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

Editor: Dr. James Chukwuma Okoye, C.S.Sp., Director, Center for Spiritan Studies, GM Libermann Hall, 600 Forbes Avenue, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA 15282, U.S.A.
Telephone: (1) 412 396 4824
E-mail: okoyej@duq.edu

Editorial Board: James C. Okoye, C.S.Sp., Dr. Janie M. Harden Fritz, Dr. Sara Baron, Dr. Marinus Iwuchukwu, Dr. Fintan Sheerin, Dr. Gerard Magill, Dr. George Worgul.

Spiritan Consulting Committee

Spiritan Horizons is an annual publication. ISSN: 1933-1762.
It is also published online at http://www.duq.edu/spiritanhorizons ISSN: 1935-0759

Subscription rate: $10.00 (postage included)

Published by the Center for Spiritan Studies, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA 15282, U.S.A.

Cover design: Dr. Matthew J. Walsh, Community Engagement Coordinator, Counseling Services, Duquesne University.
Contents

Introduction

SPIRITAN HORIZONS 4
EDITOR’S NOTE 5
THE CENTER FOR SPIRITAN STUDIES FLYER 7

Wellsprings

FRANCIS LIBERMANN: A SPIRITUAL GUIDE FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY 8

LIBERMANN, ABNEGATION, AND LITURGICAL THEOLOGY 22
Prof. David W. Fagerberg

FROM CRISIS TO COMMITMENT: LIBERMANN’S PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY HOUSE OF NAZARETH AT LORETO 36
John McFadden, C.S.Sp.

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE AND MISSIOLOGY 46
Cornelius McQuillan, C.S.Sp.

THE CHALLENGES AND FUTURE OF SPIRITAN MISSION 52

MISSION WORKS, DONORS, CHALLENGES 64
Ray Sylvester

SPIRITANS FOR TODAY: PETER ODUENYI DIKE, C.S.SP. 1948–2010 72

Soundings

LET THE CHURCH ROLL ON 84
Most Rev. Fernand J. Cheri III, O.F.M.

“LET US NOT CLIP THE WINGS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT” 93
Dr. Austen Ivereigh

BENEDICT XVI, ROBERT CARDINAL SARAH,
FROM THE DEPTHS OF OUR HEARTS,
PRIESTHOOD, CELIBACY, AND THE CRISIS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH 100

CAN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AFFORD TO DO WITHOUT CLERICAL CELIBACY 114
Francis Edumalichukwu Okonkwo, C.S.Sp.
### Priestly Formation in Africa in the Light of the Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis

Bede Uche Ukwuije, C.S.Sp.

---

### Education

**Liberal Arts Online: Educating for Human Dignity in the COVID Era**

Dean Kristine L. Blair

---

**Mission as a Dialogic Unity of Contraries**

Prof. Ronald C. Arnett

---

### Lived Experience

**Twenty-Seven Years at the Student Life Division of Duquesne University**

Sean M. Hogan, C.S.Sp.

---

### Reviews

**Gerhard Lohfink, The Our Father. A New Reading**


---

**Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, World Christianity Encounters World Religions. A Summa of Interfaith Dialogue**

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

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

The Center for Spiritan Studies is a collaborative venture between the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit. The Center was founded in 2005. Its purpose is to foster and disseminate research into Spiritan history, tradition, and spirituality. It serves the Congregation throughout the world and Duquesne University by making resources for the Spiritan charism available for ministry, learning, and teaching. It likewise serves all people who wish to benefit from the Spiritan charism in their various callings.

The church could not remain silent in the wake of the protests for racial justice occasioned by the public snuffing out of the life of George Floyd, an African American. Bishop Fernand J. Cheri, III, O.F.M., auxiliary bishop of New Orleans, an African American, spoke from the heart to the United States Major Superiors Men. With his permission, that lecture is here published as *Let the Church Roll On*. Dr. Austen Ivereigh, a Fellow in Contemporary Church History at Campion Hall, Oxford University, reflects on the Amazonia Synod, *Let us not Clip the Wings of the Holy Spirit – The Synod for Amazonia*. Many were disappointed the pope did not lend his voice to the ordination of married men (*viri probati*). Ever the man of the spirit, the pope urged continued discernment sure that “wherever there is a particular need, [God] has already poured out the charisms that can meet it.” In-between the Synod and the Pope’s Exhortation appeared the book by Benedict XVI and Robert Cardinal Sarah, *From the Depths of Our Hearts: Priesthood,*
**Celibacy and the Crisis of the Catholic Church.** They argued that the Catholic priesthood was always celibate and must remain so. The review article by James Chukwuma Okoye, C.S.Sp., barely did justice to this important contribution. The discussion continues with Francis Edumalichukwu Okonkwo, C.S.Sp., *Can the Catholic Church afford to do without Clerical Celibacy?* Leaving controversy aside, Bede Uche Ukwuije, C.S.Sp., *Priestly Formation in Africa in the Light of the Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, offers insights into the pitfalls and gains of formation in Africa.

With COVID-19 on the attack, all schools went online last March. Our new dean, Dean Kristine Blair, *Online Learning and Education for Human Dignity*, addresses the issues moving forward. If Spiritans embrace preferential option for the poor, what happens to academic excellence? Prof. Ronald Arnett, *Unity of Contraries: the Mission of the University and Academic Excellence*, plots a pathway.

