JOURNAL INFORMATION

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In print, we had just over 400 subscriptions in a handful of countries. I think you will agree that our experiment has been a resounding success! Please feel free to email any of the editors with comments or suggestions about how we can make our journal better.
Tonight, as on every night, powerful instruments of research receiving radio and light waves search out stars far away. However, they are examining stars in a new way. They are looking for planets circling around those stars. Beginning in 1992, planets outside of our solar system were detected. Those celestial objects are now called “exoplanets.” We have entered into a new world, one that is indeed a vast universe.

New Planets and Extraterrestrials

There is an extensive search for exoplanets. In less than twenty years, over 300 planets have been discovered outside of our solar system. In 2009, NASA launched a space observatory named Kepler to study 155,000 suns and to search out possible planets. A recent announcement from NASA says that Kepler, after a search of two years, has found 715 new planets. Among those planets in our galaxy a considerable number of them resemble Earth. Moreover, some circle their stars in a zone more or less conducive to life. Finding a planet in “a habitable zone” around a star like our Sun is a significant step towards finding Earth-like planets. Astronomers point out that planets resembling Earth and so more likely to have intelligent life are not rare and frequently are not so distant from us.

Thomas Franklin O’Meara, O.P., is the author of Vast Universe: Extraterrestrials and Christian Revelation (Michael Glazier, 2012). A past president of the Catholic Theological Society of America, he has been a visiting professor at Wartburg Lutheran Seminary (Dubuque), St. Joseph’s Theological Institute (Cedara, South Africa), Boston College, and Catholic Theological Union (Chicago).
North of San Francisco, a radio telescope with forty-two dishes has been set up; there will be 350 dishes when the Allen Telescope Array is complete. One of its purposes is to search for life in outer space. Two years ago a new telescope in Europe began the examination of 120,000 stars.¹

How many stars in one galaxy? Twenty years ago, the estimate was 500 million stars in one galaxy. That rose upwards to 5 billion, 10 billion suns? Now the estimate is 100 billion to 400 billion in a galaxy. So many galaxies, each with billions of solar systems, can only increase the likelihood of distant civilizations with intelligence. Just in our Milky Way, whose number of estimated stars varies from 100 to 400 billion, some astronomers have estimated four billion exoplanets. The universe is indeed vast.²

Some years ago a group of scientists produced an exercise in probability: the Drake Equation. It looks at: a) the percentage of galaxies with the right kinds of stars suited to forming planets; b) the percentage of planets hospitable to life; c) the percentage conducive to animal life; d) the minimal percentage of planets suited to intelligence; e) and the percentage of those communicating at this time. In terms of the Drake Equation, Michael D. Lemonick concludes: “If the average civilization does in fact endure for between one thousand and one million years, then the number of [communicating and intelligent] civilizations in one galaxy is between one thousand and one million.”³ This is just in one galaxy.

Extraterrestrials and the Christian Faith

A theologian would not presume to decide whether there are other intelligent beings in the universe or not. Neither theologians nor astronomers should dictate to divine intelligence and power what it has fashioned or will initiate. Does the Christian faith insist that only one salvation history exists—The one recorded in the Bible? Is Jesus so central a figure that only he and his Middle Eastern religious world can reveal God?

The subject of the following pages, a quite speculative exo-theology, is creatures living on other planets orbiting other suns. To be involved with the divine, the creature needs to be intelligent and free. Also, we are concerned here with intelligent beings in our material universe. “Extra-terrestrials” have some form of body, some matter; we are not concerned with beings without corporeality spirits, traditionally called “angels.” Further, there would be countless forms of animal and vegetable life in the universe; we are interested in them if they have mind and freedom.

Extraterrestrials amid Nature and Grace

Are there intelligent creatures on planets orbiting stars in our galaxy? Are there only a few such races? Are there many of them?

Three topics appear constant and basic in religion. They are also very much the subject of the Christian faith. These areas underlying much of religion are: a) the knowing person, b) the person’s relationship to God, c) sin, and evil. This triad is the format in which human beings on Earth ponder what in hope and ritual is called religion. It offers an initial approach to the new topic of the condition of extraterrestrials in terms of creation and redemption.

¹ French astronomers attempt to picture in color exoplanets according to their relationships to their stars locations in Guillaume Ducrot, “Les Exoplanètes les plus spectaculaires de 2013, Collection Science & Espace. Exoplanètes, les nouveaux mondes (Naintre: Diverti, 2014), 29-39. A position for ethics and religion at the Centre National des Études Spaciales in France is held by Jacques Arnould; see his publications in French and in English such as Icarus’ Second Chance. The Basis and Perspectives of Space Ethics (Vienna/New York: Springer, 2011) and Une brève histoire de l’Espace (Paris: J. C. Béhar, 2011).
² Recently, in Paris, the Institut pour l’Astrophysique de Paris offered the hypothesis that there are more planets than stars (suns) in a galaxy.
1) *The Knowing Person.* We on Earth should be open to varieties of creatures, imagined or barely glimpsed to unusual races. Carl Sagan observed: “There is no reason to think that there is only one path to intelligent life. The selective advantage of intelligence is clearly high.” For Christian faith and theology, the natures of other intelligent creatures, when they exist, would be open to variation, dramatic variation. Like everything in the universe, their forms comes from a divine wisdom and love that are themselves its only limits. The extent of the universe suggests a variety of ways of life and so of intelligent life. For instance, for inhabitants of a planet around a distant sun, their personal and religious life might be timeless; the divine presence would dwell among people without story or history. Time lies not in their happy nature. There can be different kinds of minds, cultural energies, and temporalities.

2) *Grace.* Christian faith is not about God’s existence. Christian faith teaches about God’s life and love touching human beings in a special way. Christians call that special contact with God “the kingdom of God,” “life in the Holy Spirit, or “grace.” What religions call revelation and grace are expressions of a special presence of God. Words like “revelation” and “grace” attempt to present facets of the divine life offered silently to us. In this regard, Christian faith poses a further question: do intelligent creatures draw forth from God’s free plan some special contact? Does God relate in a personal way only to us on Earth? There might be a number of modes of supernatural life with God: a variety of God’s intimate life shared with intelligent creatures in a billion galaxies. Is it likely that there are millions of bands on the spectrum of natural life but only one form of created supernatural life? After all, a spiritual and graced existence is higher and more open to variety. Or, do other intelligent beings have in their psychological and biological energies no longing for fulfillment from beyond. They would have no aspiration to life after death and no longing for a special contact from God. On the other hand, would not this or that intelligent creature receive some special life and information, grace and revelation, from God? Roch Kereszty concludes,

> Considering the consistency and unity of what we already know about God’s plan of salvation...a perfect participation in God’s life through the Son in the Holy Spirit, we may assume with some probability the same supernatural goal for all other possible spiritual beings.\(^5\)

3) *Evil.* Towards kinds and degrees of evil too there must be openness and imagination. Evil does not exist necessarily. Being and life and intelligence are good; evil is not their necessary companion. If evil exists elsewhere in the cosmos, it might be of various kinds. A race might be involved in natural disasters, in illnesses—or they might be free of all of them. Sin in one race might not weaken the personality extensively (as it does on Earth); or it might touch individuals but not the collectivity (as Earth’s transmission of original sin does). It might not infect an entire species on one planet. It might be that in the universe a creature’s free choice for serious evil is an exception. Much of science fiction finds creatures coming to Earth from elsewhere inevitably violent. Movies and television depict extraterrestrials as deadly viruses or as huge flying machines resembling dinosaurs. And also, writings on science not infrequently speak of an almost inevitable de-

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5 Roch Kereszty, “Christ and Possible Other Universes and Extraterrestrial Intelligent Beings,” Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology (New York: Alba House, 1991), 380. Some theological traditions like the Franciscan school or churches in Eastern Orthodoxy hold that intelligence tends to call forth from a freely generous God some sharing in divine life beyond the forms of being. Other, largely Western, theologies can imagine persons living in a purely natural world, living without grace.
cline for any intelligent civilization into conflict and self-destruction. There is no need to think that in the cosmos evil is more prominent than grace. How curious that in these considerations, art and science would be pessimistic and faith optimistic.

So, in each of the three basic religious areas, humans should be open to varieties of life and existence.

**Four Theologians**

There are a number of Christian theologians who through the centuries, have discussed this topic. Four stand out.

1) *Origen*. In Alexandria, the center of the intellectual world of Hellenism and then the Roman Empire, in the early third century, Origen taught philosophy and science in order to prepare people for his Christian theology.\(^6\) His view of the universe placed its beginnings in God’s creation of a vast number of minds destined to enjoy a divine happiness. The Creator first produced free intelligences and then, in a distinct second stage, matter and non-rational creatures. All the rational creatures—they became angels, devils, stars, and humans—were created together and as equals. They were absorbed in the contemplation of God, but their attention wandered; they more or less lost interest in celestial life and fell away from their pristine state. They fell in different degrees, and the degree of the fall gave diversity to angels and demons in modes of existence, and it diversified human beings in their sensual animality. The preexistent intelligence destined to serve as the soul of Jesus born in Bethlehem did not fall. Joined to the Word of God, this intelligence—the man Jesus—is the instrument by which the Word on Earth explains sin and grace and teaches men and women how to pass through the sufferings of Earth, its darkness, and even death into future spirituality. A journey forward to God is offered to all; souls ascend through various heavens, living and learning in order to become more knowledgeable and balanced. Origen affirmed an *apocatastasis*, the happy resolution of all intelligences in the Word, who on Earth is the risen Jesus Christ. The end mirrors the beginning.

In the universe, the Logos works salvation in several forms for several worlds. He becomes a human being for humanity, and he becomes an angel for each kind of angel. The created and personal reality (angels too have some slight form of a body) united to the Logos acquires an angelic condition among the angels just as among terrestrials it acquires a human condition.\(^7\) Thus Origen gave a cosmic variety to the incarnation. The Logos moves from nature to nature as redemption operates throughout the universe.

2) *Thomas Aquinas*. A millennium after Origen, Thomas Aquinas fashioned an original theological system for his cultural age, one formed not by Middle Platonism but by Aristotelian science. Aristotle rejected an infinite universe and a plurality of worlds, maintaining that the universe was composed of a finite amount of matter where the activity, purpose, and symmetry of nature were central. Aquinas also affirmed one universe. A single unity for all beings finds support from science as well as from theology. He treated the topic of one or many worlds as an issue in metaphysics and physics and not in Christian theology. Cosmologies asserting many worlds had two problems: first, they located the origin of the universe in chance, and second, they neglected wisdom’s order. Aquinas was considering not other units within a single universe, a world much greater than the Ptolemaic system like a gathering of galaxies, but other universes with no connection to the stars and planets of the Milky Way or to each other. Plural worlds meant a number of worlds with no single source, no focal point, and no relationships among the parts.

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In looking at Aquinas' theological directions and attempting to think along with him, it is a mistake to stop with this or that conclusion from medieval philosophy. Otto Pesch concludes, “Anyone who knows a little of St. Thomas is never safe from making surprising discoveries.” A few of Aquinas’ principles offer supportive insights for considering extraterrestrials theologically. God is without limits and is intelligent and eminently active. “Comprehending all in itself, it contains being as an infinite and indeterminate sea of reality.” In God are many ideas, ideas for everything that was made, will be made, or that could be made. God is a creator-artist who, out of the ideas of all realities, freely leads forth beings into their actuality. The divine motive for all its actions towards beings is goodness. Generosity comes from that goodness and is realized in love pouring itself outward by bestowing existence on others. Love carries the divine plans into external realizations. “God is a living fountain, one not diminished in spite of its continuous flow outwards.” God intends a universe that is diverse and also coherently empowered.

God has produced things in existence to communicate his goodness to creatures and to represent that goodness in them. Because it [that goodness] cannot be represented efficaciously by one creature alone, he has created many diverse things so that in various ways what one does not present as from the divine goodness another does.

Intelligent creatures are the summit of the universe; they exist on Earth and in countless spiritual (angelic) forms. Intelligent creatures reflect the divine in a special way, and as such they are the image of God mentioned by Genesis, an image found in the ability to know and to be free. Angels and earthlings are part of a wider polity of divine life, beings with whom God can be friends.

The divine motive for creation is God's goodness diffusing itself. That is also the motive for what is called incarnation. Incarnation means that a divine person (from the community of three) without losing its identity becomes an individual creature. In Jesus of Nazareth the mission of the Word has a particular intensity: a silent presence of God brings a special grounding of Jesus’ reality. “The incarnation was suitable to God because of the infinitely high level of his goodness intent on human salvation.” While the Word and Jesus are one, the life of Jesus on Earth does not curtail the divine Word's being and activity: “The power of a divine person is infinite and cannot be limited to anything created.” The universe is vast. Did Aquinas think there could be other incarnations? “But it is impossible for the Uncreated to be circumscribed by the created. Whether we look at the divine power itself or its personhood (the term of the union [with Jesus]), the divine person can assume more than one human being.” All three persons can become incarnate because incarnation is only one aspect of an endlessly rich divine power, and so each divine person could be incarnate (beyond Jesus) in further creatures. Aquinas observed that the species of nature, including the human race, have precise properties and these influence the activities of divine grace in the human person. Specificity and diversity in nature and grace would be true in other intelligent peoples. Given

9 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I, 13, 11.
10 Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I, 14, 8. Aquinas spoke of “the art of divine wisdom and the realm of divine goodness” in Summa Theologiae III, 1, 1, 3.
12 Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I, 47, 3. “Consequently it is the entire universe that participates in and represents the goodness of God more than any one creatures” (see also I, 47, 1).
13 Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I, 93, 4 and 5.
14 Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I, 20, 2, 3.
16 Aquinas, Summa Theologiae III, 7, 3.
17 Aquinas, Summa Theologiae III, 7, 3 Culturally and religiously each incarnation would have something proper drawn from the world where it was incarnate in a creature (Summa Theologiae III, 8, 3).
Aquinas’ emphasis upon higher forms of life, is it not likely that the universe contains a variety of them? A variety of civilizations with billions of persons in the universe suggests a variety in number and in kind of intense relationships with the Trinity.

3. Guillaume Vaurouillon. A Franciscan living in the first sixty years of the fifteenth century and taught at the University of Paris and serving as a theological expert at the Council of Basel drew on the Franciscan tradition to ponder openly creation and incarnation. Vaurouillon began by saying that God could create a vast number of worlds, worlds like our or worlds better than this one. “Infinite worlds, more perfect than this one, lie hid in the mind of God...it is possible that the species of each of these worlds is distinguished from those of our world.”

He did not think, however, that information about those worlds would ever reach Earth, for they are too far away. The insightful theologian in the 1440s pondered what would revelation, sin, and a redeemer be on another planet. “If it be inquired whether people existing on that world have sinned as Adam sinned, I answer, No. They would not have contracted sin because their species is not from Adam.”

What is the role of Jesus Christ? Vaurouillon’s answer was nuanced. If different kinds of sin are hypothetical, then redemption is also hypothetical.

As to the question whether Christ by dying on this Earth could redeem the inhabitants of another world, I answer that he was able to do this not only for our world but for infinite worlds. But it would not be fitting for him to go to another world to die again.

He means that the Incarnate Word by its power can exercise wider redemption, but that Jesus the man does not belong in other worlds.

His conclusion is that neither our sin nor our redemptive grace, nor our redeemer, has a role beyond Earth. How interesting and surprising; already at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance, we have a fundamental theology of extraterrestrials.

4. Karl Rahner. The Jesuit theologian already in 1974 mentioned what he called “the possible history on another star of Geist,” of intelligence and freedom. We can conceive of creatures on other “stars” who are corporeal and intellectual, that is, like human beings or similar to them. The gigantic number of stars argues for other intelligent civilizations. Rahner in a challenging way asked: Why in worlds where life is a potentiality or a reality would God stop the development of life short of intelligent creatures. The possibility of the development of life to the point of intelligent consciousness cannot be excluded.

It would be excessively anthropomorphic to view the Creator-God as directing cosmic evolution at another location in the universe to the point where the immediate possibility of free and intellectual life is present—but then casually breaking off that development.

For Rahner, the active, self-seeking person draws forth from God a richer contact. Would there not be for each civilization of extraterrestrials revelation and grace as the special self-communication of God?

19 Quattuor librorum Sententiarum Compendium venerabilis patris fratris Guillermi Vorrillonis Lib. 1, dist. xliv, folio 105.  
20 Quattuor librorum Sententiarum Compendium venerabilis patris fratris Guillermi Vorrillonis Lib. 1, dist. xliv, folio 105.  
21 Quattuor librorum Sententiarum Compendium venerabilis patris fratris Guillermi Vorrillonis Lib. 1, dist. xliv, folio 105.  
We presuppose, therefore, that the goal of the world consists in God’s communicating himself to it. We presuppose that the whole dynamism which God has instituted at the very heart of the world’s becoming by [its] self-transcendence (but beyond what constitutes nature) is always meant as the beginning and first step toward this divine self-communication.24

Are not intelligent beings normally or always invited to God’s special friendship? Rahner expects that a special presence of grace comes to others even as he recognizes the religious independence of other planets.

One could say that these other corporeal and intelligent creatures in a meaningful way also have a supernatural determination within an immediacy to God (despite the totally unmerited reality of grace). At the same time we can conclude nothing about the history of freedom of these creatures.25

Christian theology should accept the limitations of its religion and revelation as they are on Earth. He concludes:

A theologian can hardly say more about this issue than to indicate that Christian revelation has as its goal the salvation of the human race; it does not give answers to questions which do not in an important way actually touch the realization of this salvation in freedom.26

The four theologians just presented have expressed a modesty about what Christian revelation and theology might say on the topic of extraterrestrials. And too, they tend to look at the three basic topics of the knowing person, grace, and evil.

Conclusion

As an amateur, I read in spectacularly illustrated books about clusters of 30,000 stars or clusters of galaxies each with billions of stars. It seems more and more likely that because of the size of the universe, there is somewhere another race of knowing and free people. The reflections above, however, lead to a further challenge. It would seem probable that there are many such civilizations. Would there not be hundreds, thousands of many civilizations of intelligence and culture in the past, the present, and the future? Billions of galaxies with billions of solar systems seem to make this inevitable. It is not our responsibility on Earth to limit the divine power or to manage the number of created beings or the kinds of divine presence in galactic planets. The Trinity is not afraid of the cosmos it created.

25 Rahner, “Naturwissenschaft und vernünftiger Glaube,” 59
The purpose of this lecture is simply to focus on some conflicts in the contemporary church from a cultural anthropological perspective. Rarely have anthropologists turned their intrusive gaze on the cultural realities of the church. Today I dare to do so. Anthropology, as Raymond Firth said, “is an inquisitive, challenging, uncomfortable discipline, questioning established positions…peering into underlying interests, if not destroying fictions and empty phrases…at least exposing them.” Let us see if I can live up to Firth’s description.

I begin by defining what I mean by myth and narrative. I will then focus on one function of myth and narrative, namely its ability to legitimize the way people act. This will be illustrated with examples from what is happening within our contemporary church. Finally, I will seek to explain why binary oppositions within myths evoke particular, ideological conflicts within the church.

First, let me define this slippery word: culture. Only those people who assume that the Church is a pure spirit can claim that it does not form a culture and cultures. It is no misty entity. Inaccurate perceptions of and defective attitudes to culture, and therefore myth analysis, have led, and continue to lead, to bad theology, as well as faulty pastoral policies and practices. Culture is a pattern of meanings encased in a network of symbols, myths, narratives and rituals, created by individuals and subdivisions, as they struggle to respond to the competitive pressures of power and limited resources in a rapidly globalizing and fragmenting world. Culture instructs its adherents about what is considered to be the correct, orderly way to feel, think, and behave. Note the emphasis on order and feeling. Culture is 90 percent feeling!

The key word I wish to concentrate on is myth. Father Louis Luzbetak was right. “The study of myth...is as difficult as it is important.” The knowledge of local mythology can “provide contact points for the transmission of...
the Christian message [and]...myths can help locate points of conflict between the Gospel and traditional ways of thinking and behaving.” There is very little philosophical reflection on the importance of myths simply because philosophers rarely take myths seriously. Likewise contemporary theologians and historians, despite the volumes they have written, seem hesitant to ponder the importance of myths in analyzing Vatican II documents and their impact on our contemporary ecclesiastical cultures.

Myths

Myths, according to anthropologist Malinowski, are charters for social organization, that is they describe why things are the way they are and why people should continue to act in the same way. Myths are value-impregnated beliefs or stories. They are the glue that binds people together at the deepest level of their group life. They are stories that people live by and for. They claim to reveal in an imaginative and symbolic way fundamental truths about the world and human life. They are efforts to explain what usually is beyond empirical observation, and to some degree outside human experience. This is why Aristotle says myths are composed of wonders. And wonders can never be fully described. Or as that master of mythology, John Ronald Tolkien, warned us: “The significance of myth is not easily to be pinned on paper by analytical reasoning…; unless (we) are careful…(we) will kill what (we) are studying by vivisection.”

In brief, myths tell those who believe them what reality is and what it should be. The fact is that no matter how seriously we seek to deepen our grasp of the meaning of myths, they will remain somewhat emotively ambiguous and mysterious, because they attempt to articulate what cannot be fully articulated. In the words of Paul Ricoeur, myths contain a surplus of meaning, that is, myths have an inexhaustible supply of possible meanings. Myths are not falsehoods, but truths that are imaginative insights, more profound than scientific and logical analyses to those who accept them.

Myths can evoke deep emotional responses and a sense of mystery or wonder, as Aristotle writes, simply because they develop out of the very depths of human experience. The emotional quality of myths is especially evident in what I call “residual myths.” A residual myth is one with little or no daily impact on a group’s life, but at times it can surface to become a powerful operative myth. They lurk in the culture unconscious, always waiting to re-emerge. Sloban Milosevic, the Serb leader, manipulated Serbian public opinion in his incendiary speech of June 28, 1989, by invoking a residual myth of humiliation when he recalled the defeat of Serbs by Muslims in 1389. Similarly, the myths of the pre-Vatican II Church still lurk deep in the collective unconscious of the Church’s culture and are forever rising to the surface. For this reason we speak of myths as reservoirs of memory.

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7 Luzbetak, Church and Cultures, 284. Luzbetak cites in agreement the assertions of Jacob Loewen. See Jacob A. Loewen, “Myth as an Aid to Missions,” Practical Anthropology 16 (1969): 185-192.
10 Aristotle, Metaphysics 982b.
Myths and History

Luzbetak writes that “a myth in the technical sense is like a parable, play, novel, or poem; even when not historical, scientific, or within the realm of human experience, it can nevertheless be a veritable treasure house of truth.” However, myth and history do not necessarily contradict each other because each relates to facts from its own standpoint; history observes facts from the “outer physical side, myth from the inner spiritual side.” Myths are moral commentaries on history. The example of Abraham Lincoln, tramping several miles through snow to return a few coins overcharged to a customer in his store, may or may not be historically true. However, it conveys critically important values to the American people down through the ages. However, myths can twist historical facts, as we will see.

Narratives

Myth and narrative are two sides of the one coin (see Figure 1). Myths make our lives intelligible in the past, but the retelling of these stories in light of present needs is what we call narratives. In the process the myths are enlarged, altered, or even discarded; though, it is always assumed that the myths remain unchanged. The myths legitimize the authenticity of the narratives, even though they may conflict with historical facts.

Myths: Stories that make sense of the past
Narratives: Stories that apply myths to present context

Figure 1. Myths and narratives

The aim of myths and their contemporary application through narratives is, to legitimize, as Malinowski asserts, actions. The following are examples of the ways in which narratives create new identities and in the process foundational myths are changed or revitalized.

Examples of Narrative Changes

Narratives of refounding

A narrative of refounding is a story that radically encourages people to try dramatically new ideas, new values, and new ways of being-in-the-world. Refounding is the process whereby people relive the founding mythology of a group, and are so inspired by the experience, that they imaginatively, and creatively, search for thoroughly new ways to relate to the contemporary world. Refounding goes to the roots of problems, renewal only to the symptoms. As Paul Ricoeur writes, a refounding narrative can encourage people to “try new ideas, new values, new ways of being-in-the-world,” and consequently achieve radically new identities.

For example, the narratives of the Council called for a refounding of the church, a radical cultural shift in values and behavior, not merely a superficial renewal. The council evoked a “mythical earthquake,” a movement “from commands to invitations, from laws to ideals, from definition to mystery, from threats to persuasion, from coer-

14 Luzbetak, Church and Cultures, 266.
16 See Arbuckle, Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians, 72.
cition to conscience, from monologue to dialogue, from ruling to serving, from withdrawn to integrated.”18 Sure, the Council remained faithful to authentic tradition of the Church, but this must not hide or downplay the fact that it evoked dramatic mythic and behavioral ruptures—ruptures that called for the refounding of the church itself, not merely superficial adjustments of existing structures. As an anthropologist looking at the Council documents, I cannot stress enough the radical nature of the cultural breaks with the past. Certainly there is continuity, but to deny the enormity of these cultural ruptures is to deny the radical call to return to the founding mythology of the Church.19

What narratives now predominate in the Church? Let me highlight, as an anthropologist, several narratives that do not take this call to return to the founding mythology of the Church seriously. Though I identify different narratives, in practice they often overlap.20

Narratives of cultural romanticism

Narratives of cultural romanticism idealize a cultural past. For example, sometimes it is said that the Church is not a democracy—it has never been and will never be one, and so Rome can justifiably ignore the values of participative or consultative leadership. There has been what is called a myth drift. Not only is this contrary to the spirit of Vatican II, but it ignores the original practice of the Church for a significant period of history. For example, historian Leonard Swidler concludes that as late as the beginning of the twentieth century fewer than half of the world’s bishops were directly chosen by the pope.21

Narratives of fundamentalism

Political and/or religious fundamentalism is apt to occur in almost every society or organization as a reaction to cultural chaos. People yearn for simplistic, clear-cut identities in the midst of this confusion. There are no gray areas of uncertainty, only absolute answers. People sense that history has gone awry and their task is to restore it to “normality,” as defined by them.22

Within the Catholic Church fundamentalism is present in different forms, in reaction to the dramatic theological and cultural changes introduced by Vatican II. The residual mythology of the pre-Council Church re-surfaces in narrative form. Sects like Catholics United for the Faith (CUF) have formed to defend the church against what they call the “evils of secular humanism,” “the loss of orthodoxy,” or the “liberalizing excesses that Vatican II inspired.” Catholic fundamentalists are highly selective in what pertains to the church’s identity, insisting on accidentals, not the substance of issues, and readily ignore papal teaching on social justice. As in all orthodoxy crazes, respect for truth and human rights can sadly suffer.23

20 For a more detailed analysis of the following narratives see Gerald A. Arbuckle, Catholic Identity or Identities? Refounding Ministries in Chaotic Times (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 9-30.
23 In 1997 the Holy See promulgated new procedure rules called “Regulations for the Examination of Doctrines” which modified previous norms governing the investigation of theologians. However, they do not substantially change the previous rules. As canonist Ladislas Orsy writes: “for anyone educated in the sensitivities of jurisprudence, [they] do not respond, as they were intended, to the demands of the present day…They have their roots in past ages; they were not born from the vision of human dignity and the respect for honest conscience that is demanded the world over today…They are not rooted in any divine precept.” Receiving the Council: Theological and Canonical Insights and Debates (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009), 102-03. The theologian Elizabeth Johnson had not heard that the Committee on Doctrine of the United States Bishops Conference had investigated
Narratives of disconnection

In narratives of disconnection leaders proclaim that narrative policies of their institutions are true to their founding myths, but in fact this is not the case.

