solidarity as much as nationalistic ones: they shape loyalties, frame questions, inform votes and spending practices.

Discerning the prospects for cultivating the promise of *Gaudium et Spes* in our day requires learning from both challenges and signs of hope that have marked these past fifty years. Engaging complex social realities "on the ground" may help to attune our listening to the conciliar call to dialogue, grassroots engagement, and human rights. By way of one example, the binational Kino Border Initiative operates in Ambos Nogales at our own Lampedusa, the US–Mexico border. During the KBI's painstakingly extensive needs assessment phase, discussions with many individuals on both the Mexico and Arizona sides of the border alerted them to pressing needs: the vulnerability of women on the move and the intransigence of immigration attitudes close to the border. As a result, KBI focused its initial programming to meet these felt concerns—rather than simply sending a Jesuit in to staff a parish there as was initially requested. KBI explicitly understands itself as operating with one foot on either side of the border, as "a point of contact and mutual transformation not only for the migrant community members who encounter one another in the context of [its] programs, but also for the Provinces of California and Mexico, the Missionary Sisters of the Eucharist, and Jesuit Refugee Services."<sup>45</sup> This posture reflects a "two-way street" of social engagement, modeling partnership and reciprocal "evangelization" in the spirit of *Gaudium et Spes*. In this vein Catholic social action can remain open to ongoing conversion by the suffering and resilience of those in need, rather than triumphalistic in its possession of truth, remote from concrete concerns, or static in its formulations.

Surveying today's signs of the times, persistent human needs continue to strike a chord with Christian responsibility, met with increasing levels of awareness that respecting dignity demands empowering others' agency and sometimes prophetic critiques that disrupt perceived harmony. Where today transnational threats have succeeded the Cold War fears of fifty years past, neoliberal globalization extends some threats then posed by colonialism, and "Selma's" work remains unfinished, we must ask anew: Where do we find deafening silence and where are we at

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43 Whereas the aggregate impact of NAFTA or CAFTA is complex, most agree they have taken a negative toll on the most vulnerable populations in Latin America, who rely more than ever on remittances sent home by family members who migrate to the United States. In 2008 the bishops of Mexico directly linked the recent surge in immigration to the United States to the effects of NAFTA on small rural communities whose farmers are unable to compete with heavily subsidized producers north of their border. Chapter four of my *Kinship Across Borders: A Christian Ethic of Immigration* considers this issue in further detail.

44 Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013) no. 54, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).

45 Mark W. Potter, "Solidarity as Spiritual Exercise: Accompanying Migrants at the US/Mexico Border," *Political Theology* 12, no. 6 (2011): 842.

tuned to urgent new questions and the invitation to collaborate toward a more humane world? On the paradigm of Lampedusa, where we find church embracing pain with humility, may the church heal those in need; may the church penetrate “soap bubbles of indifference” and anesthesia of the heart; and may the church treat her own wounds, where she falls short of the vision of the council and the proximity of the Reign. Cultivating a culture of encounter and a church for the poor, let nothing authentically human fail to find an echo in our hearts.



# Bernardin and Bergoglio: What the Cardinal's Legacy Offers to a Church Led by Pope Francis

by Kevin J. V. Mannara, CSB

Although Pope Francis (the former Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Jorge Mario Bergoglio) has been the bishop of Rome only two-and-a-half years, he has assertively and dynamically set forth his vision for the church in word, symbol, and gesture from the moment he stepped onto the balcony of Saint Peter's. Those familiar with the history of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States since the Second Vatican Council see some striking similarities between where he is pointing the church and the vision that the late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin (1928–96) was pursuing. Thomas Reese, SJ (*National Catholic Reporter* and *America Magazine*), David Gibson (*Religion News Service*), Kevin Ahern (*Daily Theology*),<sup>1</sup> and Nicholas Hahn (*Wall Street Journal*) are but a few across the swath of Catholic commentators who forecast a renewed interest in Cardinal Bernardin during this papacy. I will address consistencies between Bernardin and Francis in the hope that leaders of the US church today will look to the writings of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin for insight and wisdom in their effort to follow the direction of Pope Francis. In particular, seminaries and other schools of Roman Catholic theology can study Bernardin's writing when implementing Pope Francis's vision into their curricula as they shape future church leaders. Such a fresh look will require refinement so that Bernardin's contributions can mature, applying the wisdom of the years since his death to develop those concepts for today's context.

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## The Enduring Legacy of Joseph Bernardin

The Bernardin legacy is proving to hold lasting value for the Catholic Church in the United States, especially now that he has an ally of sorts in the current pontiff. Bernardin's 1989 biographer, the late Eugene Kennedy, optimistically stated "Bernardin's story . . . will continue to parallel and reflect the larger narrative of American Catholicism."<sup>2</sup> In the decade that followed, Kennedy's optimism was derailed by both a clear shift from Rome toward a more conservative church and the cardinal's untimely death at age sixty-eight on November 14, 1996. Nineteen years have passed since Cardinal Bernardin succumbed to pancreatic cancer and over these years some would argue that the church took a direction other than the one the cardinal pursued, especially

1 Dr. Ahern gave the Catholic Common Ground Initiative Spring Lecture on March 19, 2015, at the Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, entitled "Toward a Vibrant Church: The Ecclesial Visions of Cardinal Bernardin and Pope Francis." Most of this journal article was written before that lecture. Dr. Ahern also notes similarities in the personal backgrounds of Cardinal Bernardin and Pope Francis as well as the increased tensions that result from the current polarization in the church, but this article addresses a different direction where the cardinal's legacy can lead us today, namely directing us toward intentionally exposing today's graduate students of theology to the work of Cardinal Bernardin. To view Dr. Ahern's lecture go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDHXE1QdtWM>.

2 Eugene Kennedy, *Cardinal Bernardin: Easing Conflicts and Battling for the Soul of American Catholicism* (Chicago: Bonus Books, 1989), xi.

in the United States. Currently a shift in Catholicism is taking place that is redirecting us toward a more dialogical church that engages US culture rather than disparages it, an approach consistent with Bernardin's vision.

There are those who have indirectly affirmed the power of the Bernardin legacy by continuing to attempt to discredit or devalue it. One such naysayer is American author and political activist George Weigel. As recently as four years ago, fifteen years after the cardinal's death, Weigel was still trying (unsuccessfully) to nail the cardinal's coffin shut. The simple fact that he still felt the need to dedicate an entire essay to Bernardin was an admission of the power of Bernardin's ongoing relevance, one that threatened his own view of the church. In February 2011, Weigel stated, "In his prime, Joseph Bernardin was arguably the most powerful Catholic prelate in American history; he was certainly the most consequential since the heyday of James Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."<sup>3</sup> He then went on to argue that the Bernardin era had come to an end and pondered what the post-Bernardin era would be like. The papal election of Jorge Bergoglio, now Pope Francis, seems to indicate (to paraphrase Mark Twain) that the report of the death of the Bernardin era was greatly exaggerated.

### **Pope Francis and Cardinal Bernardin**

There are a number of similarities in the backgrounds of Joseph Bernardin and Jorge Bergoglio. Both were born of parents who emigrated from Italy to the New World; the Bernardin family settled in South Carolina in the United States and the Bergoglio family in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The mothers of both young men encouraged their sons to go into medicine; instead each pursued a vocation to heal souls. Both rose at young ages through ecclesiastical ranks holding various positions that would serve as incubators of learning, preparing them for service both as archbishops of major sees as well as service to the larger church. Each was a man well aware of the broad context of his own time and place, using the tools of communication available as those tools developed.

In Francis, the world has a pope fully immersed in today's information age. He regularly goes off script in speeches and offers impromptu interviews during long airplane rides. Social media buzzes with his words. His daily homilies from Casa Santa Marta are immediately translated and sent around the world. In preparation for his apostolic visit to the US, Pope Francis employed yet another tool of our age to engage his flock: a live-streamed town hall meeting with a virtual audience in multiple locations. Possibly more powerful than his words are the images broadcast around the world. If a picture is worth a thousand words, photos of his embrace of a disfigured man, selfies with young people, and those of him going to confession have evangelical power beyond the written word of the past.

Although none of these carry any weight as official teachings of the church, they do offer insight into the mind of Pope Francis and are helpful in discerning his overall stance. In the face of such a significant amount of Francis's writings, homilies, and interviews, this essay primarily focuses on two specific ways Francis has shared his vision for the Catholic Church. First is his wide-ranging interview with Antonio Spadaro, SJ, editor in chief of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the Italian Jesuit journal, published in *America Magazine* on September 30, 2013, under the title "A Big Heart Open to God."<sup>4</sup> Second is his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*,<sup>5</sup> *The Joy of the Gospel*, which has been called his Magna Carta for the church. In the time since its release on November 24, 2013, eight months into his papacy, we have seen that vision beginning to take shape.

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3 George Weigel, "The End of the Bernardin Era: The Rise, Dominance and Decline of a Culturally Accommodating Catholicism," *First Things* (February 2011), <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2011/02/the-end-of-the-bernardin-era>.

4 Antonio Spadaro, SJ, "A Big Heart Open to God," *America* (September 30, 2013), <http://americamagazine.org/pope-interview>.

5 Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).

The Francis papacy has breathed new life into a number of issues that were significant to Cardinal Bernardin. For the sake of brevity and focus, only two are surveyed here, namely the Consistent Ethic of Life and the Catholic Common Ground Initiative, to show how Bernardin had been leading the church in a direction congruous to the one set forth so far during Francis's papacy. As appropriate, Catholic attempts at influencing public policy will be noted.

### Consistent Ethic of Life

“The point that [Bernardin's] consistent ethic makes is exactly the same point that Pope Francis is making—let's look at the whole picture and not just focus almost exclusively on three or so issues,” said Archbishop Michael Sheehan of Santa Fe, NM.<sup>6</sup>

A recurring theme of Pope Francis is that the church must go to those who live on the periphery. In his interview with Spadaro, Francis notes that society's outsiders as well as the church's “outsiders” bear deep wounds, occasioning his image of the church as a field hospital after battle.<sup>7</sup> Later in that same interview, Francis stated “We cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage, and the use of contraceptive methods. This is not possible. I have not spoken much about these things, and I was reprimanded for that. But when we speak about these issues, we have to talk about them in a context.”<sup>8</sup> These are three areas on which the US church hierarchy in the past staked much of its moral capital; the pope was not dismissing their importance but was calling the church to see them in a broader context.<sup>9</sup> Along with moral capital, incredible financial capital has gone into addressing these three issues, leaving one to wonder if those resources would have been better spent attending to clear gospel mandates.<sup>10</sup> By looking at a wider context as the pope suggests, the church's overall understanding of the human person could better be elucidated, thus its stance on all these issues would be more credible and appreciated. His call to look at the larger view occasions us to again look at Cardinal Bernardin's Consistent Ethic of Life, also known as the Seamless Garment.

At Fordham University's Gannon Lecture on December 6, 1983, Cardinal Bernardin presented an address entitled “A Consistent Ethic of Life: An American Catholic Dialogue.” This was a follow-up to the US Bishops' 1983 pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, which he had been instrumental in shaping. Bernardin believed there was a prophetic role for the US bishops in our government's strategy of using war to bring about peace in the age of nuclear weaponry. Of interest in this pastoral letter was the linkage of war and abortion. At the Gannon Lecture, Bernardin sought to flesh out that concept more. He believed this discourse should take place at American Catholic universities, not fearing that academic discourse in that locus would imply ecclesiastical approval of all aspects of such robust debate and discernment. Bernardin stated that he wanted to “discuss the pastoral letter in terms of the relationship of our Catholic moral vision and American culture . . . as a starting point for shaping a consistent ethic of life”<sup>11</sup> in a comprehensive manner drawing on “the Catholic moral position and

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6 David Gibson, “Pope Francis Breathes New Life into Cardinal Bernardin's Contested Legacy,” *Religion News Service* (October 24, 2013), <http://www.religionnews.com/2013/10/24/pope-francis-breathes-new-life-cardinal-bernardins-contested-legacy/>.

7 Spadaro, “A Big Heart Open to God.”

8 Spadaro, “A Big Heart Open to God.”

9 One might question which has wounded people more: these three realities or the way the church has obsessed on them.

10 In just one example, in 2010 the Catholic bishops of Minnesota produced and mailed 400,000 DVDs to Catholics in the state urging them to vote against same-sex marriage. In the same state in that same year 9000 homeless wandered the streets, 10 percent of Minnesotans (540,000) lived below the poverty level (among them a disproportionate number of women and minorities) and 25 percent lived near poverty, according to the US Census Bureau. Same-sex marriage is legal in Minnesota (as well as nationwide) despite the exorbitant resources the bishops invested to oppose it.

11 Joseph Bernardin, “A Consistent Ethic of Life: An American Catholic Dialogue” (Gannon Lecture, Fordham University, December 6, 1983) in *Selected Works of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin*, ed. Alphonse P. Spilly (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 82.

the public place the Church presently holds in the American civil debate.”<sup>12</sup> Aware of the pluralism of the American context, Bernardin was a leader who sought dialogue between the church and society, rather than attempt to strong-arm US public policy. It was a dialogue of various intellectual equals, dependent on the power of persuasion such that people of faith could state their argument in terms appealing even to those of other or no faith traditions. Bernardin stated that “The principal conclusion [of the bishops’ pastoral letter] is that the Church’s social policy is at least as important in *defining* key questions in the public debate as in *deciding* such questions”<sup>13</sup> and its central idea is “the sacredness of human life and the responsibility we have, personally and socially, to protect and preserve the sanctity of life.”<sup>14</sup>

Bernardin went on to address the multiple ways that life is threatened beyond war and abortion in an attempt to unify a common respect for human life as the basis for how to respond to threats against it. Although the threat of nuclear war is no longer at the forefront of our concerns, many topics from his day remain, including war in general (including war by terrorism), abortion, capital punishment, and euthanasia. Others have taken on new urgency, such as undocumented workers, political refugees, access to health care, and environmental degradation.

A consistent ethic of life is inclusive of not only the right to life but also the dignity, livability, and quality of life for those who are alive. Too often the term “pro-life” is limited to being “anti-abortion,” diminishing the church’s witness to valuing all human life and leaving ourselves vulnerable to charges of hypocrisy and myopic vision. We cannot insist that life be respected from the womb to the tomb, and neglect the span in between. Bernardin warned, “Consistency means we cannot have it both ways: we cannot urge a compassionate society and vigorous public policy to protect the rights of the unborn and then argue that compassion and significant public programs on behalf of the needy undermine the moral fiber of the society or are beyond the proper scope of governmental responsibility.”<sup>15</sup>

Bernardin met resistance to the Consistent Ethic of Life approach from some of his contemporaries,<sup>16</sup> as Pope Francis acknowledges he does today when espousing a similar broad, inclusive perspective. In Bernardin’s early attempts to clarify, he made this distinction: “A consistent ethic of life does not equate the problem of taking life (e.g. through abortion and war) with the problem of promoting human dignity (through humane programs of nutrition, health care, and housing). But a consistent ethic identifies both the protection of life and its promotion as moral questions.”<sup>17</sup> Opponents said he was clouding the central issue of their interest, namely abortion.<sup>18</sup> Bernardin’s more nuanced and intellectual approach was resisted by those who wanted a straightforward enemy to fight against, and they used abortion as a simplistic, one-dimensional political litmus test. Pope Francis has reaffirmed the church’s position on abortion, but has challenged us to not lose sight of other issues related to life within the whole range of moral issues.

Euthanasia is one prominent and timely topic within the Consistent Ethic of Life that has evolved since Bernardin’s time. Pope Francis has time and again expressed concern that the elderly are neglected in today’s “throwaway culture.” In an interview with Eugenio Scalfari published October 1, 2013, in the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, he

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12 Bernardin, “A Consistent Ethic of Life,” 82.

13 Bernardin, “A Consistent Ethic of Life,” 83.

14 Bernardin, “A Consistent Ethic of Life,” 84.

15 Bernardin, “A Consistent Ethic of Life,” 88.

16 These include Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua, Archbishop of Philadelphia, Cardinal James Hickey, Archbishop of Washington, and Cardinal Bernard Law, Archbishop of Boston.

17 Joseph Bernardin, “A Consistent Ethic of Life: Continuing the Dialogue” (William Wade Lecture, Saint Louis University, March 11, 1984), <http://labove.com/today/topics/consistent-ethic-of-life/#stlouis>.

18 See Kristen Heyer’s *Prophetic & Public: The Social Witness of U.S. Catholicism* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006) to see why some are against any engagement that compromises with those who hold opposing views.

went so far as to say that youth unemployment and neglect of the elderly are the two most serious evils afflicting the world today.<sup>19</sup> This devaluing of those approaching the end of life, often based on an attitude of utilitarianism, easily leads to euthanasia. Last year a young woman named Brittany Maynard went public with her intention to euthanize herself on November 1, 2014, in Oregon, where it is legal. Using the nomenclature of “death with dignity,”<sup>20</sup> she made a convincing argument that swayed much of public opinion. Juxtaposing her choices in the face of illness with Cardinal Bernardin’s, we see how he showed us another approach to “death with dignity,” one based in courage rather than fear; one that relied on life, not death, as the path to dignity. Like Pope Francis, Bernardin taught not only with words but with powerful symbols and images from his own life.

As a child Bernardin had experienced firsthand the devastation of cancer during his father’s final illness and death, and its aftermath on his family. After his own diagnosis of cancer in June 1995, Cardinal Bernardin called a press conference to share the news with his “family,” the people of the archdiocese of Chicago. That began the drama, described by a non-Catholic Chicagoan and quoted in the *New York Times* as “He has shown us how to die.”<sup>21</sup> One might also say he showed us how to *live* in the face of death. To help us better understand this final leg of his earthly journey, the cardinal published his journal in a book entitled *The Gift of Peace*.<sup>22</sup> In it, he revealed a life filled with meaning and importance, even as cancer ravaged his body. Rather than only looking inward, Bernardin continued his missionary stance by turning outward. While in the hospital, he ministered to other cancer patients and followed up with them after their discharge. He continued his work as the leader of the archdiocese and lived his life as he had always tried his best to: publicly and transparently.

The treatment bought him some more time but the cancer returned in August 1996. The time of his final illness was filled with great suffering, from both the cancer and the consequences of the treatment he underwent. Unlike those who would opt out by choosing euthanasia, the cardinal found meaning and provided witness until his death occurred naturally. But unlike many of the neglected who concern Pope Francis, the cardinal was surrounded by people who loved him until the very end. The pope identifies the sad situation of many who face the end of their lives lonely and without adequate care. Cardinal Bernardin’s witness of “how to die” comes face to face with those who do not have the means to such a death with dignity nor the companionship of loved ones. How can we assure all people that they will have the medical care, including pain relief, to allow them both a meaningful life and a dignified death?<sup>23</sup> It is worth noting a distinction between those who refuse to live a life they feel has been compromised, and those who do not have the financial means or personal relationships needed for dignified final years and days. While we must work for systemic changes to our health care system, we must also give our time and love to the elderly and suffering in our families and communities.

Bernardin’s Consistent Ethic of Life received less attention as the years went on and the church and American society drifted into an era of black and white approaches to complex moral issues. During this same time, the attacks on human life have broadened and some have taken on new urgency. War is carried out in alarmingly new ways (terrorism, chemical and biological warfare) and on multiple fronts, prompting Pope Francis to warn of a Third World War being fought piecemeal.<sup>24</sup> The internet is showing itself to be a tool of both great benefit and grave con

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19 Critical voices such as US cardinal Raymond Burke were quick to express their disapproval and question how the pope could have not named abortion.