With over forty years at Duquesne, Sean Hogan, C.S.Sp., is the longest-serving Spiritan in Duquesne. His *Twenty-Seven Years at the Student Life Division, Duquesne University* is a mine of information and humor.


*James Chukwuma Okoye, C.S.Sp.*
*Director, Center for Spiritan Studies*
The Center for Spiritan Studies is a resource facility for the Spiritan Congregation (through research on its charism and history, tradition and spirituality) and Duquesne University Community (in re-imagining its Spiritan legacy for a new era).

ITS SERVICES INCLUDE:

The Spiritan Collection
an online resource housed in the University Gumberg Library

Spiritan Resources on the Holy Spirit
online at Center’s website

The Spiritan Scholar Program
scholarships for research on Spiritan subjects

Spiritan Horizons
a scholarly annual journal on topics related to Spiritan life and mission

In-service Workshops
for University personnel on ‘Connecting with the Spiritan Mission’

The Supple Room
for Spiritan research in the Gumberg Library

Publications
books and pamphlets on Spiritan issues

The Spiritan Series
position papers on Spiritan Pedagogy, Mission, and other topics

Worldwide annual Essay Competition
for Young Spiritans in Formation

Summer Workshops
organized regionally for Spiritan Formators

Further information on these services can be found on the Center’s website at www.duq.edu/spiritans
INTRODUCTION

The Second Vatican Council (1962–65) affirmed that every member of the church is called to holiness (LG, no. 39). This sometimes forgotten truth germinated a seed deeply planted in the church from its beginning and flourished variously in different places at different times. The prodigious publication of spiritual classics, academic interest in spirituality, and new contemplative practices, for example, centering prayer, have opened up many new paths to holiness. How are Catholics to discern the reading, study, and practices best suited to them in their quest for holiness? Vatican II proposed a gospel and ecclesial path provided by our common Christian heritage (LG, nos. 40–42) and looks to religious congregations to share ways to holiness inherited from their founders, that can “give rise to the spread of a fruitful spirituality” and wise spiritual guidance for all the baptized. One such founder is Venerable Francis Mary Paul Libermann (1802–52).

Francis Libermann (second founder of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, “The Spiritans”) is a well-known name in the missionary annals of the nineteenth century. He, along with Cardinal Charles Lavigerie (founder of the Society of Missionaries of Africa) and Bishop Daniele Comboni (founder of both the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus and the Comboni Missionary Sisters) were pioneers “stretching beyond the parameters of the official church in Europe in their time.” His 1846 Memorandum to Propaganda Fide “is now regarded as one of the greatest missionary texts of the 19th-century.” It clearly demonstrates that “Libermann promoted missionary accommodation to African customs, formation of indigenous clergy and subsequently bishops, and evangelization of Africans by Africans.”

Libermann was also one of the great spiritual directors of the nineteenth century. Roger Tillard, a Dominican priest, described his “openness to the Spirit and to the world” as “revolutionary” for its time particularly as “systematic and methodical drilling in holiness becomes flexibility and profound respect for each person and his or her mode of being.” Tillard ranked him, along with Saints Benedict, Francis, and Ignatius, as a pivotal figure in the history of Catholic religious Orders. The Spiritan Bishop, Mgr. Jean Gay, recognized the relevance of Libermann’s spirituality in the wake of changes following the Second Vatican Council. “We, as Spiritans, have the precious advantage of possessing a guide who was of extraordinary virtue,
wise and well balanced, whose supernatural impulses never go in opposition to practical common sense, and in whom we can oftentimes discover the solution to today’s challenges.”12

The former Spiritan superior general and theological adviser at Vatican II, Fr. Joseph Lécuyer, writing in 1980 on Libermann’s spirituality noted that he “refused to be bound by Gallican, nationalist, colonialist, political, racial or social ideologies whatever their origin.”13 Adrian van Kaam proposed Libermann’s spiritual guidance as “transcultural,” in that it possesses “elements that are fundamental for any spirituality and, a priori, for a transcultural, missionary spirituality.”14

Pierre Blanchard, professor at the Catholic University of Lyon, in an article which first appeared in the French review, La Vie Spirituelle, claimed Libermann as “a spiritual guide for our contemporary world,”15 particularly as a “practitioner in directing souls” rather than “a theoretician of mystical theology.”16

STUDYING LIBERMANN

The burgeoning interest in Libermann in the 1980’s was prompted by the Spiritan General Chapter of 1976, which recognized that the congregation’s renewal in the light of Vatican II required the research of its founding charism. It called for a study of Libermann’s thought and apostolic vision, “so as to derive inspiration from them” (GA 49). The Chapter added, “It is particularly important to interpret and adapt his teaching to the needs of our times” (GA 49) and “to spread a knowledge of Spiritan spirituality and traditions” (GA 51).