For example, in 2000 John Paul II wrote that, in the conclusions of Vatican II “we find a sure compass by which to take our bearings.” That is, he insisted that the fundamental mythological theological shifts such as collegiality would be adhered to. However, narratives emanating from Roman congregations since then have commonly contradicted this statement. In 2001 Rome issued a document, *Liturgiam Authenticam*, without consultation with the episcopal chairman of ICEL, reaffirming a ban on gender-inclusive language. The document’s narrative asserts that Rome has the right to intervene in liturgical matters, but this contradicts the Council’s mythology. John Allen writes: “The document strikes at the heart of Vatican II ecclesiology by centralizing power in the curia and by insisting that local cultures adopt an essentially Roman style or worship.”

Narratives of acculturation

Narratives of acculturation are the conscious or unconscious absorption of the values and customs of another culture. For example, patriarchy is a social system in which the male gender role acts as the primary authority and power figure at the heart of all social relations. Integral to patriarchy is the assumption that men must rule and maintain female subordination. Within the Church, the insistence that exclusive or patriarchal language be still used in the liturgy is a narrative that denies the findings of contemporary Scriptural research, facts of history, and the insights of contemporary social movements for gender equality.

In pre-Pauline and Pauline Christian communities, women appear to have acted in almost identical ways to men. As Maureen Fiedler records, women preached the gospel, went on missionary journeys, and filled some leadership functions in early Christian communities. All this was to change with the Peace of Constantine (313 CE), when persecutions against Christians ceased. From then on the Church’s leadership embraced the patriarchal values and structures of contemporary Roman culture. Even some early Fathers of the church in their theologizing about the role of women in the church often uncritically absorbed the contemporary cultural views about the gender superiority of men.
Narratives that silence mourning

Narratives of mourning are processes whereby losses are formally and publicly acknowledged and allowed to slip into the past. Then the future is able to be slowly, and more or less confidently, embraced with all its uncertainties, fears, and hopes. In both Old and New Testaments we see many examples of people, who once they begin to recount the story of their grief, are able to discover new hope, new visions of society, new identities.

The public mourning of grief can, however, be silenced. Tyrannical governments particularly fear the public display of grief at funerals of their victims, for it is there that the narratives of sadness can energize people to further resist tyranny. Yet unarticulated grief remains like a powder-keg waiting to be ignited into all kinds of individual and community-destroying behavior. Ovid, the first century Roman poet, well described the reality of unnamed grief, “Suppressed grief suffocates.”

Today the Church is overloaded with unarticulated grief. This is a consequence of repeated losses. Here are some of the issues that have caused, and continue to cause, so much unresolved grief: the departure of people in their thousands from the Church; the closure of parishes often without consultation; sexual abuse scandals; questionable liturgical changes; the failure of Rome and bishops to consult; witch-hunting of theologians--lack of due process in ecclesiastical trials, discouragement of responsible dissent, even their public excommunication; and the controversial criticism of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) by the Vatican. Restorationists discourage or prevent narratives of grieving. Instead they are reviving the narratives of the pre-Council Church in order to block people from creating narratives that would vibrantly relate the Council’s theology to contemporary pastoral issues.

Polarities in Myths

Controversial anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss makes two positive contributions to our understanding of myths. First, their often inherent, complementary polarities. Secondly, the ability of myths to reconcile these polarities. However, these myths very rarely spell out precisely how the reconciliation is to take place. Therefore, because people cannot live in uncertainties, they gravitate to one pole or the other, often in an ideologically rigid manner. These insights throw more light on the continuity/discontinuity debate regarding the documents of Vatican II.

In the mythology of democracy there are two complementary poles: the rights of the individual and the rights of the common good. The third quality, “fraternity,” is the balance between these two mythological poles. What “fraternity” means in practice will depend on which polar opposite is emphasized. For Americans, fraternity means that the rights of the individual are to be respected, even though the common good may suffer. Since the rights
of the individual take precedence, the individual retains, for example, the unqualified right to own guns despite the clear, tragic consequences to the community. Not surprisingly, therefore, interest groups such as the National Rifle Association are able to wield considerable unrestrained economic and political power. Even the medical profession constitutes a powerful lobby, through its professional associations and major insurance corporations. Any attempt by governments to redress the imbalance in favor of the common good is met with strong emotional opposition. Hence, healthcare reform also, that respects the needs of the common good, has been so difficult to achieve in the United States.

The documents of Vatican II are filled with ambiguities and tensions, resulting from the reintroduction of the polar opposites of key myths within the original creation mythology. Gone are the many certainties of the pre-conciliar apologetics, constructed on the assumption that complementary theological opposites did not exist. Here are some of the mythic ambiguities contained in the documents:

- The church is universal, but it is to be incarnated within local churches to reflect their diversities of culture.
- The church is an institution under the leadership of the bishops who are committed to maintain order and unity, but it is also the People of God who, as pilgrims, are not concerned about rank.
- The pope has full, supreme, and universal power over the church, but the bishops collegially govern their dioceses with authority that is proper to them.

These polar opposites are concretized in two often emotionally opposing theologies: the neo-Augustinian and the neo-Thomist. Mythologically, however, though the theologies are opposed to each other, “neither one can exclude its opposite.” Nowhere in the documents does the Council spell out precisely how these polar opposites are to be balanced in real life. In fact it simply could not do so. Rather, it rightly challenged all members of the church to struggle to develop a living balance between the opposites through charity, ongoing mutual respect, and dialogue. When this does not happen, however, people over-identify with one pole or the other.

Ultimately, this balance is achievable over time only if all sides are able to interiorize the vision of the church as Christ's Mystical Body given us by St Paul: “Now Christ's body is yourselves, each of you with a part to play in the whole” (1 Cor 12:27).

Concluding Reflections

Let me conclude with a summary and a sign of hope.

Symbols, myths, and rituals are not replaced as quickly or as easily as buildings or landscapes, or mass-produced as neatly as automobiles or toothbrushes. The uprooting of the inner framework of cultures, even when there is conscious and intellectual assent to what is happening, destroys a people's stable sense of belonging. They are bound to experience lengthy periods of loss and confusion. The establishment of appropriate structures and power systems,
based on the revitalized founding mythology, is a long and often tortuous process. It demands patience, the ability to live in a fair degree of ambiguity until these structures are firmly and confidently in place.

But culture gives people a vital sense of belonging. When uncertainty rears its frightening head, the residual status quo of culture re-surfaces. People fall back on their tried-and-true ways of feeling and acting in order to weather the storm evoked by the fear of cultural change. As one experienced observer said: “Culture can eat strategy for lunch!” Leaders skilled in cultural change are needed to lead people sensitively through mythic changes. If leaders fail, their followers are left in more confusion. Residual power structures re-emerge stronger than ever. Often there is a short period of concessions to change by those now in power, then a growing rigidity and insistence on widespread conformity and uniformity builds frustration to breaking point. Such is the case for some countries following the revolutionary movements of the Arab Spring, Egypt, for example.

This theory helps to explain some significant conflicts that have followed Vatican II. The Council fathers did not foresee that cultures, especially a deeply embedded, long-standing, highly centralized, and authoritarian culture of the pre-conciliar Church, do not change smoothly simply because a document says they should. Many Council fathers and their successors were ill-equipped to lead cultural changes. Consequently, the residual mythology of the pre-conciliar Church rapidly re-surfaced. This is especially evident in the restorationist behavior of the Roman Curia. The pendulum has swung firmly in favor of the first parts of the polar opposites which I have described.

At the same time thousands upon thousands of lay people, priests, and members of religious congregations took the Council’s documents with intense seriousness. The mythic beliefs became deeply embedded in their lives. The residual mythology of the pre-conciliar Church no longer made theological and pastoral sense to them. They have watched with ever-deepening sadness, even despair, the poverty of hierarchical leadership that became all too common in recent decades. Hence, the conflicts I have described.

Yet, something remarkable has occurred to give us hope. The residual founding mythology of the Church itself, not the pre-conciliar mythology, has dramatically re-surfaced. Pope Francis from the moment of his election adopted a new style of leadership based on the founding mythology of the Church itself: “unlike his predecessor, no miter with gold and jewels, no ermine-trimmed cape, no made-to-measure red shoes and headwear, no magnificent throne.” And he “deliberately abstains from solemn gestures and high-flown rhetoric and speaks the language of the people.” To quote Elton John: “Francis is a miracle of humility in an era of vanity…This pope seems to want to bring the Church back to the ancient values of Christ and at the same time [bring it into] the twenty-first century.”

I believe we can speak of Francis as a “Gospel comedian.” All good comedians, such as King Lear’s Fool, and in the early days of the movies, Charlie Chaplin (and even Chaplin’s somewhat infamous contemporary Fatty Arbuckle), have one thing in common. Chaplin refused to be crushed by the pomposity and arrogance of government officials. In fact, such figures were reduced to objects of fun and even pity. True comedians are able to touch the hearts of their audiences at a profoundly deep level. We just feel they understand. They are liminal people,

45 See Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church,* 36-66 and *Catholic Identity or Identities?*, 34-67.
47 I describe these people as “lamentative” Catholics. See Arbuckle, *Catholic Identity or Identities?*, 65.
projecting in their behavior society’s fundamental incongruities such as hope and despair, order and disorder. Yet they are able at the same time to transcend these incongruities. They deliberately create disorder in the midst of order to give the appearance of incongruity. They call us into this incongruous situation to experience its tensions and then invite us to identify the resolution of these tensions. The social status quo is not set in concrete.51

Anthropologist Mary Douglas speaks of comedians as “ritual purifiers.” She even proposes that “perhaps the joker should be classed as a kind of minor mystic,”52 because comedians invite their audiences to critique orderly structures and status in society in search of values and truths about life. Good comedians mock on behalf of humanity the behavior of those who unduly assert authority, who overly insist on rules and obedience to traditions. They do not just condemn the world of status, wealth, power, and violence, but in some way provide us with a feeling of hope. Like biblical prophets, they hold out irrepressible hope that life is not necessarily preordained toward defeat, collapse, and tragedy, that fate is conquerable.

Such is the role and attraction of Francis, a Gospel comedian! Peter Berger asserts that humor is a revelation of the transcendence, a cautious call to redemption, and for this reason “the actions of a clown take on a sacramental dignity.”53 This is what St Paul is referring to when he describes to the fractious Corinthians his own role as a clown of Christ, without social status and power: “We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise…We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute…We have become like rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day” (1 Cor 4:10, 13).

Pope Adrian VI declared in 1523 that “We know well that even in this Holy See…abominable things have happened…We intend to use all diligence to reform the Roman Curia.”54 A similar challenge now faces Francis. He must translate his symbolic gestures into wider structurally supported action at key levels of the church. An anthropologist cannot minimize the enormity of the challenges and risks. We need to be ever mindful of the anthropological axiom: when strategies hit cultures, cultures win! We cannot underestimate the built-in cultural resistances to reform within the Church. Restorationism, with its roots firmly in pre-Vatican II mythology, is very likely to go underground and remain a powerful residual mythology just waiting for the chance to re-surface once more with powerful force as it did after Vatican II.55 My hope for Francis, therefore, is this: that he has insight into the ways in which culture can aid or hinder the fulfilment of the Church’s mission, and that he possesses the intervention skills to make desired changes happen in the structures of the church.56

51 These insights are more fully explained in my book: Laughing with God: Humor, Culture, and Transformation (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 52-55 and passim.
55 Pope Francis is firmly against restorationism: “If the Christian is a restorationist, a legalist, if he (sic) wants everything clear and safe, then he will find nothing…Those who today always look for disciplinary solutions, those who long for an exaggerated doctrinal ‘security,’ those who stubbornly try to recover a past that no longer exists—they have a static and inward-directed view of things.” See “A Big Heart Open to God: The Exclusive Interview with Pope Francis,” America (September 30, 2013), accessed October 1, 2013, http://americamagazine.org/pope-interview.
In this article, I discuss the ordinariness of death shrines/memorials erected in the city of Milwaukee after gun violent homicides. Not surprisingly, one also finds shrines within the confines of children’s playgrounds or even near children’s daycare centers. Primarily my intention is to raise concerns about what more needs to be done to redress the issue of gun violent homicides.

To that end, this article contains four parts: 1) introductory remarks about my research on this topic; 2) a brief overview of the debates surrounding the Second Amendment, including other questions and thoughts raised regarding its historical context; 3) a discussion on the artifacts and symbol system that are contained in the shrines and an examination of this in relationship to black spirituality and the black spirituals and lament, which I offer are the sources to be used for the prophetic voices and political imagination; and 4) suggestions as to where do we go from here as we act more empathetically and compassionately.

I strongly believe that it is time for some fresh Catholic theological ethical reflection about the spontaneous erection of death shrines/memorials in predominately African American and Latin@ communities as a result of gun violent homicides. There remains too much silence around this issue among Church officials in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.1 It is not enough that these death shrines/memorials are erected after gun violent homicides as a sympathetic or even a frozen intellectual, emotional, or spiritual catharsis to tragic loss and grief. Empathy and compassion are also important as we draw on sources from the black experience and culture that speak to the spiritual, social, and political healing and transformation essential to redressing this ethical issue. Those sources include black spirituality and black spirituals. Black spirituals, for example, tend to contain the language of lament that speaks to empathy and compassion. The language of lament was also the language of the enslaved African and African Americans as they worked their way toward freedom from

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1 This silence around gun violent homicides in Milwaukee by Catholic Church officials is merely one observation among numerous others. For years, Catholic moral theologian Bryan Massingale and systematic theologians M. Shawn Copeland and Diana Hayes have written, taught, and lectured on the Church’s grand silence when it comes to white supremacy and black human life. Protestant systematic theologian James C. Cone draws on reasons for this silence as found in his reflections on systematic theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. See Cone’s The Cross and the Lynching Tree (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2012), 30-64.
social injustices and unnecessary deaths. It is the language undergirding prophetic voices and political imagination.³

For our purposes, sympathy means “to suffer with” or the acknowledgement of another’s emotional hardship and providing comfort and assurance.⁴ Empathy takes sympathy to another level of relationship. Empathy means “suffering inside” with “the ability to do something concrete and hopefully positive to help alleviate the pain and suffering of another.”⁵ It is the bridge to compassion, where compassion, too, requires one to “act beyond the limits of what is considered reasonable and acceptable.”⁶ For example, radical and creative prophetic voices are empathetic and compassionate advocates who act to redress the brutality and dehumanization resulting from gun violence. These advocates are essential to social and political action as they focus on monitoring and rectifying the problems driving gun violent homicides, such as no commonsense gun control laws, the ethical implications of the thoughtlessly uses of guns, the history undergirding the Second Amendment, the cycle of oppression-internalized oppression,⁸ among others.

Mass shootings continue to haunt our nation, the most recent one, as of the writing of this article, being in Isla Vista, California, near Santa Barbara, by college student Elliot Rogers. Yet, I am also very much aware of the nationwide concerns surrounding perpetually gun violent homicides in inner cities that occur multiple times in a twenty-four hour period of time. I live in the city of Milwaukee in a zip code area where gun violent homicides are all too common.⁹ Nightly, sirens and horns from ambulances, police cars, and fire trucks reverberate past my residence on a major thoroughfare, stemming from the cascade of bullets fired and human life senselessly injured and/or destroyed. Yellow tape borders the crime scene, white chalk outlines the dead body, red blood is spattered on the ground, bullets are lodged in the victim’s body, and stray bullet holes are found in buildings, cars, trees, windows, and at times innocent bystanders.

Driving past several death shrines on my way to work one day in May 2013, I became very distracted by death shrines/memorials that seemed to be increasing in number daily.¹⁰ I parked at the roadside to further explore these shrines that had been erected to honor victims of gun violent homicides. The following day, I photographed the artifacts enclosed in the shrines while also making note of the places where these shrines were located. This information would assist me in locating the background story associated with the memorials, including demographic information on the victims of the homicides, and what sparked the shooting episodes in the first place. Sometimes

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² For example, black spirituals and black spirituality that include lament reveals resurrection hope and happiness, that healing and transformation is about to come. That there will be no more sorrow, no more weeping, and joy will come in the morning. See Bryan Massingale, Racial Justice and the Catholic Church (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010), 104-108 and Walter Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 49-51.
³ Walter Brueggemann, Mandate to Difference: An Invitation to the Contemporary Church (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 131. “Having said that worship features our humanly constructed acts of imagination designed to advocate a perspective, we inescapably must ask if it is all ‘made up,’ for the term ‘imagination’ is a tricky one. But of course in the community of faith, to ‘imagine’ does not mean to ‘make up.’ It means, rather, to receive, entertain, and host images of reality that are outside the accepted given.” The artifacts that act as symbols in the death shrines/memorials are those objects outside the accepted given that point to political imagination as the community of faith gathers to pray about, reflect on, and grieve the loss of loved ones who died as a result of gun violence.
⁷ Massingale, Racial Justice and the Catholic Church, 115.
⁸ For more information on how this dynamic cycle of oppressor—internalized oppression works, please see Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Continuum Press, 1994).
¹⁰ It is important to note that death shrines/memorials are also erected for those who might have been killed in car accidents, stabbed, hit by a moving vehicle, and/or died of unknown causes on the street. This paper strictly focuses on the death shrines/memorials erected after gun violent homicides.
grieving friends and family members were present at the site; I would start a conversation with them just by asking “what happened here?” Helpful information was freely shared.

At other times, I found myself right in the middle of the actual ritual building of the death shrines, where multiple expressions of grief were palpable. Intrigued by how the larger media networks captured the overwhelming amounts of sorrow displayed at these sites, I often wondered how these networks could help stop the epidemic of gun violence in the city instead of just showing up to do what it appears to be an exploitation of the deep sorrow expressed.

Nevertheless collective responses to the pain, suffering, and death of African American and Latin@ men, women, and children at these homicide sites create vivid pictures of what one could characterize as merely a unified sympathetic faith response to the disillusioning experiences of human indignity, suffering, and death. Here the community gathers to express their grief for a loved one that has died tragically. Here the community uses artifacts or symbols to touch into this notion of political imagination as a way to bear witness in protest to the pain and social injustice resulting from gun violent homicides. Hebrew Scripture scholar Walter Brueggemann, for example, offers that the task of political imagination brings to public expression those very fears and terrors that have been denied so long and repressed so deeply that we do not know that they are there. The public expression of fear and terror, of course, requires not analytic speech and not the language of coercion but the language of metaphor, so that the expression can be touched in at many points by different people.

Hence, when the makeshift monuments and public ritual have been completed, it is no surprise that a similar ritual commences soon. This type of protest bears public witness to the pain that the community experiences from the loss of a loved one(s). This loved one, a social being, created in the image and likeness of God, had a fundamental right to dignity and respect no matter what.

The city of Milwaukee homicide data collected and analyzed for the year 2013 totaled 115, including African American and Latin@ males and females between the ages of 5 and 50. However, the scenario of gun violent homicides in Milwaukee is repeatedly played out in the public square, polarizing debates on the Second Amendment persist as well. What deeper hidden questions need to be pondered about this amendment’s historical context?

**The Second Amendment**

The right to possess firearms by some private citizens has existed in the United State since its adoption on December 15, 1791. The Second Amendment states that “a well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.” Given the culture, consciousness, and context for when this amendment was ratified, historian Edmund S. Morgan in his book *American Slavery American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* hints at some of the thinking behind the Second Amendment, as his work generates these questions for me. Why does the US Constitution guarantee “a right to keep and bear arms?” Who would have had constitutional rights or were considered free citizens in the first place during the time that this amendment was ratified? Why was it so important to secure a free state against well-regulated militias? Is it...
possible that the militias could have included huge numbers of Africans and Native Americans against those in the white privileged establishment who were afraid of insurrections and to repel invasions by them?

In responding to the last question, it might be best answered through reflections on Article I, section 8 of the Constitution and the Second Amendment of the Bill of Rights. It reads,

Congress is granted the power to raise and support an army (8.12); provide and maintain a navy (8.13); call forth the militia to execute the laws of the Union; call forth the militia to execute the laws of the unions, suppress insurrections, and repel invasions…  

Essentially, one can extrapolate from this constitutional amendment and from Edmund Morgan's work that the constitutional sanctioning of the right to bear arms was not only to provide and maintain armed forces, etc., but it was also to prevent slaves and Native Americans from leveraging insurrections against white people. This statement also links Ta-Nehisi Coates' claims that white supremacy is foundational to the history of the United States of America. In essence, his claim does not exclude the historical fact that those entrenched in a white supremacist worldview could have access to and/or own guns, which meant that only unarmed people--African Americans and Native Americans--could not be armed and, thus, easier to control. Armed citizens can ultimately enforce oppression and submission on another.

No doubt, history records show that since their arrival in the U.S. in 1619, African Americans were banned from having access to guns.

Legislation called upon every able bodied white citizen to be a member of his state militia and possess a rifle, bayonet, and ammunition if called upon for service. This effectively banned African Americans from service in the militias…Throughout the early period of the twentieth century, guns continued to be concentrated in the hands of white citizens…Throughout the twenty-first century African Americans continued to be disproportionately impacted by gun violent homicides.

With this history of African Americans and gun prohibition, it is interesting to note that the very firearms that they were not allowed to own or to have access to, now, are their weapons that drive the ongoing number of death shrines/memorials erected after gun violent homicides in Milwaukee.

Today, legal and constitutional scholars, US historians, theologians, philosophers, among others, note that huge disagreements continue with less understanding about what the right to bear arms means. For example, nearly 223 years later, gun rights advocates continue to emphasize the lawful use of guns and their valued place in US history and culture. They contend that the fundamental right to bear arms is sacrosanct. Joe the Plumber demonstrates this sentiment in his response to the May 2014 mass shootings by Elliot Rodgers outside of Santa Barbara, California: “I myself have a son and a daughter and the one thing that I never want to go through is what you are

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16 See Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution and the Second Amendment of the Bill of Rights. Italics added to emphasize the issue of insurrections and invasions.


going through now. But as harsh as this sounds, your dead kids don’t trump my constitutional rights!”20 Immediately, a Catholic ethical response must declare that Joe the Plumber’s statement is blatantly idolatrous. All human life is created by God, and is of incomparable worth. A constitutional right to bear arms never trumps the fundamental rights to human life and flourishing.

Antithetically, gun control advocates focus on the negative effects of gun availability on health and safety. They note numerous ethical implications resulting from gun violent homicides. The trauma from these homicides adversely affects human dignity: the spiritual, emotional, social, and political economy of those in the communities. Furthermore, highly disproportionate rates of homicides continue among African Americans and Latin@s despite the popular pro-gun ownership slogan that “guns do not kill people, people do.” Essentially, this reckless use of guns triggers the cascade of bullets as they resound in the city of Milwaukee for reasons such as: somebody’s girlfriend or boyfriend had a fight on Facebook, gang initiation activity, someone gave someone a dirty look, a drug deal that had gone bad/wrong, mistaken identity, stray bullets, mental illness, etc.

Catholic ethicist Bryan N. Massingale reminds us in his essay, Healing a Divided World that, “the gunfire that barks down streets and alleys of Milwaukee’s central city is our song of death. And we are all the composers…”21 The songs of death endure even despite the fact that civic and religious leaders from Milwaukee called a weeklong Ceasefire Sabbath during the summer of 2013. The composers of the song, the white supremacist oppressors, and the singers of the death songs, the internally oppressed, who throughout the centuries, “…everywhere kept singing their old slave songs, their dirges and the ditties, their blues and jubilees…”22 For Freire, the oppressors and the internally oppressed sing in unison as the cycle of oppression and internalized oppression continue.23 “Once a situation of violence and oppression has been established, it engenders an entire way of life and behavior for those caught up in it—oppressors and oppressed alike.”24 The internally oppressed have learned how to take on the invisible hand of the white supremacist oppressor.

Nevertheless, with the rise in senseless gun violence occurring today, the erection of death shrines in honor of the dead seems perpetual. Radical, creative, and prophetic voices are empathetic and compassionate advocates. These advocates must be summoned to address this issue. What do these death shrines and their artifacts have to offer to us in helping to redress this issue?

**Death Shrines/Memorials**

According to Erika Doss’ essay, Spontaneous Memorials and Contemporary Modes of Mourning in America, she views spontaneous memorials as:

> creative products of human thought and emotional need, spontaneous memorials help to mediate the psychic crisis of sudden and often inexplicable loss… Spontaneous memorials are actually rightly orchestrated performances of mourning: rituals of visibly public lamentation aimed at expressing, codifying and ultimately managing grief. Their spontaneity is only in their origination, in their swift response to the sudden and unexpected events of tragic and traumatic death. Their materiality and meaning are highly scripted.25

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20 “Joe the Plumber’s Blunt Message on Gun Control” was tweeted by Zach Noble @zachnoble on May 28, 2014 at 10:49am.
23 See Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 40.
24 Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 40.
In these shrines it is common to find pictures, mylar or helium balloons, votive candles, signed sympathy cards, poster boards with handwritten messages, flowers, plush stuffed animals with a notably large number of teddy bears of varying colors, shapes and sizes, clothing, shoes, caps, glass liquor bottles, aluminum cans. More often than not, the shrines are built at or near the roadside. Others are found inside parks or playgrounds for our children. It is important to note that some would argue that many of these artifacts found in the shrines harken back to African traditional religions whereby these scripted works of art transcend ordinary questions about their makeup and confinements: it is divine force incarnate. For example, in Yoruba culture, artifacts provide the highest link between the people, the ancestors, and the gods.26

As aforementioned, the erection of death shrines/memorials must be more than a sympathetic response to grief and mourning. The artifacts or symbols must reveal sources that push us to empathetic and compassionate action through prophetic voices and political imagination. For example, Brueggemann notes, “[t]he task of political imagination is to cut through the numbness, to penetrate the self-deception, so that the God of endings is confessed as Lord.”27 Thus, in reflecting on the symbolism of the artifacts enclosed in the death shrines/memorials, I believe that these challenge prophetic voices to envision the symbols as “vehicles for redemptive honesty...to bring to public expression those very fears and terrors that have been denied and suppressed so deeply that we do not know that they are there.”28 In essence, materials or symbols contained in these monuments are consistently present in the vast number of the shrines. How might they move us to empathy and compassion? What other sources might be helpful? Indeed one can draw on: 1) Black spirituality which is holistic, communal, and joyful and 2) Black spirituals for the language of lament as found in the spirituals’ double code messages.

Black Spirituality

Drawing from the 1984 black Catholic Bishops’ Pastoral Letter, What We Have Seen and Heard, the notions of sympathy, empathy, and compassion have relevance to the holistic nature that characterizes black spirituality. For example,

[b]lack spirituality, in contrast with much of Western tradition, is holistic. Like the biblical tradition, there is no dualism. Divisions between intellect and emotions, spirit and body, action and contemplation, individual and community, sacred and secular are foreign to [black people]...29

Further reflection on Erika Doss’ definition of death shrines/memorials, black spirituality and black spirituals, including lament, come to mind. For example, when black spirituality is applied to what is observed about death shrines and the memorials, they are not merely haphazard monuments with materials depicting sympathetic,

27 Brueggemann, Prophetic Imagination, 49.
28 Brueggemann, Prophetic Imagination, 49-50
intellectual, or emotional responses to gun violent homicides. Empathy and compassion are illuminated, here, in that groups of people gather to build the shrines, to support each other, while in a profound way “recognize the vital relationship between the life of the individual and that of her or his community.”30 Those gathered might sing, pray, share stories, offer words of wisdom, and/or sit quietly as they remember the loved gone forever. This captures one of the characteristics of black spirituality, community. Another characteristic of black spirituality is joy, its hallmark. The communal grief resulting from the shock of gun violent homicides eventually will give way to joy, the opposite of grief. Peter’s letter31 speaks of believers rejoicing in hope even while they suffer grief in all kinds of trials (1 Pet 1:6). From John 16:20, 22, “Your grief will turn to joy” and “no one will take away your joy.” “Joy is a sign of our faith and especially our hope. It is never an escape from reality, however harsh it may be. Indeed this joy is present in the midst of deep anguish and bitter tears,”32 allowing us the necessary energy and stamina to bear witness to our common humanity. In many ways the common humanity is marked by social practices that are either equitable, righteous, or truthful, or are inequitable, unrighteous, or untruthful.33 Black spirituals and lament also speak to these aspects of our common humanity.