20 Such naming often masks or confuses the issue at hand. For example, who could argue with a term like “pro-choice,” until one learns the political baggage that is attached to it?

21 “Death as a Friend,” *The New York Times* (December 1, 1996), <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/12/01/magazine/death-as-a-friend.html?pagewanted=all>.

22 Joseph Bernardin, *The Gift of Peace: Personal Reflections* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1997).

23 This role, often one of support and advocacy, must be kept in mind when preparing candidates for church ministry in a rapidly changing social context.

24 Stefano Rellandini, “Pope Says World’s Many Conflicts Amount to Piecemeal World War Three,” Reuters (September 13, 2014), <http://mobile.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN0H808L20140913>.

cern. The world is facing new crises related to human migration and refugees on a scale it has not seen since the Second World War. Concern for the environment is in fact concern for whether or not the Earth will be capable of supporting human life. These must be the concerns of our bishops today, and they must be addressed by those who are being prepared to lead the church into the decades ahead. Bernardin's Consistent Ethic of Life provides material to be studied, developed, and honed by today's seminarians and other graduate students of theology, and then applied to today's moral life issues.

The papacy of Francis is directing us to again look at Bernardin's Consistent Ethic of Life, one that "identifies both the protection of life and its promotion as moral questions."<sup>25</sup> This broad approach to life issues is not only valuable within the church and US society, but will lend credibility to US bishops still attempting to recover their moral voice in the aftermath of the sexual abuse crisis. Unlike paternal attitudes reeking of "Father knows best," taking the holistic, relational view and speaking with a consistent and coherent voice while both creating room for and calling US society into a dialogue offers us a path forward on many issues related to the human person.

### **Catholic Common Ground Initiative (CCGI)**

In August 1996, Cardinal Bernardin was told that the cancer had returned and he had six months to live. (He lived only three more months.) With death approaching, he focused his remaining strength and resolve to launch what he initially called the Catholic Common Ground Project as his chosen legacy to the Catholic Church in the US. The amount of work this dying man put into it is reflected in no less than four documents in the final three months of his life.<sup>26</sup> What is the CCGI and why does it have relevance during Francis's papacy?

Francis does not fit into politicized categories of left and right, liberal and conservative, progressive and traditional. In his November 6, 2014, speech at the Catholic University of America entitled "Theological Background of the Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Vision of Pope Francis," Walter Cardinal Kasper said that Francis cannot be trivialized, "categorized, much less appropriated, by any specific school—he's not an academic theologian in the professional sense, but a man of encounter and practice. . . . Reality has primacy over ideas."<sup>27</sup> Subsequently, ideas espoused by any such categorization would shrink in Francis's vast perspective. For both Bernardin and Pope Francis, political labels of moderate or centrist should be rejected: the only valid label is that we are followers of Jesus Christ. "Jesus Christ, present in scripture and sacrament, is central to all we do; he must always be the measure and what is measured;"<sup>28</sup> that is the criterion for Christian discipleship.

It seems everyone can find support as well as challenge in Francis's broad, Christocentric view of Catholicism, what scripture scholar Donald Senior, CP, has referred to as the "big tent" as opposed to the "small chapel."<sup>29</sup> Once we are committed to overcoming the polarization<sup>30</sup> present in the church and focus on the common good, Bernardin's CCGI provides a road map for us to follow. It would be a struggle to find a specific quote of Pope Francis to sup

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25 Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: Continuing the Dialogue."

26 Cardinal Joseph Bernardin and Archbishop Oscar Lipscomb, *Catholic Common Ground Initiative: Foundational Documents* (New York: Crossroad, 1997).

27 Walter Kasper, "Theological Background of the Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Vision of Pope Francis" (lecture, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, November 6, 2014), <http://trs.cua.edu/news/news/November-2014/2014-quasten-award-lecture-and-presentation.cfm>.

28 National Pastoral Life Center, *Called to be Catholic: Church in a Time of Peril* (1996), no. 3, <http://www.catholiccommonground.org/called-be-catholic>.

29 Donald Senior, "Small Chapel or Big Tent: What Should the Church Be?" (lecture, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, IL, January 13, 2014), <http://learn.ctu.edu/what-should-church-be>.

30 At the 17th Annual Cardinal Joseph Bernardin Jerusalem Lecture on March 6, 2012, at Northwestern University, guest lecturer John Allen Jr. claimed the US church is beyond being polarized and has become tribalized, divided into factions that are intolerant of opposing views even as we claim a common Catholicism. He said the only way forward would be for the US church to embrace the principles of Bernardin's Catholic Common Ground Initiative.

port the claim that Bernardin's CCGI will find a place of distinction in Francis's papacy. The struggle is because there are so many, forming an attitude toward how the church engages society that is consistent with Bernardin's.

In the CCGI's inaugural document of August 12, 1996, *Called to be Church in a Time of Peril*, Bernardin asked "whether American Catholicism can confront an array of challenges with honesty and imagination," and identified several urgent questions for the US church to face, questions that still have relevance and questions that in some form or other have been raised by Francis. These include but are not limited to:

- the changing roles of women
- the Eucharistic liturgy as most Catholics experience it
- the meaning of human sexuality, and the gap between church teachings and the convictions of many faithful in this and several other areas of morality
- the image and morale of priests, and the declining ratios of priests and vowed religious to people in the pews
- the succession of lay people to positions of leadership formerly held by priests and sisters, and the provision of an adequate formation for ministers, both ordained and lay
- the ways in which the church is present in political life, its responsibility to the poor and defenseless, and its support for lay people in their family life and daily callings
- the manner of decision-making and consultation in church governance
- the responsibility of theology to authoritative church teachings
- the place of collegiality and subsidiarity in the relations between Rome and the American episcopacy.

Which of these topics does not remain a struggle in the US church today? Pope Francis has commented on them all from a universal perspective; it would behoove US Catholic leadership to look to the CCGI set before them nineteen years ago in order to offer insight for today's context.

We might ask why it has not done so before now, or maybe it would be better to ask why the CCGI has caught on in some areas of the US Catholic Church but not others. Bernardin himself acknowledged that the Catholic Church in the US is "dotted with vital communities of worship and service."<sup>31</sup> The divisions he observed in the wake of Vatican II's implementation have sharpened in the years since 1996. The role of church leadership should be to connect those dots, to unify them into a tapestry that can beautify US culture and society, drawing us closer to the Kingdom of God. Instead we have often focused on the areas between the dots, empty areas of separation and tension.

One such area where the recent tactics of the US bishops has had limited effectiveness is in their handling of the recent debate on religious liberty. Do Bernardin's later thoughts, from which the CCGI derived, offer us any insights into a more effective approach?

Aware that his death was imminent, Bernardin delivered a speech at Georgetown University on September 9, 1996, entitled "Reflections on the Public Life and Witness of the Church in US Society and Culture." In it he addressed

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31 National Pastoral Life Center, *Called to be Catholic*, no. 1.

the “intersection between the Catholic moral vision and US society” and “how Catholic teaching speaks to American society [and] how these issues should be reflected upon in the internal life of the Church itself.”<sup>32</sup> His reflection on Vatican II’s *Declaration on Religious Liberty* has timely import for today’s emphasis of the US bishops on resisting the Health and Human Services mandate regarding health insurance and its inclusion of contraception for women. Bernardin was one to navigate away from confrontations with win/lose consequences, as we have seen of late, toward a conciliatory approach based on dialogue. Such discourse aims for the common good: all at the table must listen to each other long enough to find their commonalities and respect their differences. His approach to church–state relations was one of “engagement, not separation.”<sup>33</sup>

We can only speculate what Bernardin would have thought about the way the US bishops are conducting the current debate on religious liberty. He would certainly have advocated that the voice of the church remain included in the debate and it would be fair to suggest that he would have found a less antagonistic path. Pope Francis has warned us against obsessing on artificial contraception, the *de facto* topic that occasioned the religious liberty debate and continues to fuel it. This particular topic is one that directly affects women, and the bishops have a long history of being poorly informed in regard to women’s issues. A group of celibate men making a case against access to artificial contraception, whatever the other circumstances are, fuels the perception of the US bishops as being against women, or at minimum leads the American public to question why the bishops have invested so much into this one issue (regulation of pregnancy) at a time when their decades of attempts at expanding health care are finally being realized. Is there a better way?

At its core the CCGI calls for dialogue. Opponents feared dialogue would lead to dissent being considered on the same level as truth, thus compromising or clouding church teachings. Bernardin was given a final opportunity to address them in an August 29, 1996, press statement. Disagreements can be legitimate and valuable but “must be accountable to Catholic tradition and the Church’s teaching authority.”<sup>34</sup> Asked whether dialogue itself is questionable he acknowledged it can be cheapened into single-minded advocacy (similar to Pope Francis’s warning against lobbies and ideologies). The misuse of a method does not invalidate the method, but rather calls for its refinement and careful application. Unfortunately, there are those who refused the method of dialogue. Why? Perhaps this happened out of intellectual laziness or incapacity, fear of their power being threatened, or inability to subject the church and its teaching to reasoned debate in the public square of an educated, pluralistic society. What is one to do when dialogue with a variety of informed, intelligent voices leads us in a direction other than what the church currently teaches?

For example, inviting experts in the social sciences into a dialogue on a number of church issues could be informative but also threatening of the status quo. Would this cause confusion among the faithful? Or can careful discernment of the issues and questions lead to a fruitful dialogue that holds the church accountable to critical inquiry? In cases where dialogue leads to further questions and discernment, is the church willing to admit error, not of a malicious nature, but possibly due to a lack of understanding or as a response to new knowledge? The church has already had to admit error in a number of the natural sciences. One wonders if both the church and the social sciences would mutually benefit from open dialogue. Would the church gain credibility among an educated, pluralistic US populace through such authentic, intellectual engagement, including with those who hold conflicting but informed opinions? Given Francis’s call for honest and open discussion at the 2014 Extraordinary Synod on the

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32 Joseph Bernardin, “Reflections on the Public Life and Witness of the Church in U.S. Society and Culture” (lecture, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, September 9, 1996), in *The Seamless Garment: Writings on the Consistent Ethic of Life*, ed. Thomas A. Nairn (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008).

33 Bernardin, “Reflections on the Public Life.”

34 *Questions and Answers Regarding the Catholic Common Ground Project*, press statement by Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, August 29, 1996.



Family, it seems he would favor such dialogue, confident that it will lead us closer to the truth, even when it means change, refinement, or development in a teaching. The CCGI offers us a look at how to structure such dialogue.

A concrete way Pope Francis has already engaged in this form of dialogue is in the development of *Laudato Si'*. He chose a topic of universal concern, the environment. It is an encyclical of symphonic character written from the best in our tradition along with that from the natural and social sciences. While the degradation of the environment is a popular topic about which much has already been studied and written, Pope Francis focuses our attention on how it disproportionately affects those who live on the peripheries of life, the very place Jesus repeatedly directs our attention in the gospels. The encyclical brings into dialogue the best the church, society, and academia has to offer. What emerged has become an instrument that proclaims the mission of Christ and his church, challenging the entire world in regard to a critical issue that affects all humankind and our ability to live in our common home. It demonstrates how our engagement with society results in a fresh perspective, one centered in the gospel, grounded in our care for creation in such a way that it might lead all people to our creator.

## Conclusion

Heeding Pope Francis's call to attend to "the seamless garment of the Lord,"<sup>35</sup> leaders in the US church today should look to the writings of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin for insight and wisdom in their effort to follow the direction of Pope Francis, in particular Bernardin's Consistent Ethic of Life and Catholic Common Ground Initiative. There are many other similarities that could be developed, but it is hoped that these have invited the reader to give Cardinal Bernardin's legacy to the US church another look. It is especially important for younger students of theology who may not be familiar with Cardinal Bernardin or his writings to be introduced to his thought. The Consistent Ethic of Life and the Catholic Common Ground Initiative should become a part of the educational formation in schools of theology and ministry for all those preparing for future church leadership, seminarians and lay students.

As with all great church leaders, the passage of time is the test of their lasting contributions, especially those whose work was not fully appreciated in their own era. As with all those who have left a lasting contribution to the church, their work should not be accepted simply as originally proposed, but like a true gem should be subjected to ongoing refinement until its beauty shines more brightly.

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35 Francis, "Apostolic Journey—United States of America: Meeting with the Bishops of the United States of America at St Matthew's Cathedral (Washington, DC, 23 September 2015)," News.va, <http://www.news.va/en/news/apostolic-journey-united-states-of-america-meeting>.

# From the Site of the Empty Tomb: Approaching the Hidden Grief of Prenatal Loss

by Susan Bigelow Reynolds

**O**n a chilly Saturday evening in March, I lost my first child in the womb at seven weeks. The loss was bewildering. For months I could do little else but grieve the blueberry-sized flesh of my flesh I had both never known and known more intimately than I had known anyone. I later remarked to a friend that losing a baby changed my life more than having a baby would have. When, after two more miscarriages, we finally welcomed our daughter, my hypothesis was confirmed. The birth of a child, at least in the best cases, is an event that enfolds a woman into a deep river of community and memory. Casseroles delivered, diapers gifted, advice solicited and unsolicited: all seem like echoes of the voices of mothers rising up from ages past, whispering, “We have done this before.”

The death of a child in the womb brings with it no such community of memory. The isolation my husband and I felt in the wake of our loss was both assuaged and compounded by the realization that we knew many women, including both of our mothers, who had experienced miscarriages. But what did they do afterward? Did they grieve?

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We knew nothing of these losses, only that they had occurred and hung like shadows in the unlit corners of our family histories. A kind of death as ancient and expansive as humanity itself had visited us, and we knew nothing.

Questions of loss find a particular home within the Christian tradition. Christianity abounds with images of suffering and death. Its sacred texts echo with cries of lamentation and its soteriological claims involve a confrontation with suffering and meaning. Its symbols—a wooden cross; ashes; a crucified God whose head is encircled by crown of thorns; flesh and blood

turned bread and wine, broken and poured out—whisper of death. Where, in this religion of passion, death, and resurrection, did my suffering belong?

Estimates indicate at least 15 to 20 percent of clinically recognized pregnancies end in miscarriage, the involuntary loss of a baby in the womb before twenty weeks’ gestation.<sup>1</sup> Roughly one in three women will experience at least one miscarriage in her lifetime.<sup>2</sup> Stillbirth, a loss at or after twenty weeks’ gestation, occurs at a rate of about six in

1 According to the National Institutes of Health, roughly half of fertilized eggs die spontaneously, often before a woman is aware that she is pregnant. (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001488.htm>). A clinically recognized pregnancy refers to a pregnancy that has been “visualized on an ultrasound or that pregnancy tissue was identified after a pregnancy loss” (UCLA Obstetrics and Gynecology, [obgyn.ucla.edu](http://obgyn.ucla.edu)). Thus, the actual rate of miscarriage is likely higher than this reported number.

2 Carina Corbet-Owen and Lou-Marie Kruger, “The Health System and Emotional Care: Validating the Many Meanings of Spontaneous Pregnancy Loss,” *Families Systems and Health* 19, no. 4 (2001): 411–427; Kim Kluger-Bell, *Unspeakable Losses: Healing from Miscarriage, Abortion, and Other Pregnancy Loss* (New York: Quill, 1998).

one thousand live births.<sup>3</sup> Yet despite the prevalence of prenatal loss,<sup>4</sup> surprisingly little sustained theological attention has been given to the experience of death before birth. This theological lacuna reflects an even more critical pastoral one.

The neglect of prenatal loss is felt perhaps most palpably in feminist theology, a field concerned with giving voice to silenced narratives of female suffering. Why have theologians in general, and feminist theologians in particular, continuously overlooked the experience of prenatal loss? What is missing from our communal theological consciousness when such experiences remain hidden from view? And where in the Christian tradition can we retrieve stories and symbols that can bear the pain and mystery of such loss—stories and symbols that help us to construct rituals and ministries that bring comfort to women and families grieving the loss of a child in the womb? This paper is an exercise in practical theology that emerges from the tears of women whose wombs have become tombs and unites them with the tears of Mary Magdalene before the empty tomb of Jesus. I suggest that a critical lacuna exists in theological reflection and pastoral practice with respect to the statistically widespread, socially silenced experience of prenatal loss. While Catholic teaching is unequivocal in its opposition to abortion and embryo destruction, the sparse and improvisational nature of theological, pastoral, and liturgical responses to women who experience the loss of a pregnancy calls into question the depth and breadth of its commitment to the conviction that all unborn life is sacred and, when it ends, worthy of public mourning. I begin by briefly mapping the contours of feminist theological discourse on pregnancy, motherhood, and suffering, arguing that the neglect of prenatal loss impoverishes feminist theological insight with respect to these themes. Identifying three areas of social and theological contestation that have contributed to this neglect, I suggest that a retrieval of the Mary Magdalene/empty tomb tradition in John's Gospel (Jn 20:1–18) provides a promising hermeneutical lens through which to approach in a theologically and pastorally adequate way women's experiences of death before birth.<sup>5</sup> I conclude with an example of the use of the empty tomb narrative in practice, drawn from a parish-based service of healing and remembrance for women grieving the loss of a child through miscarriage or stillbirth.

### **Pregnancy, Motherhood, and Loss: Identifying a Lacuna in Feminist Theology**

Pregnancy and motherhood have long represented contested terrain in feminist theological reflection. Feminist theologians have problematized in critical ways theological accounts of motherhood that essentialize womanhood and childbearing, spiritualize or idealize the trials of motherhood, and confine motherhood (including notions of the “motherhood of God”) to stereotypical feminine attributes such as nurturing and compassion. While feminist deconstructive work on motherhood is plentiful, somewhat less so are substantive (re)constructive efforts. Among the first major attempts at a cross-cultural feminist theological consideration of motherhood was the 1989 volume

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3 It is important to note that striking racial disparities exist in stillbirth rates in the United States. For non-Hispanic white women, the rate is 4.88 per 1,000 live births. For black women, that rate more than doubles to 10.53 per 1,000 live births. American Indian, Alaskan native, and Hispanic women all experience stillbirths at higher rates than white women. CDC/HCHS National Vital Statistics System. *National Vital Statistics Report* 64, no. 8 (23 July 2015).

4 I use the term “prenatal loss” in this paper to refer to experiences of miscarriage and stillbirth. While the language of “pregnancy loss” is a more common way of referring to these experiences, I believe that “prenatal loss” better captures what many women experience as the full reality of what is lost when a child of any gestational age dies in the womb. It is not only the condition of pregnancy that is lost but, for most women, also the reality of another person existing within one's very self. My use of a singular blanket term to refer to all experiences of prenatal loss is not meant to overlook the many distinctions that exist between and among such experiences of loss. Rather, this paper seeks to bring greater theological and pastoral attention to all forms of prenatal loss.

5 It should be noted that the effects of miscarriage and stillbirth extend beyond mothers. As little clinical and pastoral attention is devoted to women who have suffered pregnancy loss, still less is given to fathers, partners, and families affected. Unfortunately, this paper will do little to remedy this imbalance. My analysis here centers primarily around the embodied experiences of women who have experienced the loss of a child in the womb, advancing a practical theological vision for the formation of communities of memory and hope over and against social silencing and pastoral inattention that accompanies pregnancy loss. Greater attentiveness to pastoral care for fathers, families, and other loved ones affected by pregnancy loss represents an important area of growth.