The Spiritan Studies Group set up shortly after that Chapter to help realize these goals discovered that Libermann had little significance for many in his own congregation. Research concluded that “those who are searching for authentic religious missionary renewal are much more likely to turn to contemporary authors who know the problems, the needs, and the hopes of today’s world.”17 The group comprised confrères from different parts of the Spiritan world. Their work, beginning perhaps as a babel of confusion, moved towards a profound re-discovery of Libermann’s life and writing. From 1976 to 1988, they published twenty-two issues of Spiritan Papers in French and English. Libermann was the subject of twenty-one articles with a variety of topics covering aspects of his life, writings, missionary vision, and spirituality.

Libermann was French, wrote in French, and was a key figure in the French missionary movement of the nineteenth century. He continues to be a subject of research for French missiology and spiritual theology.18 The congregation’s archives at Chevilly-Larue, a suburb of Paris, preserve
Libermann’s original letters, writings, rules and general documentation associated with his life and work.\textsuperscript{19}

Since Vatican II, there has been increasing interest in the study of Libermann in English. A small group of Spiritan scholars, such as Frs. Henry Koren, Adrian van Kaam, Bernard A. Kelly, and Seán Farragher, presented him to an English-speaking audience. There was also an increasing interest in translating Libermann into English with pioneers such as Spiritan Frs. Walter van de Putte, F. X. Malinowski, and Myles Fay leading the way. For the most part their work provides literal translations of Libermann’s writings.\textsuperscript{20} Fay noted that he translated Libermann’s \textit{Commentary on St. John’s Gospel telle qu’elle} (as is). Recognizing the time-specific nature of the writing, he proposed the possibility of its transposition “into terms current in some modern writing, terms like enrichment, commitment, polarity, dynamics, vulnerability, brokenness, awareness, challenging, beautiful, exciting, having a feel for or a sense of, being authentic and so on . . .” However, he chose not to do this, as “they would ring false in the context.”\textsuperscript{21}

**TRANSLATING LIBERMANN**

In the Foreword to Fay’s translation of Libermann’s commentary, the editor, Fr. Brian Gogan, C.S.Sp., noted a problem for readers. “The journey the reader takes is two-fold—back to mid-nineteenth century France to Francis Libermann—and secondly, in his company, to the faith world of St. John.”\textsuperscript{22} But, he added, “If they can cross these barriers, then they will find themselves immersed in a profound and loving awareness of the one true God made flesh in Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{23}

The challenge is not to repeat Libermann’s words or explain his concepts in the language borrowed from his time and place, but to interpret Libermann in contemporary terms. In other words, we need a Libermann hermeneutic that connects him with spiritual seekers today. The work of interpretation will flourish only when there is confidence that his life and thought is valuable for today, and can transcend its own time, place, language, and world-view.

A particular difficulty in translating Libermann is that he “was over twenty when he learnt French. He learnt it sufficiently to make it a clear and adequate instrument for his thoughts, but not sufficiently to become a Racine or Victor Hugo (born the same year as Libermann). His vocabulary remained limited.”\textsuperscript{24} However, there is a directness and clarity in Libermann that allows for a faithful rendering of his thought through a creative interpretation that retains its original insight and power for the contemporary reader.
INTERPRETING LIBERMAN

Libermann’s broad anthropological approach of accepting people as they are and not wishing to change them or “make them better” according to some social standard of his time, makes his writing both amenable and insightful for today. His gentle voice speaks through the ages, of God, the human person, and the relationship between them—spirituality’s perennial quest. We find in his writing a holistic understanding of the human person, a quest for the sacred and for life’s meaning and purpose, the notion of personal flourishing and the search for ultimate value. Contemporary Western spirituality reflects the postmodern culture in which it operates and often defines itself in secular terms. An act of faith is required not only in Libermann’s ability to speak, but in our ability to hear him.

Other congregations have made that act of faith in their founders. The American Franciscan spiritual writer, Fr. Richard Rohr, sees the teaching of founder, St. Francis of Assisi (1182–1226), as relevant for today. He speaks of “Franciscanism” as “a sidewalk spirituality for the streets of the world, a path highly possible and attractive for all would-be seekers.” Jesuits have adapted and re-presented the Spiritual Exercises of their founder, St. Ignatius of Loyola (1492–1556), as a program of spiritual development to meet the needs of modern people. One adaptation, by Monty Williams S.J., is a good example of this. Williams explains that, “the language we use in this exploration of the path of intimacy is Christian. It emerges from a religious tradition in Catholic spiritual life articulated by St. Ignatius of Loyola.”

How can Spiritans develop Libermann’s spirituality to achieve the “modest goal” set by Pope Francis of a “call to holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges, and opportunities”? Libermann had a practical approach to holiness. He was attentive to human experience and open to the multi-faceted inspirations of the Holy Spirit. A life experience that knew deep family belonging and rejection, much success and failure, and dramatic change and new trust in God energized his spirituality. As Alphonse Gilbert put it, “Francis was a mystic before everything else; he spoke from experience when he elaborated on the spiritual ways. His method was existential; that is why it remains relevant.” He knew that human endeavor could not exhaust the mystery of the individual’s relationship with God. “Divine and interior things must not be subjected to the examination of our reason.” Rather he emphasized that grace operates primarily at the level of the human heart. In spiritual direction, he prioritized the will over the intellect for “mental
“preoccupations” often disturb the freedom and simplicity in which we are to live. 34