Black Spirituals

Black spirituals comprise sacred songs, the blues, including the language of lament that emerge from some of them, perhaps drawing from the Psalms, the prophets, narratives about Jesus, various biblical images, among others. Songs sustained African Americans in separation and in captivity, helped them to respond actively to life situations, and gave them the ability to create new songs to answer new needs.34 In all of this, the black spirituals do not consist of separate components, some of which may be dropped, while others are retained. They consist of an organic complex of themes or motifs that speaks to the “heart and soul of a people who, with no viable future should have given into despair and defeat.”35 Black spirituals also contain double code messages that are “both compensatory and revolutionary.”36 During 2013, in Milwaukee, reportedly over one hundred gun violent homicides occurred and many death shrines were erected, creating sacred places at the roadside. The artifacts or symbols found in the death shrines also integrally interconnect lament and double code messages. Both lament and double code messages represent that “the beauty in black existence is as real as the brutality, and the beauty prevents the brutality from having the final word.”37 In essence lament speaks to us of the

cries of anguish and outrage, groans of deep pain and grief, utterances of profound protest and righteous indignation over injustice, wails of mourning and sorrow in the face of unbearable suffering.

Lamentation is a cry of utter anguish and passionate protest at the state of the world and its brokenness.38

Lament depicts the frustrations and disillusionment with the government’s inability to put an end to senseless deaths due to gun violence. Lament helps to reflect on the disappointment at the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and its seemingly curious silence when people like Joe the Plumber declare that one’s constitu-

31 All of the passages from Sacred Scripture are taken from the New American Bible.
32 Black Bishops of the United States, What We Have Seen and Heard, 9.
35 Hayes, Forged in a Fiery Furnace, 71.
36 Hayes, Forged in a Fiery Furnace, 77.
37 Cone, Cross and the Lynching Tree, 95.
38 Massingale, Racial Justice and the Catholic Church, 105.
tional right to bear arms trumps human life. For those in the African American and Latin@ communities, lament can be exemplified in passionate protest, in bearing witness to polarized Second Amendment debates and gun violent homicides that ultimately trump the sacredness of human life.

Furthermore, double code messages point intuitively to perhaps one perception of the black spiritual, artifact, and/or narrative and yet to another perception. In essence, more than one message conveyed in one's thoughts or feelings abound. Thus, lament and double code messages figure affectively in artifacts or symbols in the death shrines, especially in correlation with these black spirituals:

The lighted votive candles or the long stemmed candles can point to the Exodus Event where the Israelites are marching through the hardness of the wilderness, as God leads this travelling community “by night in a pillar of fire or light” (Ex 13:21), singing this African American spiritual, This Little Light of Mine. The symbolism of light can also be associated with the hope of a New Jerusalem, where the city “has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Rev 21:11; 21:23). The multiple numbers of teddy bears and plush stuffed animals are not only toys that comfort children; they can also warn of the need to watch out and care for another that brings Joy, Joy, Joy… that everything will turn out right. The empty liquor bottles or soda cans illustrate perhaps not only the social life of the person and his friends, but the pouring of something fluid at the death site points to the African traditional religious ritual of pouring libation as a toast to one who has Been Drinking from the Fountain… Flowers and heart-shaped colorful helium balloons symbolize the need for perpetual agape love for the one who has died and for those in the community. It is important to note that all these materials hang from either trees or light posts or are laid at their trunks of The Old Rugged Cross. In spiritually imaginative and creative ways, the presence of these materials speaks to life, death, and resurrection hope. Unanchored helium balloons ascend high into the sky, connoting a sense of freedom and liberation as captured in the sacred song, I’ll Fly Away. Soaring, the balloons leave behind the death shrines/memorials erected at the roadside. The earthly cries and anguish of the communities continue. In the next hour, day, and/or weekend more shrines are erected. This process restarts.

So Where Do We Go From Here?

Left up for a temporary period of time, the city of Milwaukee sanitation workers remove the death shrines/memorials. Rival gang members desecrate them too. Still much silence remains around the all too frequent cascade of bullets that take away human lives in Milwaukee. One death shrine is destroyed, yet another one is erected the next day, and/or three more over the following weekend several miles away. Polarizing debates on the meaning of the Second Amendment between pure gun rights advocates and commonsense gun control advocates lead to ongoing indifference and fragmentation.

In spite of it all, the amount of suffering and death as a result of gun violent homicides continue, generating unified sympathetic responses from the impacted communities. The artifacts or the symbols of the death shrines/memorials when viewed through the lens of black spirituality and the black spirituals comprising the lament yield cries of despair, hope, and healing. These sources along with political imagination and radical prophetic voices undergirded by empathy and compassion are of the urgent essence. Collectively, they must be employed to facilitate concrete dynamic action to redress this horrific ethical problem.

39 Lead Me, Guide Me, no. 190.
40 Lead Me, Guide Me, no. 199.
41 Lead Me, Guide Me, no. 110.
42 Lead Me, Guide Me, no. 37.
43 Lead Me, Guide Me, no. 149.
The year was 1914. England stood in a twilight zone. The balance of power in Europe had shifted and a unified Germany was strengthening. In the period leading up to World War I, England advanced its educational systems and buttressed its defense capability. Making overtures to France and Russia, it held Germany at a long distance.

Domestically, the pre-war years under George V proved turbulent. Tariff reform caused widespread consternation, and unrest abounded amongst labor and suffrage movements. Pre-War England experienced some of the greatest industrial strife in its history. Massive strikes of dockworkers, railroad workers, and miners threatened to bring the country to a halt. Meanwhile, twenty-five percent of the population found themselves living in poverty.¹

From this historic island, and its people's existential struggles in place and time, there arose the voice of a gifted communicator with a compelling spiritual vision. The intellectual clarity and persuasiveness of the speaker were unmistakable, though the voice was an unanticipated one. Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), after all, was a woman, someone who in her socio-cultural context, was expected to do little more than marry young and raise a family. Underhill had no ecclesiastical backing; she had no benefactors, and her gender rendered it impossible for her to receive a formal theological education. But it was her voice, at the start of the twentieth century that lifted the spirit of a people. Convinced that religion had to speak to people and their struggles, Underhill insisted that the future of Christianity would depend on the retrieval of its rich mystical tradition, a tradition to which few persons had access, and one that had enormous formative potential.

By 1914, Underhill’s classic text, *Mysticism: The Preeminent Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (1911) had attracted a broad audience. It received the attention of the noteworthy Baron Friedrich von Hugel, friend of Ernst Troeltsch and a correspondent of William James, with whom Underhill often is compared in twentieth century religious thought.² *Mysticism* was a tour-de-force, a brilliant and carefully rendered piece for

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which Underhill had studied a thousand sources in order to explore the mystic way. The five hundred page volume established Underhill’s reputation and gave exposure to a treasury of mystical literature in the Christian tradition that was largely unknown in the English-speaking world. The book marked the start of a prolific spiritual writing career for Underhill, and it signaled the revival of mysticism with some fresh accents.\(^3\) Underhill went on to produce some three hundred pieces on the spiritual life: books, essays, introductions, and reviews. She became the first woman invited to give theological lectures at Oxford and the first asked to lead clergy retreats in the Anglican Church.\(^4\) At home in both academic and ministerial settings,\(^5\) her deft coupling of theology and spirituality was exemplary. Upon her death, *The Times Literary Supplement* described her as “unmatched by any professional teacher of her day in understanding the deep longing of the human soul.”\(^6\) T.S. Eliot recognized her as the one who had most understood “the grievous need of her contemporaries for a contemplative element in their lives.”\(^7\) A full century later she continues to inspire. Theologian Kathleen Henderson Staudt notes: “she brings together a mind that is fascinated by theological and philosophical exploration with a heart that recognizes and is devoted to the practice of prayer and a strong sense of vocation as a teacher of spiritual practice.”\(^8\)

### A Practical Mysticism for All

In late 1914, three years following the publication of Underhill’s massive tome, there followed a smaller book, *Practical Mysticism*, that proved to be more accessible for ordinary people, and timely. *Practical Mysticism* carried within its pages a passionate message, one that proved helpful to those struggling with the unprecedented outbreak of World War. Lucy Menzies, a contemporary of Underhill’s and a spiritual teacher and author in her own right, recalls the personal impact of this text: “By the mercy of God, *Practical Mysticism* came into my hands at a time of great need. It was given to me at the first Christmas of the Great War in 1914. I had been prepared for its message by many years of searching without finding, and it spoke straight to the heart of my condition.”\(^9\) *Practical Mysticism* offered persons a realistic and invigorating way of proceeding spiritually in the face of a war that caused every conscience-driven European to shudder.

Underhill dedicated this book “to an unseen future.” She knew neither how the War would unfold nor whether the vision of a practical mysticism would survive all of the senseless sufferings of war. In the forward to her book, she addresses this:

> Many will feel that in such a time of conflict and horror, when only the most ignorant, disloyal or apathetic can hope for quietness of mind, a book which deals with that which is called the ‘contemplative attitude to existence’ is wholly out of place...Indeed, deep conviction about the Divine Spirit in the human soul, which is at the heart of a mystical concept of life is hard to reconcile with much of the human history now being poured red hot from the Cauldron of war...

\(^{(2012)}, 107.\)

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3 Most notable amongst these is Underhill’s democratization of it.


5 Underhill was named a Fellow at King's College in London and was awarded an honorary degree from the University of Aberdeen. In addition to her teaching and writing, she offered spiritual direction, led retreats for women and for ministers, and engaged in a substantive practice of outreach to the poor.


Yet, the title [I have] deliberately chosen for this book—that of *Practical Mysticism*—means nothing if the attitude and the discipline it recommends be adopted to fair weather alone: if the principles for which it stands break down when subjected to the pressure of events and cannot be reconciled...10

Adopting a pacifist stance herself and proceeding courageously, utilizing her knowledge of the historical Christian spiritual tradition, Underhill describes the nature and function of practical mysticism. She speaks of it being something natural and dynamic that with training and attention can grow and mature out of the life process itself, causing persons to feel less distinction between prayer and deeds, and more linkage between contemplative awareness and the furthering of God's creative spirit in transformative action.

Writing as “an evangelist for Reality,” she urges a “union with the Real”11 with “the Real” being a referent for God, as the foundation of a practical mysticism. She tells people that they are summoned to nothing less than “union with the Real” in challenging times, and reminds them that practical mysticism is not a rarified thing that pertains only to some. She denounces any and all distinctions made between spiritual life and practical life, finding these unhelpful. For her, increased consciousness of one’s rooting in God as the Real leads necessarily to deeper engagement in the world.

In endearing terms, Underhill writes about the spiritual life of ordinary practical mystics as “a steadying and enlarging sort of thing.”12 She describes it as one that involves a being urged from within and drawn from without, specifically because of the giving of God’s self, experienced as “the direct activity of the one Love, passing through and vivifying one, like the sea waters supporting and passing through a shellfish.”13 Givenness becomes a further favored referent for God in Underhill’s work: “Your whole life hangs on a great Givenness,”14 she will exclaim. Interjecting some humor, she writes that exercising one’s mystical faculty will take attentiveness and discipline: “if not the renunciation of the cloister, then at least the virtues of the golf course.”15 Development in a practical mysticism then enables a person to see his or her world more honestly, discerning beyond apparent ruthlessness, while moving toward a love free from sentimentality, a love that instills a genuine hope.16 Such is the everyday mysticism that makes possible “a life soaked through and through by a sense of God’s reality and God’s claim.”17

From 1914 forward, Underhill’s vision of a practical mysticism for all stood as the driving melody line from which all else that she wrote modulated. It was a term that caught people’s imaginations, igniting desire, and inspiring courage. It still does. In the early decades of the twenty-first century, it is helpful to explore its beckon anew and to consider the specific process that leads to development in it.

**Dynamics of Practical Mysticism in Twenty First Century Perspective**

Engaging the work of Underhill in our time prompts a basic question: What can be learned from her about that process that leads persons to grow into more realistic union not only with the flux of life but with the Source of life, the Whole in which all lesser realities are subsumed? This process, according to Underhill, corresponds with a latent mystical faculty in the human as created. And growth in union with the Real is something natural, something not achieved by pushing and striving, though it does require attention and discipline, desire and effort. The

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12 Greene, ed., *Fragments of an Inner Life*, 54.
way that persons develop as practical mystics is threefold for Underhill: 1) through a disciplining and simplifying
of our attention, 2) through intentional self-adjustments that serve to move us to greater singleness of heart, and
3) through openness to some patterned forms of contemplation through which we are “accompanied supported,
checked and fed.”18 The “education” that ensues from these practices is rich, leading to a bracing of our conscious-
ness, an “emancipation from the fetters of appearance,”19 and a turning toward new dimensions of the world.

Considering each strand of this educative process in turn, simplification of attention, as described by Underhill,
suggests a quieting down and a centering, the movement toward an inner stillness where one's focus becomes God,
who is Reality and nothing less. Mindful of how often we stumble on ourselves as the assumed epitome of reality,
Underhill cautions: “Any spiritual view which focuses attention on ourselves and puts the human creature with its
small ideas and adventures in the center foreground, is dangerous till we recognize its absurdity.”20 She comments
specifically on indicators of self-preoccupation: “Fuss and feverishness, anxiety and intensity, intolerance, instabil-
ity, pessimism and wobble, every kind of hurry and worry—these are the signs of the self-made and self-acting
soul.”21 It is simplification of attention that returns focus, putting things back in their true proportion; and it is
simplification of attention that prepares persons for prayer, making recollection possible.

From a twenty-first century standpoint, living and working in a noisy environment of digital technological distrac-
tion, Underhill's prodding to simplify our attention assumes more meaning than she ever imagined.22 As we situate
ourselves at our daily workstations, our computers “ping” to let us know that email has arrived. Cell phones ring,
while iPods play familiar pop songs. Beeps alert us to the presence of new voice mail, and a variety of apps on iPads
offer breaks from the task at hand and escape from life concerns.

There are drawbacks to our high technology. On the one hand, it appears that we're able to receive communica-
tion from others handily and all of the time, and to respond quickly or not. On the other hand, we too readily
assume that we are super connected and in control of our connectedness, when in reality these connections are
disembodied, providing mere slices of persons and places. We move increasingly in technological environments
that foster a “networked individualism”23 in which persons connect with all sorts of folks in isolated ways, having
far less live embodied exchange with anyone. Has rugged individualism morphed to a more acceptable networked
individualism?

In technocentric environments, so much competes for our attention. Attempts to be more reflective are thwarted
often by the blessed interruptions of our technological aids. Daily use of social media options has made distraction
almost ubiquitous. This is the thesis advanced by Maggie Jackson in her book Distracted: The Erosion of Attention
and the Coming Dark Age. Jackson observes: “The seduction of alternative virtual universes, the addictive allure
of multitasking people and things, our near religious allegiance to a constant state of motion: these are markers of
a land of distraction, in which our old conceptions of space, time, and place have been shattered.”24 Amidst first
world material riches and abundant information systems, we who glorify technology may well be headed towards
a negative period of decline, a turning point historically.

18 Underhill, Spiritual Life, 36.
19 Underhill, Practical Mysticism, 7.
20 Underhill, Spiritual Life, 12.
21 Underhill, Spiritual Life, 93-94.
23 This is a term coined by Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman. See Networked: The New Social Operating System (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 2012).
24 Maggie Jackson, Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age (New York: Prometheus Books, 2009), 14.
Dashing to browse, surf and tweet, persons experience obstacles to their good intentions to move toward what Underhill calls a “disciplining of our attention.” Indeed the “habits of our technological hearts”25 warrant more critical review. Are our devices shaping us? Surrounded by unlimited social media options, and grafted to our technological “necessities,” are we able to move to those places of recollection where we truly see, feel, taste, touch the Real? Underhill’s urging to discipline our attention carries fresh import in a technocentric ethos where attention is an increasingly untethered thing.

A second component identified by Underhill as integral in the education of a practical mystic is the making of intentional self-adjustments, the simplification of our affections and will and a detangling from clutter, psychological or otherwise, that could prevent the singleness of heart that prepares persons more fully for union with the Real. Writing about this formative dimension, Underhill has the contents of human consciousness in mind. In twenty-first century consumerist contexts, however, it becomes fruitful to critically reflect on this element not only in terms of the contents of our consciousness but also in terms of our actual possessions, our many splendid things.

In cultures of consumption, possessions promise false but mighty senses of security. Excess quickly becomes normalized, and “sufficiency” is grossly distorted. The line between wants and needs, comfort and excess becomes very blurry. The economies of consumerist cultures count on continuous excessive consumption and the successful perpetuation of commodity mentality. Media advertising strategizes to keep on stimulating consumers. Inhabitants of consumerist cultures become accustomed to being surrounded by myriad amounts of goods—90 different options for sneakers? 201 brands of cereal? 75 different watch styles? It may appear that having an unlimited choice of things provides a sense of control, but in reality, possessions more often than not control people. A great irony here is that we have little actual connection to our many transient things. And we’ve managed to turn a blind eye to where our many things come from and who makes them. When things start to take precedence over persons, people and the services they render quickly become commoditized as well.26

The detangling of consciousness from what inhibits singleness of heart ought to include a reassessment of our relationship with our things, some exploration of why the things we value are valued, and discernment regarding the degree to which possessions are possessing us. Breaking from the allure of consumption is neither an easy nor a once-and-for-all intentional adjustment. It requires the adoption and readoption of something akin to what the sociologist Juliet Schor calls “an attitude of plenitude,”27 a calling one’s focus back to the inherent bounty of all that can’t be consumed. Making adjustments in this way means taking decisive strides toward opting to be rich in things that in fact matter: relations with one another and with a planet in peril. By restoring our investments in one another and our communities, and by moving toward less ambiguous postures of sustainability, we find ourselves released from the shackles of “I have, I need, and I want.”

Turning to the third component in the education of a practical mystic, Underhill identifies particular forms of contemplation. Here she specifically addresses three complementary ways of encounter with God: the discovery of God in creation, the apprehension of infinite Reality in what is finite or the sense of the More in the real, and, finally, trustful dwelling in God, which results in our letting go of tightly reined selves so that God’s activity becomes more manifest in our human activity. Underhill senses that the practice of these ways of contemplation opens persons to the living touch of God in the present moment, something that remains ever more than the specific

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26 For an excellent analysis of this, see the classic text by John F. Kavanaugh, Following Christ in a Consumerist Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006).
moment itself. It is that greater Real in the existential moment upon which all creatures depend for their existence. Human beings hunger for glimpses of it, sightings of the hidden “eternity with us” that accompanies and draws.

The created world, for Underhill, is a revelatory place where an infinite God manifests Godself in a multiplicity of forms. Engagement with God in the natural order of creation, the first of Underhill’s three ways of contemplation, is both a possibility and a choice. Persons can opt to bring a high degree of conscious awareness to their engagement of the created order or not.28

Of all of the forms of contemplation addressed by Underhill, the first, discovery of God in the created order, carries some real urgency in our time. Historically, humankind has never stood more in need of a strongly ecological, spiritual consciousness. The earth continues to warm up as greenhouse gas concentrations rise, tropical forests are being destroyed at the rate of 25 million acres each year, and multiple species of plant and animal life are becoming extinct annually. More than ever, our forms of recollection must reflect greater consciousness of place. Ignorance regarding the created order becomes a matter of arrogance at some point, something that contemporary ecologists emphasize.29 Lack of mindfulness of the created order stands in sharp contrast with the first form of contemplation identified by Underhill.

In the twenty-first century, the first contemplation points in the direction of rediscovery of God in creation, and genuine care for the primary World Wide Web, without which we all perish. As inhabitants of the earth, we have been heavily socialized to think about all of the ways that humans are distinct from the rest of created life. Such thinking has resulted in our having such minimal knowledge of other life forms with whom we share the earth and upon whom we heavily depend.

People espouse “stewardship of the earth” as a value but typically don’t have much knowledge of the natural world and its ecosystems. What does “stewardship” mean without some understanding of the created order itself and without acquisition of the kinds of skills required to care practically for it? Contemporary discussions of stewardship will be more effective when they point in the direction of concrete specific, practical care for creation. We will care for that which we love, and we will love that which we have truly come to know and understand, all of which is made more possible through contemplation and action. The practical mystic of the future will be a lover of the natural world, who knows and understands forms of life and life processes.

The Dispositions of Heart of the Practical Mystic

In seeking union with the Real through simplification of one’s attention, intentional self-adjustments for the sake of greater singleness of heart, and openness to patterned forms of contemplation, there are interior dispositions and habits to be cultivated. In her book *The Spiritual Life* (1937), Underhill, influenced heavily by the seventeenth century Cardinal Pierre de Berulle, 30 describes dispositions and habits of the heart that figure prominently in the lives of practical mystics: adoration of God, adherence to God, and cooperation with God’s Creative Spirit in the world.

Like Berulle himself, and like her wise spiritual director Friedrich von Hugel, Underhill claims that the experience of God evokes awe in the human, and that the most natural stance of all in the face of awe is *adoration*. Adoration

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28 Underhill illustrates this point by telling an old story of “Eyes” and “No Eyes,” who travel along the very same path, but approach it so differently. “Eyes” chooses to be open to the revelations of creation as he goes, while “No Eyes” doesn’t have time for or interest in this. Underhill is skillful in contrasting their experiences. See *Practical Mysticism*, 6-7.


30 Pierre de Berulle (1575-1629) was a mystic, cardinal, and statesman. He is credited with being the founder of the French School of Spirituality. Underhill amplifies his categories here. See *Spiritual Life*, 58-59.
of God is something different from theological description or analysis.\textsuperscript{31} It is an inner posture, an interior bearing. It is not a rigidly defined practice but a disposition of heart that lies at the core of prayer. And Underhill goes so far as to identify adoration as the basis for and preparation for right action.

Adoration tills the ground for deepened communion, for fuller \textit{adherence to God}. The human reception of God's giving of God's self puts us face to face with ways and energies of the Triune God to which we are all invited to adhere. Adherence moves outward then toward the world and to the possibility of \textit{cooperation with God's creative spirit} within it.

Underhill consistently emphasizes this—worldly cooperation with God. She writes: “The riches of the spiritual landscape are not disclosed to us in order that we may sit in the sun parlor, be grateful for the excellent hospitality, and contemplate the glorious view...Our place is not the auditorium but the stage of the world—or, as the case may be, the field, the workshop, the study, the laboratory—because we ourselves form part of the creative apparatus of God.”\textsuperscript{32} People tend to associate mysticism with the transformation of individuals, rather than that of societies and institutional structures, but for Underhill, the latter association is imperative. And practical mysticism cannot be divorced from public engagement. Reflecting on the Lord's Prayer with public life in view, she asserts: “Thy Kingdom COME! There is energy, drive, purpose in these words; an intensity of desire for the coming of perfection into life. Not the limp resignation that lies devoutly in the road and waits for the steam roller, but a total concentration on the interests of God, which must be expressed as action.”\textsuperscript{33}

Ultimately development in practical mysticism, in Underhillian perspective, involves assuming our small part in the vast operations of God's Spirit rather than trying to see what we can create by ourselves. Engaging the world as practical mystics will influence our choice of spiritual practices, the causes we support, the leadership we favor, the choice of those alongside whom we stand in solidarity, and the decision about where we exert our time, treasure, and talent. And, as it did a century ago, the choice of a practical mysticism will serve as a truthful way of proceeding in times of struggle requiring endurance and long effort.

In 2014, one hundred years following the publication of \textit{Practical Mysticism}, we are not that people standing on the brink of the pending atrocities of World War I. We are instead the ones who find ourselves rummaging around in a lot of rubble, standing in the aftermath of a number of disasters: 9/11, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Katrina and Sandy, earthquakes in Haiti, tsunamis, nuclear meltdowns, clergy sex abuse scandals, terrorist threats, violation of the human rights of our opponents and dissidents through torture in defense of national and international security, chemical weapon slaughters in Syria, and the list motors on. There are Good Friday experiences in our landscape and Easter Sunday risings too, but we, early on in our century, are most conscious of living in an uncomfortable Holy Saturday sort of place. In this “neither here nor there” position, in the between of death and life, we run into piles of debris, the reminder of \textit{so much that is no longer}. We do our best to assess what has and hasn't moved out of death, in order to understand what of life there is to which we can testify.\textsuperscript{34}

The theological giant Karl Rahner, reflecting on the experience of Holy Saturday, speaks about “its due place in our life of faith.”\textsuperscript{35} Describing it as “the situation of one who stands between a present that is already vanishing, and a

\textsuperscript{31} Underhill humorously notes that it is something very different from what Karl Barth calls “the dreadful prattle of theology.” Underhill, \textit{Spiritual Life}, 62.
\textsuperscript{32} Underhill, \textit{Spiritual Life}, 74.
\textsuperscript{33} Underhill, \textit{Spiritual Life}, 77.
\textsuperscript{34} I am indebted here to the exceptional work of practical theologian Shelly Rambo, who speaks of the experience of Holy Saturday in moving ways that bring its terror and its possibilities to the forefront. For extended discussion of this, see Shelly Rambo, \textit{Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining} (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).
future which is so far present only in hope.”  

Rahner writes about death and life interpenetrating one another in the experience of Saturday. He gives witness to the Christ reality already at the heart and center of the Saturday experience. Rahner writes: “He is there as the innermost essence of all thing...even when every kind of order seems to be breaking up. He is with us as the light of day and the air are with us, which we do not notice.”  

What then becomes the stance of the practical mystic in this “Holy Saturday” reality?

Saturday mystics are middle day attesters to the Spirit of God that remains. The Spirit stays even in what are ruins, inviting persistence. The aftermaths of tragedies and injustices escape human comprehension and control and yet, in the disciplining of attention, the making of some necessary self-adjustments, particularly adjustments regarding a sense of outcomes, and genuine openness to the Real beyond the immediately troubling, persons can and do cooperate with God’s creative Spirit, giving life full form to what it is that remains in Holy Saturday debris. With good-humored resilience in the face of rubble, practical mystics persevere with a joy and zest for life even when light is dim. Perhaps this itself is an act of adoration.

Commitment to a practical mysticism takes fresh shape in a time when the need for contemplatively-edged action is great. In haunting words that span the decades, echoing anew, Underhill continues to guide: “It is your business to actualize within the world of time and space, perhaps by great endeavors, perhaps by small ones in field and market, tram and tube, office and meeting room, in the perpetual give and take of the common life—that more real life, that holy creative energy...You shall work for mercy, order, beauty, significance; you shall mend where you find things broken, and make where you find the need.” Such is the art of union with the Real. Such is the vocation of the practical mystic.