*Motherhood: Experience, Institution, Theology*, a relatively early contribution edited by Anne Carr and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. The diversity of voices, perspectives, and themes treated by the volume's contributors set the stage for subsequent theological investigations into images of mothering in church and society and the relationship between motherhood and ecology.<sup>6</sup> The same year, Cynthia Rigby published an article appropriately entitled "Exploring Our Hesitation," in which she identifies ambivalences toward a vocational understanding of motherhood in feminist theological literature. She ultimately advances a feminist vision of the vocation of motherhood that reclaims its "inclusive, life-sharing, and self-fulfilling" dimensions.<sup>7</sup>

In the decades that have followed, feminist theologians across fields and traditions have engaged with pregnancy and motherhood in ways that reposition motherhood as a unique, embodied locus of theological and spiritual knowing and social and theological critique. Notable is the work of practical theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore, whose emphasis on the distinctly bodily and uniquely maternal dimensions of knowing is grounded in lived experiences of pregnancy and motherhood, such as birthing, lactation, and the experience of working motherhood.<sup>8</sup> In *Christian Theology in Practice*, Miller-McLemore maps the terrain of feminist theory and practical/pastoral theology, within which she offers a comprehensive essay tracing the development of contemporary maternal feminist theological epistemology.<sup>9</sup> Here and elsewhere, she seeks to locate, or relocate, the spiritually revelatory dimension of motherhood not in a realm apart from the chaos of ordinary life with children but rather deep within it.<sup>10</sup>

Tensions emerge in feminist wrestling with spiritual and embodied dimensions of maternal suffering. Like Miller-McLemore, Julie Hanlon Rubio grounds her reflection in the embodied particularities of everyday maternal existence, from breastfeeding to sleep deprivation to the myriad lifestyle changes that accompany the transition to motherhood. While attempting to resist pitfalls associated with an overly sacrificial notion of maternal love, Rubio draws out bodily dimensions of maternal self-sacrifice. For Rubio, the clearest example of this sacrificial love is pregnancy, wherein "the child takes over the mother's body (eating from her food, drinking from her drink, moving within her, causing her pain and discomfort, and distorting the shape of her body). If this is not sacrifice, what is?"<sup>11</sup>

The philosophical work of Julia Kristeva also engages Christian understandings of the unique pain and divided subjectivity of motherhood that follows from the intimacy of a mother's connection to her child. It is a pain that "comes from the inside" and "never remains apart." Kristeva critiques the tendency of feminism to "identify motherhood with [an] idealized misconception" and, through its rejection of the real experience of motherhood, ultimately—and ironically—reinforce this misconception.<sup>12</sup> A mother, Kristeva writes, is a "crucified being";<sup>13</sup> she is "always branded by pain."<sup>14</sup> While some have critiqued Kristeva's early treatment of maternal suffering, her em-

6 Anne Carr and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, eds., *Motherhood: Experience, Institution, Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989).

7 Cynthia L. Rigby, "Exploring Our Hesitation: Feminist Theologies and the Nurture of Children," *Theology Today* 56, no. 4 (Jan. 2000), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/004057360005600408>.

8 See Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother: Work and Family as Theological Dilemma* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994); Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Epistemology or Bust: A Maternal Feminist Knowledge of Knowing," *The Journal of Religion* 72, no. 2 (April 1992); Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Family and Work: Can Anyone 'Have It All?'" in *Religion, Feminism, and the Family*, eds. Anne Carr and Mary Stewart Can Leeuwen (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 275–93.

9 Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "A Maternal Feminist Epistemology," 113–36; and "Feminist Theory and Pastoral Theology," 211–37; *Christian Theology in Practice: Discovering a Discipline* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012).

10 Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *In the Midst of Chaos: Caring for Children as Spiritual Practice* (San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons, 2007).

11 See Julie Hanlon Rubio, *A Christian Theology of Marriage and Family* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003), 92.

12 Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 161.

13 Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," 168.

14 Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," 167.

phasis on relational subjectivity, focus on the maternal body, and attempt to take seriously the love and suffering bound up in maternity represent a critical contribution to feminist discourse on motherhood and embodiment.

On the other hand, the work of ethicist Christine Gudorf represents a countercurrent against the urge to bind too tightly maternity and suffering. Against a one-way portrait of maternal sacrifice, Gudorf points out the often-unacknowledged mutualistic and reciprocal nature of the mother–child relationship. Elevating the values of sacrifice and self-denial to a place of primacy in maternal identity, she argues, instrumentalizes the mother and ultimately impedes the development of mother and child alike.<sup>15</sup>

Many women theologians of color have also challenged the notion of redemptive maternal suffering from positions of marginality and histories of oppression and racism. Womanist theologian Delores Williams proposes the image of Hagar, the biblical mother of Ishmael, as illustrative of black women’s experiences of slavery and abuse, surrogacy and survival. Drawing on the forced surrogacy of Hagar as an image emblematic of the suffering of black women, Williams argues that suffering can never be understood as redemptive but is always the result of sin, oppression, and the destruction of right relationship.<sup>16</sup> Importantly, womanist, *mujerista*, and Latina theologians have also tended to emphasize the communal, relational, and familial importance of motherhood—emphases that serve as a critical corrective of first-wave, white liberal feminist thought that tended exclude the voices of women of color and disregard or overlook such themes.<sup>17</sup>

These varied explorations, critiques, and constructions represent the range of feminist voices that have addressed experiences of motherhood and pregnancy in their work. However, they are nearly unanimous in their omission of the phenomenon of prenatal loss. Though feminist theologians have problematized the Christian tendency toward the idealization of motherhood, such analyses nevertheless operate within a paradigm that neglects the voices and experiences of women who have lost children in the womb.

Pastoral resources are more plentiful than theological ones.<sup>18</sup> A notable exception to this neglect is the collection *Hope Deferred: Heart-Healing Reflections on Reproductive Loss*. The collection comprises theological and pastoral essays by five female theologians from various Christian denominations, each of them grounded in personal experiences of infertility, miscarriage, and stillbirth.<sup>19</sup> The collection’s origin is a testament to the widespread yet remarkably hidden nature of prenatal loss. As noted in the collection’s introduction, the five contributors—the only women present at a small theological conference—realized through a chance conversation in the women’s bathroom that they had all been personally touched by miscarriage, stillbirth, and/or infertility. The volume grew out of a shared recognition of the paucity of theological literature devoted to prenatal loss and infertility. Its goal is to “explore resources of the Christian tradition that offer comfort and corrective” in the face of destructive social and theological narratives that contribute to self-blame and shame, the spiritualization of suffering, and the disordered glorification of pregnancy and motherhood. In one essay, Serene Jones powerfully weaves together the stories of

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15 See Christine E. Gudorf, “Parenting, Mutual Love, and Sacrifice,” in *Women’s Consciousness and Women’s Conscience: A Reader in Feminist Ethics*, eds. Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, Christine E. Gudorf, and Mary D. Pellauer (New York: Harper and Row, 1985); Gudorf, “Sacrificial and Parental Spiritualities,” in *Religion, Feminism, and the Family*, eds. Anne Carr and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).

16 Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), especially Chapter 2, “Tensions in Motherhood: From Slavery to Freedom.”

17 See especially Ada María Isasi Díaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996).

18 One particularly thorough, well researched, and spiritually sensitive resource is *What Was Lost: A Christian Journey Through Miscarriage*, by United Methodist Pastor Elise Erikson Barrett (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010). Additionally, in recent years, an increasing number of personal essays about miscarriage have appeared on religious and nonreligious blogs ranging from *Her.Meneutics* (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/women/>), a blog on women and culture run by *Christianity Today*, to *Motherlode* (<http://parenting.blogs.nytimes.com/>), the *New York Times*’s blog on motherhood.

19 Nadine Pence Frantz and Mary T. Stimming, eds., *Hope Deferred: Heart-Healing Reflections on Reproductive Loss* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2005).

two miscarriages—her own and that of a friend—that revealed to her the aching need for liturgical response that holds and gives voice to the desolation and grief of women whose bodies have become the sites of death.<sup>20</sup>

With the important exception of Jones and her co-authors, the near silence of feminist theologians on miscarriage and stillbirth is surprising. Despite general early feminist discomfort with maternal themes, contemporary feminist theological writing evinces a strong desire to grapple with the embodied, broken, and nonidealized dimensions of contemporary motherhood. The exclusion of prenatal loss from feminist theological explorations of pregnancy and motherhood is unfortunate when one considers that many such explorations seek to take seriously women's embodied realities and subvert disempowering, shaming, or exclusivist understandings of motherhood. Yet reviewing feminist theological accounts of motherhood leads one to believe that either all women's bodies carry all babies to term, or that experiences that fall outside of this norm are either theologically insignificant or so anomalous that to address them directly would be unwarranted. In reality, at least one in five pregnancies end in miscarriage. Though women experience prenatal loss in a vast multiplicity of ways, few would relegate the experience to the realm of insignificance. If, as Mary McClintock Fulkerson argues, practical theology can be understood as a response to the scene of a wound,<sup>21</sup> the deep hiddenness of the wound of pregnancy loss in church and society invites and demands theological reflection.

### Theologizing from a Wound: Silence, (Dis)embodiment, Polarization

The absence of narratives of miscarriage and stillbirth from feminist theology highlights the contested and ambiguous nature of these experiences. Both socially and theologically, women who have lost children in the womb are propelled into a liminal space that defies categorization. As such, this dimension of human experience—an experience shared by hundreds of millions of women throughout the world, and one as intimately connected to the human condition as birth and death—“belongs” nowhere. The voice of a woman who has experienced the pains (physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, social) of prenatal loss can be viewed as insufficiently maternal, especially when she does not have other, living children. Her way of knowing does not emerge from the act of raising her child but, primarily, from mourning the death of her child's brief and mysterious life within her. Yet neither does her grief qualify her to speak theologically as one who suffers, as her loss is frequently dismissed as common and natural, or, in its hiddenness, ignored altogether. If, as Victor Turner notes, liminality is often illustrated through symbolic imagery of pregnancy and womb, pregnancy loss is an even more ambiguous and liminal experience.<sup>22</sup> It is an experience of “both/and” and “neither/nor.”

I would suggest that theological and pastoral silence surrounding prenatal loss reflects the intersection of three factors: cultural taboos surrounding miscarriage; longstanding theological and ecclesial ambivalence with respect to women's embodied experiences of reproduction; and polarizing, vitriolic rhetoric of the US abortion debate that co-opts theological discourse and pastoral practice while undermining women's attempts to construct meaning when confronted with the pain of death before birth.

*Social Silencing.* Prenatal loss is the site of multiple intersecting cultural and gendered taboos. A miscarriage itself is a visceral collision of taboos: (in)fertility and death; blood and tissue; bathrooms and hospitals. The silencing

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20 Serene Jones, “Rupture,” in *Hope Deferred*, 47–65. Jones' essay in the collection is drawn from a similar, longer article: Serene Jones, “Hope Deferred: Theological Reflections on Reproductive Loss (Infertility, Miscarriage, Stillbirth),” *Modern Theology* 12, no. 2 (2001): 227–45, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1468-0025.00158>.

21 Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 13.

22 In his classic treatment of liminality, Victor Turner notes, “the attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are *neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.*” See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969), 95; emphasis added.

that occurs around pregnancy loss serves to obscure the reality of a woman's grief, isolate and compartmentalize her suffering, and cultivate around what is a widespread occurrence a myth of anomaly. Newly pregnant women are encouraged by medical professionals and social convention to wait until their second trimester, when the risk of miscarriage decreases, to tell others they are expecting a child. Such advice, while sound on some level, implies that a miscarriage, should it occur, is logically something that is supposed to remain secret, even to friends and loved ones. While the death of a loved one brings with it a network of support, the loss of a child in the womb often brings isolation. Somehow, it is communicated to women who have miscarried that the thing they are supposed to do after miscarrying—even while in the process of miscarrying—is to proceed with their lives as if nothing had happened: go back to work, get on with life, try again.

Miscarriage is indeed personal. However, as Walter Brueggemann notes, social conventions often serve to suppress the public expression of pain, containing it within the realm of the private. Yet, according to Brueggemann, it is precisely the public processing of pain that reveals most clearly what it is that societies and communities of faith value most.<sup>23</sup> Undoubtedly, there are women who have no desire to tell anyone about their loss or to enter into a community of support or healing, however informal. What is dangerous is when women are made to believe that they *cannot* grieve in public, that their grief is inappropriate or unworthy of communal recognition. Such neglect undermines the possibility of community and hope and leads instead to isolation, numbness, and despair. A cursory Internet search reveals the existence of massive online networks and communities constructed by and for women who have lost children in the womb—hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions. Many of them, it becomes clear in their blog posts, message board comments, and status updates, lack robust communities beyond the virtual realm where they feel able to name their losses and speak honestly and openly about the reality of their grief. The deeply personal nature of much of this writing—much of it authored by women using their real names and identifying information—discredits the notion that such grief is somehow too private to share. Rather, society imposes upon prenatal loss a myriad of taboos, silencing and suppressing narratives that otherwise beg for communal recognition.

*Contested Terrain of Women's Embodied Epistemology.* The phenomenon of prenatal loss reveals the need for epistemological openness to embodied dimensions of knowing within theological reflection. Women who experience the death of a child in the womb can experience a profound sense of alienation from their own bodies. The body once trusted to nurture and defend the fragile life within can suddenly seem like a traitor, an antagonist, a failure, perhaps even a murderer.<sup>24</sup> It has failed in its mission to protect. Jones, recalling the miscarriages of herself and a friend, writes,

Her body, my body, we were graves. . . . This death-site was inside us, deep in us. It was in a place even unknown to our own eyes, in a cavern from which we had believed a future would spring forth but from which only loss had issued. Not even death, for death supposes life and life was what we couldn't give. It was a tomb for the never-to-be: our bodies, ourselves.<sup>25</sup>

Prenatal losses are sometimes discovered or confirmed through the use of ultrasound, in which the womb and its contents are projected in stark, grainy detail and interpreted by a medical professional. The subject in the womb—the life that both was and almost-was—becomes an object of clinical translation. Women experience the deep intimacies of their own bodies as profoundly other when these are re-presented and reinterpreted back them

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23 Walter Brueggemann, *Hope Within History* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988).

24 Jones's essay explores the complex dynamic of powerlessness, guilt, and self-blame that she and her friend both experienced during and after their miscarriages. See "Rupture," 51–53.

25 Jones, "Rupture," 59.

in the jarringly objective grammar of modern medicine. A hoped-for child becomes a “spontaneous abortion.” A shattering loss becomes the mere failure to detect a heartbeat.

Miller-McLemore identifies several issues at stake in taking seriously from a theological perspective women’s experiences of pregnancy and motherhood. Feminist theology operates at the complicated intersection of celebration and suspicion of the role of distinctly female bodily experiences, especially those surrounding fertility and reproduction, in dynamics of knowing and theological insight.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Miller-McLemore notes the inherent difficulty in arguing “from bodies to knowing without overestimating biology and nature.”<sup>27</sup> Reclaiming the embodied dimension of women’s epistemology (even, to some extent, positing the existence of anything like women’s epistemology) risks, on one hand, overestimating or essentializing biological givenness and identifying childbirth as the exclusive or best source of a woman’s fulfillment.<sup>28</sup> Cultural and religious identifications of “good” femininity with motherhood, and “good” motherhood with suffering and self-sacrifice, is symbolized most saliently in Catholic imagination in the uneasy comparison of all women with the dual maternity and virginity of the Virgin Mary.<sup>29</sup> Such narratives serve as the basis for gendered, complementarity-based ecclesial and anthropological models that can subordinate women’s voices and experiences and spiritualize or cast as redemptive their real sufferings. However, it would be equally dangerous to ignore or reject embodied ways of knowing that emerge from women’s unique experiences, including those of pregnancy and motherhood. Attempting to set the body aside spiritually and epistemologically only reinforces the conspicuous and chronic absence of women’s (real) bodies from Catholic theology, imagination, and pastoral discourse.

What becomes more complicated, then, is the question of how it is possible to “read” bodily experience as a distinct and credible source of knowing, holding biological givenness in tension with the socially and culturally mediated dimensions of bodily experience and its interpretation. As Miller-McLemore asks, “Can we not uncover an experience of motherhood that lies somewhere between the extremes of oppressive traditional discourse and avant-garde feminist protest that totally rejects this but offers nothing in its place?”<sup>30</sup> How, in other words, is it possible to stand conceptually, experientially, and theologically “in the ‘no-man’s-land’ between this either/or and grapple with the potential power of woman’s experience of reproduction and relationality?”<sup>31</sup> I would argue that the experience of pregnancy loss exists precisely in this “no man’s land,” this liminal space “betwixt and between”<sup>32</sup>—and, as Miller-McLemore suggests, begs to be grappled with.

*Conception and Natural Death: The Silencing Effect of Polarized Rhetoric.* The spectrum of natural psychological responses to prenatal death is vast.<sup>33</sup> For many women, profound grief, anxiety, confusion, guilt, and depression persist months and even years after their losses. One large-scale study found nightmares and flashbacks to be common among women even years after a miscarriage. In the same study, more than one in ten women reported

26 Miller-McLemore, “Feminist Theology: A Review of Literature,” *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 332.

27 Miller-McLemore, “A Maternal Feminist Epistemology,” 114.

28 Miller-McLemore, “A Maternal Feminist Epistemology,” 114.

29 John Paul II’s apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* is often cited as an example of the Magisterial tendency to frame in a narrow and essentialized way the “dignity and vocation of women.” Among feminist theologians, Mary Daly issued perhaps the strongest critique of the identification of women with the Virgin Mary as a representation and perpetuation of patriarchal repression, control, and ownership of women. See Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973). Rosemary Radford Ruether, on the other hand, attempts to recover Mary as a liberating symbol for women, communicated most saliently in the Magnificat. See Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

30 Miller-McLemore, “A Maternal Feminist Epistemology,” 124.

31 Miller-McLemore, “A Maternal Feminist Epistemology,” 124.

32 See Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95.

33 See Corbet-Owen and Kruger, “The Health System and Emotional Care,” 411–27. See also Kristen M. Swanson, “Research-Based Practice with Women Who Have Had Miscarriages,” *Image: The Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 31, no. 4 (1999): 339–45. The study concludes, “Responses to miscarriage are closely tied to the deeply personal meaning individuals and couples hold about what it is like to be expectant and to abruptly lose that pregnancy. . . . [T]he events of expectancy and loss are uniquely experienced in the context of each woman and couple’s lives” (344–45).



having contemplated suicide after their loss.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, emerging psychological research suggests that a significant percentage of women experience miscarriage and stillbirth as a psychologically traumatic event, and many exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in the aftermath of their loss.<sup>35</sup> Yet such reactions, while widespread, are not universal. Other women, particularly those for whom news of their pregnancy was unwelcome, can experience its sudden loss as relief. Yet even such feelings of relief can sometimes be accompanied by traces of shame, guilt, and regret.<sup>36</sup>

In all of these cases, women face the challenge of understanding the meaning of their losses. Yet I would suggest that in the United States, where public discussions of life in the womb typically occur within the highly polarized context of the abortion debate, politicized and often volatile rhetoric surrounding the nature of unborn life tends to co-opt—and in co-opting, stifle—women’s abilities speak openly and honestly about this unique and mysterious kind of death. Writer Ellen Painter Dollar notes that US discourse on the unborn evinces an incapacity to deal with the liminal, in-between space occupied by such burgeoning life. As the debate goes, she writes, “either embryos are the same as babies or they are merely bunches of cells subject to their parents’ choices.”<sup>37</sup> Numerous studies suggest that most women, including those who have had early miscarriages, understand their loss as the loss of a baby.<sup>38</sup> Yet even for this majority of women convinced of the personhood of the unborn life they have lost, there exist numerous practical differences between the death of a baby before birth and the death of a child who has been born—differences that become painfully obvious in the kinds of questions that arise in the wake of such loss. Such questions, and the ambiguities they disclose, can be particularly pronounced in the case of early loss: *Is it my child I am mourning or my own lost hope for a child, or both? Should I name my baby? Whom should I tell about the loss? Can I mourn publicly? How publicly? Where can I be open about my grief? Do I bury the remains? Where? How? What if I have no remains to bury? At Mother’s Day Mass, should I stand to receive a blessing, too? Is that blessing meant for me? When people ask me if I have children, or how many children I have, what do I say?*

When a child dies, social scripts, liturgical rites, and pastoral practices exist that seek to comfort grieving parents. These give, among many things, a sense of validation to the magnitude of what was lost. When a child dies in the womb, no such social or pastoral protocols exist. Women are left to work out, often in isolation, the meaning of their loss. Dollar points out that the English language lacks a word for a miscarried baby, giving attempts at naming these losses, particularly early losses, a sense of inadequacy. When a pregnancy ends spontaneously, we find

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34 John DeFrain, Elaine Millspaugh, and Xiaolin Xie, “The Psychosocial Effects of Miscarriage: Implications for Health Professionals,” *Families, Systems, & Health* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 331–47, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0089794>.