Libermann’s spirituality begins and ends with the assertion, *Dieu est tout, l’homme n’est rien*, “God is all, man is nothing.” These words come from his own journey to Christian faith and, spoken on his deathbed, bear testimony to his life. This is the quotation most associated with him, a proclamation of faith, which “must be read in the light of his understanding of the Absolute that God is. If God is all, then man must be nothing. But Libermann is also aware that God loved this ‘nothing’ and predestined a marvelous dignity for it, hence he too loves man.”35

**LIBERMANN, THE SPIRITUAL GUIDE**36

A rare study in English on Libermann’s spiritual teaching, written shortly after the hundredth anniversary of his death, by the Irish Spiritan, Bernard J. Kelly, suggested that the people of Libermann’s time knew him best as a spiritual director.37 According to Kelly, a professor of spiritual theology, Libermann “had a rare understanding of the workings of human nature and of grace which fitted him most particularly for dealing with the practical problems of the soul’s ascent to God.”38 Kelly considered Libermann more a practitioner than a theoretician, more a spiritual guide than a spiritual author. He saw the importance of spiritual accompaniment for those who took Christian living seriously. Those setting out on the journey of Christian discipleship benefit greatly from a spiritual companionship that the direction relationship provides.

In the considerable correspondence with his brother, Samson, the first in the family to convert to Catholicism, we discover not only a deep fraternal attachment, but also a significant amount of spiritual guidance. In one letter, Libermann addressed Samson’s difficulty with meditation and, a reluctance to receive Holy Communion due to scruples. His advice was clear. “Make the state of your soul known to a prudent and wise man and your fear will disappear.”39 He added, “Make known to a man of God everything that takes place within you, and then be guided by his counsels.”40

Libermann set great importance on spiritual direction for growth in Christian holiness. At the same time, he relativized the role of the director, urging in one letter, “Do not put your confidence in my words, in my direction of your soul, but seek to obey God alone and to follow his guidance. Never base yourself on what you might think to be good in me.”41 He understood his role simply as a transponder for the Holy Spirit’s guidance of another.

Libermann’s spirituality bears testimony to his experience...
of God’s call revealed in a powerful conversion experience at his baptism when he was twenty-four years of age. His response, by joining the seminary, and the deepening of that choice through sickness and adversity, schooled him in the way of Christian suffering, emptying him of any sense of self-importance and prompting him to place his trust in God alone. Perhaps the most significant moment in Libermann’s life, second only to that of his conversion and baptism, was in 1839, when at thirty-seven years of age, he decided to travel to Rome and there, against all the odds, seek permission to found a missionary society for l’œuvre des noirs (the Work for the Blacks). Bernard A. Kelly refers to this as his “second conversion” when Libermann gave sublime expression to the conviction that “God is all” and describes it as nothing less than “a complete surrender of himself into God’s hands.”

**TOWARDS A LIBERMANN HERMENEUTIC**

How are we to interpret Libermann’s life experience and spirituality? We can begin, as he did, with the New Testament. In this, we are in tune with contemporary Christian spirituality, as all Christian spiritual traditions “are ultimately rooted in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, particularly the teachings of Jesus Christ in the four gospels.” The gospel model of Christian discipleship begins with a divine call prompting a human response that matures into participation in God’s mission in the world. Jesus chose those he wanted—without any reference to human qualities to justify his choice. They were to leave all things to follow him, to the extent of giving up their lives out of love (John 15:12-13) and share in his mission to bring about God’s Kingdom in the world. Libermann’s commentary on John’s gospel transposes the call of John’s two disciples (John 1:35-39) into the language of a spiritual relationship beginning with attraction and desire that leads to knowing the Lord and, finally, commitment to discipleship. Libermann described maturing in discipleship as “three movements in the human soul that gives itself wholly to our Lord.”

> All three function in virtue of his grace, which acts on our various powers. The first is that attraction to him, that seeking and desire, which carry us along towards him. The second is the application of our mind in order to see and know him and be taken up with him; this movement was still at work in the two disciples. The third comes after these other two, and only when one possesses him: the will enjoys him and commits itself to being entirely, definitively, directed to him alone.
The Libermann hermeneutic offered here is informed primarily by a letter Libermann wrote from Rennes to a seminary director in 1838\(^7\) and his spiritual commentary on the Gospel of St. John, written two years later in Rome. The letter describes Libermann’s method of spiritual direction and the commentary provides a gospel narrative for the guidance he offered.

### 1. The Call to Relationship with God

Libermann presented “the high ideal of Christian perfection” to those who aspired to “the perfection of the interior life.”\(^48\) The spiritual journey into union with God begins as a quest for the sacred, a desire for God, put there by God, who approaches us according to our imagination and feelings.\(^49\) The classical expression of this desire is found in the Confessions of St. Augustine, “For yourself you have made us, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” The aspiration for holiness is the starting point for the journey to spiritual perfection. God takes the initiative, igniting enthusiasm for the spiritual by exciting the imagination and stimulating the senses.\(^50\) Beckoned by Philip, Nathaniel came to Jesus who, seeing his sincerity and good faith, “imparted a strength that penetrated to the very depths of his soul.”\(^51\) Those seeking a spiritual guide do so because they feel drawn to God. They want to set out on a journey of exploration and seek a guide to help them. If there is no enthusiasm, there is no journey!