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38 See Rambo, Spirit and Trauma.
Lost and Found: Immigrant Conversion Stories, the New Evangelization, and Parish Life

by Brett C. Hoover

Perhaps the most important story in the history of US Catholicism is that of movement or migration.1 As James T. Fisher argues, “America is a nation of immigrants and the story of Catholicism in America is largely the story of an immigrant church.”2 This story has most consistently been told of European immigrants and their descendants, but even many who do not see themselves as coming from an immigrant experience per se—African American, New Mexican Hispano, and Native American Catholics, for example—still tell stories of movement on the land, sometimes violent and involuntary, and the transformations that have gone with it. Recent immigration from Asia and Latin America continues to provide examples of compelling migration stories. The theologian San Hyun Lee speaks of Korean migration to the United States as a “pilgrimage in the wilderness of marginality.” He writes, “Creative and redemptive events occur at the in-between and often despised margins of the world.”3 The theologian Daniel Groody focuses on the transformative interior journey evoked by the exterior journey of undocumented immigrants. For Groody, migration has a paschal character to it. It is a Via Crucis—a way of the Cross, an imitation of Christ’s journey through Calvary to the empty tomb.4 Narratives like these—of pilgrimage in the wilderness or of the Way of the Cross—are powerfully evocative of the immigrant experience, but they are far from the only stories that today’s migrants tell to make sense of their experience. One contemporary narrative that deserves the attention of pastoral leaders and theologians is a conversion narrative associated with the nueva evangelización, the new evangelization. Emerging from the precincts of Latin@ Catholicism today, this “lost and found” narrative has roots in Latin American manifestations of the new evangelization but has taken particular form here in the United States. It frames conversion as the outcome of explicit religious education in the Catholic tradition, an approach that offers both gifts and limitations. On the one hand, this new evangelization conversion narrative offers immigrant parishioners a rich template for articulating their own stories of faith, especially in times of dramatic change. On the other hand, that same template has some polemical and reductionist themes that do not serve the common good of parish life in a pluralistic society.

Brett C. Hoover is Assistant Professor of Theological Studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. He is the author of The Shared Parish: Latinos, Anglos, and the Future of U.S. Catholicism (New York: NYU Press, 2014).

Pastoral leaders and theologians do well to note both the advantages and ambiguities of this story as they attempt to reflect back in preaching and teaching the everyday experience (what Latin@ theologians call lo cotidiano) of Latin@ Catholics in a US Church increasingly their own.

The conversion narratives presented here come from the parishioners of All Saints Roman Catholic parish in the small Midwestern city of Havenville. I spent a year listening to Mexican immigrant parishioners there as part of a larger research project on shared parishes, that is, parishes with distinct masses and ministries for different cultural communities who nonetheless share the space of parish facilities. Here I try to reproduce them faithfully but also respectfully and critically.

Francisco Martínez was the head usher for the Latin@ community at All Saints. I met him there in 2007. Francisco, a middle-aged man with a thick shock of dark hair, had migrated to Havenville in the late 1990s from a small town in Central Mexico. He described himself as disoriented and lonely in those days after he arrived. Migrants deal with that disorientation and loneliness in different ways, but he addressed it by getting himself to church. As he very eloquently expressed it in Spanish: “I came with a thirst to find a church in order to feel tranquility, to unburden myself. When one comes as an immigrant, one arrives with that weariness and one desires to pray, to rest with God.” After an initial mishap in which he went to the county courthouse instead of the local Catholic parish—the courthouse sat in the middle of a downtown plaza with an imposing clock tower—he found his way to All Saints. Shortly thereafter, he was present at a Bible study led by the priest. And there, according to Francisco, it happened. “One day God removed the blindfold from my eyes,” he said, “and I could discover the truth. It was for me very beautiful, for me at that time I began to weep because I had remained in the shadows and the Word of God made it so my life was given expression.” By his own account, Francisco’s commitment to learning about his Catholic faith at All Saints increased dramatically after that.

During months of ethnographic research at All Saints parish, I heard many similar conversion narratives. People told about how migration had left them alienated, lonely, or even in a place of great moral and spiritual temptation. They felt lost. Participation in parish life helped them to feel “found,” but it was often a particular kind of participation in parish life—religious education courses, ministry training, sacramental preparation, Bible study. They saw faith formation as giving them solid ground on which to stand amidst the disorientation of migration. Many claimed they had lived in great ignorance of their Catholic faith before attending such programs at All Saints. In a memorable phrase frequently quoted, they had merely “warmed the pew,” (in Spanish, “calentabamos la banca”). Faith formation changed their lives. It helped relieve many difficulties in people’s lives, including confusion and grief, marital troubles, and even the threat of addiction.

A middle-aged man known as Don Chuy described his movement out of alienation and bitterness toward women; he attributed this to his involvement in faith formation at All Saints. Paulina Delgado described the emotional claustrophobia and ennui she felt upon arriving in the United States, resolved by her joining a group of catechists who met weekly to plan their classes for children. “Now,” she said, “our family is much bigger.” Others echoed this narrative of conversion through faith formation as a proposition for other people. Adriana Garcia, a young widow, thought that conversion would undoubtedly follow if people could just learn more about Catholic tradition. Maria del Pilar Mercado said that faith formation at the parish could help those who had little sense of God in their lives.

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5 The names of the parish, the city, the priest, and all parishioners are pseudonyms. Hoover, Shared Parish, 2.
6 Hoover, Shared Parish, 2.
7 Hoover, Shared Parish, 6.
8 Hoover, Shared Parish, 93.
Miguel Fernandez, one of the ushers working with Francisco Martínez, thought that the entire parish should be focused on educating people in their Catholic faith. It would make them better human beings in every part of their lives.

Of course, dramatic narratives of conversion have always been a part of Christian life; though, their style and structure has varied with the times. Bruce Hindmarsh, a scholar of evangelical conversion narratives, writes, “Yet for all the similarities at one level, the Damascus road encounter [of St. Paul], [Augustine hearing] the child’s voice in the garden at Milan, the tower experience [of Luther] at Wittenberg, and the strangely warmed heart [of John Wesley] at Aldersgate Street took place in very different religious and cultural contexts.”9 At All Saints, the tales of dramatic change emerged from the disorienting experience of entering a different and often inhospitable culture. Yet the remarkably consistent tropes of the story—alienation and temptation upon arrival in the United States; a lack of or languid participation in faith life; incorporation in the faith formation programs of the parish; and immersion in a supportive community of meaning, liberation, and awareness of God’s presence—imply structured expectations of what such a story ought to sound like. Where did these expectations come from? Oddly, they seem to echo the conversion narratives of the American evangelical tradition. Whether they come from the preaching of the Second Great Awakening of the early nineteenth century or evangelical megachurches today, these stories nearly always speak of dramatic change; exposure to the Christian story provokes a transformation from an unchurched life steeped in temptation to a rich, meaningful life in Christ. Some scholars refer to these stories as “crisis conversion narratives.”10 Their partial similarity to the conversion narratives at All Saints seems assured, but how exactly do elements of an American evangelical tradition of storytelling become embedded in the stories of Mexican immigrant Catholics?

The answer is contained in a word many All Saints parishioners (and their priest Padre Nacho) used over and over again: the Spanish verb evangelizar, to evangelize. They used this word to frame their notion of faith formation instigating conversion of life. Jorge Alvarez, a young adult leader, summed it up thus:

The most important thing is that each person feels the need and has the interest to do what they can to evangelize (evangelizar). Sometimes we are limited by the lack of people who are well-educated, but from the same people comes the desire to get ahead. And they start to investigate, to go to courses, to go on retreats, to go to classes. And in this way we are continuing to evangelize.11

For many parishioners at All Saints, evangelization constituted a necessary defense. Antonio Nuñez argued that a lack of knowledge about the Catholic tradition made people vulnerable to proselytizing by evangelical and Pentecostal groups. They needed to learn to defend themselves. Manuel Nieves also worried that Pentecostal and evangelical groups were making inroads. And this is how the evangelical conversion story enters US Hispanic contexts. Latin@ Protestant churches have long adapted the American evangelical tradition of conversion narratives in a powerful way. Latin@ Catholics have, in turn, borrowed that narrative tradition but altered it subtly. On the one hand, Francisco Martínez and others saw their lives as permanently altered by an encounter with the word of God just as evangelicals and Pentecostals expressed it. But Catholics tended to replace the evangelical language of encounter with a personal savior with a narrative of encounter with Catholic tradition through faith formation. This is not surprising, since for centuries the chief model of spiritual conversion for Catholics came from entrance and incorporation into religious life. For Catholics, to be evangelized is to be formed in a tradition.

10 Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 16.
This adaptation started in Latin America and then came to the United States. A view of evangelization as faith formation that changes people's lives and inoculates them against the proselytism of evangelicals and Pentecostals specifically echoes Latin American perspectives on the new evangelization. In Europe and North America, the new evangelization is generally perceived as the redoubled effort of the institutional Church to promote the faith against the tides of secularization or secularism. While secularization and secularism have an impact in Latin America, the greater concern of pastoral leaders there is the perception that Catholics have a superficial understanding of their faith. The Dominican scholar of Latin America Edward Cleary expresses the point with less delicacy: “Awareness of ignorance in cultural as well as practicing Catholics is the great engine driving priests and lay Catholics toward a ‘new evangelization.’” Accordingly, the 1992 Santo Domingo assembly of CELAM, the Latin American bishops’ conference, asserted in their final document, “The aim of the new evangelization is to form people and communities whose faith is mature.” The 2010 Aparecida CELAM assembly generally avoided the term new evangelization, but they still insisted, “The challenges posed by the situation of society in Latin America and the Caribbean require a more personal and better grounded Catholic identity. Strengthening this identity entails adequate catechesis to promote personal and community attachment to Christ, especially in those who are weaker in faith.”

From a theological perspective, this “finding Christ through catechesis” may tap into an impoverished vision of the nature of Christian faith. After the Reformation, Catholics and Protestants fought nationalist wars that seemed to hinge on doctrinal distinctions on multiple fronts—the role of faith and works, different Eucharistic theologies, notions about baptism, the place of the clergy in the Church. Ever since, Christians have been tempted by a reductionist view of faith as intellectual assent to correct doctrine. Twenty century theologians—Catholic and Protestant—re-articulated faith as an existential commitment to God across the whole of one's life made possible by grace. The new evangelization, on the one hand, often argues for the need for an existential encounter with God in Jesus Christ, but its pastoral emphasis is too often on imparting a fuller sense of doctrine as the key means of arriving there. We might also wonder if a doctrinal approach to forming “people and communities whose faith is mature” may rest on assumptions of the educated class that poor people whose faith was inculcated through intergenerational storytelling and popular religion could not possibly possess “mature faith.”

To be fair, understanding the new evangelization requires historical context. Starting in the 1980s and 90s, the Vatican promoted the new evangelization in Latin America to offer an alternative theological vision to liberation theology. The Vatican long worried that the Marxist social analysis in liberation theology reduced Catholic faith to economics or ideology, and CELAM explicitly echoed this worry at its 2010 Aparecida assembly. The nueva evangelización thus, for the most part, eschews economic analysis and political advocacy. Nevertheless, a focus on relieving poverty and misery remains. At Santo Domingo, human development—not liberation—is called a “privileged dimension” of the new evangelization, with a particular focus here on promoting Catholic social teaching as a means of addressing poverty and inequality. As the Church’s social teaching points out, “development ought to lead man and woman from less human to ever more human conditions until they come to full knowledge of Jesus Christ.” This personalist view does not ignore the terrible impact of miserable conditions, but it focuses more on the interior life of individuals and communities.

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poverty on Latin Americans, but it sees economic development as one aspect of the full development of the human person, a full human development crowned by an explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ. CELAM, with encouragement from the Vatican, argued that salvation comes more through good theology than through political liberation. Nervous about Marxist-tinged social and political analysis, the Latin American bishops decided to rely on ecclesial tools reminiscent of the late Reformation Era—strategic use of papal and magisterial authority, propositional truth statements, catechisms, and a precise focus on correct doctrine as boundary maintenance between religious groups.19 This was in accord with CELAM’s strong concerns about the spread of evangelical and Pentecostal groups.

This focus on doctrine and belief and suspicion of activism provided the seedbed in which the conversion narratives at All Saints grew. The Mexican immigrant priest at All Saints, Padre Nacho, who was educated at a regional seminary in central Mexico where the nueva evangelización had taken hold, told me that he chose to focus on faith formation when he realized that many immigrant parishioners had not had their first communion and confirmation. He saw his mission at All Saints as enabling parishioners to not only attend mass and pray but to deeply understand the faith they had inherited. In his native Mexico, he observed, the tight scheduling of masses and sacraments meant that crowds of people came and went with little understanding of their faith. His cousin, also a priest, described the parish in Mexico as like a fábrica, a factory. Padre Nacho emphasized his own preference for more faith formation time with parents of children rather than simply celebrating more (and perhaps less crowded) masses. He clearly felt that faith formation served as the most powerful tool for the growth and development of his people as human persons.

The CELAM bishops did not intend the focus on religious education in the new evangelization as an excuse to ignore social issues or secular concerns. “It [the new evangelization] shows continuities with Vatican II,” Peterson and Vásquez argue, “in its recognition of the church’s need to be in touch with the laity’s secular life and in its continuing concern for social issues.”20 At All Saints, Padre Nacho and his parishioners agreed. He preached constantly about the dignity of too frequently exploited immigrants, and involved parishioners spoke about that same experience alternatively with sarcasm and poignancy. At the Easter Vigil, Padre Nacho echoed Jesus’ resurrection command not to be afraid, telling people they should not even be afraid of La Migra—the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE).

Yet both priest and people shied away from structural analysis or activism. Fr. Nacho refused to speak publicly about immigration raids, persuaded it would only lead to panic. Parishioners interviewed at All Saints never even supposed that the Church should assist deportees or help people arrange their immigration papers. They just hoped and prayed for change. As one immigrant parishioner noted:

I think that all those that are here and attend the church are praying to God so that an agreement come together in this country and allow us to work peacefully without worry of this, without worry that you are going out into the street and…God only knows if you are going to return again home or if they are going to grab you and send you back to Mexico.21

Peterson and Vásquez note a parallel movement away from political involvement in Latin American base communities of the 1990s: “Rather than fostering participation in extra-ecclesial social movements that address larger social questions, CEBs [comunidades eclesiales de base] and other pastoral programs now tend to concentrate on personal and family problems.”22 Indeed, at All Saints, no one had much confidence in political change or saw ways

19 McGuire, Lived Religion, 22-44.
21 Hoover, Shared Parish, 98-99.
of participating in it. In 2007, the immigration system seemed broken beyond repair. A city meeting on immigration reform drew very few parishioners. Immigrant parishioners had little faith in government; in their experience, one-party rule in Mexico had ended only to give way to capitalist cronism and the organized crime of the cartels. But parishioners did believe in the power of a deeper education in their faith tradition to empower them to take control over their personal lives. It gave them focus and discipline. It helped them resist temptations. It initiated them into a world of personal and spiritual growth that made a definitive difference for them.

This echoed Father Ignacio’s teaching. He routinely emphasized spirituality, personal maturity, and commitment to marriage and family in his catechetical talks and homilies. Social justice advocates and critics from the political left often warn that such an intense focus on personal matters draws people’s attention away from structural injustice, perpetuating the status quo. Certainly at All Saints people had little interest in any activism that might address structural injustice. But neither were they naïve about it. Indeed, the common sense narrative about immigration I chronicled in the community framed the issue of immigration structurally, especially through the lens of governmental hypocrisy. Here in the United States, they saw that people wanted their labor and their consumer spending; the US government just did not want to afford them the rights and privileges that would go with legal papers. Thus, though pastoral leaders may find fault with the new evangelization and its conversion narratives for an individualistic focus or for a lack of focus on social justice, that criticism does not seem entirely fair.

Perhaps more troubling is the polemical tone of conversion narratives shaped by the new evangelization. Because education in the faith serves as the fulcrum of conversion in these stories, storytellers may look disparagingly upon those less educated in the faith. Indeed, parishioners at All Saints did so, even deprecating themselves in their former lives of faith. They constructed a firm boundary between the ingroup of involved parishioners and those who simply “warmed the pew,” to whom they sometimes seemed to extend little sympathy. Additionally, as already noted, some parishioners articulated the new evangelization conversion narrative in an ecumenically defensive manner. It empowered Catholics to fight off the threat of the sectas, a pejorative term for evangelicals and Pentecostals. At All Saints, Manuel Nieves, said, “The sectas and Protestantism are gobbling us up out there, while we are left behind.” He led an apologetics group specifically designed to educate Catholics to combat the influence of Pentecostals and evangelicals. He began the session I visited by criticizing evangelical pastors who demand a ten percent tithe and who preach that withholding it is tantamount to robbing God. A few others nodded and confirmed this as a kind of “narrative of greed.” But one man, offering something of a minority report, corrected this set of stereotypes, noting that many such preachers were actually volunteers.

This drawing of firm and defensive boundaries with both the uninvolved and Protestants occurs in accounts of the new evangelization in Latin America, but it takes on particular force in the United States, probably as a response to shifting religious demographics. The Pew Research Center has found that US Latin@s’ identification with Catholicism has declined significantly in recent years. In 2013, almost a quarter of all Latin@s claimed to be former Catholics; 55 percent claimed to be currently Roman Catholic. About 8 percent of Latin@s have become Protestants—most evangelicals or Pentecostals—but a larger number, 12 percent, have disaffiliated with religion entirely. The latter group is more likely to be young and US born. Indeed, parishioners at All Saints felt the force of these changes. They pointed to the presence of neighborhood proselytizers as well as friends and relatives who urged them to join evangelical or Pentecostal churches. They also spoke of those who did not attend mass or even refused to identify as Catholic, even some who sent their children to Catholic school. Their own “lost and found” conversion narratives seemed to depend on a definition of these “others” in their midst.

Whatever the reason for this greater emphasis on boundary marking, it has aroused criticism among both Protestant and Catholic theologians and pastoral leaders. The Peruvian evangelical theologian Samuel Escobar has complained about this negative tone vis-à-vis Protestants in the new evangelization in Latin America itself, which he finds wildly inappropriate after Vatican II. The 2010 assembly of the Latin American bishops’ conference (CELAM) agreed, and it re-emphasized ecumenism after a lukewarm mention at Santo Domingo in 1992. Closer to home, the US Catholic biblical scholar Jean-Pierre Ruiz has criticized the new evangelization for its adversarial tone directed at Latin American Protestants.

Nevertheless, despite these developments, the conversion narratives of the new evangelization at All Saints provided a powerful way of framing the disorienting experience of migration. Francisco Martinez, the man whose story I shared at the beginning of this paper, had felt lost, lonely, robbed of a sense of confidence and well-being. Learning about his faith in Bible study had helped him feel found, solid, at home. As I quoted at the beginning, he said, “One day God removed the blindfold from my eyes, and I could discover the truth . . . my life was given expression.” Whenever a narrative structure gives voiceless people a means for self-expression, we must take notice. Indeed, from the uncertainty of his early days in Havenville, Francisco went on to become a leader and mentor in the parish. His story reminds us how a narrative with flaws can still function as a template for empowerment. Many other stories at All Saints demonstrated a similar passage from anxiety and loss to confidence and leadership. Pastors and theologians should take note.

It remains to be seen, however, whether this lost-and-found narrative of conversion fits the experience of the children of migration. In focus groups among the Latin@ youth at All Saints parish, almost all born in the United States, I never heard someone speak of how education in the faith changed his or her life. They had no life divided into two halves, before and after, old country and new country. Their challenge was different. They stood uneasily on the boundary between cultures and between cultural interpretations of the Catholic faith. Many expressed that they were bored at mass in Spanish; yet they found the English mass rara, that is, weird. I attended a confirmation class in Spanish full of children of immigrants in their late teens and early 20s. The teacher asked me to help a young woman, Lupita, who spoke Spanish passably well but could only read and write in English. As she wrote a summary of the day’s lesson in English, she turned to me and asked, “How do you say Espíritu Santo in English?” She found herself in the curious place of having been religiously socialized in Spanish even though she lived a hybrid life, much of it in English. She did not need a narrative of disjunction like that of the new evangelization. She needed a narrative of integration, something to help her synthesize the elements of her bicultural life, giving due honor to both sides. As well as the new evangelization conversion narratives serve the parents of these young people, we might wonder what new narrative, perhaps still unexpressed, will come along to speak of their experience and our common future as Roman Catholics in the United States.

The Church as a Conspiracy of Unity
by Ramón Luzárraga

It is a tautology to say that we live in a global Catholic Church that is, historically, at its most catholic in actuality to the point that it can truly echo the ideal of this mark of the Church. This catholicity has been made possible with the Church becoming replete with the voices of Catholics in the Global South, voices that have now reached to occupy the See of Peter itself. This welcome reality of a global, polyglot, and multicultural Church does bring up the question of whether we are risking the creation of "ethnotheologies," which would balkanize the Catholic Church in ways similar to what happened to Eastern Orthodox Christianity with their autocephalous churches drawn on ethnic and national lines, and what happened to Protestant Christianity with their national churches. A working definition of ethnotheology can be understood as when the encounter between the human and the divine is best realized within the life of an ethnic or national group¹ at the expense of a global Christian communion. This problem is an old one for the Church. Christopher Dawson wrote that "most of the great schisms and heresies in the history of the Christian Church have their roots in social and national antipathies."² The task is more challenging for a Church of unprecedented pluralism, and more urgent for the readers of these pages, because Dawson correctly concludes that "if this [phenomenon of social and national antipathy as a source of Church disunity] had been clearly recognized by the theologians, the history of Christianity would have been a different one."³ One could add all persons engaged in ministry as a target of Dawson's statement, since they would likely encounter the problem before the theologians.

It is well known how the Church models its unity theologically on the unity of God: a unity based as much on difference as well as sameness. The Church is one because God is one. Its different peoples should be bound together by relational bonds of love (or of peace) that models themselves from the bond of love which unites the distinct persons of the Trinity who communicate differently, but in relation to one another, the same divine essence.⁴ In tension with this unity is the Church's acceptance of human difference. God confirms human difference as good by virtue of having created it, by God becoming incarnate in Jesus therefore

¹ I borrow this definition from Aristotle Papanikolaou, who writes of how ethnotheology among the Eastern Orthodox was a product of the rise of nationalism in the emergent Eastern-Orthodox Christian nations declaring independence from the slow collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Aristotle Papanikolaou, The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 44. Ethnotheology was a factor too, beginning in the Reformation period, when religion played a role in the formation of nation states which concluded with the consensus of Westphalian nationalism in the seventeenth century.
³ Fitzpatrick, 54.
⁴ See Augustine, De Trinitate, Book IV, 12 and VIII, 12.
signaling an essential acceptance of human nature, and the Church’s consequent rejection of anti-incarnational heresies like Gnosticism which, in its rejection of God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ, by extension also rejects the incarnated nature of human beings in all its social and cultural variety.

Theology knows well this tension, and has sought to negotiate it with successful efforts including first, working through the ramifications of the doctrine of the Trinity which serve as the model for a diverse and unified Church, whereby unity and diversity reinforce each other; second, articulating how particular ethnic and cultural practices of the universal truths of the faith can be justified by scholastic arguments where the universal can be known through its particular instantiations; and third, using theological justifications for inculturation based on how God accepts our embodied selves, save for sin, through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. These efforts serve to demonstrate how the Church can be of many peoples yet authentically be one. Therefore, how can our catholicity as one Church of many peoples inform our being one Church, and how can our being one Church fully reinforce our catholicity as a global Church that embraces a people of unprecedented diversity? How should we renegotiate this ongoing tension of an ancient problem of the Church and avoid an “ethnotheological” breakdown?

One important challenge in addressing this tension is to find a means that can be understood and have impact on all the levels theology is done: popularly, pastorally, and professionally. To that end, it is useful to retrieve and employ John Courtney Murray’s use of the term “conspiracy” in the original meaning of that word: “to breathe together.” It can be used within the context of another well-trodden area of theology, the theology of vocation, provided a problem within that particular area of theology can be dealt with: the theology of vocation’s tendency to focus on formal ministry, both lay or clerical. This tension can be constructively dealt with, if not permanently resolved, through an understanding of a shared conspiracy of Catholics dedicated to a common vocation that takes up a cultural location but does not get stuck within an ethnotheology that reduces Catholic faith and life to a single, specific, perhaps hegemonic cultural expression of it. This is because Catholics share a common quality that has always been foundational to vocation, both in formal ministry and the informal practices of vocation in day-to-day life: the life of faith as first and foremost a commitment.

People familiar with Murray may find it odd that I use his understanding of conspiracy to apply to the Church. In We Hold These Truths, Murray himself did not. There, he used “conspiracy” to help explain how the American political consensus developed. “Conspiracy” for Murray meant its original Latin sense: unison, concord, unanimity in opinion. A people in conspiracy are united in action for a common end. Murray’s project asked how the then-four conspiracies of the American society of 1960, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and secularist, could form an American society that can be just, civil, and peaceful. (The conspiracies that make up American society have multiplied since.) This Stoic philosophical term, which passed into American political philosophy through Cicero and then through the medieval scholastic tradition, Murray argues, is basic to the success of civil society, where these groups conspire to live together as one: 

6 Murray, 23.
7 Murray, 22.
8 Murray, 22.
as one, because the origins of the word in his thought are ecclesial. Murray’s use of “conspiracy” originated in the scholasticism, specifically the Thomism, that undergirded his public theology. First, his use of “conspiracy” was in support of an argument that was essentially theological, with natural law and theism serving as the basis for his argument. Second, Murray’s focus on the term “conspiracy” for analysis is a product of Cajetan’s influence on the style of scholasticism Murray studied, where the former insisted on a “philological precision among the senses of individual terms.” Third, Murray’s faith that human social conspiracies can conspire to a social consensus is grounded in the affirmation of scholastic ideas that there is a natural law to serve as the basis of a consensus based on truth. Human beings, no matter the conspiracy they hold allegiance to, can reason their way to that truth because each person has access to enough specific instantiations of universal truth to move from those particulars to the universal. This includes conspiracies of religious groups, which is why Murray examined the question of God at work in human communities beyond the Church. Consequently, “conspiracy” can be used as a term to help understand how disparate and very dissimilar ethnic and social groups can nonetheless “breathe together” as one religious communion, as one Church.

This use of “conspiracy” is justified further by the history of how Church unity was often achieved not primarily on theological grounds, but through a dominant cultural mediation of the Christian faith. That, in turn, was itself a byproduct of Church efforts throughout history to unite human beings on a temporal basis into political societies and national unions. It can be argued that these efforts at temporal unity, ironically, could and did undermine Church unity because the Church throughout history often has not allowed different ethnic groups to conspire to become Catholics with their cultural differences, but instead become one Church through a single imposed cultural mediation of the faith that alienated many minority Catholics who could not subscribe to that hegemony.