35 T. M. Walker and K. M. Davidson, “A Preliminary Investigation of Psychological Distress following Surgical Management of Early Pregnancy Loss Detected at Initial Ultrasound Scanning: A Trauma Perspective,” *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology* 19, no. 1 (2001): 7–16; L. Born, C. N. Soares, S. Philips, M. Jung, M. Steiner, “Women and Reproductive-Related Trauma,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1071 (2006): 491–94; and I. M. Engelhard, M. A. van den Hout, A. Arntz, “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder after Pregnancy Loss,” *General Hospital Psychiatry* 23, no. 2 (2001): 62–66.

36 Corbet-Owen and Kruger, “The Health System and Emotional Care,” 417–18.

37 Ellen Painter Dollar, *No Easy Choice: A Story of Disability, Parenthood, and Suffering in an Age of Advanced Reproduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012). Emphasis added.

38 See Denise Coté-Arsenault and Mary-T. B. Dombeck, “Maternal Assignment of Fetal Personhood to a Previous Pregnancy Loss: Relationship to Anxiety in the Current Pregnancy,” *Health Care for Women International* 22, no. 7 (2001): 649–65. This study found that 75 percent of 72 women surveyed felt that they had lost a baby. Limbo and Wheeler studied 87 women and also found that roughly 75 percent believed the loss of their pregnancies, most in the first trimester, to be the loss of a baby. See R. K. Limbo and S. R. Wheeler, “Women’s Response to the Loss of their Pregnancy through Miscarriage: A Longitudinal Study,” *Forum for Death Education and Counseling Newsletter* 10, no. 4 (1986): 1–2. See also Marianne Hopkins Hutti, “Parents’ Perceptions of the Miscarriage,” *Death Studies* 16 (1992): 401–15.

ourselves at a literal loss for words.<sup>39</sup> It instead places attempts at meaning-making at the mercy of the only readily available cultural lexicon for discussing unborn life: the one provided by the abortion wars, a lexicon that makes up in vitriol what it lacks in nuance and compassion.

It is a distressing irony that the Church's vocal defense of life in the womb in the context of the abortion debate is not matched by pastoral or liturgical support when this life ends spontaneously. This dissonance does real violence to grieving women and families while rendering the Church's pro-life message incomplete and undermining its credibility. Indeed, Catholic pastoral responses to miscarriage, where they exist, are typically improvisational at best. In a recent issue of *Commonweal*, historian Agnes Howard recalled the painful absence of ritual and pastoral resources from the days that followed her miscarriage:

We were visited by our priest. With warmth and prayer, he gave care there in the hospital and later at the gravesite, but there was a provisional sense about his gestures, as though he were improvising out of his own kindness rather than acting on long liturgical practice that the church had devised in meeting these crises from time immemorial.<sup>40</sup>

Some church cemeteries reserve burial grounds specifically for miscarried or stillborn babies. Some parishes and dioceses hold annual masses of remembrance or offer support groups for women and families affected by pregnancy loss. But rarely is information about such services, where they exist at all, widely disseminated. Women, like Howard, are perhaps implicitly invited to call a priest, plan a mass or prayer service, or start a support group, but few pre-existing structures exist for those who find themselves unable or unwilling to coordinate a liturgy or construct a ministry from the ground up. While the Church is outspoken in its opposition to abortion and embryo destruction in procedures such as in vitro fertilization and certain types of stem cell research, the *ad hoc*, improvisational nature of pastoral responses to spontaneous pregnancy loss that Howard points to calls into question its practical pastoral commitment to the sacredness of life from conception to natural death.

When they collide, these three areas of social and theological contestation function to privatize and silence the experience of miscarriage and to render even more ambiguous its already contested meaning. Such forces also inhibit the creation of community among women and families grieving this loss. When the creation of communities is suppressed, the possibility of articulating memory, constructing meaning, and envisioning hope is also constrained. In the next section I suggest that a retrieval of the Mary Magdalene/empty tomb tradition in John's Gospel provides a promising hermeneutical lens through which to begin to make space theologically and pastorally for communal practices of lament and hope in the face of death before birth. Establishing what Schüssler Fiorenza calls an "ambiguous 'open space'"<sup>41</sup> of absence–presence, death–(re)birth, memory–hope, the empty tomb tradition represents a confrontation with suffering that does not identify it as redemptive *per se* but rather allows one to envision pastoral praxes of accompaniment that promote the cultivation of communities of memory and hope.

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39 Many scholars, including Dollar, have contrasted the absence of Western language or ritual surrounding fetal death with the Japanese Buddhist ritual of *Mizuko Kuyo*, a memorial service for a miscarried, stillborn, or aborted baby. In Japanese, a deceased fetus is called a *mizuko*, meaning "water child." Writer Peggy Orenstein writes, "Historically, Japanese Buddhists believed that existence flowed into being slowly, like liquid. . . . A *mizuko* lay somewhere along the continuum, in that liminal space between life and death but belonging to neither" (Orenstein, "Mourning My Miscarriage," *New York Times Magazine* [April 21, 2002]).

40 Agnes R. Howard, "Comforting Rachel: How Christians Should Respond to Prenatal Death," *Commonweal* (November 4, 2013): 11. <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/comforting-rachel>.

41 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 125.

## Confronting the Empty Tomb: A Relational Epistemology of Loss

Miller-McLemore identifies the relative paucity of literature that focuses on issues of women's embodiment in Christian theology. Against this trend, she contends that "[w]omen's embodiment, specifically the experience of pregnancy and birth, represents a distinct perspective and may evoke particular ways of perceiving and thinking."<sup>42</sup> This is not to suggest, she clarifies, that "all birthing, nursing women inherently share one distinct mode of knowing."<sup>43</sup> Rather, what Miller-McLemore seeks to offer in her essay, and what I would argue can be gained from a similar consideration of the situated epistemology of women experiencing the loss of a pregnancy, is a "view from a body" that is "always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body" (here she borrows language from Donna Haraway).<sup>44</sup> If, as she argues, pregnancy and childbirth represent epistemologically distinctive and significant embodied experiences, then it is reasonable to suggest that miscarriage and stillbirth, too, represent such experiences.

For Miller-McLemore, maternal knowing "refers to thinking particular to women who *have known another inhabiting themselves and have maintained this very interior link* by suckling, carrying, sharing bed, body, and soul, and, finally, letting loose to live."<sup>45</sup> Women who have mothered a child in the womb but not in the world share some but not all of the experiences of motherhood that Miller-McLemore identifies. However, their particular motherhood is situated at the inverse of what we typically consider to be true of the mother-child relationship: death before birth, loss before life, womb and tomb combined. In the case of a later miscarriage or stillbirth, a woman may eventually hold in her hands or arms the body of her child. When loss occurs early in the pregnancy, it can be nearly impossible to distinguish embryonic or fetal remains from tissue and blood from the mother's own body. In an unexpected way, the experience of prenatal loss magnifies, not severs, the relational dimension of maternal epistemology to which Miller-McLemore points.

The distinct perspective that emerges from the particular bodily experience of prenatal loss evokes a unique and relational way of theological knowing. As such, it calls forth from the Christian tradition memories and symbols able to contain pain, ambiguity, and mystery. In *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*, Schüssler Fiorenza posits the empty tomb as a liminal space—an appropriate image to characterize the ambiguity and in-between-ness of death before birth. The empty tomb that Mary Magdalene encounters, Schüssler Fiorenza suggests, can be understood as an ambiguous and imaginative "open space."<sup>46</sup> The empty tomb bears the capacity to hold in tension the presence and absence of the resurrected Christ, the grief and hope of Mary Magdalene, her desire to dwell with the lost and the necessity of continuing to live.

The empty tomb is an illuminating symbol for interpreting theologically the wound of prenatal loss because, as Schüssler Fiorenza suggests, "the texts of the empty tomb tradition take suffering and death seriously but do not see them as having the 'last word' or a religious-theological value in themselves."<sup>47</sup> The empty tomb interrupts theological tendencies to view the cross in soteriological isolation and thus to regard suffering and obedient self-sacrifice as redemptive, salvific, or "revelatory" of a higher, more important reality.<sup>48</sup> Yet it also does not cast suf-

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42 Miller-McLemore, "A Maternal Feminist Epistemology," 115, 119.

43 Miller-McLemore, "A Maternal Feminist Epistemology," 119.

44 Miller-McLemore, "A Maternal Feminist Epistemology," 119, citing Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 589.

45 Miller-McLemore, "A Maternal Feminist Epistemology," 132. Emphasis added.

46 Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*, 125.

47 Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*, 125.

48 Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*, 127.

fering into the realm of meaninglessness. Instead, within the space of the empty tomb, the ultimate meaning of suffering and pain is woven together with the gentle hope reaffirmed by Christ's resurrection.

Jones imaginatively explores the significance of the cross and tomb within the context of miscarriage. On the cross, Jones writes,

[t]he whole of the Trinity . . . takes death into itself. Jesus doesn't die outside of God but in God, deep in the viscera of that holy tripartite union. Because the union is so full, no part of God remains untouched by this death. It seeps into every corner of the whole body of persons. If this is true, then, yes, God becomes quite literally the site of dying.<sup>49</sup>

The experience of prenatal loss reveals in the language of human bodies the deeply, divinely relational nature of Jesus's death, a dimension of the crucifixion that is often overlooked. The pregnant woman becomes a communion of persons, one making room and one dwelling. When her child dies, the communion of her body does not cease. Her body, like the body of the Trinity, takes death of her child into itself. Among her organs and bones, she contains death. Her womb becomes a tomb, and yet she remains, somehow, alive.

Jones suggests that for Jesus's disciples, the tomb represented not only the death of their friend but also of the hope they had placed in him, their hope in the kingdom: "In that cave where he is buried, that womb outside Jerusalem's walls, we find not only the body of Jesus, his flesh torn in tortured death, but also the tissue of a future that would never be. Buried with him is a dead hope."<sup>50</sup> When Mary Magdalene finds the tomb empty, she finds not only Jesus resurrected but also, with him, her hope arising from its tomb within her soul.<sup>51</sup> It is for this reason that, as Schüssler Fiorenza argues, "the empty tomb does not signify absence but presence: it announces the Resurrected One's presence on the road ahead, in a particular space of struggle and recognition."<sup>52</sup>

Like the empty tomb, the womb of a woman who has lost her child challenges facile or obvious interpretations. Both womb and tomb, in such cases, are holy spaces of in-between-ness—of the comingling of absence and presence, death and life, memory and hope. When womb becomes tomb, a woman may find herself like Mary Magdalene, weeping, quite literally beside herself. Her grief socially silenced and pastorally ignored and the nature and meaning of her loss replete with unanswerable questions, she, like Mary Magdalene, experiences alienation in multiple ways from self and society. Drawing an imaginative connection between the womb and the empty tomb, as the site of life, death, and resurrection, is not to draw a misleading soteriological link between a woman's womb and the possibility of her redemption. Rather, the empty tomb is a rich symbol precisely because it helps to locate the theologically revelatory dimension of such loss not in the pastorally inadequate exhortation to "take up one's cross," to measure the assurance of salvation by the severity of one's maternal suffering, but instead suggests the presence of an accompanying Christ who calls his friend by her name ("Mary!"<sup>53</sup>) precisely within her experience of hopelessness and disjuncture. The empty tomb, the site of death and loss, becomes at the same time the site of re-remembrance, re-cognition, re-incorporation. The tomb as a site of the encounter between life, death, and resurrection also reveals that any constructive pastoral or liturgical response to women who desire to mourn the loss of a pregnancy must take seriously its unique bodily and relational character. Mary's transformation from despair

49 Jones, "Rupture," 62.

50 Jones, "Rupture," 62.

51 In the Roman Catholic liturgy, the Easter Sequence, sung on Easter Sunday morning, beautifully connects the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of hope: "Speak, Mary, declaring / What you saw, wayfaring. / 'The tomb of Christ, who is living, / The glory of Jesus' resurrection; / bright angels attesting, / The shroud and napkin resting. / Yes, Christ my hope is arisen; / to Galilee he goes before you.'"

52 Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*, 126.

53 Jn 20:16.

to suspicion to recognition to hope is an essentially embodied and relational transformation: she stands outside, bends over, looks; she weeps; she listens, speaks, turns, is recognized and recognizes. It is then that she proclaims to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord” (Jn 20:18).

### **Conclusion: The Empty Tomb in Practice**

The grief that followed my first miscarriage felt, among other things, painfully directionless. I realized that I ached for ritual—for a space within the liturgical life of the Church to spiritually lay to rest the baby I had never met, to join my prayers and laments with those of the community. The liminal nature of my early loss manifested itself in liturgical ambiguity: a baby never born receives neither Baptism nor funeral. I learned, by chance, of another woman in the parish who had recently miscarried. We collaborated with a priest in planning a prayer service based on the Blessing of Parents after a Miscarriage or Stillbirth in the *Book of Blessings*,<sup>54</sup> selecting the empty tomb narrative as the Gospel reading for the service.

As the service approached, it occurred to us that perhaps there were more of us out there: women and families who had lost children in the womb who wanted to grieve with others but did not know where to go, who were never told they could. We placed a bilingual announcement in the bulletin of our small parish. As it turned out, there were more of us than we thought. By the time we began, almost two dozen people, mostly women, had crowded into the chapel with us.

After the Gospel was read, the priest invited those gathered to offer their own reflections. At first, there was silence. Then, in Spanish, a woman began to speak. She told the story of her recent, unexpected loss of an even more unexpected pregnancy. Her youngest child was fifteen, and her grown daughter was pregnant, too.

After her, another woman spoke of her daughter, who had died from a terminal bone disorder hours after she was born. Her voice was quivering but determined as she recounted the death that had occurred more than a decade prior. Months after the stillbirth, she recalled, she dreamt that her daughter appeared to her in a garden. Like Mary Magdalene’s encounter with the resurrected Christ, she did not recognize the girl in the garden until the girl dried her mother’s tears and told her not to cry any longer.

One woman compared viewing the black, blank space of her uterus projected onto the ultrasound screen in the hospital, confirming her miscarriage, to gazing into an empty tomb.

Another, an unmarried parishioner, had miscarried that January. She later said that she had come to the service under the pretense of supporting others but had no intention of revealing her own loss. Hearing other women speak, however, moved her to share her own story.

One after another, the women there gave words to their hidden grief. The sharing occurred spontaneously and organically. Some had lost babies recently. Others had borne the weight their losses silently for years, even decades. The service concluded with the invitation for those gathered to write the names of the children they had lost on candles and to lay these at the foot of a large image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which had been placed in front of the altar. The final scene was an arresting one: a gently glowing groundswell of memories that, until that night, had never been brought to light; real losses finally named, publicly remembered, and communally held.

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<sup>54</sup> The blessing can be accessed on the USCCB website at <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/bereavement-and-funerals/blessing-of-parents-after-a-miscarriage-or-stillbirth.cfm>.

The purpose of the ritual was not to provide facile “closure” to the grieving process or to dispense pastoral answers to the painful questions, both medical and spiritual, that haunt such loss. It did what Christian ritual does: it drew the women there together into a community of memory and hope through shared participation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. As Jones observed, it allowed those gathered to place the many kinds of loss that accompany prenatal death within the space of God’s own loss, represented by the tomb. It made present the gentle hope embodied by Christ who, raised from the dead, returned with his wounds to the site of his hasty burial to wipe the tear-stained cheeks of his dear friend, a women bewildered by grief.

Miller-McLemore contends, “Women’s modes of knowing are unsettling; they fly in the face of qualities valued and judged superior within the academy.”<sup>55</sup> Taking seriously experiences of pregnancy loss discloses this capacity to unsettle hegemonic theological discourses, name pastoral oversights, and subvert taboos that silence and marginalize women’s embodied experience. As importantly, it exposes and works to unseat unacknowledged assumptions and exclusions operating just below the surface in feminist theology. It is only by first exposing these hidden things that we can advance a constructive project that moves beyond critique and toward the envisioning of communities, ministries, and rituals that are formed at the site of this imaginative open space, this empty tomb. As Howard states, “Churches meet an aching need when they offer a service, a public place, recognition, and prayers for those who have lost children in the womb.”<sup>56</sup> Perhaps we should not only hope for such communities. We should expect them and—in our sorrow—give life to them.

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55 Miller-McLemore, “A Maternal Feminist Epistemology,” 123.

56 Howard, “Comforting Rachel,” 11.

# Ministry to Catholic LGBTQ Youth: A Call for Openness and Affirmation

by Arthur David Canales

How can we proclaim Christ to a generation that is changing? We must be careful not to administer a vaccine against faith to them. . . . If someone is gay and seeks the Lord with good will, who am I to judge? . . . I remember the case of a very sad little girl who finally confided to her teacher the reason for her state of mind: 'My mother's girlfriend doesn't like me.'

—Pope Francis, conversation en route to World Youth Day, July 29, 2013, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Pope Francis's remarks above direct attention to some difficult and virtually undiscussed concerns about the way the Catholic Church is to minister to LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning) youth. Concerns regarding LGBTQ youth range from serious theological disagreements about ecclesial teachings to ignorance among youth ministers about the situations that these adolescents face. LGBTQ youth often experience fear, shame, and the hostility of peers and parents.<sup>1</sup>

At a recent national ministry conference, I presented a paper on LGBTQ youth and it seemed that nothing was more controversial and potentially divisive than the issue of homosexuality. Ministers from various denominations stated that "this is the most pressing and continuous issue" in their churches. This article contends that Catholic LGBTQ youth deserve, and should expect, proper and competent pastoral care from their parish youth ministry. The purpose of this article is twofold: (1) to elaborate on the ministry to Catholic LGBTQ youth in the United States and (2) to propose a more open and affirming Catholic youth ministry that addresses LGBTQ issues and concerns. The question of ministering to Catholic LGBTQ youth is both a practical theological matter and a youth ministry dilemma that merits serious attention.