The role of the spiritual guide at this stage is twofold. First, to validate the desire for God as an operation of grace. Libermann warns that directors “cannot guide souls properly unless their principal attention is fixed upon the activity of grace.”\(^52\) This is not a time for moderation, Libermann says, but a time to “run and fly in an outburst of faith.”\(^53\) He discouraged prudence calling it “a very dangerous virtue to want” at this stage, as it is a prudence “of ‘self-love’ instead of the prudence of God.”\(^54\) The important thing then is to let God act freely and “to fix attention on the universal personal Truth that is Our Lord Jesus Christ.”\(^55\) It is the guide’s task to recognize and remove the obstacles in the way of divine action, rather than impose a system or a method.

Second, the guide needs to make interventions that conserve the enthusiasm and channels the initial energy towards long-term discipleship. We have an example of such an intervention from Libermann’s correspondence with a seminarian who wanted to be a missionary. Eugene Dupont wrote to Libermann expecting a prompt reply and immediate enlightenment on his desire. Some months elapsed before Libermann could reply.
He interpreted this unavoidable delay as providing a lesson for Dupont on patience and trust in God. His letter began, “It seems that Our Lord Jesus Christ wants to make good use of all possible means to moderate your eagerness and natural activity and make you acquire the habit of restraint, self-possession, and interior peace in his presence.”

2. Leaving all to follow Him

Libermann recognized the need to move beyond the senses and the imagination to a deeper relationship with the Lord that discerns in faith what is invisible to the naked eye. The “Feeding of the Five Thousand” (John 6:1f) provides a gospel narrative to illustrate this transition from imaginary to real discipleship. Many failed to comprehend that Jesus offered not only food that would satisfy their physical hunger for a short time, but also spiritual food that would last to eternal life. They did not believe, for “no one can come to me unless the Father draw him” (John. 6:66). Commenting on this verse, Libermann remarked “it is not nature that gives perseverance, but grace.” Many “withdrew from the way of perfection which our Lord taught and returned to their former life of flesh and blood.”

Like the apostle Peter, those who choose to stay with Jesus will say, “No! We do not want to leave you, we want to become ever more attached to you, for no one else has that word of life which thrills us and gives us life.” These will advance in the way of spiritual maturity by attentiveness to the working of God’s grace. “We try to do nothing; we try to quiet all the movements of the soul and we gently correspond to the grace which is in us and prompts us in all our interior and exterior actions . . . [You are to] follow grace; never proceed, never run ahead of it.”

The role of the spiritual guide at this stage is twofold. First, to point out any thinking or activity that prevents God’s free action in the human soul. We are not to hurry in with solutions to relieve anxiety and a sense of emptiness. Rather we are to guard the sacred space and not obstruct the free movement of grace. We are to remain passive and open to the Spirit’s promptings.

Second, the spiritual guide encourages the seeker to continue the journey. Libermann often encountered a sense of defeat and discouragement among those he advised. On experiencing setbacks, they began to blame themselves and forgot that the primary agent of their holiness is the grace of God. To a seminarian in this condition he wrote, “Your long catalogue of faults doesn’t frighten me at all. None of them is a true obstacle to the stream of divine graces, which our Good Master destines for the poor, abandoned souls through your service. Cheer up, therefore, and be full of confidence.”
3. At One with Him

The goal of the spiritual journey is a discipleship free from any support of the senses, imagination of the mind, or force of human will. A state of pure faith and simple prayer brings about contemplative union with God. It is entirely the work of grace, the action of the Holy Spirit. The gospel narrative of Mary hurrying outside the village to meet Jesus (John 11:29-30) after the burial of Lazarus, her brother, prompted Libermann to reflect as follows:

Libermann, the missionary, is, as spiritual guide, at his most mystical in his writing of our union with the Lord in terms of the union of the Son with the Father through the Spirit of Jesus. Commenting on John 10:41-42, “. . . many of them believed in him,” Libermann wrote, “Once a soul comes close and follows him, he lets it see some part of the divine wonders he embodies; then the mind reflects on things, learns to know our Lord, becomes clear and convinced and the will comes into play. When will is joined to reason, the soul is established in faith through perfect adhesion to our Lord and his divine word.”

There is need to nurture an integration of prayer with daily living. As Christian disciples, “we are called to be contemplatives even in the midst of action and to grow in holiness by responsibly and generously carrying out our proper mission.” The phrase, “practical union,” is part of the Libermann lexicon. The mutual enrichment of prayer with action was not only evident in his life, but a key principle of his spirituality. God perfects the spirit of prayer within us so that there is a movement from reflective prayer to a prayer of communion with God in which we simply come and rest in faith before God. “True prayer is not a question of voluntarism or a tensed action; it is a constant self-abandonment to the will of God; a constant thirst for God.” Prayer is openness to God in whom we find our ultimate purpose and identity as children of God.
Kelly, in his study of Libermann as a spiritual director, understood the importance he gave to the action of the Holy Spirit in the direction of souls. “Our Blessed Lord, acting in souls through his Holy Spirit, is the supreme Pastor and hence the supreme director.” He stressed the need for a spiritual director at the beginning of the spiritual journey, but when “a soul has arrived at a relatively stable spiritual condition, and has learned by experience the difference between the ways of nature and those of grace, the need for a spiritual director is much less.”