The origin of this problem over how Church unity has too often been wrongheadedly achieved can be found with the Catholic Church’s urgent need to bring order to a chaotic world following the collapse of the Roman Empire. Since that time, the Catholic Church has possessed a strong (but by no means absolute) preference for national unity from the first medieval European kingdoms to the Westphalian nation-state (a preference that remained despite the fact that many of those states exercised strong, even virulent forms of anti-Clericalism), to the European Union whose foundation is credited to post-Second World War European Catholic politicians. Examples of this preference abound throughout history and across the world. Jean-Benoit Nadeau and Julie Barlow observe how the deliberate French government policy of leveling regional differences for the sake of creating a united French culture defined and governed from the center (Paris), is a direct consequence of France being a Catholic country despite its official secularism and repeated episodes of anti-clericalism to supplant Church power with an all-

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12 Murray, We Hold These Truths, 327-328.
13 See Hooper, 122.
15 France was an idealized reality that transcended the government of the day for many French Catholics; a great and holy Republic, symbolized by the French revolutionary battle of Valmy (often described as a miracle) and patriots like Joan of Arc. See Emile Perreau-Saussine, Catholicism and Democracy: An Essay in the History of Political Thought, trans. by Richard Rex (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 107.
pervasive state power that is “heavily centralized, hierarchical, and homogenizing.” The Church in Brazil, despite suffering anti-clerical measures under the reign of Emperor Pedro II and the early First Republic that overturned him, still saw itself as indispensable to the formation of Brazilian national identity which included unity in faith. Glen Caudill Dealy describes Latin America’s need to structure social conduct and human relationships in an integrated, organic fashion, even to the point of putting in power authoritarian governments to enforce it, as a direct consequence of how the Roman Catholic Church shaped culturally and socially the countries of that region.17

The United States, despite its self-identification as a diverse immigrant culture, found the Catholic Church in this country driving for both Church and national unity together in a common American assimilationist project (reinforced by an ultramontanist ecclesiology)18 which encountered resistance by minority Catholic groups. Here are a few examples.

Between 1880 and 1925, Carpatho-Rusyns (commonly known as Ruthenian Catholics) experienced conflict with the American Latin-rite bishops19 who termed their liturgy and practices “a foreign rite” with its inculturated practices of liturgy and worship, ecclesial practices such as having married clergy, and their priests possessing the faculty to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation without the need to seek permission from their bishop. The Latin-rite bishops, led by the Archbishop of St. Paul-Minneapolis John Ireland, “could not understand nor tolerate a diversification of rite.”20 He sought to place Eastern Catholics and their clergy “under their complete control and absorbing them as they had the other nationality groups of the new immigration.”21 A major consequence of these conflicts was that many Ruthenian Catholics left to become Eastern Orthodox,22 specifically the once-Russian Orthodox body that is today the autocephalous Orthodox Church of America.

Between 1904 and 1917, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, under their ethnically German Archbishop Sebastian Messmer, encountered the threat of schism between Polish Catholics and the Church. The flashpoint was over Messmer’s policy of trying to unite a polyglot diocese of eight ethnic groups (mostly from eastern and southern Europe) into an “American Catholic phalanx”23 for the greater unity of the Church; to Americanize the Church into an English speaking cohort that could, in his mind, combat a slew of social problems locally.24 Poles saw this as an attempt to strip away their language and cultural identity. Tensions were compounded by the Poles’ insistence not only of the preservation of these two things, but preserving them through a measure of autonomy exercised by the appointment of a Polish bishop, preferably as the head of a diocese or through an auxiliary bishop “who would take over as pastor of some prominent Milwaukee Polish church, and in effect be the de facto ordinary and regular minister of the sacraments to the Poles.”25 These tensions marked much of Messmer’s time as archbishop.

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18 Ecclesiologically, the greater autonomy dioceses enjoyed in the nineteenth century gave way in the twentieth “to a stricter chain of command that began with the pope and flowed through the curia to local bishops and their bureaus and departments. The apotheosis of this came when a long-awaited codification of canon law was issued in 1917 and declared effective in 1918. The administrative clarity of the “New” Code of Canon Law gave broader powers to Roman and diocesan officials.” Steven M. Avella, *The Richness of the Earth: A History of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee 1843-1958* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002), 317.
19 In the grand scheme of Church history, this American episode was a continuation of the recurring conflict between the Slavonic Rite and the Latin rite bishops of Central Europe, which should have been settled by the efforts of Saints Cyril and Methodius gaining official acceptance of the former rite by Pope Adrian II, but was not. (See Fitzpatrick, 54-60.)
21 Warzeski, 108.
23 The phrase was Messmer’s. See Avella, 320-322.
24 Avella, 320-321
25 Avella, 320-321.
and were calmed only when Polish priests finally became bishops in their own right and negotiated between the demands of Polish Catholics and the authority of their non-Polish hierarchs. But other dioceses were not so fortunate. The events in Milwaukee and other dioceses with substantial Polish Catholic populations (e.g. Chicago and Grand Rapids) negotiated these tensions in the shadow of the 1897 schism between the Diocese of Scranton, Pennsylvania and what became the Polish National Catholic Church. The latter group crisscrossed America looking for opportunities to add other, disaffected Polish Catholics to their ranks.

What Timothy Matovina correctly identified as the multiple origins of the Catholic Church in the United States reveal other unique, culturally mediated forms of the Catholic faith; forms that tended to buck the American Catholic assimilationist project. A goodly number of South Louisiana's Catholics always worshipped in French using inculturated forms of the faith known to them, and Hispanic populations across the United States have always done so similarly with the Spanish language and the pre-Tridentine forms of worship mediated through symbol and ritual as much as, if not more than, the written word. These examples are numerous to the point that they cannot be dismissed as exceptions to the assimilationist rule, but instead serve as harbingers of the plural Roman Catholic Church we have in the United States today: “the most ethically and radically diverse national ecclesial body in the world.”

All of these examples serve as a warning: if the Church cannot renegotiate the means by which different groups of Catholics find a means to conspire together, to breathe together as Church without resorting to a unity imposed by a cultural hegemony, we could lose these groups as happened with the Ruthenian Catholics, many Polish Catholics, and today many Hispanics. (Perhaps one could make a similar conclusion about the Church globally.)

The urgency is amplified by the fact that recognition in the Church is a reliable means for an ethnic group to gain recognition, a fact that holds true not just for the Catholic Church in the United States but for Christian churches in general both here and worldwide. Local Church congregations and organizations continue to serve as a refuge for people to celebrate their particular, inculturated form of faith, and this comfort zone enables them to adapt to the host society on their own terms and at their own pace. Again, examples abound. The United States saw the Second Great Awakening (1800-1830) that served as a direct and major cause of the development of Jacksonian Democracy, where, for better and for worse, faith in the ability of the people to govern themselves intuitively, without the day-to-day direction of an intellectual elite, was asserted. The story of the Pentecostal movement in the United States in the twentieth century mirrored that of Methodists in the eighteenth century and Baptists in the nineteenth. These movements enabled people who “beginning as total outcasts [usually from the lower class], they were to gain a status of suspicious toleration, followed eventually by full acceptance by the community.” One sees a similar phenomenon with Hispanics, whose political engagement in U.S. society occurs primarily through their churches. Internationally, in the Caribbean, political and cultural liberation began with the recognition that God

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26 See Avella, 336-338.
27 See Avella, 319-320 and 338.
29 Matovina, 38.
30 See Matovina, 66.
33 Michael Jones-Corrao and David Leal found that active Catholic churchgoers generally participated in politics more and this conclusion applied to both Hispanic and non-Hispanic Catholics. The reason lay with the simple fact that the Church performed “a particularly central function for civic instruction and engagement,” especially for Hispanics who, unlike non-Hispanics are involved in few associations outside the Church and tend to be politically mobilized through the Church. Michael A. Jones-Corrao and David L. Leal, “Political Participation: Does Religion Matter?,” Political Research Quarterly 54, no. 4. (December, 2001): 760-764.
sees the people there as not inferior to their former colonial or post-colonial masters, but as human beings and that carries socio-political import for liberation.34

How can the Catholic Church promote authentic conspiracy among its diverse groups to come together as a plural, yet one Church, without resorting to a false unity based on a faith mediated through a cultural hegemony instead of theology? How can this be done on all levels theology is done, popular, pastoral, and academic, so that all people may help realize it? The theology of vocation where all are seen to possess a vocation of some kind from God could serve as one potential working solution. However, the problem with the theology of vocation in the Church is that within industrialized nations, an understanding of vocation has an understandable bias to formal types of lay and clerical vocation. For example, in their document Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord, the Catholic Bishops of the United States define ministry “in its broadest sense, as service (diakonia) and is the means for accomplishing mission in the communion of the Church. It is a participation in and expression of Christ’s ministry. Within this broad understanding of ministry, distinctions are necessary.”35 From there, the document proceeds to distinguish between lay and ordained ministry. So far, the document appears to embrace what I am articulating, but later that same document addresses how bishops ought to guide the work of lay ecclesial ministers in the Church in the following way. “[A bishop’s] guidance can take a range of forms in the life and structure of a particular church: establishing standards for formation and evaluation, providing opportunities and resources for continuing education and professional development, formalizing job descriptions and establishing appropriate processes to authorize those beginning a lay ecclesial ministry, and supporting the resolution of conflict situations between lay ecclesial ministers and the ordained.”36 Theologians who are experts on ministry speak in a similar way. H. Richard McCord, in a series of responses to Co-Workers, speaks of the need to institutionalize lay ecclesial ministry in order that the Church formally authorize its existence and continued sustenance in the Church.37

This bias for the formal extends to the universal call to holiness from which a theology of vocation is drawn. In Co-Workers the Catholic bishops define this call as something lay men and women find “in each and every one of the world’s occupations and callings and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, form the context of their existence.” Notice what comes first.38

Now, this bias toward the formal, or institutionalized forms of ministry and work is not a problem in itself. We in the Church want well-formed, well-educated ministers, both lay and clerical. Or, if people cannot do ministry for the Church full-time, we want them to be in formal, institutionalized jobs and careers so that they can sustain themselves materially so they can minister when and where they can. The recent scandals in the Church will push it for still more formalization of ministry. However, it is a problem insofar as many Catholics around the Global South lack regular access to ministry, but despite this are not cut off from the Church. They often practice what Ondina González and Justo González identify as “private Catholicism.” Historically, for millions of Catholics in Latin America, “it was the only presence the Catholic Church had in their lives.” This phenomenon was defined by González and González, “as Catholics [who] had to find their own way without the guidance–and restraints–provided by official representatives of the church, [and so] they often turned to symbols and rituals that grounded them in the familiar past.”39 This phenomenon is not simply a Latin American phenomenon, but a global one.

34 Lewin L. Williams, Caribbean Theology (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 200, 211.
36 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 23.
38 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 8.
where institutional structures of the Church fall short due to lack of resources and/or the availability of educated clergy and lay ministers to serve the people. Then, ministry and the practice of faith by necessity must become informal. One's spiritual director can be one's own mother or wise elder. Catholic faith is communicated and practiced through the many manifestations of popular religion found worldwide. Here, the theology of vocation, if it insists on its bias toward formal, institutional ministry, cannot apply. In the Global South, informal ministry often accompanies informal forms of economics and government, which function without official, formal recognition, though at their best, they are completely legitimate in their practice. Therefore, a broader category is needed within theology: namely commitment. Commitment may be the core idea in a theology of vocation that can unite all levels, popular, pastoral, and academic, and by extension the diverse peoples of the Church to conspire to “breathe together” as one. It can because commitment is a theological concept with a long pedigree in Church history, and has often been critically retrieved to address contemporary challenges to the Church.

Gustavo Gutiérrez is an excellent example of one such retrieval. He speaks of the Christian life first as a commitment. He writes that “The Christian community professes a ‘faith which works through charity. ’ It is—it should be—effective charity, action, and commitment to the service of others.” Theology follows as the “second act” to understand this commitment to God and neighbor. At face value, Gutiérrez appears to challenge Anselm’s traditional definition of theology as faith seeking understanding which, in his contemplative environment, comes first. This is not the case. Gutiérrez is critically retrieving something from Anselm.

Anselm confirms Gutiérrez’s insight, and therefore shows us that this idea of commitment is neither just a common nor familiar term when one examines the traditional, accepted basis for doing theology on any level: faith seeking understanding. Here, Anselm argues that “the prerequisite for a correct understanding of the faith is ‘solitas fidei’ [‘firmness of faith’], acquired through ‘sapientiae et morum gravitas’ [‘wisdom and serious comportment’].” In other words, he is describing a commitment. Otherwise, “Theology without the practice of the faith is therefore not possible.” While Anselm would understand this within the context of a monastic foundation, the practice of a “firmness of faith” with “wisdom and serious comportment” while best done with the full intellectual and pastoral leadership and resources of the Church in easy reach, can nonetheless be done anywhere in the Church… even on an informal and popular level. Gustavo Gutierrez’s statement that theology begins as a commitment is not the usurping of Anselm, but the critical retrieval of something properly basic to articulating how theology can be practiced as faith seeking understanding on any level of the Church.

It is clear to most Catholics that the election of Pope Francis has signaled the proper recognition of the Global South in a global Church, demonstrating how the Church has become catholic in actuality. Less acknowledged is the means of how to unite these people on all levels, including the informal, popular forms of faith where many Catholics live. A “theology of commitment” properly basic to how we practice the faith in common, can enable us to conspire to breathe together as Church, not fragment into “ethnotheologies,” and attain this unity without the intentional or unintentional creation of a dominant or hegemonic cultural mediation of the faith that imposes unity from without instead of generating it from within the Church, theologically. This effort can, in turn, develop ways to formalize and bring closer into the institutional fold those who have no option save that of the informal practice of their faith. What stands before us is nothing new, but is a reminder, critically retrieved, of a foundational quality of vocation. A quality with which we can conspire together as different peoples who communicate different instantiated communications of Catholic faith and practice, and use those different instantiated expressions of faith to become, with God’s help, more truly one Church.

40 Gustavo Gutiérrez, Teología de la Liberación, 10th ed. (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 2004), 67-68. [Translation mine.]
41 Leinsle, 81.
42 Leinsle, 81
Religious Life in the U.S.: A Vocation of Border Crossing

by Jung Eun Sophia Park, S.N.J.M.

Apostolic religious women in the U.S. have recently been in the media spotlight, due to the visitation of women religious communities and the investigation into the theology of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious by the Vatican Curia. Attention has also been given to the responses from religious women's groups, as well as from laity, from around the world. Since the Second Vatican Council, religious women have tried to interpret the spirit of the council and construct a new way of apostolic religious life. Throughout this process, one of the most challenging and thought-provoking issues has been the identity of religious women in the U.S. This theme has often been mentioned, in conjunction with the vocation crisis, as something which signifies the decrease in membership.¹

Some scholars argue that religious women have lost their sign as consecrated women, in regard to their nature of “being separate” from the world.² In this argument, the main cause of low membership is the lack of signage or visibility, which is very often explained as the veil and habit. Here, the identity of women religious is equated with the habit and/or certain customs. Other scholars explain the decrease in membership from a socio-political perspective, in that women have more professional opportunities due to feminist advances, so that they do not necessarily seek a religious life. But most often, the main cause of the decrease in vocation is seen as the women religious’ identity crisis, which questions the contemporary understanding of the three vows.³ In such a discourse, the identity of women religious is considered a static entity rather than a dynamic process. This essay offers a suggestion for how the religious women’s identity can be constructed and, in so doing, explores the meaning of religious life in the U.S. With such an exploration, we can address the identity of women religious in the U.S. as border crosser and their vocation as border crossing.

In this endeavor, I will first explore the process of identity construction, employing the concepts of the “empty signifier” and the “master signifier” by psychological theorist Jacque Lacan, and argue the identity of US women

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² In order to understand current critique and questions for the contemporary women religious in apostolic community, see Apostolic Religious Life in America Today: a Response to the Crisis, ed. Richard Gribble, C.S.C. (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011). Also see Sandra Schneiders’ explanation on the decrease of religious vocation in That was Then...This is Now: The Past, Present and Future of Women Religious in the United States (Notre Dame: St. Mary’s College, 2011). These two represent different perspectives.
religious as border-crosser, examining the early history of religious life in the U.S., and applying it to the current multicultural global setting.

**Identity Construction**

In linguistics, meaning or signification is produced when communication happens between a sender and a receiver through a signifier. In this dynamic between the two parties, the signifier functions as a tool for delivering meaning, and the signified results in the delivered meaning or signification. Very often, the signifier is a language, within which are embedded body language, facial expressions, and clothing. The identity of religious life—which is deeply related to the meaning of religious life—exists in the process of producing the signification. In other words, religious women express their meaning of life, which can be translated as their identity as a whole, by integrating their values and faith. Women religious send to the world their messages—whatever they are—through their language (including speech, body language, and clothing), missions, and action. As such, the signifier is related to the whole system of religious life.

In order to understand the process of identity construction, Lacan’s concepts of the “master signifier” and the “empty signifier” are very helpful. A strong connection between the signifier and the signified is expressed as such that “without this fundamental duality of signifier and signified, no psychoanalytic determination is conceivable.”\(^4\) Additionally, the “master signifier” represents those with whom the subject—who is one or a group in the process of meaning production—most deeply identifies and who, accordingly, has a key role in the way the subject wants to give meaning to or communicate with the world. Applying this notion to the words “vowed religious life” as the “master signifier,” we sense that the words “religious life,” in fact, conveys the ideals of religious life. Thus, the lifestyle of women religious—including their ministries and activities, as well as their statements—signifies their identity and becomes the medium through which women religious communicate with the world.

Importantly, the function of the “master signifier” lies in its efficacy: the “master signifier” stimulates the subjects to reorient their lives and, with respect to all other signifiers, to structure their sense of identity. Thus, the words “vowed religious” as the “master signifier” reorients the life of women religious and strengthens them to continue their journey. For example, when women religious (as individuals or as an institution) reflect on their identity, the phrase “the life of women religious” can function as the master signifier and guide them to reflect on questions such as, “Am I on the right path as a women religious?” or “What is the right decision for me or for the community to make at this moment of life?” In this way, the “master signifier” serves as a measure to orient religious life in their community, as well as to serve the world.

How, then, do we know the “master signifier” conveys the ideal meaning to the receiver? Also, how do religious women ensure that the “master signifier” becomes the signified, which the subject desired or even forced? Unfortunately, it is impossible for the subject to convey or share the same meaning with the world as with the receiver. Lacan calls this ongoing process of meaning production and identity construction the “empty signifier.” As with all of Lacan’s key formulations, this notion also emphasizes that the “master signifier” is actually the “empty signifier” or “signifiers without a signified.” What Lacan’s account of the “master signifier” thus emphasizes is the gap between the signifier and the signified.\(^5\) Applied to the religious life, the words “women religious” as the “master signifier”—which guarantees and provides a stable identity—becomes ambiguous, and the meaning becomes an

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enigma for the members themselves as well as for other people in the world.\(^6\) As such, the “empty signifier” indicates the vague characteristics of the once produced meaning, while the “signifiers without a signified” underscores that identity exists not as a status, but as an ongoing process.

In addition, Lacan argues, in line with his emphasis on the decentered self, the ongoing and usually unquestioning use of these words represents how the construction of sense depends on the transferential supposition that “others are supposed to know.”\(^7\) In other words, by being a decentered self, meaning is given by others. Lacan argues that what is efficient in generating our belief in—and identification with—this elusive “thing” is a conviction that other people know with certainty. In my understanding of Lacan’s “empty signifier,” the other or the world gives meaning to religious life, after which the deeper meaning—by decentering ourselves and dialoguing with others—is then produced.

Here, two things need to be considered. The first is our initial certainty about the nature of such obvious things as “women religious” (women religious may even be vexed when asked by someone). Its certainty in meaning is constantly on the move and, thus, “the master signifier” should always be examined. As long as the religious community or an individual religious woman consistently ask the meaning of the master signifier, this process will lead to listening to others about the meaning they receive from others.

Along with Lacan, the “empty signifier,” the symbols or any other medium through which women religious convey their identity, suggests that only when women religious are congruent with society, and thus given meaning, can they find the meaning of life or their identity. It is a paradoxical truth that the more they want to convey the meaning of religious life, the more they must give up control and, instead, be open to society and wait for whatever is given to them. Thus, by looking at and listening to contemporary society, they can receive a more vital meaning and identity.

In summary, the “master signifier,” in this case the phrase “the life of women religious” in the U.S. indicates the idea of identity and, accordingly, has a key role in giving meaning to the world. The phrase “the life of women religious” has importance in reorienting and structuring their own identity. However, the phrase “the life of women religious” can also become an “empty signifier” or signifier without meaning, which suggests that the phrase no longer has a general or universal meaning for people. As time passes, the phrase “the life of women religious” means something increasingly ambiguous.

Furthermore, Lacan would argue that the meaning of the phrase “the life of women religious” depends on “what others think of them,” rather than on what they think of themselves. In other words, the meaning of life or the identity of religious life is given by others. In the concept of the “empty signifier,” the meaning of the life of women religious or the identity of women religious is not to be given to others, but given by others. It is a paradoxical truth that in emptying oneself as Jesus did, one gains life. As such, it is extremely difficult to say that the identity of women religious depends on their visibility in terms of wearing veils. Rather, it depends on their relationship with the world, with which women religious have endeavored to work. The choice to wear or not wear a habit, and the resulting reaction to it, can also be a part of the process of identity construction. The identity of women religious in the U.S. is contained in the process of being shaped and reshaped. As such, it is better to glimpse the identity of women religious through their experiences in terms of a relationship with society, rather than through prescribed documents and dogma, or through their habit.


\(^7\) Sharpe, http://www.iep.utm.edu/lacweb.
Religious Life as a Vocation of Border Crossing

It is reasonable to say that the identity of women religious depends on their relationship with the other or the world. As many theologians have suggested, for a paradigm shift in the identity of religious life, the most desirable model is one which is both open to the transformative process and dialogical with the world, focusing on the signs of the times. Sandra Schneiders claims that women religious in the U.S. have worked hard to live the transformative process. Since the Second Vatican Council, women religious have tried to reach the world and, through their service, have created a bridge between the world and the Church.

Emphasizing the role of a bridge, from a sociological perspective, Diarmuid O’Murchu uses the concept of liminality in explaining the nature of religious life in contemporary society. The concept of liminality crystallizes the situation as being located in-between, between two different cultural areas. I believe this concept fits well today in explaining the vowed women’s religious life in the U.S. The religious and the religious community do not belong to this world yet live in the midst of it. This kind of living, which is sustained by the charism, exists in liminality.

Liminality is characterized as being situated at the margin, so that it has the closest access to other dimensions. Fundamentally, living the liminal life is the act of bridging and, very often, border crossing, if much attention is given to action and movement. Gloria Anzaldua in her book, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza, defines the liminal person as one who is situated in an “in between” space and lives in this process. Because liminal people have left comfortable homes, the bridge—which represents the process—becomes “home” for them. Applying the concept of the bridge to women religious in the U.S. suggests both keeping the essential elements of religious life, while still continuing to move with the flow of society.

The borderland where two frontiers encounter each other is a space for transformation and empowerment, in spite of danger. Border towns are known for violence, yet the so-called borderland is a place where all kinds of marginality can meet and create newness. For example, the border towns between the U.S. and Mexico spawn new cultures and new languages. The process of creating borderland is the action of border crossing. Thus, border crossing as the nature of the life of women religious symbolizes movement toward a new direction, toward the other in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, culture, and age. The early history of women religious in the U.S. shows this vocation of border crossing.

The Early History of Women Religious in the U.S.

Considering identity as an ongoing process, the concept of border crossing goes well with the identity of women religious in the U.S.. Border crossing indicates a series of risky and dangerous actions, yet also includes great opportunities to gain, transform, and challenge certain cultures. It functions to bridge two different cultural entities and is a process of constant movement. Very often in the action of border crossing, two different cultural values are embraced in one person and create a third cultural space, called the borderland. Seen through the lens of the border crossing process, the identity of the women religious in the U.S. is clearly visible within its history.

We can demarcate three timelines in the history of religious women in the U.S.: (1) From 1727 to 1917—The beginning of the sisters’ apostolic ministry to the 1917 Code of Canon Law; (2) from 1918 to 1963—From the 1917...
First, the beginning of religious life in the U.S. parallels the immigration history of Europeans to the U.S. Many religious community chronicles show that the first group of sisters crossed borders by ships and launched their apostolic work in the U.S. These religious women were immigrants who served immigrants. Mark Massa explains how exposed the sisters were at that time to anti-Catholic sentiment, especially in relation to many poor immigrants from European countries. According to Massa, Catholics were generally considered suspicious, and convents became easy targets for anti-Catholic groups. Since 1727, when the first twelve Ursuline sisters from France arrived in the U.S., women religious from various communities have been diligently working here, in the U.S.

Research on the early history of women religious in the U.S. shows that these immigrant women founded education systems, hospitals, and social work in the U.S. and, in so doing, helped lift anti-Catholic sensibilities and helped Catholic become integrated into American society. In this way, the “nuns’ work built bridges into the larger community.” In other words, women religious connected the immigrant Catholic Church to American society. As a result, approximately 25 percent of US population is now Catholic. The writings of the early years of these women record that they were fighting anti-immigrant policies, all the while serving the people. During the Civil War, these religious women served wounded soldiers regardless of their affiliation. Some turned their convents into hospitals, and others took over disease-ridden public hospitals, such as the cholera-plagued Union facility. Their selfless service disarmed the bias against Catholicism. The sisters who were foreigners served the people and, in this way, lived their vocation of border crossing. This life of border crossing laid a firm foundation of Catholic faith in the U.S..

Second, the early history of women religious showed the characteristics of border crossing in terms of race and class. Two Catholic sisters—Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange and Saint Katharine Drexel—each founded an order to help African Americans and battled racism within their own Church. Sr. Mary Elizabeth Lange, who was a French-speaking Creole from Haiti and of partially Jewish heritage, struggled with her own hybrid ethnic identity. From this struggle, she tried to form her own order of Catholic sisters with women of color who would educate impoverished people of color. In this early time period, women religious participated in the struggle of race and class, claiming equality and fighting for the freedom to pursue religious vocations. This border crossing action stood against the Church, which admitted to classism within its community. Because it was impossible to create a community with various ethnicities, Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange wanted to found a religious community for women of color.

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As well, in the struggle to empower the black community, African American congregations wanted to be independent.19 In her letter, Sister June Fisher of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, an African American congregation of women religious, articulated her concerns in regard to filling the position of the residence director of Xavier University, a historically black college in New Orleans. Sr. June lists that the qualities of a person for this job should be as follows: one who comes to learn and not to teach, to become aware of and not to impose, one who comes to receive, and not to give in condescension, a “with” attitude, not a “for” attitude.20 Amy Koehlinger contends that sisters who identified with African American neighborhoods learned from their struggles for liberation, which helped them to recognize their own oppressed status in the Church.21 Thus the border-crossing action of the early nuns stimulated them to be aware of their own marginalized situations.

Finally, early women religious in the U.S. lived the vocation of border crossing in terms of mobility. As prospectors and pioneers moved further West in the U.S., women religious also went and educated the children. Most of sisters took long journeys for mission on ships, cargoes, and trains. In the case of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary (founded in Longueuil, Canada, in 1844 for the Christian education of children and young girls), twelve sisters arrived in Portland on October 21, 1859, after months on the sea. The amount of trouble undertaken by the sisters was beyond the scope of most women of the time. According to the chronicles of the Holy Names sisters, they often suffered from motion sickness but their great sense of joy and prayerfulness for the mission was remarkable.22

Unlike the Church’s general ideal of religious life as monastic, these nuns were active and mobile. In this period of time, mission was the primary value to those nuns, and whenever they had conflicts with the hierarchical church—often the bishops—they left for new mission. In this way, the women religious in the U.S. lived the vocation of border crossing, challenging the stable and cloistered life which had been forced by the Church.23 The great durability and capacity of mobility was one of the elements that constructed the identity of women religious in the U.S.