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The methodology of this article is (1) descriptive, which is theological and theoretical in nature; and (2) prescriptive, which is pastoral in scope. The essay begins with a brief discussion of the terminology, then moves to a discussion of the theological and moral conundrum facing ministry to LGBTQ youth. Next, it examines the failures of ecclesial documents to address the quandary, and finally, it addresses the need to become more open and affirming in the ways of ministering to LGBTQ youth.

<sup>1</sup> L. E. Durso and G. J. Gates, "Serving Our Youth: Findings from a National Survey of Service Providers Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth Who Are Homeless or At Risk of Becoming Homeless" (Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute with True Colors Fund and The Palette Fund, 2012), 4.

## Situating the Discussion

Research suggests that views on same-sex relationships vary by Christian denomination and by religious practices.<sup>2</sup> Currently, mainline Catholicism ministers to LGBTQ youth as teenagers with eyes wide shut. The ministerial presence currently available to the *young church* (a phrase used in youth ministry that refers to high school adolescents ages fourteen through eighteen), particularly to Catholic LGBTQ youth, is almost non-existent.<sup>3</sup> The overwhelming majority of Catholic youth ministries in the United States do not cater to, actively attract, or tolerate LGBTQ youth. The Catholic Church in general, and youth ministry specifically, could be and should be doing more to reach out and minister to LGBTQ youth. Catholic LGBTQ youth need a place in the church where they can be accepted, their gifts empowered, their faith and spirituality nurtured, and their sexuality supported.

Therefore, this essay is an invitation for US Catholic Bishops, Catholic pastors, and Catholic youth ministers (1) to be more hospitable, gracious, and open-minded with the LGBTQ youth community and (2) to have LGBTQ Catholics present at the table for dialogue and critique about the lack of advocacy and pastoral care in Catholic youth ministry. This essay hopes to encourage youth ministers and adolescent catechists “to minister *to, with, by, and for*” LGBTQ young people, as is so beautifully articulated in the original Catholic youth ministry document, *A Vision of Youth Ministry*.<sup>4</sup>

Typically, the topic, discussion, and rhetoric surrounding sexual minorities and the Catholic Church centers around three camps of theological thought: (1) *traditional/conservative*, who are those theologians who adhere to the Magisterium’s<sup>5</sup> position on homosexual acts with little or no pastoral concern for the LGBTQ person; (2) *mediating/moderate*, who are those theologians who do not challenge magisterial teaching on homosexual acts, but place a greater emphasis on the pastoral ramifications for the LGBTQ person; and (3) *revisionist/progressive*, who are those theologians who openly challenge the magisterial teaching on LGBTQ persons.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps a revisionist perspective is needed concerning this delicate issue, in order to allow an open-minded approach toward LGBTQ youth. All Catholic people--LGBTQ youth included--share in the same Catholic identity and dignity as heterosexual Catholics, which is shared by virtue of baptism, sealed at confirmation, and nourished at the Eucharistic table.<sup>7</sup>

## Defining the Terminology

It is beneficial for the readers to learn the basic terminology for this study. The language will also give a general Catholic audience common ground and a common vocabulary to speak from, as well as the proper understanding of the terminology, such that it can be incorporated into future Catholic documents.

LGBT refers to individuals who consider themselves as either lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Adolescents who claim the LGBT sexual status are considered minorities— more specifically, “sexual minority teenagers”—by the American Academy of Pediatrics.<sup>8</sup> In recent literature surrounding LGBT youth, the letter Q has been added,

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2 L. J. Francis, B. G. Fawcett, and J. Linkletter, “The Sexual Attitudes of Religiosity Committed Canadian Youth within the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches,” *Journal of Youth & Theology* 12, no. 1 (2013): 11. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/24055093-90000057>.

3 Samuel Sanabria and Joffrey S. Suprina, “Addressing Spirituality when Counseling Gay Boys, Adolescents, and Men,” in *Counseling Gay Men, Adolescents, and Boys: A Strength-Based Guide for Helping Professionals and Educators*, ed. Michael M. Kocet (New York: Routledge Group, 2014), 54–55.

4 Department of [Catholic] Education, *A Vision of Youth Ministry* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1976), 6–7.

5 The Magisterium (Latin for “office of the teacher”), in the Catholic Church, refers to the authoritative teaching of the universal church, which belongs to the whole college of bishops (Catholic bishops around the world) who are united with the bishop of Rome—the presiding pope.

6 M. J. Maher and L. M. Sever, “What Educators in Catholic Schools Might Expect When Addressing Gay and Lesbian Issues: A Study of Needs and Barriers,” *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education* 4, no. 3 (2007): 82. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J367v04n03\\_06](http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J367v04n03_06).

7 Gerald D. Coleman, *Homosexuality: Catholic Teaching and Pastoral Practice* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996), 110.

8 D. A. Levine, “Office-Based Care for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth,” *Pediatrics* 132, no. 1 (2013): 198–99. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1542/peds.2013-1282>.



referring to the word “questioning,” and can be appended at times to the acronym LGBT to read LGBTQ. “Questioning” refers to adolescents who are still discerning their sexual orientation and/or struggling with their sexual identity. The letter Q can also represent the word “queer,” which has become more popular in homosexual literature and in queer theory (explained below). Therefore, it is not uncommon to see the acronym LGBTQQ, which includes a second Q-letter to represent queer understanding. The second Q-letter will *not* be part of the parameters of this work.

Understanding sexual orientation is an extremely important part of human development. According to the American Psychological Association, the sexual orientation of a person is an enduring, individual pattern of emotional, romantic, and physical (sexual) arousal and attraction to persons of the opposite gender or sex, the same gender or sex, or to either genders or more than one sex.<sup>9</sup> These sexual attractions toward other human beings are generally categorized under heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality, although the category asexuality does exist, which is the lack of romantic or physical attraction toward others.

*Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth.* A lesbian youth is an adolescent female who self-identifies as a person who has sexual tendencies, overtures, and attraction toward other females and women.<sup>10</sup> A gay youth is an adolescent male who categorizes himself as a person who has sexual tendencies, overtures, and attraction toward other males and men.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, bisexual youth are teenagers who self-identify their romantic and physical attraction, and their emotional and/or spiritual intimacy, toward people of both sexes and genders.<sup>12</sup>

*Transgender and queer youth.* The term *transgender* is a broad term that covers various groups. It can include transsexuals, cross-dressers, drag queens, people who are intersex (people born with both male and female genitals), and straight people. Being transgender is not necessarily a reflection of sexual orientation. All transsexuals are transgender, but not all transgender people are transsexual.<sup>13</sup> Young people who describe themselves as transgender are those persons who exhibit “gender-nonconforming” characteristics and actions—that is, those individuals who transcend their typical gender paradigms.<sup>14</sup> Many transsexual persons are in transition—either from hormone therapy and/or cosmetic surgery—to live in a gender role of choice, but have not undergone sexual reassignment surgery.<sup>15</sup> The term *queer* was once a derogatory term used by heterosexuals; today, the term has become increasingly popular with LGBTQ youth as an empowering term that is consciously used as a way of reclaiming their uniqueness and power as outsiders and as sexual minorities. In past decades, and sometimes today, the term *queer* is associated with transgender persons.<sup>16</sup> In academic homosexual literature the word *queer* is used to frame

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9 American Psychological Association, *Answers to Your Questions: For a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2008), 1–2.

10 Levine, “Office-Based Care,” 199. Although an adolescent female may self-report being a lesbian, she will still occasionally have sex with males, because with teenagers sexual behavior does not necessarily equal sexual identity.

11 Levine, “Office-Based Care,” 199.

12 Michael J. Bayly, *Creating Environments for LGBT Students: A Catholic Schools Perspective* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2007), 18. Similar to lesbian youth, a gay adolescent male may self-recognize being gay, but he may sporadically engage in sex with females, for the reason that sexual conduct is not tantamount to sexual distinctiveness.

13 Kelley Huegel, *The Survival Guide for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Teens* (Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, 2011), 206.

14 A. H. Grossman, and A. R. D’Augelli, “Transgender Youth: Invisible and Vulnerable,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 51, no. 1 (2006): 112. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J082v51n01\\_06](http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J082v51n01_06).

15 Bayly, *Creating Environments*, 21.

16 Bayly, *Creating Environments*, 20.

and sustain *queer theory*.<sup>17</sup> Knowing these terms and the ways they are expressed is helpful in guiding the conversation with LGBTQ youth, and it is important for Catholic ministers to learn and feel comfortable using these terms.

### The Theological Quandary and Moral Conundrum

The theological quandary regarding LGBTQ youth is directly enmeshed in the rhetoric surrounding the doctrinal and theoretical aspects of Catholic teachings on homosexuality. Part of the quandary is the obfuscation and misunderstanding of a pastoral plan with and for Catholic LGBTQ youth. The Catholic Church has not directly written anything concerning LGBTQ youth in its documents on youth ministry, which is a particularly peculiar phenomenon in this day and age. The Catholic Church has written a few specific documents (addressed below) on the “pastoral care” of persons of homosexual inclination, and although written with empathy and compassion, they lack “teeth” and conviction, and offer precious little by way of advocacy and pastoral care for LGBTQ youth.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, traditional Catholic teaching on homosexuality is warranted.

The Catholic Church teaching on the subject is clear. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (hereafter CCC) states:

- All human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, known as *imago Dei* (no. 299);
- Love is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being (no. 2392);
- All human beings deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, which upholds their innate integrity (nos. 2284-2317);
- Sexuality is a gift that is ordered toward conjugal love (no. 2360);
- Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of the body and the soul (nos. 2332, 2361);
- Every person should acknowledge and accept his or her sexual identity (no. 2333);
- Homosexuality refers to relations between men or women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction towards persons of the same sex (no. 2357); and
- All Christians are called to various forms of chastity and to remain chaste outside of matrimony (no. 2348).<sup>19</sup>

These points represent a rudimentary understanding of the church’s teaching on human sexuality and homosexuality.

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17 Y. Taylor, S. Hines, and M. E. Casey, *Theorizing Intersectionality and Sexuality* (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2011), 3. “Queer theory attempts to avoid analysis of asymmetrical power relations with its focus on the destabilization of categories, often negating the privileges and (dis)advantages allowing and denying such inclinations.” Queer theory has been on the rise in academic literature, especially in the fields of psychology, sociology, and feminism.

18 Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1986); United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers* (Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing, 1997); United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care* (Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing, 2006). None of these documents is written to advocate a particular agenda or to endorse a homosexual lifestyle or way of life, which probably does not engender a warm reception from the homosexual community.

19 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), nos. 299, 2332, 2333, 2392, 2284–2317, 2360, 2361, 2357, 2348.

There is nothing unclear about these ecclesial doctrines. The theological quandary and the complexities for practical theology and pastoral ministry are statements such as this: “Basing itself on sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of *grave depravity*, tradition has always declared that homosexual acts are *intrinsically disordered*. They are contrary to the natural law.”<sup>20</sup> Wording such as “intrinsically disordered” tends to be divisive instead of binding, and it is offensive and alarming for homosexual persons. Besides being extremely un-pastoral, the phrase “intrinsically disordered,” which applies to the homosexual genital acts, can easily be misconstrued by thinking that the message is that all homosexual people are intrinsically disordered people, which is slippery slope.<sup>21</sup> As Catholic moral theologian Stephen J. Pope notes, “The Magisterium’s message about gay sexual orientation is powerfully stigmatizing and dehumanizing.”<sup>22</sup> The wording utilized by these ecclesial pronouncements presents a theological quandary for pastoral ministry because it is polarizing and defaming. Moreover, describing a person’s sexuality as “gravely disordered” would seem only to stimulate suspicion, provoke mistrust, and cause alienation among LGBTQ people. Pope further adds, “The Magisterium’s teaching about homosexuality stands in tension with its affirmation that each [LGBTQ] person is created in the *imago Dei*.”<sup>23</sup> This tension represents a moral conundrum for practitioners of pastoral care and youth ministry who are charged with ministering to the total person: mind, body, and spirit.

The Christian custom regarding sex before marriage or outside committed marriage is seen as fornication and it is considered morally wrong and sinful (Gal 5:19–21). The parameters of this article do not allow for a full discussion on sexual morality. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the traditional or conservative view regarding sexual relations is abstinence and chastity. Abstinence is the avoidance of a particular pleasure (food, drink, sexual intercourse) for a determined length of time, usually on certain days.<sup>24</sup> Chastity is a virtue and a Christian lifestyle. Chastity is the successful integration of human sexuality within a person and thus the person’s interior life (spirituality) is in unity with the outer life (sexuality).<sup>25</sup> Hence all Christians are called to chastity; even married couples and spouses are chaste nonvirgins.<sup>26</sup> A Catholic moderate view of sex before marriage or outside of marriage would indicate that sex between two committed and consenting adults is ideally based on genuine mutual respect, companionship, and love.<sup>27</sup> A Catholic revisionist/progressive view of sex before or outside of marriage would maintain that sexual encounters cause no unjust harm, involve free consent, mutuality of sexual desire, and equality of personhood, power, and status.<sup>28</sup> Monogamy is still the gold standard! Even a Catholic revisionist perspective would disapprove of so-called “causal sex” or “one-night stands” between uncommitted couples. The rationale for bringing up these three views of sex before or outside of marriage is to demonstrate the theological and moral dilemma that pastoral practitioners such as youth ministers must face, especially with LGBTQ adolescents.

Despite charged emotions, personal opinions, troublesome psychological theories, and conservative theologies regarding homosexuality, the larger issue remains: LGBTQ youth deserve, and should expect, proper and competent

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20 John Paul, CCC, no. 2357.

21 S. J. Pope, “The Magisterium’s Arguments Against ‘Same Sex Marriage’: An Ethical Analysis and Critique,” *Theological Studies* 65, no. 3 (2004): 549. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/004056390406500303>.

22 Pope, “Magisterium’s Arguments,” 550.

23 Pope, “Magisterium’s Arguments,” 550.

24 John Paul, CCC, no. 2337.

25 John Paul, CCC, no. 2337.

26 Vincent J. Genovesi, *In Pursuit of Love: Catholic Morality and Human Sexuality*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 136.

27 Genovesi, “*In Pursuit*,” 171–75.

28 Margaret A. Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 216–23.

pastoral care from their parish youth ministry. If the Catholic Church is not careful, it may be criticized as suffering from LGBTQ *ephebiphobia* (the fear of teenagers) towards sexual minority adolescents.<sup>29</sup>

### Official Ecclesiastical Documents that Address LGBTQ Youth

The three major Catholic Church documents concerning ministering to LGBTQ people are (1) the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith's document entitled *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*,<sup>30</sup> (2) the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' document entitled *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care*,<sup>31</sup> and (3) another USCCB document titled *Always my Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*.<sup>32</sup> All of these documents call for the church— institutions, organizations, and ministries—to have an empathetic heart and to provide pastoral care to the homosexual community. However, the three documents provide little by way of real pastoral care and seems out-of-touch with LGBTQ reality.

These three documents leave most LGBTQ people disappointed by their lack of pastoral concentration; the documents smack of institutional control as well as exacerbating cultural barriers.<sup>33</sup> It appears that neither the Magisterium nor the United States Catholic Bishops consulted critically or dialogued pastorally with anyone from the LGBTQ community.<sup>34</sup>

The 1997 U.S. Catholic Bishops' document, *Always my Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*, provides some reassurance for Catholic parents and recommends the following:

1. Accept and love yourselves as parents.
2. Do everything possible to continue demonstrating love for your child.
3. Urge your son or daughter to stay joined to the Catholic faith community.
4. Recommend that your son or daughter find a spiritual director/mentor.
5. Seek help for yourself, perhaps in the form of counseling, as you strive for understanding, acceptance, and inner peace.
6. Reach out in love and service to other parents struggling with a son or daughter's homosexuality.
7. Take advantage of opportunities for education and support.
8. Put your faith completely in God.<sup>35</sup>

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29 Andrew Root and Kendra Creasy Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), 207. *Ephebiphobia* is the fear of teenagers and is very distinct from *ephebophilia*, the primary sexual desire and attraction of adolescents by adults. I am using the term in the context of the Church could be criticized as having *ephebiphobia* toward its homosexual teenagers.

30 Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1986).

31 USCCB, *Ministry to Persons*.

32 USCCB, *Always Our Children*.

33 Maher and Sever, "Educators in Catholic Schools," 83.

34 Bayly, *Creating Environments*, 85.

35 USCCB, *Always Our Children*, 6.

These are fine words of wisdom, but they can also be applied to practically all Catholic parents, not only parents of LGBTQ youth.

The 2006 U.S. Catholic Bishops' document does not offer anything directly pertaining to LGBTQ youth except for this passing comment:

Young people, in particular, need special encouragement and guidance, since the best way of helping young people is to aid them in *not* getting involved in homosexual relations or in the *subculture* in the first place, since these experiences create further obstacles.<sup>36</sup> (Italics added.)

Such a statement hardly constitutes pastoral care and offers no pastoral plan. The language of the document only creates further alienation and ostracization, which the majority of LGBTQ youth already experience. Questions loom large: Are we providing the best pastoral care to LGBTQ youth in our parishes/congregations? Are we—the church—doing enough to support, advocate, and minister “to, with, by, and for” LGBTQ adolescents? What are the best ways to minister with LGBTQ teenagers? The Catholic Church is merely conflating a pastoral plan with authentic ministry to the LGBTQ community. Moreover, Catholic youth ministry seems to be *avoiding* LGBTQ youth instead of *advocating* on their behalf, which is a substantial critique of Catholic youth ministry.

### Assessing Catholic Youth Ministry Documents

Neither the original 1976 *Vision of Youth Ministry* (out of print and virtually out of use) nor the updated version, *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* (hereafter *RTV*),<sup>37</sup> mentions ministering to LGBTQ youth. The exclusion of addressing LGBTQ youth in these two youth ministry documents is a glaring oversight. *RTV* is the current benchmark and definitive standard for Catholic youth ministry in the United States. All Catholic youth ministries are strongly encouraged to adhere to its content and follow *RTV*'s framework. *RTV* establishes the criteria and goals for youth ministry, which are expected to be integrated and implemented in Catholic parish youth ministries and Catholic school campus ministries in the United States. *RTV* is the principal pastoral tool that Catholic youth ministers utilize in their pastoral work with young people; unfortunately, there is absolutely nothing written in the document that addresses LGBTQ youth sexuality, issues, dilemmas, or situations.

*RTV* provides Catholic youth ministers with eight components that are to help shape the youth curriculum and are to be integrated within the youth ministry. The components consist of the following: advocacy, catechesis, community life, evangelization, justice and service, leadership development, pastoral care, and prayer and worship. There are two possible sections in the *RTV* document where ministering to LGBTQ adolescents could have been integrated: the Component of Advocacy and the Component of Pastoral Care.<sup>38</sup> *RTV* has beautifully written pages on advocacy with adolescents and pastoral care with teenagers, but nothing in those sections that specifically address the needs, issues, and dilemmas that LGBTQ youth encounter. *RTV* really misses a marvelous opportunity to address the concerns that LGBTQ youth experience on a daily basis. It will be valuable to examine these two ministry components regarding LGBTQ youth more closely.

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<sup>36</sup> USCCB, *Ministry to Persons*, 21–22.

<sup>37</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* (Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing, 1997).

<sup>38</sup> For more detailed information of the Ministry Components of Advocacy and of Pastoral Care, see *RTV*, 26–28 and 42–44.