Libermann had many spiritual conversations with others discerning God’s will in decisions he would make, but we do not hear of a spiritual director. At the same time, Libermann warned against self-delusion. He feared illusions in himself, particularly at the time in Rennes when he was discerning what God’s will was for him. “Feeling himself particularly vulnerable to illusion, he set high store by the advice of others.” We are to protect ourselves against illusions by overcoming our self-love and surrendering ourselves entirely to the mercy and love of God. We are not to take ourselves too seriously, however, as “there is probably no saint in heaven who has not had a great number of them [illusions] in his life, excepting, however, the Blessed Virgin, and a few others.”

The Spirit is at work in and through spiritual friendships and community discernment. “We do not live for ourselves, nor should we live in, or by ourselves.” A shared life in common for the glory of God and the evangelization of the world was Libermann’s vision for his followers. The Spirit of God enables community and empowers mission. This is summarized by the Spiritan Rule of Life (SRL, 39), “the Spirit’s greatest gift, is the sign that it is the Lord who brings us together and sends us out. ‘It is by your love for one another, that everyone will recognize you as my disciples’ (John 13:35).”

CONCLUSION

Libermann’s goal of union with God achieved through a dialogue of the heart and openness to the Spirit culminating in an integration of action with prayer marks him out as a spiritual guide for our time. Van Kaam concluded his biography of Libermann by noting that he “was destined to shine, not within the household of Judaism, but across broad stretches of the outer world, a veritable light shining unto the revelation of the Gentiles. He became the pioneer and fountainhead of the doctrine of simplicity and childlike surrender to God, which in our times has become the commonly travelled path to holiness.”

Commenting on the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, Libermann noted, “It was a
well, and not a flowing spring, which irrigates the country by itself; this was meant to show that when the divine spring arrived not all the inhabitants of the country would drink of it, but only those who came to draw.”⁷⁴ We can liken Libermann’s spirituality to a deep well containing spiritual riches for our time. Only those who draw deeply from it will experience its sweetness and know its beauty. It is for Spiritans today to approach this, their own well, and drink deeply. Then, they in turn, can quench the thirst of those who seek to live out their baptismal calling and say with St. Paul, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

Duquesne University, Pittsburgh

ABBREVIATIONS


LG  Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen gentium.


ENDNOTES

1. One of the recent success stories of Catholic publishing is the popular Paulist Press series *Classics of Western Spirituality*. From several initial volumes in 1979, the series now includes more than a hundred titles. In addition, Orbis Books has published a *Modern Spiritual Masters* collection, with some sixty-five titles.


3. Centering Prayer is a practice promoted internationally by “Contemplative Outreach” and founded in the 1970’s by Trappist monks of St. Joseph’s Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts. The Abbot, Thomas Keating OCSO, has written extensively on contemplative practice in everyday life.


7. ND VIII. 222–277.


16. Ibid.


19. For a list of these works see *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*. Tome 9 (2017) Cols. 768–770.

20. The Paraclete Press Publications of the Irish Province published some translations of Libermann, including Commentary on St. John’s Gospel. More recently, its Office for Spiritan Life has published translations of *La Brève Vie de François Libermann*, and, *Fais cela et tu vivras!: Quelques éléments de la spiritualité de François Libermann* Both were taken from the French Province collection «Spiritualité Spiritaine». Duquesne University in its Spiritan Series also published on Libermann, including translations of his letters in five volumes.


23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.


34. Libermann, Letters, Vol. 4, 63.


36. The general term, “spiritual guide,” is used here, as Libermann, although spiritual director to some of his correspondents, to others who had another as spiritual director (example. Paul Carron, who had Fr. Galais as his spiritual director), Libermann was an additional spiritual guide.


38. Ibid.


40. Ibid., 50.


44. Ibid., 6.

45. *A Spiritual Commentary*, Book 1, 42.

46. Ibid.


49. Ibid., 387.

50. *A Spiritual Commentary*, Book 1, 7.

51. *A Spiritual Commentary*, Book 1, 45–46.

52. *A Spiritual Commentary*, Book 2, 98.


54. Ibid.


58. *A Spiritual Commentary*, Book 2, 98.
59. Ibid., 99.
60. Ibid., 100.
63. Libermann, Letters Vol. 3, 211.
65. Ibid., 99.
68. Ibid., 133.
71. Libermann, Letters Vol. 4, 239.
INTRODUCTION

I do not have to persuade readers of this journal that Francis Libermann merits repeated visitation. Readers know that this mountainous figure rewards each visit by the complexity of his life and thought. One can look at his personal conversion story, at the first founding of his mission society, at the second founding of the Spiritans, at the spiritual direction he gave both personally and by the tireless activity of his pen, at his advocacy for prayer (meditative, affective, contemplative), at his devotion to the Blessed Mother, at the intricate doctrine of sin and grace he continually unfolds, or at the practical apostolate resting upon holy union with God.¹ I have neither the time nor the temerity to review the above features for readers who already know Libermann well,² but I will be so rash as to speak about what is perhaps Libermann’s most distinctive teaching, namely abnegation, daring to do so only out of the hope of bringing an additional perspective to it. This is the perspective of liturgical theology, which is the field where I work. I propose that the self-denial that Libermann recommends so fervently and persuasively is actually in service to our liturgical life. If abnegation is not placed against the liturgical horizon, we fail to do justice to Libermann’s understanding of it.