Re-Invitation to the Vocation of Border Crossing

For the past fifty years, since the Second Vatican Council, women religious in the U.S. have tried faithfully to renew their religious life. The whole movement of women religious in the U.S. can be called a process of Ressourcement, Development, and Aggiornamento, which literally means going back to the source, real change in substantial continuity, and adaption to the changed conditions of the contemporary world.24 Schneiders’ claims that religious life in the U.S. has moved into the world and has worked in the world.25 In this radical movement, women religious have situated themselves at the borderland, having moved from residing inside the Church to inside the world. Given this change, how can the vocation of border crossing be applied to contemporary society in a multi-cultural context?

20 Sister June Fisher to Sister Margaret Ellen (Mary Peter) Traxler, type written letter, July 26, 1969, series 4, Box 3, National Catholic Conference of Interracial Justice)-Marquette University Archives.
24 Schneiders, *Buying the Field*, 599-600.
25 Schneiders, in her book *Buying the Field*, emphasizes the shift the direction from inside to outside since the Second Vatican Council.
First, the vocation of border crossing can be actualized in relation to immigrant communities. Just as the early immigrant women religious became the bridge between US society and the immigrant Catholic Church, non-immigrant women religious can become the bridge between immigrants and the current American society.

Second, some early sisters struggled with the race issue and tried to found communities for women of color. In the mid-twentieth century, as racial injustice grew less acceptable in the U.S., Catholic women religious were among the first to speak out and jump into action: Sisters of many congregations marched in the streets in Montgomery, Alabama, and registered voters in Georgia; they provided education for children of color who were turned away from churches and schools; they ministered to immigrant communities; and they defended the rights of Native Americans to keep their land and maintain their cultures. Yet, racism within communities of women religious was still prevalent.26 Most women religious preferred to maintain white communities than to reflect the multicultural reality around them.

Finally, women religious need to seek mobility internally and externally in a global sense. The scope of service should be global, just as the foreign nuns came to the U.S. to serve the poor in the nineteenth century. At the same time, sisters should be equipped with a multicultural or global mentality. For this level of vocation of border crossing, we need a conversion. This attitude can be summarized in what Korean American theologian Anselm Min calls “not solidarity with others, but solidarity of others.”27 Solidarity with others assumes that we are at the center and go to the margin, standing there for the other. Solidarity of others presumes that there is no center or margin. In this paradigm, everyone has some kind of marginality and is in solidarity of others; everyone cooperates with and supports one another. In this kind of society, there is no authority or hierarchical leader. The call of the vocation of border crossing is to live with others in community, through which women religious will be given a new identity by the very world that they are continuously transforming.

Women religious in the U.S. continue to live the vocation of border crossing and their identity continues to be shaped and reshaped. From their deep and intimate relationship with the world, women religious in the U.S., as border crossing people, will be transformed and will transform the world. Hopefully, this new and post-conciliar transformation can bear fruit in their identity as border crossers and in their vocation of border crossing.

Memory, Identity, and Community: 
A Creatively Faithful Approach to the 
Formulation of a Theology of Interment

by John J. Slovikovski

Rev. John J. Slovikovski is a priest of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown and a part-time faculty member at Saint Francis University in Loretto, PA. He earned his Ph.D. in Systematic and Moral Theology in 2011 from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh PA. He has authored articles for Theology, Chicago Studies, and Priest Magazine.

It is difficult to believe that the issue of cremation was considered to be verboten almost a century ago. In 1917, with the promulgation of the first Code of Canon Law, the Church formalized its condemnation of this practice as an extension of the evils of modernism (real or perceived) specifically inspired by affronts to Christian doctrine, especially as evidenced in the traditions of certain secret societies such as Free Masonry. In the Code, the law was clear that Christian burial was required and cremation reprobated, with the sanction that those who pursued the latter option would be denied ecclesiastical burial (cf. c. 1203 and 1240). In 1963, the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office (now known as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) relaxed the prohibition of cremation, noting that it was not intrinsically evil by virtue of its object and that cremation be a valid exception yet not the norm based upon reasons of “health, economics, or other reasons involving the private or public order,“ but never in cases of either explicit or implicit denial of the resurrection of the dead. This change was noted subsequently in the 1983 Code of Canon Law (c. 1176) and the Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC] (no. 2301) promulgated in 1992 and welcomed by members of the faithful who found themselves entangled in situations that would have formerly left them liturgically paralyzed at a moment that was already marked by a compounded experience of pain and loss.

Over the last several decades, however, the practice of cremation on the part of faithful Catholics has become much more routine than it is rare. While the change in the official position of the Church clearly viewed cremation as primarily an extraordinary option for the faithful who celebrate the funeral rites in the wake of the death of a loved one, a significant number of Catholics have deviated from this norm. In the United States, limited data exists regarding specifically Catholic practice; however, those who exercise pastoral ministry

1 Canon 1203, par. 2: “The bodies of the faithful must be buried, and cremation is reprobated. If anyone has in any manner ordered his body to be cremated, it shall be unlawful to execute his wish; if this order has been attached to a contract, a last will, or any other document, it is to be considered as not added.” Canon 1240: “The following persons are deprived of ecclesiastical burial, unless they had before death, given some signs of repentance: cf. par. 5, persons who have given orders for the cremation of their bodies.” Translation is mine.

will attest to similarities in this movement of the celebration of Christian funerals. A 2012 report of the Cremation Association of North America (hereafter, CANA) indicates that the cremation rate was at an alarming 40.3 percent in the United States alone.\textsuperscript{3} Even more telling is that a notable number of funeral directors and crematory operators indicate that one of two Americans will choose cremation over burial by 2017.\textsuperscript{4} The nubbin of the wide acceptance of this practice is three-fold. First, while official church teaching has advanced clear criteria for the toleration of cremation, there are no sanctions for cases where regulations fail to be followed with the atypical exception of the case of demonstrable denial of resurrection faith, although an understanding of resurrected life is far from consistent and clear on the part of contemporary Catholics. Second, the matter of cremation remains objective and morally neutral while intentions are relatively subjective and unexposed. Third, the ever increasing cost of full funeral services, including the interment of either bodies or cremains, has made the option of cremation almost second nature for many in the poor and middle class.\textsuperscript{5}

Therefore, the die is cast as far as inclusion of cremation in Catholic practice both in the United States and around the world given that certain required criteria are met (e.g., economic, geographical, ecological, familial, etc.) and Catholic assent to the doctrine of the resurrection of the body is upheld in earnest.\textsuperscript{6} In recent years, however, the even more pressing problem has arisen with regard to the decisions made concerning the treatment of cremains, and finding a final resting place for the ashes of the deceased. Specifically, CANA approximates that only one third of cremains are interred while another third are scattered in various places, and a final third are kept in the family home or some other “safe place.” To the secular eye, the problem would seem to rest with the veritable piecemeal of laws arranged together regarding the location of ashes. This second option is only rarely a difficulty for Catholics since the dissemination of ashes within the environment, regardless of one’s rationale, has been strictly prohibited. A much greater subversive challenge is the failure to inter the cremains, opting instead in favor of locating them in the family home or another predetermined location in a highly visible place of honor. No laws at present regulate or restrict the aforementioned practice, and anecdotal evidence from clergy and other pastoral ministers attests that this option is being exercised with relative frequency.

The question becomes: given the Church’s strong preference for the burial of the deceased, coupled with leniency afforded in permissible scenarios, why would the individuals who take on a key role in the funeral liturgies decide not to inter cremains, which while not physically a corpse still are the deceased, albeit in variant form? The reasons are many and diverse; however, they are easily précised and presented here. Specifically, three elements seem to allow some Catholics the ability to disregard the importance of burial of cremains: failure to be aware of and understand the connection between our burial and Christ’s with particular ignorance of the significance of Jesus’ rest in the tomb on Holy Saturday; a relatively innocent yet serious misunderstanding of the nature of the resurrection of the body and virtual ignorance of the symbolic theological role of interment in resurrection; and finally a need to be proximate to the deceased in order to experience an abiding presence of their loved ones. This catalogue of reasons seems to challenge the hope characteristic of future life with God and requires a corrective. The present essay will attempt to offer something of a remedial and creatively faithful theological catechesis regarding each of the three aforementioned deficiencies with the hope of providing the groundwork for a theology of interment of cremains rooted in the Catholic Tradition.


The principal strands of argument in favor of the interment fall under three general headings: Memory, Identity, and Community, each of which will be examined in turn. Generally speaking, memory refers to recalling the importance of the actual burial of the Lord, which is only complete when viewed vis-à-vis the transforming mystery of Holy Saturday. Identity refers to the nature of the resurrected body and the symbolic importance of the tomb in the completion of the transition to full humanity through the departure from time to arrival at the universal experience of eternity. Third, community gives witness to the fact that the deceased has arrived at a fuller connection with the entire communion of saints, providing far more consolation than an urn engraved and enshrined in the home. Creatively faithful theological reflection upon each of these realities to varying degrees will augment and perhaps surpass the Church’s current articulation of the importance of the burial (with significant attention to the ashes of the deceased) based upon reverence and respect for the future resurrection with little elucidation or nuance having been provided specifically in terms of the theological purpose of interment.7

Memory

The Burial of Jesus

Relatively little organized treatment of the burial of Jesus has been pursued in academic literature with the exception of limited biblical commentaries and ancillary treatment in investigations of the historical Jesus and Jewish funerary practices. Even there, much of the information remains somewhat shrouded and selectively presented. One fact to which the aforementioned studies attest is that in investigating the burial of Jesus for the development of a theology of interment that can be extended even to cremains, it is important to begin by examining the funerary practices and rituals of the Jews and Christians in early Roman Palestine that shared a common ethnicity.8

The importance of interment is first underscored by the insistence that Jewish funerals normatively occur immediately following death, usually on the same day. The prescribed preparations were made immediately upon death and the corpse was processed to the place of interment, accompanied by family and friends, where it was placed in a subterranean chamber in the tomb by the immediate family. Generally the trek to the tomb was protracted since graves were located no closer than the outer edge of the village for the purpose of the maintenance of ritual purity.9 Upon physical interment, public lamentation, the delivery of eulogies, and the placement of personal artifacts would follow. Funeral rituals did not end here; however, for rituals to returning to and mourning at the tomb lasted anywhere from thirty days to one full calendar year, given the nature of one’s familial relationship to the deceased.10 After one year had passed, a second burial occurred when the bones of the departed were gathered and placed in ossuaries and reburied in the tomb. While little is known of the purely religious or theological significance of these practices, they speak volumes in regard to ancient Jewish social perspectives and structures. As noted by Bryron R. McCane,

The funerary ritual of Jews in early Roman Palestine gave symbolic prominence to two cultural life values: kinship and ritual purity. As an expression of Jewish ethnicity, burial practices in this region and period were laden with symbolic representations of family and piety. Kinship relations were celebrated in the rituals of primary burial, mourning, and secondary burial…Ritual purity was valorized in the location of tombs…For the Jews in this region and period, and the highest good in life was to be found in a set of relationships among family members and their God. They lived and died as if their ultimate

7 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Cremation and Corporeal Burial.”
9 McCane, Roll Back the Stone, 55-56.
10 McCane, Roll Back the Stone, 55-56.
responsibility was to love the Lord their God with all their heart and soul and mind and strength, and their neighbor as themselves.\footnote{McCane, Roll Back the Stone, 56.}

Thus, interment affirmed the full humanity of the dead through the ritualized celebration of the two primary relationships that virtually defined their existence. It is in this context that the burial of Jesus must be examined and evaluated.

To begin to determine the significance of the burial of Jesus for a theology of interment it is important to authenticate its occurrence. Turning to the New Testament, its certainty is well attested. To begin, in the ancient creedal formula of 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, the fact that Jesus was buried is one of the four central tenets of the Paschal Mystery communicated in the evangelization of new Christians.\footnote{Raymond F. Collins, First Corinthians, Sacra Pagina, ed. Daniel Harrington, S.J. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 528-534.} Also, the fact that the burial of Jesus is presented in each of the four canonical gospels adds to its legitimacy. What becomes somewhat troublesome is that historically, this is where objective data ends—namely the occurrence of the burial. It is widely attested in modern exegetical studies that virtually every detail of Jesus’ burial is greatly embellished and even improved upon with each subsequent gospel’s reporting of it. In terms of embellishment, the Gospel of John for example conveys that Jesus was buried with one hundred pounds of spices. Given the standard dimensions of a single tomb however, such an amount would have crushed the corpse under the mound.\footnote{Raymond E. Brown, The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave, Vol. 2, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1260.} In regard to progressive exaggeration of Jesus’ interment, the theological signatures of each evangelist become more detailed with each account.\footnote{See McCane, Roll Back the Stone, 101.}

Despite the evangelists’ best efforts, however, one fact in the burial narrative remains strikingly clear: it is unmistakably obvious that the burial of Jesus is shameful in light of the established Jewish funerary practices of the time. In all the accounts, regardless of their laundering or embellishment, two constitutive characteristics of dishonorable burial remain, namely, no mention of either a family tomb and no formal ritual of mourning (i.e., no procession, no eulogies, no placement of personal effects, no public lamentation).\footnote{McCane, Roll Back the Stone, 102.} When these missing elements are taken in conjunction with the purposeful orchestration by the Jewish authorities, in collaboration with the Romans, to bury Jesus as a condemned criminal in an unmarked grave, the event of Jesus being laid to rest clearly becomes a patent event of shame.\footnote{McCane, Roll Back the Stone, 106.}

At the level of the gospel narratives, it would seem that the dishonorable burial of Jesus provides little if any weight to the development of an expedient theology of interment given Jesus’ wretched and pitiable experience. Assessment of the positive value of the experience would be a charge for later theology to undertake. Thus, in order to assess the importance proposed by the present study, one must see the occasion through a metaphysical lens—as a segue to Holy Saturday, the experience between the cross and resurrection that solidifies Jesus’ solidarity with and redemption of humanity.

\textit{Holy Saturday}

For many, it will appear difficult to make the connection between the theological significance of interment and the mystery of Holy Saturday since the theological tradition seems virtually to have passed over it, treating it no less definitively than the author of the fourth gospel who in all of his theological sophistication gives it barely a
For the purposes of the present inquiry, given its limitation of time and space, two related yet distinct theological insights will be considered briefly. Each contributes to the argument that through anamnesis of the meaning of Holy Saturday its usefulness for the present is refined and thus advocates for the unquestionable importance of the consignment of bodily remains to the earth as a virtually compulsory component of Christian funerary practice.

The first insight evolves from an ecclesial context, specifically the ruminations of Benedict XVI on the occasion of his pastoral visit to Turin and his veneration of the Holy Shroud. Here the pope refers to Holy Saturday as “no-man’s land” where in this “time-beyond-time, ‘Jesus Christ descended to the dead.” He interprets these words to convey that God incarnate, on entering and remaining in the tomb, united himself with humanity’s most profound and dismal solitude, devoid of love and comfort, a proverbial and veritably indomitable “hell.” Through this tarry in the tomb, endured solely for love of all humanity, Benedict asserts that Jesus Christ transcended this ultimate sentence of seclusion, bringing all believers, past, present, and future with him. Thus, his hallowed tomb became more of a point of transition than an otherworldly penitentiary, for it became the place where love, fully mired in the abyss of death, at the command of the voice of God, would galvanize the Spirit to raise Jesus from the dead. For the pope, Holy Saturday, the odium of the tomb, has become a night marked by the seeding of the cosmic garden with love that allows the new hope of Resurrection to germinate and mature. He concludes that this experience, having been assumed by Christ, applies to all humanity and appears to suggest that all subsequent experiences of the tomb prepare believers to arise anew with the One who is the cause and model of human resurrection. It is only logical to surmise that in the mind of Benedict, the interment of human persons in the earth symbolically serves as a necessary ritual component of the embrace of the overall mystery of death and resurrection.

Turning to the world of more formal academic theology, Anthony Kelly grounds his consideration of the final acts of the drama of the Christ event in a comprehensive treatment of eschatology grounded in the paschal mystery. Accordingly, he devotes a brief yet powerful section of his work, *Eschatology and Hope*, to the mystery of Holy Saturday. His reflections manifest an incredible conformity with those of Benedict XVI. He too speaks of Christ’s solidarity with humanity, sinking to the lowest of possible depths, a solitude that “connotes that limit of God-forsakenness at which no human hope is possible” so that through solidarity in death humanity may know existentially the fullness of life. It is within the bowels of the earth that Christ reveals the “all-embracing love of the Father and embodies the creativity of the Holy Spirit moving with inexhaustible vitality even at the depths of darkness and defeat.” It is almost for Kelly as if Paradise is revisioned and restored through love that is both economic and immanent, resulting in the complete obliteration of primordial “aloneness.”

Kelly’s theological addition is discovered in his equation of Christ’s solidarity with the dead in the tomb with the manifestation of God’s limitless mercy. God’s sending his Son into the tomb signifies God’s reaching out to all sinners including, and especially, those who distance themselves from God by means of self-imposed isolation, thereby joining himself with humanity in its greatest distraction and desolation, making the consolation of libera-

19 Benedict XVI, *Veneration of the Holy Shroud*.
20 Benedict XVI, *Veneration of the Holy Shroud*. This conclusion serves as an extension of the solidarity between Jesus and humanity.
22 Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 90.
23 This Paradise is not that found in the mythical Eden, but rather the enduring relational serenity promised to the repentant thief addressed by Jesus on the cross (cf. Lk 23:43).
24 Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 90.
tion from death and hopelessness universal existential possibility. This does not suggest that one is compelled to be saved, for this action on the part of Christ is by no means a limitation of human freedom. More accurately, according to Kelly, it is the hopeful and ultimate rival of ultimate perversion. Clearly then, Christ's hiatus in the tomb is neither a sign of divine defeat nor imposed salvation. Rather, it is the final soteriological movement of divine benevolence and compassion aggressively extended to all. For Kelly, it appears that Holy Saturday has become a fountain of redemptive hope complementing perfectly the final prayers of the Church which invoke the clemency of the One who creates and calls all humanity to return to Himself.

The consequences of the interval between cross and resurrection for the formulation of the theology of interment are profound and pressing. Memory of Jesus' burial sets the stage for the suffering of ultimate aloneness through his own shameful interment. The grave is the universal sign of seclusion for humanity. In the depths of earth, Jesus symbolically assumes solidarity with humanity in its final solitude and transforms it. In his trans-historical linkage with humanity, human persons are fitted for a new relational and resurrected existence. Thus, the universal extension of God's mercy present in the dynamic encounter of Holy Saturday is made real when it is remembered liturgically through the rites of interment. It may be argued then that interment of the person can ascend from the status of personal option to that of theological necessity.

Identity

A second justification for the proposal of a universally applicable theology of interment falls under the heading of Identity. By virtue of the term, anyone vaguely familiar with the contours of Catholic eschatology can assume that the proposed identity is that of the resurrected person. To understand the import of the risen person, the nature of resurrected existence must be clarified and nuanced. This venture is not new for theology, for questions regarding this new "state of being" have been a part of Christian theological speculation since the late writings of the Apostle Paul, where, specifically in 1 Corinthians 35-44, he speaks to the nature of the risen body invoking the aid of an imaginary interlocutor to respond to members of the Hellenistic community about the veracity of the resurrection. He employs a number of analogies drawn from the realm of everyday experience. It has been noted that these analogies fall under three headings: agricultural, zoological, and astronomical (cf. 15:36-41). In so doing, he does not offer great specificity. He does appear however, to insist upon "radical change within continuity." Since that time, speculation of the nature of the resurrected body has produced a voluminous amount of proposals.

At this point, it is important to recall that two issues are almost always presumed in discussions of the resurrected body, namely the identity of the risen person and the characteristics of the risen body. With regard to the second, popular notions of the resurrected body have tended to focus issues ranging from upon material continuity to supernatural characteristics of glorified bodies. Present popular theologies advance ideas regarding the resurrected body as perfectly attuned to the risen state in age, beauty and perfection. Yet for all of these elaborate and fanciful aspirations about the perfection of the present body, for the majority of the seventy percent of Americans who do

25 Kelly, Eschatology and Hope, 91.
26 For an example of the reifying power of liturgical memory, see, Thomas P. Rausch, Eschatology, Liturgy, and Christology: Toward Recovering and Eschatological Imagination (Collègeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), 26-27.
27 Collins, First Corinthians, 562-568.
28 Rausch, Eschatology, Liturgy, and Christology, 82.
30 Four common characteristics included Impassibility, or freedom from all suffering; Subtlety, or the ability to pass through solid objects; Splendor that is shining with great luminosity or resplendence; and Agility, unbound by the laws of nature. See, Thomas Aquinas, Supplement, Summa Theologicae, q. 82-85.
31 See, for example, Randy Alcorn, Heaven (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers), 2008.
believe in the afterlife, “their idea of life beyond death is vague and undefined, more a cultural idea about spiritual survival than something based in on the biblical idea of resurrection of the body and all its implications.”32

In the modern era, it is not only the fanciful speculation of the past, but the insights of scientific theory in the present that detract from holding to a firm belief in physical, bodily resurrection. When coupled with the considerations of modern philosophy and theology; however, a more palatable presentation of the resurrections may be presented. The argument is well attested in current literature and need only be summarized here with particular attention to the work of Gerald O’Collins. He begins with the clear assertion of Irenaeus that the dead rise “certainly with the same body in which they died; otherwise those who rise would not be the same persons who died previously,”33 and proceeds to discuss the contemporary view of bodily sameness.

The periodic interchange of matter with the environment calls to question whether it is accurate to speak of persons being or possessing the same body throughout the whole course of their earthly existence. In the ongoing process of bodily evolution, matter is shed and steadily replaced with almost a complete change in atoms and molecules in a period of seven years. O’Collins indicates that some have argued that the unique genetic structure of persons, inherent in their DNA does in fact maintain the same body in life; however, through bodily decay or cremation after death, physical remains are disseminated into the environment, which recasts the question of bodily continuity between the present and risen life.34 His response is to note the connection between one’s physical body and one’s history. Through bodiliness, persons develop in all of their fundamental human relationships. It is through the freedom that characterizes these relationships that one establishes a “personal history” and thus human persons become “embodied histories” which provides the possibility of “understanding our particular, embodied history being raised from the dead”.35 Resurrected persons are therefore transformed to express the bodily persons they matured into during the course of their earthly lives. In this proposal, O’Collins substantiates Irenaeus’ view through his summary assertion that “The same resurrected history means the same resurrected body.”36

What has the affirmation of the aforementioned presentation of resurrection as the transformation and completeness of the individual into glorified personal selfsameness have to do with the interment of corpses or cremains? The key may be found in the assertion that the preservation and perfection of personal selfsameness occurs only, as noted by Bernard Prusak “when the final note has been written and played” in the final consummation.37 In words, when understood in a narrative and personalist cast, resurrection of the dead cannot be said to occur at the end of an individual’s concrete history that had transpired on this side of the grave. Rather, it occurs at the Parousia or Second Coming, an idea that has been aligned closely with the Catholic Tradition.38 It is only then that the embodied history of individual persons, along with the corresponding collective human history, comes to know fully life with Christ.

Resurrection “on the last day” adds yet another dimension to the full resolution of the human narrative. Since there exists, in time as perceived by human persons, a period between individual death and personal fulfillment of the collective human narrative in the “resurrection of the body,” the existence of the intermediate state as being part of the revealed eschatological truth explicated by the Church and theologians is a logical consequence. While a num-

38 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1001. See text at http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/__P2H.HTM.
ber of theologians have dismissed this state in favor of immediate resurrection, as well as a significant number of eschatologists continue to maintain their belief in it. Theological justification for the intermediate state is necessary in order to continue to argue for its veracity and helpfulness for the development of a theology of interment. For the current theological project, the existence of this state is key, especially since it corresponds roughly with the time when the grave is occupied by the body or its cremains. The only logical appeal appears to the existence and nature of purgatory.

Given the parameters of the current undertaking, only a proposal regarding the “time” associated with Purgatory will prove essential. For many, temporal duration has made little sense, speaking of a moment of purification and perfect contrition in the personal encounter with God that takes place in death. On the other hand, the concept of purgatory having a historical duration seems to make much more sense if the extensive appeal to resurrection of the body as the preservation and perfection of one's embodied history is to be taken seriously. In this purview, purgatory is seen as “a new, compassionate relationship with the history of the world adversely affected by our failures in love” noting that “we cannot be completely in heaven as long as our sin-affected history continues.” The process of maturation, purification, and integration through exercises of embodied freedom that lacked completeness in life are fulfilled through a final period of conversion and reform in the final movement from time to eternity. This movement in “time” has been described rightly as a “dance” that is led by the Lord, of unknown duration, yet presumably one in direct proportion to the intensity of fragmentation that affects the fundamental relationships into which the human person entered during life.

Having established identity of the resurrected person as the purified and perfect selfsameness that co-exists with the Lord for eternity, it is relatively simple to articulate the symbolic theological importance of interment of remains whether a corpse or cremated remains. Returning to the concept of the memory of Holy Saturday, Anthony Kelly had suggested that to remember the interment of Christ was to remember his universal offer of clemency. The grave then became a sign of the ultimate mercy of God available to all people. In exploring the contours of the resurrection of the dead, once having transitioned completely from time to eternity, it became clear the perfection of the embodied narrative of the self would require a period of ontological and existential ablation. Resurrection and final redemption would occur at great cost and include the all of the virtues incarnated and choices made in the embodied narrative of the person brought to perfection. The intensity of this final historical soteriological movement almost escapes the imagination, for as noted by John Thiel, “Salvation, becoming who [we] most are, to some degree entails becoming who [we] were not—persons broken by their sin and the sin of others.” Further, the affirmation of bodiliness in resurrection, the absolute and complete integrity of the redeemed person, “means that our relationality continues and that the work of the blessed dead might include ongoing reconciliation and forgiveness.” Given the intensity and comprehensive breadth of the purgative experience, its duration must be far more than immediate from the human perspective, for ontological deconstruction of embodied and fragmented relationships


42 Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 130.


requires a free choice for healing that accompanies final orientation of the fundamental option to the fullness of
life and love that is God himself.

Interment serves as a profound theological symbol of the final orientation and its subsequent engagement in pu-
rification. As symbol it serves a dialectical purpose, for although the grave is not the theological and ontological
prelude to the resurrection of the body, in some mysterious manner, it makes the purgative overture present both
as a reality for the deceased and a sign for those who remain in the present. Committing one's remains to the earth,
whether a corpse or cremains in the tomb one has clearly descended to the realm of the dead in imitation of Christ.
Rather than being a prison however, the tomb is now the place of encounter of the unbounded mercy of God. Ad-
ditionally, it becomes the chamber of purification, the sign of the final commitment to be freed from those vestiges
of relational imperfection such as fear, loneliness, anger, uncertainty, and the like. These vulnerabilities, having re-
mained unresolved in life, led one to sin in life presenting scars so deep that although they were acknowledged and
addressed by sacramental reconciliation, they were not fully healed. Interment in the grave provides a symbolic
safe environment. Just as it serves as the final resting place of Sabbath for remains before they are caught up in the
resurrection of personal selfsameness at the end of time, the intermediate state also provides unwavering security,
for the ultimate destiny of the deceased cannot be changed, but rather expedited through the final act of divine
compassion. Interment then represents the entry into the final state of existence for one's embodied narrative, the
final commitment of God ultimately realized in the final symbol of it, lulling persons either anatomical or ash to a
rest cushioned in faith, blanketed in hope, and drawn in love for all eternity.