## The Ministry of Advocacy for Catholic Teenagers

Advocacy for juveniles is an important part of youth ministry that aids in the fight against economic and social forces that threaten adolescents and their families.<sup>39</sup> The section on advocacy offers four points regarding the rights of Catholic teenagers:

1. Affirming and protecting the sanctity of human life as a gift from God and building societal respect for those who most need protection and support—the unborn, the poor, the disadvantaged, the sick, and the elderly
2. Standing with and speaking on behalf of young people and their families on public issues that affect their lives, such as support for education, quality housing, employment opportunities, access to health care, safe neighborhoods, and availability of meaningful community activities and services
3. Empowering young people by giving them a voice and calling them to responsibility and accountability around the issues that affect them and their future
4. Developing partnerships and initiatives with leaders and concerned citizens from all sectors of the community to develop a shared vision and practical strategies for building a healthy community.<sup>40</sup>

This would have been an excellent place for the U.S. Catholic Bishops to provide three additional points: a fifth point about focusing on sexual development to all adolescents, a sixth point on practices and policies that will help young people avoid sexual discrimination, and a seventh point that reminds youth ministers that all people—homosexual or heterosexual—are created in God’s image and likeness. It would have been pastorally prophetic if RTV would have added a few bullet points along these lines in this section of the document:

- *Advocacy includes educating all adolescents on psychological development and sexual development, especially those teenagers who are thinking about engaging in sexual relations and those who are already engaged in sexual intimacy.*
- *Advocacy includes standing up for LGBTQ youth and engaging in policies and practices that eradicate discrimination of sexual minority young people and examine and analyze the practices that alienate LGBTQ youth.*
- *LGBTQ youth are created in imago Dei and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect and have a right to find a safe place to learn and thrive in their parish’s youth ministry.*

Unfortunately, RTV fails to advocate for LGBTQ youth in the Component of Advocacy.

## The Ministry of Pastoral Care to Catholic Teenagers

Pastoral care with teenagers is *sine qua non* for Catholic youth ministry! Without proper pastoral care healing and growth would not take place within adolescents, their peer relationships, and their families.<sup>41</sup> The section on pastoral care is more developed than the section on advocacy, but it still lacks direct mention of ministering to LGBTQ youth. According to RTV,

<sup>39</sup> USCCB, RTV, 27.

<sup>40</sup> USCCB, RTV, 27–28.

<sup>41</sup> USCCB, RTV, 42.

The ministry of pastoral care to adolescents involves promoting positive adolescent and family development through a variety of positive (preventative) strategies; caring for adolescents and families in crisis through support, counseling, and referral to appropriate community agencies; providing guidance as young people face life decisions and make moral choices; and challenging systems that are obstacles to positive development (advocacy). Pastoral care is most fundamentally a relationship—a ministry of compassionate presence.<sup>42</sup>

Again, these are caring words, but there is nothing that is ministry-specific to the needs of LGBTQ youth. In this section *RTV* lists nine points regarding pastoral care with youth, but one point in particular could have dealt specifically with LGBTQ youth, yet does not: “Pastoral care fosters the spiritual development of young people, and the healthy integration of their sexuality and spirituality.”<sup>43</sup> This would have been a perfect location to address the sexual orientation of teenagers as well as connecting the sexuality of LGBTQ youth to their spirituality. It is certainly not unreasonable to connect sexuality to spirituality. This would have been an excellent place to add something along these lines in this section of the document:

- *Pastoral Care is concerned about the total person; about the full expression of young people’s spirituality and sexuality.*
- *Integrating our sexuality—whether heterosexual or homosexual—into genuine loving relationships is a matter of greatest importance for identity formation.*
- *LGBTQ youth deserve and should expect competent and genuine pastoral care.*

Unfortunately, *RTV* fails to offer quality pastoral care to LGBTQ youth in the Component of Pastoral Care.

Of course, hindsight is 20/20 vision, but perhaps it is time for a revised and updated version of *RTV*: a new version with a fresh perspective that meets the needs of *all* adolescents today.<sup>44</sup> The reality is that the typical mainstream model of parish youth ministry does not reach LGBTQ youth because of social, cultural, religious, and sexual differences.<sup>45</sup> This is one of the many reasons *RTV* needs updating—knowing full well, of course, that Catholic hierarchy and ecclesial documents are more likely to follow the pioneering ministry or groundbreaking theology rather than setting ministry policy outright. Nevertheless, a new and improved ecclesial youth ministry document is in the best interest of Catholic ministry—a version that clearly advocates for LGBTQ youth and one that clearly states the pastoral care needs of sexual minority adolescents. The Magisterium’s document and the three U.S. Catholic Bishops’ documents mentioned above fail to provide an authentic fundamental option to LGBTQ youth like that which other vulnerable and marginalized groups receive. Therefore, in a real way, the Catholic Church obfuscates a pastoral plan for LGBTQ young Catholics and offers generic platitudes, which are neither pastorally fruitful nor practically fulfilling. It is important that teenagers who are sexual minorities receive proper and competent pastoral care and feel that they have a voice and a place within the church. It is the role and responsibility of Catholic youth ministry to reach out and accept LGBTQ youth who can contribute to the vitality of the ministry, the church, and society.

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42 USCCB, *RTV*, 42.

43 USCCB, *RTV*, 43.

44 Arthur David Canales, “The Ten-Year Anniversary of *Renewing the Vision*: Reflection on Its Impact for Catholic Youth Ministry,” *New Theology Review* 20, no. 2 (2007): 58–69.

45 Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian* (New YorkNY: Convergent Books, 2014), 22–23.

## Becoming More Open and Affirming of Catholic LGBTQ Youth

It would seem wise if Catholic youth ministry would become more deliberate and inclusive toward LGBTQ youth. Since the U.S. Catholic Bishops have called for Catholic youth ministry to be comprehensive,<sup>46</sup> then Catholic youth ministries across the country are going to have to be a lot more systematic and intentional about ministering directly and becoming more open and affirming with LGBTQ youth.

In an unpublished investigation surveying one hundred Catholic youth ministers in April 2014, the following data was revealed:

1. Many gifted youth ministers often feel helpless to truly advocate for LGBTQ youth.
2. Many youth ministers are in fear of losing their job if they came out and supported LGBTQ youth openly.
3. Some youth ministers feel that there would be repercussions for “not following” the letter of the law in the *Catholic Catechism*,
4. Other youth ministers are fearful of being fired by a conservative bishop because they are misperceived as “pushing” a ministry agenda too far by advocating for LGBTQ equality in Catholic youth ministry.
5. A few youth ministers simply do not feel comfortable approaching the issue due to a lack of understanding with regard to all the subtleties and nuances of LGBTQ youth.<sup>47</sup>

It is not uncommon for youth ministers to hear that Catholic parents say hurtful and emotionally damaging phrases to their homosexual teenage sons and daughters, such as, “No son or daughter of mine will be a queer,” or, “You cannot live under my roof if you are gay,” or something much worse. Exacerbating this are the horrifying stories about Catholic parents who disown their own daughter or son and “kicks them out of the house” when she or he discloses (reveals that they are LGBT) to their parents.<sup>48</sup> It is shameful that approximately 43 percent of LGBTQ adolescents are forced out of the house altogether by their parents, who are thus disowning their own children because they have a unique sexual orientation.<sup>49</sup> Another “black eye” for Catholic parents is that it is not uncommon for LGBTQ youth to find solace on the streets; approximately 46 percent of LGBTQ teenagers run away from home because of family rejection of sexual orientation.<sup>50</sup>

The reality of the situation is that LGBTQ youth need authentic advocacy by Catholic parishes, from parish youth ministries, and from parents. Authentic advocacy and genuine pastoral care cannot be in the form of (1) trying to change a young person’s sexual orientation, (2) pressuring adolescents to conform to societal standards of “normal” sexuality, or (3) thinking that God does not love them or does not listen to them because of their sexual orientation. Fernando Arzola astutely points out, “If the church does not provide a safe, nonjudgmental environment to help them [LGBTQ youth] process issues and questions, they will undoubtedly go somewhere else for help.

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46 USCCB, *RTV*, 19–20.

47 Arthur David Canales, “A Qualitative Study of the Attitudes of Catholic Youth Ministers toward LGBTQ Youth,” (unpublished findings). The survey was sent out to over one hundred Catholic youth ministers, via email, on April 1, 2014 and was closed and compiled on May 27, 2014. The survey was titled “Questionnaire on LGBTQ Youth & Catholic Youth Ministry” and it asked fifteen questions. The final data and results of the study are to be published in the future.

48 Ritch C. Savin-Williams, *The New Gay Teenager* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 35–37.

49 Durso and Gates, “Serving Our Youth,” 4.

50 Durso and Gates, “Serving Our Youth,” 5.



Unfortunately, these persons or places—gangs, nightclubs, and the streets—may not necessarily share the values of the church.<sup>51</sup> It is in the best interest of pastors, youth ministers, and parents to collaborate on the best practices for integrating LGBTQ youth awareness into the youth ministry.

Catholic youth ministry would be wise to focus its efforts on being more open and affirming of LGBTQ youth: (1) teaching adolescents the ways to cope as a teenage sexual minority in the family, school, and church; (2) helping young people find positive heterosexual and homosexual role models in the community; (3) providing LGBTQ youth with a safe place to meet and grow in their faith as part of the parish community and the sub-community of youth ministry; (4) catechizing juvenile sexual minorities about human sexuality and theology of the body without stigmatizing and shaming; (5) loving LGBTQ adolescents for who they are, and not for who they are not; and (6) developing ways to embrace an LGBTQ young person's sexuality and his or her Christian discipleship. Catholic catechesis plays an enormous role in helping for justification in schools and parishes to develop programs that help to bolster Catholic identity in LGBTQ youth.<sup>52</sup>

Becoming more open and affirming with LGBTQ youth honestly addresses the fundamental human needs of sexual minority teenagers. All Christian youth ministry is a response to, and in light of, God's active presence for the life of the world—a presence that reflects and acts on behalf of all adolescents.<sup>53</sup> LGBTQ youth, like heterosexual adolescents, deserve a lived theological emphasis on a lived experience of soteriology as the natural extension of God's passionate engagement with the world.<sup>54</sup> In other words, those ministering to the young church may want to be more meta-reflective with the existential (human) and ontological (spiritual) needs of LGBTQ youth. Pastoral care in Catholic youth ministry is the hope of praxis—theology in action done well in the name of God—to, for, and with adolescents.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, adolescent pastoral care aims at catering and ministering to the needs of LGBTQ youth, a population that is currently being underserved in mainstream Catholic youth ministry. To provide competent and proficient advocacy and pastoral care to LGBTQ adolescents, development of appropriate pastoral strategies is paramount for Catholic youth ministers. In the footnote below are some concrete pastoral practices that could easily be incorporated into any Catholic youth ministry as part of its comprehensive curriculum.<sup>56</sup>

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51 Fernando Arzola, Jr., *Toward a Prophetic Youth Ministry: Theory and Praxis in Urban Context* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 47.

52 Maher and Sever, "Educators in Catholic Schools," 100.

53 Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, eds. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 18.

54 Root and Dean, *Theological Turn*, 223.

55 Department of [Catholic] Education, *Vision of Youth Ministry*, 6–7.

56 A few pedagogical and pastoral strategies for implementation in a Catholic youth ministry to be more open and affirming with LGBTQ youth could be the following:

- Strategy 1: LGBTQ Youth Speaker Series. Bring in LGBTQ speakers within the community to address and discuss their personal struggles, issues, and concerns about growing up in the church. This could be a powerful conscious-raising series for all teenagers involved in the youth ministry.
- Strategy 2: LGBTQ Film Series. Develop a four-week film series on LGBTQ Issues and discuss the pertinent themes that a given movie addresses. Here are some movie options: *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), *Philadelphia* (1993), *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), *Weekend* (2001), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), *Milk* (2008), *Circumstance* (2011), *Pariah* (2011), *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013), *The Normal Heart* (2014), and *First Girl I Ever Loved* (2016).
- Strategy 3: LGBTQ Youth Book Club. Read and discuss a different book each month with a group of interested teenagers. Here is list of potential books that will interest adolescents: *Giovanni's Room* (1956) by James Baldwin, *Rose of No Man's Land* (2005) by Michelle Tea, *Hero* (2007) by Perry Moore, *The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker, *Fun House: A Family Tragicomic* (2006) by Alison Bechdel, *Boy Meets Boy* (2003) by David Levithan, and *The Difference Between You and Me* by Madeleine George (2012), but there are many more.
- Strategy 4: LGBTQ Youth Retreat. Offer a weekend retreat that highlights certain LGBTQ youth themes. The theme could be the "Dispelling Myths" retreat or the "Acceptance" retreat. The retreat could offer a variety of presentations on various topics of interest to LGBTQ youth, such as "Knowing Yourself, Loving Yourself," "Understanding LGBTQ Spirituality," "Loving God and Loving Neighbor," and/or "Living LGBTQ Christian Discipleship." The list of topics and talks for the retreat is limitless.

There are several more implementation approaches, but too many to recommend here. For more information please feel free to contact the author of this article at [acanales@marian.edu](mailto:acanales@marian.edu).

## Conclusion

Comprehensive Catholic youth ministry is not a theoretical exercise. Catholic youth ministry is a commitment to and participation in young people's joys, hopes, and struggles for a full adolescent life, and discernment of God's salvific action in teenagers' personal history.<sup>57</sup> Youth ministry is God's work-in-action, embodied and integrated pedagogically and holistically with critical thinking and theological reflection, and therefore cannot overlook ministering to, with, and for LGBTQ youth.

It is time for the Catholic Church to offer pastoral wisdom and insights on ministering to LGBTQ youth instead of offering insensitive platitudes such as "we love the sinner, but hate the sin." Simplistic answers and once-for-all explanations will not satisfy or pacify the LGBTQ community, and one-dimensional answers should not gratify Catholic youth ministers either. Catholic youth ministry would do well to perform emancipatory pastoral practices—be open and affirming to LGBTQ youth—that promote peace through justice, service, and love.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Pamela Copper-White, *Shared Wisdom: Use of Self in Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 186.

<sup>58</sup> Cooper-White, *Shared Wisdom*, 191.

# The Impact of Blessed Oscar Romero on Faith Formation

by Marco A. López

From the time that Oscar Romero was ordained a bishop, he, like all bishops assumed the roles of shepherd and teacher for the church. We know that his role as shepherd culminated with laying down his life for those whom he deeply loved. While that will most likely be the defining action for which he will be known throughout the rest of history, his role as teacher will be the context from which I will draw this reflection and from which we might consider the impact of his legacy to catechesis and faith formation. Given the limited space, I'd like for us to simply focus on Romero's own journey, his pedagogy, and his messaging.

The General Directory for Catechesis (GDC) positions catechesis within evangelization as the more in-depth function of informing and forming Christian identity.<sup>1</sup> Although the GDC is post-Romero period, his preaching and teaching responded to the reality of a people who clearly knew God and had encountered Jesus Christ, but who also had unanswered questions particularly about the reasons and the meaning of their suffering; an experience that undoubtedly marked their Christian identity.

## A Journey of Transformation

About two years before assuming the archbishop's seat in San Salvador and while he was bishop of Santiago de Maria, Romero was called upon to accompany a family and a community where several *campesinos* (farmworkers) were massacred. He never found the right words while he was with them, at times he simply remained silent, and at one point he even pronounced words that rather than give comfort caused more pain.<sup>2</sup> It has often been said that two years later, he underwent a conversion when his good friend Fr. Rutilio Grande was murdered and then he did find the right words to say, and he spoke clearly and acted decisively. Whether using the word "conversion" is accurate or not to describe what was happening to Romero in the days that followed Grande's death, those around

1 Thomas H. Groome, "Total Catechesis/Religious Education: A Vision for Now and Always," in *Horizons & Hope: The Future of Religious Education*, eds. Thomas H. Groome and Harold Daly Horell (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003), 2.

2 Scott Wright, *Oscar Romero and the Communion of Saints: A Biography* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 36–37.

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him and including himself recognized that something in him was changing; others called it transformation.<sup>3</sup> It was ultimately a transformation in his understanding of the role of the church and in his role as archbishop.

Educator Parker Palmer suggests that “transformation must begin in the transformed heart of the teacher. Only in the heart searched and transformed by truth will new teaching techniques and strategies for institutional change find sure grounding.”<sup>4</sup> Romero was transformed because he allowed himself to do so in his search for truth. More so because he was transformed by his love of and for the people who started to trust in him. Romero developed a gift for making the Word come alive in ways that touched the experiences of people were living at that time. “The Word of God,” he said, “has to be a word which springs forth from the eternal, ancient Word of God, but which touches today’s wound, today’s injustices, today’s victims.” (Dec. 12, 1977).<sup>5</sup> For years as a priest and bishop, Romero taught and preached on different occasions but as he experienced this transformation, a new technique for delivering the Word emerged.

### Romero’s Pedagogy

In analyzing Romero’s teaching through his homilies, it is not too difficult to identify three primary moments that reflect the methodology of see, judge, and act that had emerged throughout Latin America in those years. We often talk about seizing teachable moments in faith formation to spontaneously teach. Romero’s homilies became teachable moments, though perhaps not in the spontaneous way we often think of. Romero’s weekly homilies became the catalyst for gathering the entire archdiocese around the events of the previous week. This was a time for the community to hear about the disappearances of individuals or the brutal deaths that occurred that week and other unjust acts that often targeted catechists or other innocent civilians. These became moments to talk about the injustices of unlivable wages, poor sanitary conditions, and public policies that further marginalized the poor. Because this was the experience of the masses, it was not difficult to join in solidarity and for the community to be more disposed to hearing the Word and having it touch their lives and heal their wounds. This was the first moment.

After having pointed out the sin that was around them, Romero moved into the second moment in which he would introduce the Word: God’s promise of salvation and fullness of life—not in the afterlife but in the present. On one occasion, Romero reminded the faithful that “historical moments will change, but God’s design will ever be the same: to save human beings in history.”<sup>6</sup> Of course we know that the central message of the Christian faith is Jesus Christ himself and the mystery of his dying and rising, but for Romero, it was also important to preach the reign of God as something attainable. By introducing God’s reign as something that God wants for us, it allowed Romero and ultimately the people themselves to question any structure, law, public policy, institution, and individual who stood in the way of bringing about the reign of God. As teacher, he pointed the way to God; taught the way to salvation and denounced those things that stood in the way of attaining salvation for his people and the country of El Salvador. He preached and taught what he believed would allow the Salvadoran people to assume their rightful place in the reign of God.

Romero’s preferential option for the poor was not limited to the economic poor. He also prayed for those in spiritual poverty; he prayed for those who declared themselves his enemies. Ultimately this is what cost him his life—in addressing the armed forces in his final Sunday homily on March 24, 1980, he was not as much condemning them or threatening them with excommunication as much as he was exhorting them to exercise their God-given free

3 Wright, *Oscar Romero and the Communion of Saints*, 52–53.

4 Parker Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 107–8.

5 Brian J. Pierce, OP, “Romero as Preacher,” *Celebration* (March 2005). <http://celebrationpublications.org/node/1128>.

6 Wright, *Oscar Romero and the Communion of Saints*, 108.

will to disobey an order contrary to God's will—not only because it would save innocent lives but also to save their own souls.