The Christian’s telos in this life and the next is union with God, what is known as deification (theosis), adoption. Asceticism and liturgy are the block and tackle God uses to hoist us toward holiness, and if Libermann is emphasizing the former, it is not in neglect of the latter. If it was—if abnegation is treated as a simple moral category disconnected from liturgical theology—then it would be difficult to understand, and even more difficult to defend. Libermann uses terms that startle us and grate against our sensibility, like “abnegation,” “annihilations,” “indifference,” “self-denial,” “self-renunciation,” and “crosses.” He shares them with members of the French School of Spirituality.³ When we place these terms against a limited horizon of morality or human psychology, they raise objections of dualism, depravity, and self-harm. That is why the terms must be placed against a more transcendent horizon, one detected by liturgical theology. This will have a benefit to liturgical studies as well, a point I will make in conclusion.

We know Libermann best from his epistolary spiritual direction, partly made available to the English-speaking world in the five volumes published by Duquesne University Press, translated by Fr. Walter van de Putte.⁴ In them, Libermann speaks of the cross as a path to holiness.
GOD ENERGIZES, MAN SYNERGIZES

“As soon as the finger of God touches a soul to fashion it to his image and to the semblance of the saints, a first and lively charm draws it away from exterior things, and causes it to enter into itself.” It is love that will cause love to enter. “A pure and perfect love of Jesus should inspire you with a holy generosity in giving yourself to him.” And after perfect love, then renunciation of self can occur. “You ask me whence comes that openness of heart and mind in those who give themselves entirely to God. It seems to me that it comes naturally, and, as it were, necessarily, from this perfect love. A man who desires nothing upon earth fears nothing either; and a man who desires nothing and fears nothing, must necessarily have his mind and his heart in perfect freedom.” When we reach this highest degree of loving God above all things, then we can love all things in God. This, Libermann says, “is perfect love, the love of perfection. In this case we always prefer, from among good and holy things or actions, those we believe to be most pleasing to God. We then still love the things of earth—we still have a taste for, and a delight in, creatures and in the satisfactions and pleasures of this world—but we do it with moderation and without offense to God.”

The sort of union with God he is advocating is of a different kind than the union a creature might have with his creator on natural grounds. This union is supernatural, and made possible only by Jesus, the Only Begotten Son. Jesus’s life is holiness; our holiness is Christ’s filial life extended to dwell in us; his holiness becomes our sanctity. “You can say that he lives in you and that he is your life; and if he is your life, your life will be one of holiness, since he possesses all sanctity in himself and his life is sanctity itself.” Libermann’s love for his brother Jew, Jesus, is unbounded. “It is Jesus alone who is the holiness of your soul. Belong only to Jesus, love only Jesus, live only for Jesus.” When you live this way, then “your life will no longer be your own, your life will be that of Jesus Christ’s Spirit in you.” And to perfect this “there must be no impression in you foreign to this Spirit of holiness and love. Your soul must experience no sentiment, no movement, no impression whatsoever, it must have no life, but in this Spirit and by this Spirit of the love of Jesus.”

Where can we enter into such a mystical, sanctifying, perfect, conjugal union with Jesus? Libermann points the way. “Do you know the nuptial hall in which Jesus unites himself with the church? It is Calvary. It was there that he sacrificed himself for the church to make her worthy of being his spouse. Since then, every soul that desires to be perfectly united with Jesus, must expect that union to be accomplished in immolation. Rejoice therefore, in the midst of tribulations, be strong, be...
worthy of the crucified Jesus.”

Captive to sin, we cannot carry out the command to be like God, so God himself accomplishes the very command he gives.

*Our Lord establishes holiness in us by means of his divine grace. Sanctity can come in us only through the grace of Jesus, by means of which we participate in his life. Our nature, with all its powers, is always incapable of giving us the least degree of holiness. We are completely dependent on Our Lord, who alone is able to communicate that holiness to us as it pleases his heavenly Father, and he can do this regardless of the condition of our nature. It is this life of Jesus, this grace of life, which is our holiness. The more this life is developed in us, the holier we are. We have no merit of ourselves. Jesus alone is the source of all merits. It is Jesus who merits in us and in our works.*

We are asking for the life of Jesus in us, but beware. Of what did Jesus’s life consist? It was entirely consumed in his heavenly Father. Jesus gave perfect love, perfect honor, perfect glory to the Father; therefore he lived in perfect obedience, perfect submission, perfect humility. His will was his Father’s, not his own. If we beg his spirit of holiness to enter our hearts, then we are begging for “His state of detachment from all creatures, his horror for, and separation from, everything that might divide him from his heavenly Father.” If we beg his spirit of holiness to enter our hearts, then we are begging “that he may remove, cast out, exterminate from our soul all life that is foreign to the life of his Father in him and to his life in his Father. We ask that he may purify our souls from all that is foreign to God, that he may separate us from all creatures, withdraw our affections from every created object and from our own selves, so that he may attach them, together with his own, to his heavenly Father and may establish in us his own life of holiness.”