Community: A Brief Note on the Renewal of the Importance of Acknowledgement of the Communion of
Saints for Those Who Mourn

The theological importance of interment is not only to be found in a renewed appreciation of bodily resurrection,
but in the pastoral theological movements of consolation and compassion. Anecdotal evidence maintains that a
significant number of mourners have opted to allow the ashes of the departed to remain in their homes. Their mo-
tivation is pure enough, seeing that it is grounded in grief that results from loss of a relative or friend with whom
one entered a relationship framed in the context of the love command of Jesus. The location of remains of the
deceased in the home assures the mourner of the continued presence of the departed in their homes and in their
lives through a visual cue inspired by material stimulus, that is, cremains.

This posture is wrought with both theological difficulties rooted in contemporary culture and deficiencies in evan-
gelization on the part of the Church. As regards the former, modern individuals are hard pressed to respond
anything but to immediate stimuli. Although risking classification as cliché, this disposition is largely the result of
the advancements of technology and the ability for instant gratification in a number of areas. Here generation Y,47
or “millennials” are particularly guilty. Only that which is readily accessible seems real to a vast majority of indi-
viduals even if they believe in an afterlife. Such a disposition unfortunately is a cultural contagion and will only be
corrected by the return to values rooted in vicarious experiences with no direct, observable, or measureable assess-
ment. A more helpful remedy may be to address the spiritual deficiencies that result from a poor evangelization in
a central yet often overlooked tenet of the faith, namely the theology of the communion of saints.

The theology of the communion of saints presents a powerful symbol of the presence of the dead among us. Unfor-
tunately, although completely accurate, the formal ecclesial explication of this communion seems still far removed

from the lived experience of believers. The Catechism continues to use the traditional distinct and separate categories of the church militant, suffering and triumphant albeit in less formal language.48 With regard to the Communion with the dead, the emphasis is placed on the ministry of “intercession” which is bi-directional and oriented toward perfection and assistance that is either proximate or eternal. Although this focus is, again important, principled, and reliable, what becomes problematic is that this imagery fails to existentially appeal to generation Y, for as noted by Daniel Horan, “Millennials hunger to be connected to something larger than themselves,” a trait that serves as a connecting point for young adults seeking a spirituality that is far from individualistic.49 The same may be said of the members of Generation Y (X and Z as well)50 who attempt to navigate the theology of death, when faced with the passing of one that they love deeply. In order to bring closure to their mourning with clear assurance of the abiding presence of the deceased through full participation in funeral rituals including interment of remains, a theology of the community of saints must evolve in a creatively faithful manner marked by a certain degree of tangibility.

Elizabeth Johnson provides a contemporary theology of the communion of saints that may just serve as an effective response to the aforementioned lacuna. For her, the communion of saints is “an inclusive community of friends of God and prophets…accessed through memory and hope.”51 Thus her reflections are noetic rather than pious and rooted in anamnesis more than physical proximity. She continues that

Together the living form with the dead a community of memory and hope, a holy people touched with the fire of the Spirit, summoned to go forth as companions bringing the face of divine compassion into everyday life and the great struggles of history, wrestling with evil and delighting even now when fragments of justice, peace, and healing gain however small a foothold. When they are seen together with the whole natural world as a dynamic, sacred community or the most amazing richness and complexity, the symbol of the communion of saints reaches its fullness as a symbol of effective presence and action of Holy Wisdom herself.52

Three insights may be gained from these observations when contemplating the importance of the interment of remains in light of the need for the faithful to experience a sound connection with the deceased. First, it highlights the communion of saints as a community of hope, a body that shares in the patent love of God that speaks to the mutual presence of all who are invested in it, a presence that surpasses the mere possession and proximity of human remains or even human memories. Second, the communion of saints incarnates divine compassion, a desire that the living express in all of the funeral rites, with special attention to the final interment where in trust the deceased is figuratively handed over first to God and secondly to the rest of the heavenly community each of whom aids the deceased in the process of purification that is characteristic of the intermediate state. Third, it testifies that God, in engaging all creation, is not a God of the dead, but of the living, namely those who are called to fullness of life with him. Therefore, abiding presence of the deceased is assured when the present physical existence of persons is brought to closure through Christian burial. Thus, interment, which calls to mind the cloud of witnesses, provides solace and comfort and even joy to those who once lamented their dead and through domestic enshrinement of them run the risk of remaining there, needing a visible sign of their continued existence mistakenly rooted in the past and neglecting the invitation to witness their passage to a hope-filled eschatological future.

48  Cf. CCC, no. 962. See text at http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/__P2B.HTM.
50  See note 47.
52  Johnson, Friends of God and Prophets, 243.
Conclusion

The categories of memory, identity and community, with special attention to cremains that attempts to initially engage the mysteries of Holy Saturday, the Resurrection of the Dead and the Intermediate State, and the Communion of Saints, are far from routine headings under which discussions of the theological importance of the interment of the dead falls. On an intellectual level, the present investigation has attempted to utilize the grammar of eschatology to assist those who seek to understand the theological importance of Christian burial as part of Catholic funerary practice. In a pastoral level, it attempts to provide substantial motivation for those who opt for cremation to understand the status of cremains in the resurrection of the dead with the hope of inspiring a change of heart on those who would otherwise elect to retain the remains of their loved ones as something of a personal possession. For the author, it has been an initial exercise in refining personal insight into theological anthropology rooted firmly in Christology in anticipation of its future manifestation through encouragement of the fullest possible participation in the Paschal Mystery liturgically. It is proposed merely as the beginning of a dialogue aimed at further illuminating those eschatological truths related to the first of the “Four Last Things” contained in the deposit of faith.
The Desert Comes to the City

by Debbie Armenta

We, as a culture, have fallen deaf to silence. This became apparent to me recently while attending a national conference for lay ecclesial ministers. Amidst the many workshops and activities offered during the week, I engaged in conversation among professional lay ministers regarding the complexities facing contemporary ministers. Throughout the week, various discussions ensued over the struggle to maintain balance between the personal and the professional in the life of the minister.

Professional lay ecclesial ministerial positions, often under budget constraints, are characteristically a consolidation of multiple jobs recreated as a singular position. Ministers desiring to live their vocations authentically while meeting countless needs run the risk of increasing burnout.

Perhaps the most prevalent factor contributing to complications in lay ministry is the dramatic technological advances made over the last twenty years. As a result, ministers find themselves habitually replying to needs at all hours in an attempt to answer requests at the moment of occurrence. We unwittingly quantify “success” in ministry by tabulating the rapidity of responses and the number of outgoing emails.

While social media has transformed our world permanently, the danger of unrestrained electronic engagement has significant consequences for lay ministers. The 24/7 “plugged in” mentality smothers our ability to listen. We are formed in God’s image and likeness; Professor Martin Laird reminds us that we are built for contemplation. But we are no longer schooled in contemplation. The call to silence, to “Be still and know I am God” (Ps 46:10), is asphyxiated. Psalm 139:14, which states, “I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made,” becomes irrelevant to a generation uncomfortable with silence. With the groundswell of unlimited access, we risk diminishing ourselves to the point of no longer knowing ourselves.

Pragmatically speaking then, how can one integrate a regular practice of silence in a culture that eschews it? The ancient teachers of the earliest monastic movement from the Middle East provide us with tools of wisdom for incorporating silence in attentiveness to the Indwelling.

Debbie Armenta is an experienced Lay Minister and holds a Masters Degree in Pastoral Theology and a certificate of Pastoral Studies from Catholic Theological Union. She is a D.Min. Candidate finishing her thesis on the wisdom of the ancient Christians for spiritual formation for contemporary lay ministers.
Theologian and author William J. Harmless, S.J., believes the message of the early desert Christians is not only timeless but is needed now more than ever. The desert wisdom challenges us to reorder our agenda away from insularity and self-focus. In a highly individualized and myopic culture of First World Christians, this is revolutionary. The silence essential to the desert Christians allows us to confront our true failings in genuine humility and a sincere recognition of God’s indwelling presence, abundant mercy and love for each of us.

To examine the practice of silence and how it can impact contemporary ministry, I turn to two ancient figures from the early Christian movement, Abba Evagrius of Pontus and Amma St. Syncletica, as models of wisdom and praxis. Both rather unknown individuals lived in monastic communities of the fourth and fifth century in the Egyptian desert and possessed tremendous wisdom for us to share.

Evagrius, (345-399) desert monk, theologian, and prolific author, is credited with introducing ideas that laid the foundation for spirituality and theological practice that continues to affect theologians throughout the centuries even to the present day. Why Evagrius for contemporary ministers? His genius is evident in his prolific writings on prayer and stillness with his ability to observe, reflect on and write on the movement of the thought process during prayer. “Evagrius is the consummate psychologist.” His ability to observe and document was far ahead of his time. And his works profoundly impact contemporary thought on contemplative prayer and practice in a practical way.

While he was considered by some to be the Father of Byzantine spirituality, he also greatly impacted western monasticism as his writings influenced John Cassian (380-465) who in turn affected the practices of Benedictine monastic movement in the fifth century. Evagrian thought can be identified through the Cistercian movement in the twelfth century and can be traced through the twenty-first century in the works of theologians such as Rahner and Balthasar of the last several decades.

Evagrius tells us, “If you are a theologian you truly pray. If you truly pray, you are a theologian.” As an example for the integration of theology and the spiritual life, Evagrius provides us with a model. For lay ministers, prayer and theology are not dichotomous but should be fully integrated.

In his work “On Prayer,” Evagrius defines prayer as something that takes place spiritually between God and humanity. To this point, Evagrius invites us to deliberate periods of silence and stillness. He reminds us repeatedly not to get caught up in worries. He addresses the struggle of distractions in silence and provides us with a method for addressing them through the use of a prayer word or phrase taken directly from scripture. Throughout all of these efforts, Evagrius continuously reminds us all that prayer and contemplation are gifts from God. As lay ministers, this should be an implicit goal of our lives professionally and personally.

Syncletica, one of the few named women from the early Christian monastic tradition in the earliest desert writings, gives great insight to the importance of the contribution of women in the formulation of desert wisdom spirituality and practice. Theologian and Professor of Antiquities Studies, Dr. Kevin Corrigan, writes that the prophetic wis-

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dom of Syncletica has been long buried and ignored over the centuries. Syncletica, though considered an “absolute nobody,” gives “real insight into the genuine importance of women as builders of the church tradition.”

Syncletica is critically important for several reasons. Her *Vita*, or biography, is a simple volume devoid of miracles or of significant personal affiliations with well-known monastic names of her time period. But it is deeply profound. Corrigan states: “...as soon as Syncletica begins to speak...we hear the authentic and original voice of a supremely clever person who knows what she is talking about.” Scholars identify the influence of Evagrian thought in her teachings; however, Syncletica outlines a plan different from Evagrius to thwart the evil one who seeks tirelessly to pervert virtue. All of her teachings point towards the core of her concern: ultimate damage done to the human psyche by the distortions of the evil one if allowed to take root in the unsuspecting soul.

Extraordinarily, she preaches to all vocations, anchorites, cenobites (those in community), and even to those who are married. Perhaps most profound, is her articulation of psychological balance necessary on this arduous journey towards holiness and God's work. Balance of practice is not usually associated with the stringent practices of the desert monks. And yet, Syncletica eschews radical abuses and practices and admonishes the sisters in her community to balance. "How do we discern from the tyrannical and demonical?...by moderation...At all times a lack of moderation is destructive."

Syncletica models stillness and interior reflection and humbly opens herself to personal transformation for the sake of incarnating Jesus Christ in the world. Syncletica tells us that those who practice contemplation live a life of “genuine love...these [contemplatives] are the custodians of pure love.” She is an inspiration for contemporary women with her faithfulness and wisdom on community life and her clear intelligence even while exhorting us to live with balance in our lives.

A daily habit of silence and interior focus while keeping sound balance—the timeless wisdom of Abba Evagrius and Amma Syncletica invites us, contemporary pastoral and lay ecclesial ministers, to re-discover contemplation as the grounding praxis that forms and informs our daily journey.

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8 Corrigan, “Syncletica and Macrina.”
9 Corrigan, “Syncletica and Macrina.”
10 Corrigan, “Syncletica and Macrina.”
Facing Death with Life in the Balance: Challenges and Hope for an Abolishment of the Death Penalty

by Alison McCrary, C.S.J.

Death and grieving have become commonplace in recent years in my life. As a newer and younger woman religious, the age demographics in my community have placed me in the chapel at an unusual number of funerals for a thirty-two-year old. As part of the age minority where “more than two-thirds of men and women vowed religious in the United States today are older than sixty five” with only nine percent of today’s sisters under the age of sixty, in a larger congregation, the understanding and acceptance of diminishment and dying have become part of my formation. Even with this new familiarity of the death and grieving process, nothing could prepare me for the death of a man named Chris in Louisiana.

I met Chris nine years ago. He is seventy years old, Catholic, and Apache Native-American. Chris’ nickname is “Shorty.” He stands barely five foot tall. In 2005, I was hired to be a paralegal and investigator on capital cases in Louisiana and was assigned to Chris’ legal team. After working on his case and then entering law school, Chris and I continued our communication through letter writing.

For nine years, we corresponded monthly. In December of 2012, Chris wrote and asked me to serve as his spiritual advisor. A spiritual advisor meets regularly with an inmate, develops a relationship, prepares the person spiritually, psychologically, and emotionally for the execution, and assists with funeral preparations. One of my sisters accompanied Chris for twenty years until her passing in December of 2012. Within days of her death, the State set an execution date of February 13, 2013, ironically the same day as Ash Wednesday that year. The government would put Chris to death by lethal injection and bury him in one of the cemeteries at the notorious Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, Louisiana.

At the time of Chris’ request, I was a first-year novice in the Congregation of St. Joseph living in our novitiate house in Chicago, so the timing of Chris’ request from down south was not exactly convenient. I was also unsure of my emotional ability to be present in an execution room during his lethal injection and ultimate death. Though

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Alison McCrary, C.S.J. is a second-year novice in the Congregation of St. Joseph and a social justice attorney pursuing her M.A. in Systematic Theology at Catholic Theological Union. Nationally and internationally, she has worked on issues of criminal justice reform, corporate accountability, human rights, civil disobedience, and the death penalty.
afraid, a deep love within me trumped my fear and propelled me to say yes; after all, it is our vows in religious life that free us for such radical availability to love. My congregation granted my request, and the penitentiary accepted my application to serve as Chris’ spiritual advisor.

Chris and I exchanged letters and spoke on the phone frequently. Advocacy campaigns were organized requesting a commutation from a sentence of death to a sentence of life without parole. Hundreds of people wrote to the district attorney, pardon board, and governor. We argued that Chris’ death sentence should be commutated for a variety of reasons: his older age, poor health, and mental illness; his repentance and rehabilitation; the unjust punishment for the crime; and constitutional legal errors. Unfortunately, our efforts to obtain clemency for Chris failed. The district attorney, pardon board, and governor refused to grant a commutation of his sentence.

Ten days before Chris’ execution date, two sisters and I drove to Louisiana. While I met and prayed with Chris for eight hours each day, my religious sisters prayed with me and offered their support. Together, Chris and I were preparing for an unnatural death by a non-forgiving government, a government unable to see the rehabilitated and repentant Chris I had come to know and love. While Chris had mystical-like wisdom to share with me, all I had to share was my presence, prayer, and a listening ear. In the execution room, all I could be was a face of God’s love for him.

On the day before Chris’ scheduled death, the government delayed the execution because the state illegally obtained the lethal drugs to be used. Since that date, Chris received two other execution dates. Each time we prepared and then received a last minute stay of Execution. The journey has been an emotional rollercoaster.

Currently, Chris’ life hangs in a balance. I continue to accompany Chris as his legal team challenges the constitutionality of the lethal injection process. My original and ongoing “yes” to this ministry is grounded in a deep belief that our God is a God of love, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness. Even though I abhor violence and understand the need for punishment of crimes and rehabilitation, our faith calls us to follow in the salvific love of Jesus the Christ.

We are called by the foundational theme of Catholic social teaching to affirm that sacred human dignity does not discriminate between those who are innocent and those who are guilty. Instead, it is a gift that is freely and undeservedly betowed on us by our Creator and not to be taken away by humanity. In his pastoral letter, Evangelium Vitae (The Gospel of Life), Saint John Paul II writes, “whoever attacks human life, in some way attacks God himself.

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2 Less than 0.5% of the 14,842 persons executed in the United States since 1776 belong to Chris’ age bracket or older. Tracy L. Snell, U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics, “Capital Punishment, 2012 - Statistical Tables,” May 15, 2014.

3 Chris has been diagnosed with moderate brain damage affecting his ability to control behavior, emotions, and decision-making. Individuals with childhood trauma who suffer from brain damage and mental illness are grossly over-represented on Louisiana’s death row. (See Alex Mikulich and Sophie Cull, “Diminishing All of Us: A Study of the Death Penalty in Louisiana,” 2012 at http://catholicsmobilizing.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Death-Penalty-in-Louisiana_Full.pdf).

4 Chris was indicted by a grand jury system contaminated by a longstanding pattern of racial discrimination and was unable to obtain relief in the court system because his trial lawyer failed to complete the pre-trial paperwork necessary to challenge the results of such discriminatory practices. See McCleskey v. Kemp, 48 U.S. 279, 327 (1989), Brennan, J. dissenting.

5 Chris was scheduled to be executed on November 5, 2013 and February 5, 2014.


7 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Life and Dignity of the Human Person,” http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/life-and-dignity-of-the-human-person.cfm. The Catechism of the Catholic Church also calls us to acknowledge both the rights that states possess in protecting its citizenry, as well as the appropriateness of the punishment is uses to do so. (CCC 2267).

8 Saint John Paul II called our attention to how God showed mercy even when punishing Cain who murdered his brother Abel (Gen 4:15). God gave Cain a distinctive sign even against those who wished to avenge Abel's death. The Pope stresses that “not even a murderer loses his personal dignity, as God himself pledges to guarantee this.” (Evangelium Vitae, no. 9).
By utilization of the death penalty as punishment, we, as a society, violate our most cherished value—the sacred dignity of human life.

This year, a series of botched executions have made even more transparent the stripping of human dignity and sacred life as it triggered disturbing concerns about the supposedly quick, painless, and humane method of lethal injection. Many states, like Louisiana, have concealed their protocols and drug sources from the public to prevent attorneys from challenging them as “cruel and unusual punishment.” The troublesome procedure of government executions has been exposed. The current challenges in state and federal courts around the constitutionality of lethal injection give us hope for reform and abolishment of the death penalty. May this illumination lead us to see that God’s mercy calls us to find a better way that respects the sacred life and dignity of all.

11 First U.S. Congress. “Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.” “Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.”
“Always Be Ready to Give...a Reason for Your Hope...”—1 Peter 3: 15b

by Dawn M. Nothwehr, O.S.F.

Do an internet search on “climate change” and you get 76,300,000 hits; search for “global warming” and you get 31,100,000. Indeed, climate change and global warming are signs of our time. Following upon the release of the Fifth Assessment Report (AR5) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change,¹ the U.S. government released its Third National Climate Assessment (NCA) on May 6, 2014.² Distinctive about the NCA was: (1) It followed unprecedented natural disasters—heat waves, droughts, hurricanes, wildfires, and flooding—that left no section of the U.S. unscathed; and (2) It outlined in great detail, but distilled in a “Fact Sheet,” how local conditions of all the eight regions of the United States would be affected by increasingly more extreme weather and other events that would change the climate.

The NCA confirms climate change is already affecting the entire United States and key sectors of its economy and society. The need to tackle climate change threats and increase community preparedness and resilience throughout the country is immediate and urgent because:

- extreme weather and climate events have increased in recent decades, some of which are related to human activities;
- human-induced climate change is projected to continue and will accelerate significantly if global emissions keep increasing;
- climate-related impacts are evident in many sectors and are expected to become increasingly disruptive;
- climate change threatens human health and wellbeing, including through extreme weather events and wildfires, decreased air quality, and diseases transmitted by insects, food, and water;
- sea-level rise, heavy downpours, and extreme heat are damaging and will continue to damage infrastructure with ongoing climate change;

² Find the full report, report highlights, educational and interactive resources at National Climate Assessment at http://nca2014.globalchange.gov/.

Dawn M. Nothwehr, O.S.F., Ph.D. teaches courses in environmental ethics at Catholic Theological Union, where she holds The Erica and Harry John Family Endowed Chair in Catholic Theological Ethics. Her latest book is Ecological Footprints: An Essential Franciscan Guide to Faith and Sustainable Living (Liturgical Press, 2012).
• climate change is jeopardizing water quality and water supply reliability, which is affecting ecosystems and livelihoods;
• climate disruptions to agriculture have been increasing and their severity is projected to increase;
• climate change poses particular threats to indigenous peoples’ health, wellbeing, and ways of life;
• the capacity of ecosystems to withstand the impacts of extreme events, such as fires, floods and severe storms, is being overburdened;
• oceans are warming and increasing in acidity, which is affecting ocean circulation, chemistry, ecosystems and marine life;
• and while adaptation and mitigation planning is increasing, implementation efforts are inadequate to avoid the negative social, environmental, and economic consequences of climate change.

Beyond the NCA, the past several months have seen many important climate change-related initiatives. A brief sampling of these events yields reason for both frustration and hope.

• The April 2014 study of public understanding of the existence of global warming and its causes by The Yale Project on Science and Society showed that over all, public acceptance of human causes for global warming is currently up 5 percent above the rate assessed in May 2011.3

• Yale’s April 2014 report also showed only 12 percent of Americans know that 90 percent or more of climate scientists have concluded global warming is happening and human-caused.4

• In an unprecedented effort, from May 2-6 2014, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences held a joint workshop on climate change and sustainable development. The two Academies and invited experts studied human needs—food, health, and energy—seeking various pathways that both serve those needs and reveal constraints on nature’s ability to meet them.5

• In 2013, US oil demand dramatically reversed course, growing to 18.9 million barrels of oil a day (a 400,000 barrels per day increase) compared to China’s 10.8 million barrels a day (390,000 barrels a day increase). A similar increase is anticipated for 2014.6

• May 29, 2014, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops sent a letter to Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Gina McCarthy in support of strengthening the agency’s carbon emission standards for existing power plants.7

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4 Cook and colleagues (2013) examined nearly 12,000 peer-reviewed papers in the climate science literature and found a 97 percent consensus among those papers that stated a position on the reality of human-caused global warming.
• An unusual bipartisan alliance including George P. Shultz, Henry M. Paulson Jr., and Robert E. Rubin said that the country—and business leaders in particular—must wake up to the enormous scale of the economic risk involved in global warming and climate change.8

• On July 11, 2014, the World Council of Churches, which represents over half a billion Christians worldwide, decided to pull its investments out of fossil fuel companies.9

In spite of some seemingly positive developments, even as more people accept and experience the real impacts of climate change, haunting and sobering questions bear down on us: Are we acting soon enough and strong enough? Even under the best conditions, are we simply doing “too little, too late?” Where can we find genuine reason for hope in this picture? These questions challenge the faith, spirit, and psyche of the People of God and church ministers of all kinds. On the practical side, ministers can gain insight from three recent scenarios.

Collision of Beliefs and Facts

Perhaps the most perplexing for ministers is that even though more people know that there is at least a 90 percent consensus among climate scientists that climate change is real and human caused, and that there is overwhelming scientific data in support of that, they just are not willing to endorse the agreement. According to Yale Law School professor Dan Kahn, religious and political identity trumps knowledge of factual and scientific evidence.10 Scientific evidence alone is ineffective in reducing misconceptions on climate change. So what can ministers and teachers do to break through misguided religious identities (in light of Catholic social teaching on climate change and environmental issues)?

First, fundamental catechesis on the reign of God and the Christian’s primary identity as one loyal to both of its dimensions—“the here,” as well as the “not yet”—must be stressed, in light of the Church’s teaching on the unified nature of the doctrines of creation and redemption. This opens up the moral requirement that Christians need to care for the earth, their neighbors, as well as worship God. There needs to be congruence between one’s personal, spiritual, social, and political actions. At the same time, ministers need to be savvy about the incentives various elites have for spreading misinformation.11 When teaching about climate change, it is most effective to use examples of changes already occurring and developing in local ecosystems to illustrate the serious nature of the problem (See the regional sections of the NCA). At their deepest core, people get involved with issues because they see their values and ideals are at stake. This requires teachers and ministers to help people “connect the dots” between climate change and Catholic identity, doing careful catechesis on moral values found in scripture, the sacraments, or orthodox teachings on creation, eschatology, or soteriology—as well as Catholic social teaching.

Scientists Coping with Impending Realities

Secondly, we can learn from those directly involved in scientific and technological work aimed at halting or mitigating warming effects, and who often suffer psychologically and spiritually. Three such scientists recently dis-

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cussed coping with the current and impending life-threatening destruction of ecosystems and living things.\textsuperscript{12} Terry Root, Senior Fellow—Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment, who studies how animals and plants handle climate change explained:

Some of them are going to be species that we need. How do we know what species we need ahead of time? We can't save them all. That's why I get into triage...I just had a discussion on the phone with my boyfriend about how much longer can I do what I'm doing,...I mean all I do all day long is think about how species are going extinct. It is tough. It truly is tough.\textsuperscript{13}

For Abigail Derby, a conservation ecologist at Chicago's Field Museum, it is sobering to realize that the world's sixth extinction of species is in progress. But, this extinction is happening faster than all others in geological history, and it is driven by human actions.\textsuperscript{14} However, because it is human driven, it can possibly be halted by changing toxic human behavior. What each person does or does not do, matters a lot! We know what we need to do. If we act now we can avoid a tragic future. Current and developing technologies can be brought to scale to help us. Yet we need to learn to think about time and space differently—beyond the immediate moment or the next election—to 10, 20, or 100 years into the future.

**Psychological Impacts and Preparedness**

Finally, the June 2014 study “Beyond Storms & Droughts: the Psychological Impacts of Climate Change” by the American Psychological Association and the nonprofit organization ecoAmerica shows the impacts of climate change on Americans' health and psychological well-being.\textsuperscript{15}

1. The report provides guidance to communities about how to prepare for and communicate about psychological impacts and encourage future research on the issue. Three major findings will continue to challenge everyone, particularly ministers, teachers, and those in helping professions.

2. Climate change currently affects and will continue to have significant impacts on Americans' health and psychological well-being as climate change accelerates (2014 NCA). Likely impacts include: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); distress, depression, and anxiety; hopelessness; increases in violence, aggression, and crime; and strains on social relationships.

3. Everyone will be affected by climate's psychological impacts, but children, women, and communities with fewer resources will be especially vulnerable.

4. While the psychological impacts of climate change will be significant, communities and individuals can take action to prepare for them by strengthening existing social groups and networks. Taking steps to prepare for the psychological impacts can also bring other benefits; communities can strengthen preparation for natural disasters and climate change by collaborating across organizations to integrate planning for mental health impacts into existing disaster preparation efforts.

Throughout this report, faith-based groups and religious professionals are mentioned as resource persons.

\textsuperscript{12} Shannon Heffernan, “After Water: ‘How Do You Sleep at Night?’ A Writer Asks Climate Scientists How They Cope,” July 20, 2014, \url{http://www.wbez.org/series/front-and-center-water/after-water-how-do-you-sleep-night-110529}. Root said that if we get to 2 degrees warmer, we could lose 20 to 40 percent of all the known species on the planet. If we get to 4 degrees warmer then we could lose as many as half.

\textsuperscript{13} Heffernan, “After Water.”