A third moment in his homilies revolved around what we might refer to as missioning. One can almost hear Romero posing the question: “What is the Good News calling us to do?” Romero was very clear in preaching that God acted on behalf of those who did for themselves and that the Church had a unique role as an instrument of God. On one occasion he said, “I said once and I repeat today that if, unhappily, some day they silence our radio and don't let us write our newspaper, each of you who believe must become a microphone, a radio station, a loud-speaker, not to talk, but to call for faith.”<sup>7</sup> On a different occasion he said, “You have the key to the solution. But the Church gives you what you cannot have by yourselves: hope, the optimism to struggle, the joy of knowing that there is a solution, that God is our Father and keeps urging us.”<sup>8</sup>

Here he not only exhorted the individual but the entire church. If he was acting out of how he believed, he ought to live his episcopacy he was also calling the church to a higher moral ground. To this he said, “A Church that does not provoke any crises, a gospel that does not unsettle, a Word of God that does not get under anyone's skin, a Word of God that does not touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed—what gospel is that?”

### Messaging

With hundreds of homilies, speeches, and writings available that were spoken or written by Blessed Oscar Romero, it is difficult to be inclusive of all, but perhaps we can paint some broad strokes and intermingle the General Directory for Catechesis to help us harvest some kernels of truth and inspiration that might impact our catechetical ministries today.

In reflecting upon Romero's journey of transformation and as we might contemplate our own, it is worth taking note that the GDC says that “the Church usually desires that the first stage in the catechetical process be dedicated to ensuring conversion.”<sup>10</sup> Perhaps because of his own journey, Romero constantly invited his faithful to conversion and implored them to transform their country. We might each ask ourselves, “How might I first be transformed if I am to be an agent of change and if I am to invite others into a catechetical process?”

Secondly, I would invite us to consider what might be some teachable moments, or perhaps we might call these “teachable situations” or the social realities of the people with whom we are engaged in a catechetical process. The GDC reminds us that “the study of the social teaching of the Church is indispensable, since ‘its main aim is to interpret these realities, determining their conformity with or divergence from the lines of the Gospel teaching.’”<sup>11</sup> We might ask, “What are some of the realities lived today that need to be interpreted for the sake of helping the poor and the marginalized find meaning and find the presence of God?” Perhaps it's unemployment, discrimination, homelessness, street or domestic violence, or the undocumented status of immigrants just to name a few. What message do we preach and how does the Word made flesh through us touch their lives and heal their wounds.

To conclude, let us consider as an inspiration, Romero's message of hope and his belief in the reign of God spoken in his final homily just moments before his assassination. Drawing from *Gaudium et Spes* (no. 39) he states, “On this earth that Kingdom is already present in mystery. When the Lord returns it will be brought into full flower,”

7 Pierce, “Romero as Preacher.”

8 Wright, *Oscar Romero and the Communion of Saints*, 95.

9 Oscar Romero, “The Good Shepherd,” homily for April 16, 1978, [http://www.romerotrue.org.uk/homilies/95/95\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.romerotrue.org.uk/homilies/95/95_pdf.pdf).

10 Congregation for the Clergy, General Directory for Catechesis (1997), no. 62. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccclergy/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccatheduc\\_doc\\_17041998\\_directory-for-catechesis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccclergy/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_17041998_directory-for-catechesis_en.html).

11 Congregation for the Clergy, General Directory for Catechesis (1997), no. 71.

and he continues in his own words, “That is the hope that inspires Christians. We know that every effort to better society, especially when injustice and sin are so ingrained, is an effort that God blesses, that God wants, that God demands of us.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Oscar Romero, “Last Homily,” homily delivered March 24, 1980. [http://www.romerotrusted.org.uk/homilies/163/163\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.romerotrusted.org.uk/homilies/163/163_pdf.pdf).

## “They Might Have Guns, but We Have Flowers”: The Integrity of Creation and Peacebuilding

by Abbey Schumacher

Shortly after the attacks in Paris last November, a video of an interview with a father and son by France’s *Le Petit Journal* went viral. In the interview, the child expresses concern about remaining in his hometown: “They have guns. They can shoot us because they’re really mean, daddy.” The father, however, refuses to let his child be defeated: “They might have guns, but we have flowers.” The child protests, but the father explains that the flowers are there “to fight against guns.” The boy considers this for a moment. “It’s to protect?” he asks, a smile creeping across his face. At last the child tells the reporter, “I feel better.”<sup>1</sup> After watching this interview, however, I found myself weeping—finally breaking under the weight of a mountain of suffering in multiple cities that week alone. If only the answer were that simple, I thought. Yet Pope Francis offers me a crucial reminder: “Everything is connected.”<sup>2</sup> From this perspective, a healthy heap of flowers may very well point the way to peace.

Widening the scope, environmental health is in fact tightly tied to peace among the human community. According to Amy Goodman, host of the independent news program *Democracy Now*, “The world is beset with twin crises, inextricably linked: global warming and global warring.”<sup>3</sup> I suggest that a deepened understanding of this relationship, further illuminated in light of the relational worldview foundational to the Christian tradition, enables us to build a more loving and effective response to these twin crises. As Francis contends, “We can hardly consider ourselves to be fully loving if we disregard any aspect of reality.”<sup>4</sup>

1 Alastair Jamieson, “Father’s Talk With Son About Paris Terror Attack Goes Viral,” *NBC News*, November 17, 2015, <http://www.nbcnews.com/story-line/paris-terror-attacks/fathers-talk-son-about-paris-terror-attack-goes-viral-n464981>.

2 Francis, *The Encyclical Letter Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home* (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), no. 91.

3 Amy Goodman with Denis Moynihan, “Global Warming and Global Warring,” *Democracy Now*, September 25, 2014, [http://www.democracynow.org/blog/2014/9/25/global\\_warming\\_and\\_global\\_warring\\_](http://www.democracynow.org/blog/2014/9/25/global_warming_and_global_warring_).

4 Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 92.

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On the one hand, both preparing for war and waging war causes environmental destruction. First, militaries are leading consumers of natural resources, particularly fossil fuels.<sup>5</sup> In fact, a federal greenhouse gas inventory reported that the United States Department of Defense produced 95.4 million tons of carbon dioxide in 2010, a carbon footprint about equal to that of Chile.<sup>6</sup> Second, contemporary warfare damages the capacity of the environment to sustain life. During the first Gulf War, the United States used high-density depleted uranium (DU) shell casings designed to penetrate armored vehicles.<sup>7</sup> Medical doctors Barry S. Levy and Victor W. Sidel site DU as one factor likely related to “Gulf War syndrome,” which refers to the multiple illnesses and neurological impairments suffered by at least forty thousand veterans involved in the war from August 1990 to June 1991.<sup>8</sup> The effects of nuclear weapons are even more devastating. In addition to the two hundred thousand people immediately killed by the two nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, the detonation of nuclear weapons has resulted in widespread radioactive contamination and increased rates of cancer in many places throughout the globe.<sup>9</sup> Third, the destruction of the environment is often a deliberate tactic of war.<sup>10</sup> One well-known example is the US military’s use of napalm, a flammable petroleum-based gel, and the chemical defoliant Agent Orange to destroy the thick jungle vegetation that the opposing forces used for cover during the Vietnam War.<sup>11</sup> War not only produces fatal consequences for human beings, but also for the planet as a whole.

On the other hand, ecological degradation fuels violent conflict as human beings seek access to scarce resources or migrate due to forced displacement from uninhabitable or unproductive land.<sup>12</sup> Sallie McFague, for example, cites “the struggle for arable land and water” as one of the root causes of terrorism.<sup>13</sup> More specifically, the executive director of Greenpeace International, Kumi Naidoo, concludes that one of the “major catalysts” for resistance to the Assad regime in Syria was the fact that nearly “40 percent of fertile land, as a result of climate-induced drought, was wiped out.”<sup>14</sup> Marcus D. King of George Washington University substantiates this claim, noting that the drought caused migration to Syrian cities and “triggered situations where youth were more susceptible to joining extremist groups.”<sup>15</sup> Democratic presidential candidates Bernie Sanders<sup>16</sup> and Martin O’Malley have also made similar claims. In fact, a report published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* last year concluded that the drought in Syria was a catalyst for the social unrest that sparked the Syrian civil war in 2011 and the subsequent rise of ISIS.<sup>17</sup> The connection between violent conflict and environmental degradation is abundantly clear.

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5 W. Mark Koenig, “Making Havoc: War, Preparing for War and the Environment,” *Church and Society* 94 (2004): 33–34; Barry S. Levy and Victor W. Sidel, “War,” in *Environmental Health: From Global to Local*, ed. Howard Frumkin (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 281.

6 Lolita C. Baldor, “Climate Change Will Challenge U.S. Military,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 14, 2014.

7 Levy and Sidel, “War,” 271.

8 Levy and Sidel, “War,” 278.

9 Levy and Sidel, “War,” 273–75.

10 Kenneth R. Himes, OFM, “Environment and National Security: Examining the Connection,” in *The Challenge of Global Stewardship: Roman Catholic Responses*, eds. Maura A. Ryan and Todd David Whitmore (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 192.

11 Matthew A. Shadle, “No Peace on Earth: War and the Environment,” in *Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment*, ed. Tobias Winright (Winona, IN: Anselm Academic, 2011), 407.

12 Himes, “Environment and National Security,” 196–99.

13 Sallie McFague, “Is a Different World Possible? Human Dignity and the Integrity of Creation,” in *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 145.

14 “Kumi Naidoo of Greenpeace on Climate Change and War, Lessons from Anti-Apartheid Struggle,” *Democracy Now*, September 25, 2014, [http://www.democracynow.org/blog/2014/9/25/part\\_2\\_kumi\\_naidoo\\_of\\_greenpeace](http://www.democracynow.org/blog/2014/9/25/part_2_kumi_naidoo_of_greenpeace).

15 Coral Davenport, “Pentagon Signals Security Risks of Climate Change,” *New York Times*, October 13, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/14/us/pentagon-says-global-warming-presents-immediate-security-threat.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/14/us/pentagon-says-global-warming-presents-immediate-security-threat.html?_r=1).

16 Greg Levine, “Paris Attacks Provide Ready Material for Republican Candidates,” *Aljazeera America*, November 17, 2015, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/11/17/paris-attacks-provide-ready-material-for-republican-candidates.html>.

17 David A. Graham, “A Link Between Climate Change and ISIS Isn’t Crazy,” *The Atlantic*, July 22, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/07/martin-omalley-isis-climate-change/399131/>.



A relational worldview not only deepens our understanding of the deteriorating cycles of violence we face, but may also contribute to building a more holistic and lasting peace. Such a worldview is foundational to the Christian tradition. In a unique way, Christian theology affirms the unity of all things in Christ (Col 1:17). Through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God is not only mediated through the created world, but also transforms it. In the gospel of John's proclamation that "the Word became flesh" (Jn 1:14), the word "flesh" comes from the Greek *sarx*, which actually "points beyond the humanity of Jesus and us to the world of biological life." Niels Henrik Gregersen refers to this understanding as "deep incarnation."<sup>18</sup> As St. Bonaventure once said, "For as a human being, Christ has something in common with all creatures. With the stone he shares existence; with plants he shares life; with animals he shares sensation. . . . Therefore, all things are said to be transformed in Christ."<sup>19</sup> The entire Earth community is one in Christ, united and made sacred by the indwelling grace of God,<sup>20</sup> and therefore both worthy of love and called to love.

Furthermore, Christian theology not only affirms the deep interrelatedness of all created things, but also their ordered interdependence. Far before contemporary evolutionary and ecological consciousness penetrated the realm of Christian theology, patristic and medieval theologians believed that "God lovingly endowed the world with everything it needs to function internally, and its proper functioning yields the common good of all." St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, maintained that all of the distinct elements of creation "act in relation to one another to achieve the universe's common good."<sup>21</sup> Such an understanding also appears in the writings of an unnamed twelfth-century Cistercian monk who "conveyed deep appreciation of and gratitude for the cooperative interactivity of humans, other species, water, air, and land to achieve their mutual flourishing and the overall sustainability of the monastery site."<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the scriptures repeatedly demonstrate the connection between a healthy earth and peace.<sup>23</sup> In her discussion of Leviticus 25, Dawn Nothwehr summarizes, "The fruitfulness of the land is a sign of the blessing of peace."<sup>24</sup> We exist as part of an interconnected whole, which requires "the healthy functioning of all the parts" in order to be sustained and flourish.<sup>25</sup> The connection between war and environmental degradation becomes clearer in light of this relational perspective, which demands deep attentiveness to the ways in which our actions impact the web of relationships in which we exist.

Violent conflict is both fueled by and exacerbates the environmental crisis. The better we care for our Earth home, the less likely violent conflict will be; the less we rely on violence, the healthier our Earth home will be. "It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected," states Pope Francis. "We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental." Acknowledging the interconnectedness of our crises is the first step to developing the "comprehensive solutions" and "integrated approach" necessary for building peace.<sup>26</sup> The relational worldview basic to the Christian faith constitutes a deep spiritual well from which we may draw to better understand our world and more lovingly and creatively respond to its needs. In Syria and neighboring countries, many forms of creative, nonviolent, grassroots resistance have already taken shape.<sup>27</sup> Especially in a region where military action has repeatedly served

18 Dawn Nothwehr, *Ecological Footprints: An Essential Franciscan Guide for Faith and Sustainable Living* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 118.

19 Nothwehr, *Ecological Footprints*, 320.

20 Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 189.

21 Jame Schaefer, "Cooperating Within the Integrity of Creation," in *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics: Reconstructing Patristic and Medieval Concepts* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 125–27.

22 Schaefer, "Integrity of Creation," 131.

23 Hosea 4:1–5, Psalm 85:9–14, Leviticus 25:18–19 are just a few key examples of this connection.

24 Nothwehr, *Ecological Footprints*, 245–48.

25 McFague, "Different World," 148–49.

26 *LS*, no. 138–39.

27 Maria J. Stephan, "Resisting ISIS," *Sojourners*, April 2015, 14–17; David Cortright, "The Power of Peacebuilding," *Sojourners*, April 2015, 18–19; Kimberly Burge, "Songs Before the Cataclysm," *Sojourners*, April 2015, 44; Anna Lekas Miller, "Wearing the White Hats," *Sojourners*, November 2015, 32.

to exacerbate tension and spawn greater violence, it is these efforts in particular that should be the locus of international support. Flowers do protect us from guns, because their presence is “a sign of the blessing of peace”<sup>28</sup>—a symbol of the life and beauty we must treasure and by which we must move forward.

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28 Nothwehr, 246-247.

## **Betwixt Friday and Sunday: The Place of Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation**

by *Dave Kelly, CPPS, and Anthony Suárez-Abraham*

**A**fter having experienced the long journey of Lent, we are entering a space of the church in which we celebrate the very core of who we are and what we believe. Holy Week takes us from the hosannas of Palm Sunday to the shouts of “crucify him, crucify him” of Good Friday. Ultimately, we experience suffering, death, and the resurrection of Jesus the Christ in this very short week.

If anyone has been a part of the liturgical team at a parish or been involved in any way with parish life, you know that we celebrate Holy Thursday and Good Friday with a powerful liturgy and ritual, but as soon as Good Friday is over, the lilies come out and the sanctuary is decorated for Easter. Holy Saturday, it seems, becomes a liturgical void as we prepare for Easter—it is a marginalized and forgotten in-between space; it becomes, even if unintentionally, an “other.”

A short time ago, Bobby, a twenty-year-old young man who lives right down the block from the Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation (PBMR) Center at Chicago’s “back of the yards” neighborhood, was killed. He was someone everyone knew and loved. He was always “out and about” and always ready to greet people with his infectious smile. His violent death was a shock to the whole community. Outside his immediate family, no one was more devastated than his close friends. The day after the shooting, we held a prayer service at the site of violence; the next day we gathered together with his friends and listened to their anger, grief, and pain. Days later the funeral spoke of the new life given to us by Christ Jesus. It was a resurrection liturgy. For Bobby and his family and friends, the experience of the paschal mystery was very real.

But Bobby’s death still lingers. The sting of his loss remains. The trauma is still visible in the faces of his family and the youth who were his friends. The infectious smile that greeted the community while he was “out and about” is noticeably absent. The experience of Good Friday is still very real; the joy of Easter has not yet come.

Trauma is about the storm that does not go away. “It is a story of the remaining.” Shelly Rambo, in her book *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*, speaks of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the trauma that is a part of the story of post-Katrina New Orleans. Even as people spoke about the new and the rebuilt New Orleans, with

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the obvious hope to bring back tourists and businesses, it was not the reality of the residents of New Orleans's Lower Ninth Ward. The devastation and loss in New Orleans is still there and real, even all these years later. There are still the remnants of washed-out foundations and houses in ruins, scars that are still very evident. The death of more than 1,500 persons along with the countless communities that were shattered is a tarried reminder of the void. The sting of so much loss remains. People keep saying that we have to get over it already. They talk about the storm as something in the past, that it is gone. But the "after the storm" is always here.

Holy Saturday, according to Shelly Rambo, can offer a powerful moment, a space that shares the perspective of those who suffer from trauma. It provides a place to engage in the work of trauma healing—of rediscovering the long and arduous process of peace and reconciliation. Holy Saturday, this in-between or middle ground—the apparent place of "liturgical void"—enables us to embrace the ongoing and very real trauma that marks the lives of so many people like the family, friends, and community of Bobby, even as we long for and believe in the resurrection.

Holy Saturday is where the church must live—embracing the tragedy of Good Friday, even as we lift up and celebrate the hope of resurrected life. For many, the alleluias of Easter are not yet. But to believe that there is the promise of new life, to know that the bereaved are not alone in their pain, is the Easter hope. Gustavo Gutiérrez reminds us that

if the church wishes to be faithful to the God of Jesus Christ, it must become aware of itself from the underneath, from among the poor of this world, the exploited classes, the despised ethnic groups, the marginalized cultures. It must descend into the hell of this world, into communion with the misery, injustice, struggle, and hopes of the wretched of the earth—for 'of such is the kingdom of heaven.'"<sup>1</sup>

The Church must remain at the place of the poor, in the marginal places of trauma, to live in solidarity with the poor and thus become a "Church that is poor and for the poor."

For this reason Holy Saturday is the space where the Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation finds its place to remain with those who have been devastated and/or marginalized by trauma. PBMR started in the jubilee year 2000 in response to the church's call to "open wide the doors to Christ." The ministry of PBMR reaches out to those impacted by violence and/or conflict (the victim, the wrongdoer, and the community); in so doing, it shares in the vision of Pope Francis, who often reminds us that it is the forgotten, in-between, and dark places—the margins—that teach us the great mysteries of love and hope. To encounter the living God, "we must tenderly kiss the wounds of Jesus in our hungry, poor, sick, imprisoned brothers and sisters."<sup>2</sup>

It is the vision of PBMR to give witness to the human dignity of those impacted by violence and/or conflict through radical hospitality, hope, and healing. This is both the vision and the goal of PBMR. In offering hospitality, living in hope, and working through the trauma of so many, we become an alternative community where hospitality and hope are the reality—a community that does not gloss over the trauma, but lives as a new creation in the many places and experiences of trauma.

Radical hospitality is the relentless engagement of youth and families. It is the very intentional stance of arms wide open in welcoming. So often the trauma of violence and abandonment of our youth causes them to surround themselves with a guarded disposition; radical hospitality understands the impact of trauma and meets them where they are, seeking to create a relationship of trust and welcome. It is to see beyond the initial mistrust, the

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1 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History: Selected Writings*, trans. Robert Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 211.

2 Pope Francis's homily on the feast of St. Thomas the Apostle, Santa Marta, Vatican City (July 3, 2013). News.va, <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-at-mass-we-encounter-the-living-god-through-h>.

guarded demeanor and work to create a welcoming space. In Romans 12:13 the apostle Paul implores us to “practice hospitality” *with* the people of God who are in need.

Young persons who grow up in “communities of trauma”—where schools are underfunded and under-resourced, where jobs are scarce, where violence is a daily reality, and where families feel overwhelmed to simply survive—often feel as though they do not belong, disconnected from the hope of what may be a better tomorrow. It is here where PBMR engages in its ministry of hope, a message deeply rooted in the gospel of liberation. It provides an alternate vision to the victims of trauma, restoring in them a sense of meaning and purpose. Hope provides a new framework, setting them free to make choices that impact their lives and the lives of those they care about. A significant dimension of the work of PBMR is that of changing the narrative of disconnection and failure to that of belonging, possibility, and grace-filled promise. We witness to hope by being in solidarity with those who live the affects and effects of violence and/or conflict, calling them friends (cf. Jn 15:12–15), and working to create a better tomorrow with the assurance of things hoped for (cf. Heb 11:1).



Trough PBMR, Fr. Dave Kelly, CPPS (second front left), encourages the youth to engage in the arts as a pathway to healing an reconciliation.

Finally, PBMR seeks to be an agent for healing. Through relentless engagement with the youth and their families, we seek to build a relationship of trust. Within that relationship of trust, we seek to engage in the work of the healing of wounds. Through a restorative justice philosophy, we engage the trauma brought on by violence and suffering. Peacemaking circles, mentoring, and storytelling—these are ways through which PBMR fosters safe spaces to give voice to an individual’s personal suffering. We experience healing as we place our story with the story of others and, ultimately, recognize our story within the story of the paschal mystery, thereby becoming a new creation.

But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body (2 Cor 4:7–10).

For PBMR, the gates of the reign of God are marked by the many marginal spaces between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. We walk in the place between the “already, and not yet,” accompanying those victimized by trauma who have yet to experience fully the hope of the resurrection. In this way we participate in the church’s *missio Dei* to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free (Lk 4:18).

Holy Saturday embraces the reality of the suffering and the pain among us, refusing to gloss over the trauma. It is not a linear moment in which we trudge through the pain, thereby putting it behind us. It is a sacred place in which we move between and betwixt the horror of Good Friday and the alleluias of Easter Sunday. Holy Saturday is the space and the place of PBMR.

## God Writes with an Ordinary Pen

by Deborah L. Wilhelm

Once I stole a purple pen from the checkout lane at our local Safeway store. Waiting in line with Mom, I'd noticed a basketful of them displayed tantalizingly, objects of function and beauty, alongside the bubble gum, batteries, and flashbulbs. Pens! Purple! Each with a purple feather! Although I was too young to know the term "impulse purchase," I immediately experienced the impulse to own a purple pen. On a second impulse, I asked Mom to buy me one. Mom declined. So, on a third impulse, I simply slipped a purple pen into the pocket of my dress when no one was looking and carried it home. Then I hid it in my sock drawer.

The joys of ownership weren't as joyous as I'd expected, however. I'd stolen that pen, after all, and I couldn't let anyone see it, so "my" new pen lived almost exclusively in a dresser drawer, nestled among the ankle socks. Worse, I couldn't write with it. Nobody I knew owned a purple pen—so any visible purple penmanship would certainly arouse questions that I wouldn't be able to answer. And naturally, as a five-year-old, I didn't hide it very skillfully, so Mom found out. The pen and my deed were pulled out of the drawer and into the unblinking spotlight of discovery. Alas, discovery was only the beginning: Mom marched me straight back to the Safeway store where, crying many fearful tears (*Do five-year-olds go to hell?*) I had to return the purple pen, apologizing to the store manager and promising never to steal again. The manager was very kind, and I hereby thank him publicly for not calling the authorities and having me hauled away.

Many years later, the assembly members in my parish laughed somewhat uncomfortably when as a preacher I described my larceny and its embarrassing consequences. Afterward, probably a third of the one hundred fifty or so people present stopped to confess to me the name of the thing that *they'd* stolen when they were young (or some, not-so-young), how they'd been caught (or had gotten away with it), and what had happened as a result. Children listened in amazement at the door to the church as their moms said things like, "With me, it was that huge box of sixty-four Crayola crayons, and I can't figure out why Dad didn't see it bulging under my coat!" or grandfathers wryly shared, "My mother practically caught fire when she found that stolen candy." Others mentioned cheating on a spelling test, lying about attending a forbidden movie, or blaming a sibling for misdeeds (broken glassware, anyone?) they'd committed. People spoke of lessons learned. Forgiveness requested and received. Healing, restoration. Their young ones stood by, saying little, absorbing much.

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I was a new preacher then, just beginning to learn a vital preaching precept: Each person's life is—and is *not*—unique. It is—and is *not*—about that particular person. Perhaps this very moment, in fact, you're remembering your own "purple pen" event. Our individual human experiences are specific appearances of a bigger thing called Experience. Our little stories? Local manifestations of the Big Story. Most preachers understand this intellectually, but the concept has powerful implications for the word shared at worship. Preachers' words reach out to people not because they're original, but rather because they're *not* original; they have meaning not because they're profound, but rather because they're ordinary. Local, specific language brings the very notion of "story" to its ultimate inclusiveness—meaning that the carefully prepared example, illustration, or little story connects to the Big Story and, if spoken well, to the One Story: God's Story.

The Great Purple Pen Debacle or any appeal to shared emotion, insight, or experience acts as a local, specific point of access to help us connect our postmodern lives, right here, right now, to the life of the God who is present in our scriptures, our assemblies, our communities, all of creation. This appeal need not be a historical saga. It need not be about the preacher. It need not even be a full-blown narrative. It simply needs to invite the listener.

It seems so basic. Nevertheless, as we collectively mourn the loss of homogenously well-catechized liturgical assemblies—if such assemblies ever actually existed—consider a (local, specific) detail that shows why this concept is critical and liberating. My theology students at the Loyola Institute for Ministry are currently studying the history and development of Catholic doctrine, in particular the full divinity and full humanity of Jesus Christ. As the students examine the scriptures, the early Christian era, and two millennia of church history, they've become adept at articulating an intellectual understanding of what the church teaches about Christ's nature. They know what Augustine, Aquinas, and the *Catechism* say about Jesus Christ. But they're struggling with the idea of why these statements matter. The question that they're wrestling with is the one that issues a local, specific invitation: *So what?*

*So what*, indeed. If theology graduate students struggle with the concept, how much more so our assemblies! We say it matters, for example, that Jesus Christ is "consubstantial with the Father." These are not mere words. Yet the people of God may nonetheless find themselves at worship repeating memorized statements that they neither have confidence in nor understand. Their minds may wander throughout the Liturgy of the Word because they've heard the parable of the talents a hundred times, and the preacher has preached it a hundred times, and none of it seems to connect to the joys and sorrows of their lives right now, when the stakes are much higher than a stolen pen. The unemployed recent college grad, the newly released inmate, the young bride aglow with new love, the child bullied at school, the financial planner who's just made a huge commission and purchased a shiny new Lexus, the elderly widow craving human contact, the person in the last row who doesn't speak a word of the language: Why should they care about Jesus's divinity and humanity, or the Trinity, or those infamous talents? God's people at worship may stand, sit, kneel, make all the proper responses, but wonder silently what they would never ask aloud: "Does this stuff actually matter? Is it even real?"

Worse, they may do all these things and *not* wonder.

One dear friend, a Roman Catholic priest and an excellent preacher, helps voice their concern: "How does this 2,000-year-old passage remain ever old yet ever new in my life? Not like learning a lesson from the past . . . which is awesome, but real Emmanuel 'God with us,' God with me . . . right here, right now in my life story and in the life story of this worshipping community?"<sup>1</sup> Yes, this is the question. People at liturgy—ministers and assembly members alike—are hungry for God.

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1 Roy Shelly, email message to the author, February 10, 2016.

Enter the preacher with the invitation. Our scriptures tell local, specific stories about local, specific people (like Moses, Esther, Job, Elizabeth, Mary, Paul) that draw other local, specific people (like you, me, that horrible driver who won't let your car into the lane) into the One True Story, the story of God's creative energy and God's constant, loving, saving intervention in human history. Indeed, God came here, as my friend says, the "real Emmanuel," to show us the power of the communion of divinity and humanity. God, in all God's divinity, came to humanity as one local, specific person.

Repetition, however, along with cultural and geographical distance, the changes of two thousand years of human experience, and (it must be said) uninformed or uncaring interpretation have all complicated people's interactions with God's word. But the God who breathed life into our scriptures—and is still found there—is the same God who breathed life into us—and is still found here. Preachers are called to interpret the scriptures over and over again in the ever-changing light of our lives, to look for God in places both obvious and obscure, to notice God's presence, and to share that presence with others.

These responsibilities belong to all Christians, of course, but at public prayer it is preachers who invite and accompany others in seeking, noticing, acting. We use words, because words are what we have, but we do so with the knowledge that human language can only approach mystery. As preachers, we will likely never say anything truly original about God, because God is Origin. Nor will we likely say anything truly revelatory about God, because God is Revelation. We can only do what Catherine Vincie terms "naming toward God."<sup>2</sup> As Vincie says, "Our words, images, and symbols can lay claim to being truthful, but they cannot claim to express the fullness of our experiences. If this is the case with even the most basic human experiences of creaturely life, how much more so is our experience of divine mystery?"

No preacher can or should say all that can be said, which relieves us of a great burden. We have one story, told many ways—and thus with small truths, we help illumine the way to Truth. Our words invite others to see that God really is among us, to connect people individually and corporately with that "real Emmanuel," and to invite them to take that relationship out the door of the church to breathe life into the world. Every example, every detail, every story, every purple pen, is an invitation to participate in God's redemptive plan together.

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<sup>2</sup> Catherine Vincie, *Celebrating Divine Mystery: A Primer in Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 85.



Daniel Castelo. *Pneumatology: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015. xiv, 144 pp. \$27.95. Paperback. ISBN: 9780567006806.

Reviewed by Mary Frohlich, RSCJ  
Catholic Theological Union

In this short book, theology professor and Free Methodist elder Daniel Castelo not only strives to incisively review the key issues that have surrounded Christian theology of the Holy Spirit, but also to offer his own creative proposal for how to resolve some important ecumenical conundrums. The first chapter sets the stage with a discussion of reasons for the marginalization of the Spirit, focusing especially on its indeterminacy, transpersonal character, and tendency to play on or outside the boundaries of both language and life. The second chapter provides a whirlwind tour of biblical “tags, patterns and themes” for giving language to the activity of the Spirit. Their diversity and lack of easy coherence are regarded by some as a problem, but Castelo frames this as a gift that funds Christian responsiveness to diverse times, places, and situations. In the third chapter he succinctly reviews the doctrinal baseline provided by the pneumatological controversies and resolutions of the first six centuries.

In the remaining chapters Castelo’s own focus, which is on the centrality of the living Spirit in Christian life, comes more strongly to the fore. Chapter four deals with the Spirit’s place in creation and cosmology, seeking a way beyond the confrontation between metaphysical naturalism and interventionist supernaturalism. In his view, both parties to this dyad contribute to an assumption that the Spirit is fundamentally irrelevant to ordinary life. His solution is to put the Spirit back at the center of creation, thus recognizing that “Nature is Spirit-graced to its core so that what is fundamentally characteristic of nature is that it is Spirit-related.” (74) He adds that this view makes it possible to believe that people really can be “reconstituted and made anew by the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.” (79)

Chapter five proposes that the Spirit is mediated through what William J. Abraham called “canons,” here defined as “various materials, persons, and practices . . . that are set apart by God’s Spirit so as to help the church grow and mature in its terrestrial sojourning.” (83–84) Scripture is obviously a primary example, but Castelo wants to move beyond a view of “inspiration” that makes it a property of the text itself. Instead, he presents the Spirit as involved in every moment of the scriptural event, from production to inclusion in the canon to translation to biblical criticism to preaching to personal meditation. Through the diversity of meanings that are generated in this way, the Spirit works incessantly for the maturing of human faith.

Chapter six deals with differences among sacramental, evangelical, and Pentecostal views of “baptism in the Spirit.” There is a basic incompatibility in these three views, yet Castelo suggests that all may be able to find consensus in concern for the lifelong maturation and transformation of Christians—what Paul called “being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). Finally, the concluding chapter explores the classic theme of discernment of the Spirit. The author argues strongly that only an “epicletic”

self—that is, a receptively worshipping self who is actively invoking the Spirit—can discern in the true sense. This excludes approaches to discernment that rely on formulas; the example given is the “Wesleyan quadrilateral” which involves sequentially consulting scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.

This text is styled as a “guide for the perplexed,” but it is probably not the kind of book one would hand to a non-theologically educated general reader or to a brand-new theology student. While it does provide a succinct introduction to classical and contemporary issues in the field of pneumatology, the material presented is at times fairly dense as well as subtle. Also, especially in the latter chapters, Castelo is not just introducing issues, but also arguing for his own creative pneumatological proposals. These proposals are fresh and compelling, and they appear to have potential to be an important contribution to ecumenical conversations on the theology of the Holy Spirit. For those in ministry, Castelo’s insistence that theology must keep its focus on the living Spirit and its role in Christian life makes his perspective quite relevant for pastoral and spiritual purposes. In view of this, I would recommend the book quite highly for upper-level theology courses, as well as for those who have completed a theological course of studies and are interested in a short but highly stimulating reflection on the elusive topic of the Holy Spirit.

Sarah M. Moses. *Ethics and the Elderly: The Challenge of Long-Term Care*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015. lix, 206 pp. \$38.00. Paperback. ISBN: 9781626981317.

Reviewed by Thomas Nairn, OFM  
Catholic Health Association of the United States

As the title indicates, this book attempts two tasks—to articulate an ethical stance adequate to the contemporary experience of aging and to apply this ethic to long-term care in the United States. Moses emphasizes that contemporary Christian ethics can no longer view elderly persons as merely passive recipients of the care of others but rather must understand them as agents in their own right.

Moses articulates her ethical stance by recourse to the principles of dignity, equality, mutuality, and participation (148). She develops her argument by first describing the status quo regarding aging in the United States, articulating the inadequacies regarding the way in which our culture continues to deal with the issue of aging. She then offers two models that can serve as alternatives to the present situation. The first is the outreach to elderly persons developed by the Community of San Egidio, a lay community founded in Rome and now present in several countries that has chosen care for the elderly as one of its ministries. It bases this outreach on a highly developed notion of friendship. The second is the Green House Project, a new concept in long-term care begun in the United States that attempts to change the culture of long-term care by means of greater participation on the part of residents.

She continues her argument by moving to the Bible, using both Hebrew and Christian scriptures to demonstrate that the transition into old age does not “entail the notion of moving into a period in which one no longer had any purpose or responsibility” (101). She maintains that an ethic informed by the biblical witness “must demand an approach to long-term care that reflects the insight that the elderly . . . are participating *subjects* within the community (109, author’s emphasis).

She bolsters this biblical understanding with insights from a wide range of contemporary theological perspectives, from Karl Barth to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Finally, the book returns to the insights developed from the Community of San Egidio and the Green House Project and calls upon churches to go beyond models of care that keep the elderly in roles of need and dependence and to ensure that the elderly remain moral subjects with their own aspirations and responsibilities, emphasizing that old age remains a time of growth and development.

The book is especially successful when it analyzes the external factors, often systemic, that contribute to unnecessary disempowering of elderly persons, which in turn diminishes their participation in Church and society. It reminds the Christian community of its responsibilities to ensure the dignity and participation of the elderly in the Christian community and in society in general.

The book is less successful in responding to those factors internal to the life of the elderly person, often arising from diseases, both physical and cognitive. These diseases can often contribute to the isolation and marginalization of elderly persons. The author mentions these conditions several times but does not actually develop an adequate ethical response to them. For example, the author discusses Alzheimer's disease on only relatively few occasions. She acknowledges that such issues are "disquieting." It would considerably strengthen her argument, however, if she were to explain more fully how her principles of dignity, equality, mutuality, and participation can apply to situations where elderly persons are unable to exercise their agency—to articulate or even understand their "aspirations or responsibilities" because of physical or cognitive incapacity. To me, the crucial issue is how we are able to ensure respect for the dignity of elderly people in these circumstances.

In spite of this limitation, this is an important book that should be read by all in health care. It challenges the way things have normally been done, and it places the question of elder care within the ethical context of social justice, asking how the Christian community and the greater society can truly respect the dignity of their elderly members.

Claire E. Wolfteich, ed. *Invitation to Practical Theology: Catholic Voices and Visions*. New York: Paulist Press, 2014. 386 pp. \$29.95. Paperback. ISBN: 9780809148905.

Reviewed by Christina Zaker  
Catholic Theological Union

*Invitation to Practical Theology: Catholic Voices and Visions*, edited by Claire E. Wolfteich, brings together an outstanding collection of voices on practical theology. The book seeks to provide a Catholic perspective on the field of practical theology that recognizes the deep traditions of Catholic practical theology as well as to engage and expand the current praxis. The intention of the book is to open the lines of discussion around a broad approach to what constitutes practical theology and particularly Catholic practical theology in North America.

The chapters are concentrated in three sections: Part I introduces the reader to practical theology and the Catholic context. Part II gives voice to current practices and conversations from various contexts in order to showcase how practical theology can be applicable to a wide audience. Part III focuses on the teaching and research aspects of practical theology and lays the foundation for future research and development in the field of Catholic practical theology.

Part I provides a substantial introduction to the field of practical theology. Students who are new to practical theology or theologians of different fields looking to see how they might dialogue with practical theologians will find this section invaluable. The three essays in this section detail a historical look at Catholic practical theology, and they offer an introduction to important considerations and terms of the field.

Part II is replete with well-crafted essays from a range of disciplines that highlight the Catholic contribution to practical theology. With a focus on the day-to-day practices of life and faith, essays on such diverse subjects as liturgy, aesthetics in Latino/a popular religion, family solidarity and missiology put the fabric of everyday life into conversation with theology. Each essay is the contribution of a theologian exploring the practical side of his or her discipline. Although these authors may be liturgists, systematic theologians, ethicists or writers trained in spirituality, in this volume they are all practical theologians and they offer the reader more than a few roadmaps to engage any discipline in critical dialogue with Catholic practical theology.

Part III focuses attention on the area of teaching and research in practical theology. This is the area most in need of development in the Catholic context. The essays here attempt to guide the reader to take up the challenge in order to give Catholic practical theology more credibility in the wider theological conversation. Wolfteich ends the volume pointing to this area as the piece that needs careful development and attention. “The time is ripe for a more concerted focus on practical theology as a rigorous field of research that bridges academy, church and culture” (340).

*Invitation to Practical Theology: Catholic Voices and Vision* is a valuable collection of essays that work well as an introductory text for students and academics alike. The language is accessible and clear and the host of contributors, all prominent in their own fields, lends credibility to the ongoing conversation of Catholic practical theology. Throughout the text is the basic assertion of practical theology: these conversations must make sense and have an impact on the day-to-day life of the average believer. As Wolfeich concludes; “this book argues persuasively that practical theology is actually essential to *traditio*, the passing on of a tradition” (331). *Invitation to Practical Theology* is an excellent resource for Catholics who hope to pass on the rich traditions of faith, and for those interested in the Catholic voice in the widening conversation of practical theology.