\textsuperscript{14} Heffernan, “After Water.” Emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{15} See the full report at: \url{ecoAmerica}, \url{http://ecoamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/eA_Beyond_Storms_and_Droughts_Psych_Impacts_of_Climate_Change.pdf}.  

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The Reason for Our Hope

Though the challenges of climate change continue to be daunting, we can take courage from our ancestors in faith who often “walked in faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7). Indeed, God’s never failed us yet! With hope-filled hearts, let us join Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in their declaration:

It is our profound conviction that the future of the human family depends also on how we safeguard—both prudently and compassionately, with justice and fairness—the gift of creation that our Creator has entrusted to us. Therefore, we acknowledge in repentance the wrongful mistreatment of our planet, which is tantamount to sin before the eyes of God. We reaffirm our responsibility and obligation to foster a sense of humility and moderation so that all may feel the need to respect creation and to safeguard it with care. Together, we pledge our commitment to raising awareness about the stewardship of creation; we appeal to all people of goodwill to consider ways of living less wastefully and more frugally, manifesting less greed and more generosity for the protection of God’s world and the benefit of His people.16

Gifted Co-Educators: Voices from Short-Term Service Immersion Community Partners

by Joyana Jacoby Dvorak

Each year scores of undergraduates at DePaul University participate in seven to ten day service immersion experiences. Preparation includes a values-based developmental leadership framework¹ and introduction to the mission of the Vincentians in Action (VIA) Service Immersion program:

…to provide students with transformational short-term service immersion opportunities that incorporate community, spiritual reflection, simplicity, and increased awareness of social injustice. Integrated throughout the immersion experience is the Vincentian in Action ways of **awareness/appreciation, dialogue and solidarity**². We hope to inspire growth and change in a way that resonates back home through the sharing of stories and action toward systemic change.

These are grand aspirations and students have reported transformative personal changes for their faith and action in the world.³ Significant change is nurtured by asking critical questions before and after venturing into another reality. “Can short term missions do more harm than good?”⁴ “Who do we intend to accompany and who accompanies us?”

This column focuses on essential and often neglected partners who are co-educators and formators in service immersions—hosts who graciously receive students and facilitate their on-site experiences. As VIA coordinator at DePaul University, I recently conducted a program evaluation that sought to integrate this community partner

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1  Siobhan O’Donoghue and Karl Nass, “Vincentians in Action: An Interfaith Model for Civic Learning and Spiritual Growth,” *Journal of College and Character* 7, no. 6 (2006). Vincentian values of community, spirituality, and service are integrated into the formation process, empowering students to make meaning of their experiences.


4  For articles used as a part of VIA Immersion Program, see Ivan Illich, “To Hell with Good Intentions,” *Conference on InterAmerican Student Projects (CIASP) in Cuernavaca, Mexico, on April 20* (1968); JoAnn Van Engen, “The Cost of Short Term Missions,” *The Other Side* 36, no. 1 (2000): 20-23.

Joyana Jacoby Dvorak is the DePaul University Ministry Service Immersion Coordinator in the Vincentian Community Service Office and adjunct professor in the Peace, Justice and Conflict studies program.
perspective—voices seldom heard in research. They highlighted factors contributing to our mutually beneficial partnerships including shared hopes/objectives, intentional preparation of students and hosts, orientations, long-term relationships, and DePaul students’ curiosity and readiness to serve and learn.

**Spirituality of Accompaniment**

At the heart of VIA Service Immersion is building relationships, presence over simply completing tasks. A paradigm of community service rooted in being versus doing, listening to the needs of communities before responding, working with versus doing for, discovering root causes, and reflection moving towards action applies to every relationship. The primary encounter is with persons living in poverty, requiring deep listening and openness to the radical other. Partners affirmed this accompaniment philosophy and shared the hope that, though short-term, there is potential for long-term impact in students’ lives, especially if there is post-immersion follow-up focused on integration and accountability.

**Value of Relationship Building and Presence**

In addition to testimony of community beneficiaries who appreciated students being attentive and taking the time to listen to their story, partners reported positive interactions with students amidst the host community. They valued groups being ready and open to dialogue, building relationships and not putting up barriers, in contrast to groups who come in and stay distant. A concern of partners when receiving groups is that “[some students] didn’t come to be with us, [they] came to be here so [they] could get [their] ticket punched” and “feel good” about themselves. Another partner articulated a similar sentiment, “We do want to be very conscious that we are not in any way using, or taking advantage of persons who are in need.” Listening first is key to avoid this pitfall.

Especially for immersions where students spend only a brief time at many different service sites, a tension arose in the quality of relationship building that can happen. Some partners commented on the unrealistic expectation to build meaningful relationships: “When you think of it as a chance to build a relationship, how is that possible when you are only there three hours, once a year?” A few hours’ service will not meet the agency’s greater need for more stable, committed volunteers. Other partners countered this by saying there is a benefit in doing service for a short time because students “throw themselves into it and don’t hold back because they know that they only get these three hours.”

Beyond tasks or projects completed, a consistent theme was how the youth’s presence and curiosity is energizing and hopeful. The students were described as “a breath of fresh air” and a “positive light.” Their presence breaks the mundane: “When you have a shot of serious energy, you know, one month a year, it’s just like, wow, wake up time.” They also may give “new eyes” and “affirmation” to the daily routine of the hosting community, who have made long-term commitments to accompany and respond to needs.

**Intentional Preparation**

One partner remarked, “There’s a lot of grunt work that needs to be done prior to a group coming”—usually without the services of a volunteer coordinator. With these co-educators, preparation, too, has a relational quality.

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5 As described by Kim Marie Lamberty: “A spirituality of accompaniment begins with recognition of the dignity of the self as well as the other as created in God’s image. It is expressed in presence, relationship, community, and service.” Lamberty, “Toward a Spirituality of Accompaniment in Solidarity Partnerships,” *Missiology: An International Review* 40, no. 2 (2012): 188.

6 Kurt Alan Ver Beek, “The Impact of Short-term Missions: A Case Study of House Construction in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch,” *Missiology: An International Review* 34, no. 4 (2006): 477–495. This framework is supported by Ver Beek who recommends short-term missions ought not focus on fixing things for the poor, but rather on listening to the poor, observing, respecting, and dialoguing before trying to do something.
not about the number of groups we have, it is about the quality of experience…This is not a warehouse here! It’s gotta be intentional, reflective, authentic and given from the heart.” Knowing the capacity of sites and appropriate number of students is critical to avoid having too many helping hands. Most partners value an open mind and heart and a readiness to be flexible more than specific skills of the volunteer.

Partners are appreciative and can tell the difference when students are prepped to humbly “come as a student… [not] as a bountiful person who has things to give to people.” Students are guests in the host and wider community, not poverty tourists. Self-awareness calls for a “willingness to acknowledge what you do and don’t know, what your privilege is, or how you could be perceived in the community.” On-site orientations to provide necessary community contexts are critical.

**Long-term Relationships with Partners**

When asked what motivates them to continue as hosts year after year, community partners emphasized the gradual accumulation of trust, “The students have a common history here and I always like to remind them that they are walking in the footsteps of the students before them…it’s the history that leads to a readiness for acceptance by the community.” There is a mutual benefit of creating long-term, sustainable relationships and of returning to the same locations each year. Partners who have long-term relationships with community organizations are invaluable bearers of trust. They cultivate and build relationships at service sites throughout the year and are in tune with current needs. Their credibility allows for students to enter into intimate and meaningful encounters in the community.

Several partners commented how they appreciated the opportunity to take a step back and honestly reflect on our partnership. Taking the time to stop and listen cultivates mutuality. On a long-term basis, host communities accompany persons in the wider community where they serve. As co-educators in the DePaul VIA Immersion program, they accompany students who serve short-term and take a step in a journey of discovering their place in the world. With intentionality from start to finish, mutual relations of the university and community partners, hosts and students, students and persons they encounter during immersion, create in the VIA framework the gift of solidarity.
A growing trend in the art world is to support artists by creating artists’ archives. These are places where not only art but the stuff of art-making, the preliminary drawings, sketches, plans, papers, ephemera, of artists is saved so that researchers can know how art came to be. I became aware of the need of artists’ archives before I arrived at CTU as a librarian through a friend who was involved in the Artists’ Archive of the Western Reserve (AAWR). I learned that much art and almost all documentation of art and artist was not saved when artists died.

“The AAWR is a ‘living’ archive—they endeavor to reach out to artists before their death, because they know that cultural heritage can be lost when art is abandoned, mishandled, or dispersed after an artist’s death.”¹ This is something archivists understand and are trying to resolve by being proactive with artists and others whose archives are important to save. According to Heather Gendron, librarian at UNC’s Sloane Art Library,

Artists’ archives are a challenge for any archive: Artists’ archives present unusual challenges for long-term preservation. In addition to paper documents and computer files, they may contain actual works of art, as well as materials that blur the line between art and archive, such as illustrated letters, sketchbooks, photographs, and video, even brushes and paint. These archives are either misunderstood or can be difficult to manage, which means few libraries and even fewer museums actively seek them out. They tend to fall through the cracks.²

When I started learning about the archive at Catholic Theological Union, I realized that we had an opportunity to do much the same thing as these artists’ archives on a scale and with a focus that fit the mission of the archive at CTU. We already had some organizational archives of liturgical reform groups. We were offered a couple of very interesting archives of liturgical artists whose work grew out of the reforms of Vatican II and its insistence on “vernacular” art.

¹ See Artist Archives of the Western Reserve—History, http://www.artistsarchives.org/about/.

Melody Layton McMahon holds an M.S. in Library Service from Columbia University and an M.A. in theology from St. Mary Seminary and Graduate School of Theology in Cleveland, OH. She is the Director of the Paul Bechtold Library at Catholic Theological Union. She is a co-editor of NTR and author of many articles on theological librarianship.
Currently we are working with the liturgical artist John Buscemi to archive his work from start to finish—papers requesting his work, his initial plans and drawings, ephemeral material used to design, blueprints, photographs of work in progress and final work, material related to the dedications of his work, and more. Buscemi’s work is interesting because it ranges from small liturgical objects to small chapels to entire church buildings, and even to a Papal Mass held in a cornfield in Des Moines, Iowa. For this work there are many newspaper accounts of the collaborative work that was done by artisans who used his designs to create the setting for the mass. His work includes the award-winning Santa Maria de La Paz Church in Santa Fe, New Mexico, which was featured in Architectural Digest.

An interview with Buscemi was published in U.S. Catholic in 1992. Throughout the interview, Buscemi advocated for how people needed to be educated—how the liturgical renewal was fueled by people learning more about early liturgical practices. He said,

It does feel good to go into a lot of old churches, but in some ways that’s an exercise in pretend because we don’t have the worldview that built those churches…To go back and actually build nostalgic churches is not faithful to our time—it’s building clichés. It’s saying that we haven’t done our work to find out what our own expressions show. To build a Gothic church today is not to wrestle with the revolutionary concepts that the people in those times did—those buildings were a radical break from what had come before.

Buscemi’s archive provides a way to study what has gone into creating these new expressions that are part of our current churches.

Archivists are trained to leave documents in the arrangements used by the person whose archive they are acquiring and the CTU archive is fortunate that Buscemi had a fairly straightforward arrangement by project in chronological order. His work in making the transition has been mostly to identify items that were not filed properly and to tag or notate large files of digital photographs so searchers can find the photographs by project. Researchers will be able to follow one particular project from the initial creative spark to the final object or space. Or they will be able to research a particular type of object, say, baptismal fonts, and come to a better understanding of how liturgical artists took the understanding of baptism in the Vatican II documents and made the font into a real, living part of a parish church.

According to Lisa Gonzalez, the librarian in charge of the CTU Archive,

the importance of collecting contemporary materials needs to be stressed—people often think of archives as collecting someone’s papers after they die, or when you come across someone’s papers in some attic somewhere. Collecting more contemporary materials is helpful not only for those who are interested in current events, but for those who are writing contemporary history. We may not think of how important archival materials related to liturgical renewal are because people may think we are still in the midst of the renewal, and that there is no need for historical reflection yet, or people think (or hope) that liturgical renewal is passé, and not really worthy of study.

Yet, if these works are not collected now, they will likely be destroyed before an archivist can make arrangements to save them. Relatives who inherit such material will likely have no idea that it is valuable, or that it could be used for serious research.

In the *U.S. Catholic* interview, Buscemi noted, “This is a unique time. It’s premature for anyone to say what is the definitive form of church architecture. We’re not going to know for a hundred years.” Yet, if these archives are not saved and made accessible, we will likely never know. The history that will have gone into the creation of the churches born of liturgical renewal following Vatican II will have been lost.

Why is this important to readers of *NTR*? You are the ones who can help to save these archives. If you are a designer or artist, seek out an archive (often within libraries) that will accept your archive while you are still living. Make sure this information is included in your will (if you do not move it to the archive while you are alive). If you are an archive manager, actively seek to acquire the collections of “the stuff” of artists and designers, and let the world know that you have these materials for study. There are many things to consider in acquiring these collections, but for now, the important thing is to see that they are saved so that we do not lose a great part of our Catholic liturgical heritage.

Buscemi said, “We’re like Israelites wandering in the desert. It’s a time of transition, growth, and exploration, and we need to be faithful to our age.” In order for students of liturgy to know if we have been faithful to our age, we need to have the material for study. Now we are in the age of amassing this material before it is too late!

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Reviewed by Michael Anthony Abril
University of Notre Dame, IN

Orlando Espín’s compelling book reminds us that Christianity is neither a collection of abstract doctrines nor a rigid ecclesiastical hierarchy. It is the lived faith of real, everyday Christians. For Espín, the principle content of the Christian way of life is the audacity of a “subversive hope” in the truth of Jesus’ preaching about the compassion of God and God’s correlative transformation of the world. We “bet on” hope in the act of faith, living radically according to the compassion of God, which militates against the dehumanizing and idolatrous doctrines and ideologies constructed for the benefit of those in power at the expense of those whom society deems “disposable”.

As the latest fruit of Espín’s ongoing conversation with the concept of tradition, this book expounds upon the idea of “traditioning” as the cultural process by which the People of God encounter divine revelation only in and through its appropriation within a specific historical-cultural context. The inescapably contextualized nature of revelation means that traditioning must be intercultural, pluralistic, and dialogical. Christian traditioning must be the act of the entire People of God guided by the infallible *sensus fidelium*. Theology is inseparable from the real experience of everyday life (*lo cotidiano*) and from the experiences, spirituality, practices, and beliefs of everyday Christians (popular Catholicism).

Christian doctrine is not exempt from determination by its socio-historical context. There is always the risk that doctrine may become an idol, a self-justifying object of obedience that purports to be an absolute and exclusive representation of the truth. Such an idol, rather than denouncing situations of hegemonic dominance and oppression, serves only to legitimate the abuse of power. Rather than claiming privileged access to the truth, we must encounter the ultimate mystery within the “effective analogy” of the crucified Jesus and all other victims of power (121).

Here, as in prior books, there is something ironic about the way Espín operates. His framework of “traditioning” and “popular Catholicism” provides ample grounds for utilizing the practices, spirituality, and beliefs of everyday believers as a source for theology, and yet Espín does not explicitly engage in this kind of retrieval. For example, for his portrait of Jesus, rather than presenting the views and spiritual experiences of everyday Christians, Espín relies heavily upon the ideas of certain reductionistic historical-critical biblical scholars. According to Espín, “Jesus’ interpretation of the Torah—this would perhaps surprise many Christians today—did not concern itself with an individual’s eternal salvation” (2). Jesus did not come to save souls because Jesus and his audience had no concept
of either “soul” or “heaven” (191 #49). Likewise, “the historical Jesus did not preach himself,” for he “did not regard himself as anything but a human being” (92).

Without disputing the historicity of these claims, it is surprising that Espín, who argues that theology is not reserved for academics and the study of texts, puts such weight on the textual criticism of certain biblical scholars. Seeing how he insists that the interpretation of the New Testament must accord with the faith of the real People of God (20-21), should he not consider how the specific practices and beliefs of the majority of active lay Catholics, who worship Jesus and look forward to heaven, contradict this portrayal? Espín does not deny the divinity of Jesus, nor does he teach that contemporary belief in the afterlife is necessarily bad, but he does leave out any consideration of how these beliefs might be positive factors in the lives and mission of real Christians today. Because they are later developments, these beliefs are not pertinent to the core message of Jesus’ preaching (89; 191 #49).

Although this book could have been deepened by an explicit retrieval of the popular Catholicism of a particular community, it still exemplifies the depth of insight that has for decades made Espín’s theology highly influential for US Latin@ theology. *Idol & Grace* expands and develops Espín’s pivotal concepts that have served as the conceptual basis for many theologians’ engagements with particular Christian communities and their socio-historical contexts and struggles. At the same time, this book is not written for an exclusively Latin@ or even Catholic audience. Its expansive approach aims at engaging in an inclusive and ecumenical conversation. It therefore has much to offer to readers of diverse backgrounds and interests, even those who are less familiar with the theology of tradition or US Latin@ theology. *Idol & Grace* serves as a compelling witness to the world-transforming compassion of God, to which we must respond with a subversive hope and an active faith.

Reviewed by Kevin Considine
Calumet College of St. Joseph, Whiting, IN

Grace Ji-Sun Kim is making an impact in the world of Protestant intercultural theology. Her previous works included creative contributions such as re-envisioning the Holy Spirit through the East Asian concept of Ch'i and exploring a liberating Christology for North American Korean women through engagement with the biblical Sophia tradition.

Dr. Kim continues her project of constructing intercultural theologies in this small volume. She attempts to build upon the broad spectrum of feminist eco-theologies that call attention to the role Christianity plays in ecological destruction. Kim’s guiding question is this: “how can we be motivated to live a sustainable life in a world filled with the toxins of empire, colonialism, consumption, and greed?” (2). In light of this question, her purpose here is to “...examine ways of rethinking our errors so that we can work toward a safer, reimagined, sustainable planet” (5).

Kim is a contextual theologian and moves from an analysis of the current situation (a postcolonial, consumerist globalization ruled by the insatiable overconsumption of the wealthy West) to a way of understanding the consequence of ecological degradation (the Korean understanding of han, here interpreted as festering ecological wounds inflicted by humankind) to a theological response to bring about personal, social, and ecological transformation (an understanding of the Holy Spirit rooted in her previous work on Ch’i, the ruach tradition in the Hebrew Scriptures, and crystallized in an understanding of the Spirit as the creative life energy called eros).

This book has many merits. Not least among them is her overview of two defining characteristics of our world—postcolonialism and consumerism—that are the foci of chapters one and two. Many contemporary theologians are slow in engaging with these “signs of the times” but Kim provides a clear overview and clearly situates her work within this context. In addition, chapter four is illuminating as she envisions a renewed, intercultural, and transformative doctrine of the Holy Spirit whose work and presence are the motivation and sustenance for action for ecological justice. Chapter three, in which she engages the Korean concept of han and its importance for describing human violence against nature, is adequate but is not fully integrated into her entire vision. The importance of han in understanding ecological wounds quickly disappears as she moves on to her section on pneumatology.

I would like to offer one small observation that may be of interest to a Catholic audience. Although Kim is not a confessional theologian per se, her work is clearly written by a Protestant thinker for an audience saturated in the language, concerns, and theological imagination of this tradition. Catholics have much to gain from engaging this work; however, with her goal in mind of “motivating” Christians for action in the world, it is important to point out that her theological sensibilities may not fully communicate across this confessional line.
For example, she provides a useful insight when speculating that the Protestant work ethic, described by sociologist Max Weber, may be an important idea to retrieve in order to counter the sin of overconsumption in the wealthy West (35, 37-38). This same ethic, however, cannot be accepted uncritically because it once had functioned as a discourse of discrimination against a number of immigrants to and residents of the United States who were not of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant backgrounds.

Moreover, her understanding of Christianity tends to be oversimplified at times, such as when she indicts Christianity for the mistake of valuing transcendence over immanence (66). Her critique is directed at “Euro-theology” and has merit. But, it is important to point out that the thrust of Catholic theology and ritual tends to emphasize divine immanence more so than divine transcendence. These criticisms are minor and do not compromise her vision.

Dr. Kim has opened the door to a topic rich in possibilities for authentic Christian praxis. It is clear that she wants her readers to act in the world rather than just read about it and pontificate. In this regard, this is a timely and useful contribution to intercultural theologies. It is a bit pricey for personal purchase, but I would recommend this work to a broad audience interested in ecology and intercultural theology. We all can learn from Kim’s creative vision.

Reviewed by Jason A. Heron
University of Dayton

Rowan Williams’ *Faith in the Public Square* is a provocative contribution to contemporary socio-political discourse. I recommend Williams’ lectures to any reader interested in religion’s voice in secular societies. The book collects twenty-six lectures given between 2002 and 2012 at venues as varied as the European Policy Centre in Brussels and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences at the Vatican. In seven parts, Williams addresses secularism, liberalism, the environment, the economy, justice, diversity, and religion. The author writes with his characteristic charity, theological acumen, and philosophical insight.

Some of the initial essays in the volume—especially “Has Secularism Failed” and “Europe, Faith and Culture”—show Williams’ skill in speaking to both specialists and to educated religious and non-religious lay readers. Specialists interested in social theory, political history, and the theologico-political problem will appreciate Williams’ Augustinian and Sturzo-ian commitment to rational, historical process rather than facile notions of historical progress. This commitment frees Williams from both unwarranted optimism and pessimism, enabling a hopeful engagement with the secular other.

Educated lay readers invested in debates regarding the place of faith in supposedly secular spaces will appreciate Williams’ creative deploying of the Christian tradition and the necessary commitments of religious persons. Williams mines the genealogies of Western visions of God, person, world, and liberty in order to expose the irreducibly religious—and usually Christian—patterns of speech that ground contemporary debates.

As one can expect with Williams, the weaknesses here are few. Given their basis in public lectures, the essays sometimes lack the precision one expects from Williams. Some of the more provocative aspects of Williams’ thought—the relationship between same-sex couples and marriage law, the relationship between relativism and a stable human nature—are often enough present in the essays as evocative gestures. But in the charged atmosphere surrounding such issues, the reader craves detail, distinction, and explication.

Nevertheless, the book’s strengths are many. I highlight two present across the spectrum of essays. First, a useful thread runs throughout. Repeatedly, Williams gives a coherent rationale for the “procedural secularism” by which a state may decline to privilege a given religion (2). In so doing, he creates space for dialogue between the religious and the secular. But he simultaneously undermines various arguments for “programmatic secularism” by which a state may ban private convictions from public space (3). In so doing, he demands that we recognize that the religious and the secular are not partitioned from one another but are always dialoguing within a complex mutuality. In this way, Williams avoids both “renewed bids for theocracy” and the “complete privatizing of faith” (135).
distinguishing secularisms, Williams is trying to restore our faith in the public square as a place where humans—outfitted with all their commitments—may engage in “argumentative democracy” (135).

Second, Williams’ retrieval of peculiarly Christian language is a salutary contribution to the “argumentative democracy” he hopes will characterize the twenty-first century public square. Williams faithfully and creatively excavates the Christian tradition for more adequate descriptions of various crises in contemporary life. He is particularly sensitive to the way we speak of God’s relation to human and non-human creation and of the consequences of these descriptions for our socio-political existence as embodied humans. Much rides on whether or not we recognize other persons and non-human creation as gifts from God that lead us toward unity with God. I note as well that Williams’ use of the tradition is appropriately nuanced. The matter is not one of identifying Christianity as the source of everything bad about modern life or conversely as the source of the few remaining goods to which we must desperately cling. Rather, Christianity provides us with a true description of what it means to be human. The Christian tradition’s meditation on the person can thus re-ground many unwieldy debates about the good of political life, the origin and durability of rights, the duty of humans to the environment, the purpose of economic growth, etc.

Williams has thus attempted to contribute to a real discussion of the absolutely necessary place of religious faith in the public square. Further, he seeks to restore our faith in the very idea of a public square. On both counts, he has succeeded with rigor and elegance. His style is pleasing and direct, blending sophisticated teaching, persuasive argumentation, and plenty of delight. Readers will be pleased with the breadth of topics and Williams’ admirable grasp of a startling array of literature, theological, literary, political, and philosophical.

Across the broad array of topics, the essays speak from both a Christian and a religious perspective. That is, though Williams writes from a self-consciously Christian perspective, he is aware that many of his arguments hold for the religious person more generally. Thus, the title does not refer solely to the Christian faith but rather to the robust, welcome, and necessary presence of religious persons and communities in public discourse.

The book is well worth the money and will be useful for many different types of readers interested in the complex shape the theologico-political problem has taken in the twenty-first century.

Reviewed by Christopher P. Vogt
St. John’s University, New York

Judith Merkle has written an ambitious, thought-provoking book that seeks to answer the most basic yet incredibly complicated question that Christians must revisit in every age: What does it mean to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ today? Merkle argues that question cannot be answered without being attentive to context. Christians are called to put Christ at the center of their lives, but “living in Christ is not done in spite of the world, but in this world” (7). As such, how we relate to the world in which we find ourselves takes on great importance.

Secularity and fragmentation are the most important features of the American and European context for which Merkle is writing. That world is marked by a profound absence of faith where belief, religion, and God are all seen as private or unnecessary. Culture in the sense of a shared set of meanings has been lost. Many Christians find themselves adrift—detached or even alienated from the Church and its structures of religious meaning. This book explores what it means to be faithful in a context marked by secularity, unbelief, and fragmentation where people find themselves with divided allegiances and multiple, overlapping forms of belonging.

The first half of the book could serve well as a text for a course in fundamental Catholic moral theology. Merkle discusses the nature of sin (personal and social), grace, the fundamental option, conscience, the relationship between the church and the world, and more. Her treatment of these topics is not a pedagogical aside, but rather is well-integrated into her overall effort to unpack fully the implications of secularity and fragmentation for Christian moral life.

Clearly Merkle is also writing for fellow moral theologians. The second half of the book is quite innovative and would be of particular interest to that audience. Merkle draws upon the work of Mary Douglass to map four patterns of relationships that define different contexts or ways of being in the world today. One axis charts the extent to which people belong to a group that has clear structures of authority and which demands some level of conformity and obedience. The other axis tracks “grid” experiences—forms of organization that are more informal but which nevertheless sometimes exert influence or even control. Merkle explores how to be faithful in each of four different quadrants. For example, in the “strong group, strong grid” quadrant, Merkle considers the lives of people who have strong family life and strong connections to the institutional church. In contrast, the “low group” and “low grid” quadrant describes people whose lives are marked by extraordinary detachment who are more inclined to mystical forms of spirituality. The point of Merkle’s inquiry is not to name the “best” quadrant but to investigate
how people might be challenged to grow in faithfulness in these different contexts. No context is hopeless and all of them should be engaged by the Church.

Merkle’s framework of analysis is interesting and illuminating. It is especially useful for helping readers imagine how various contexts open up different ways of being a faithful Christian today and how context shapes a person’s approach to moral questions. It is less helpful for explaining how to adjudicate among the multiple belongings and moral commitments that are typical for many people today. Nevertheless, Merkle has written a rich account of how secularity and fragmentation necessitate revisiting how Catholics understand sin, freedom, and the moral life. She has taken us several steps forward in our understanding of how cultural and interpersonal context must be taken into account as the Church attempts to be an efficacious sign of God’s love in the world. This book is recommended for graduate students, theologians, and ministerial professionals who are interested in thinking through how to call to faithfulness different groups of people whose connections to the Church range from deep commitment to alienation.