*If we are holy it is because we are filled with Christ’s spirit, and if we are filled with Christ’s spirit then we love God as Jesus loves him. “And when do we love God in this way? It is when we have no desire nor affection apart from God; when they are all concentrated in him alone.”*

**THE DIVINE POTTER MOLDS HIS LIKENESS**

God seldom stamps the soul with the seal of his holiness without marking it first with that of his cross.

Biblical passages about the Cross have been worn smooth by constant repetition. We hardly hear the words anymore, and are scarcely startled when Paul says that he has been crucified with Christ (Gal 2:20), that he dies daily (1 Cor 15:31), that
those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh (Gal 5:24),
that our old self was crucified with Jesus (Rom 6:6), and that
we must die with Christ (Rom 6:8). Crosses sound more
alarming when Libermann talks about them, and examples
abound. “It seems that the good Lord wants you on the Cross
and I am glad that it is so.”17 “Do not set limits to the crosses
you are willing to bear. Accept all that come as so many precious
stones and be afraid to let any escape from your grasp.”18 “How
are you yourself? Are you still nailed to the Cross? If so, so much
the better.”19 “I am perfectly certain that the very best moments
of your life, whether past, present, or future, are those spent
upon the cross. It is here that Jesus is always to be found.”20
“Nothing is more sanctifying than crosses. Remain constantly
in your abjectness before God and tell him, a thousand times a
day if necessary, ‘Thy will be done.’”21 “You see then that God
wishes you to practice perfect self-renunciation. That is why
he places you on the Cross.”22 “We ought not to forget that if
crosses are not painful, they are not crosses at all.”23 “Carry the
particular cross which divine Goodness sends you each day. Bear
it with patience, mildness, humility, and submission to God’s
will.”24 “Do not bear any ill will towards them on that account.
It is God who wants you to be on a cross.”25 “Strive always to
suffer in peace, with humility, love, and perfect submission to
the will of God who desires to keep you on the cross.”26

Why crosses? Why abnegation, renunciation of self-love,
detachment from the world? Because this is the way to union
with God, a synonym for holiness. “As long as you retain
desires and wishes of your own, your union with God will be
neither real nor perfect.”27

THE CROSS: GOD CLEANS OUT THE ROOM FOR
HIMSELF

The cross can be imagined as a pry bar God uses to
leverage open a space for himself and to prepare us for
beatitude. The cross is “the shortest and straightest way to that
goal. It is Jacob’s ladder on which the angels of the earth—
the children of God—must ascend to their heavenly Father,
and where angels of heaven descend to lend their help to their
earthly brothers, in the painful labor of ascent.”28 Grace is the
downward traffic, asceticism makes room for it, and together
they create room for sanctity. “You will gradually become
accustomed to forget yourself or avoid pre-occupation with
yourself. In a word, you will thus be empty of self, and Our
Lord will occupy the place that is left vacant.”29 Humility and
self-renunciation make us pliant under the action of the Master’s
grace, but “that pliability, which makes the soul a faithful
instrument in God’s hands, comes only to a soul whose first
desires and hopes have been overthrown.” Libermann takes a familiar image from Jeremiah and Isaiah.

“You should remain in the Lord’s presence like clay before the potter. The workman does what he pleases with it: he beats it, presses it, and beats it again to make it supple. The clay offers no resistance; it leaves the potter perfect liberty to do with it what he wishes. The potter fashions a vase and it often happens that when it is half-finished he breaks it up and reduces it to a shapeless mass. He then starts anew to make of it the particular vase he wants. The more the clay has been battered and crushed, the easier it is for the potter to achieve his purpose . . .”

“Allow God full liberty to handle you,” Libermann concludes, because we are his possession, his property, and he does with us what he wills. “Does the earthen vessel say to the potter, ‘Why do you make me thus?’ Does it not allow him to fashion it according to his wishes?” Libermann returns to this theme repeatedly. ”He is the Lord of your soul; let him do what he wishes with his property; remain prostrate and at peace before him.” “Since Jesus, then, is the owner of your soul, leave to him the care of defending his property. Instead of being preoccupied with yourself, think only of pleasing him, the Lord to whom you belong.”

“After all, even if [a sister] should become incapacitated, is not Jesus the master of his possession? . . . If he desires to act in that soul in a way that destroys her body, what right have we to object?” “Everything that is in you should be employed for God, and for God only. He alone may dispose of it as a chattel that belongs exclusively to himself, and over which nobody else has any right or control.”

The purpose of crosses, in a word, is to sanctify us. Libermann says this over and over, and examples are easy to find. “These trials are given for your sanctification, to make you more flexible in his hands, more humble, more detached from yourselves and more confident in God.” And “he sends you this life of crosses and pains. They are for your sanctification; they must help you to detach yourself from the world and from all that it contains.” And “courage, my beloved confrères! God is giving you his grace. You have begun with the cross! It is a sign that God’s goodness desires to sanctify you.” And “with God’s help, you will persevere in your good desires and make use of the cross to advance God’s work through the sanctification of your soul.” We must be emptied of self and world before we can be filled with holiness. We like the filling more than the emptying! Nevertheless, this is the necessary sequence, the necessary route we must follow.”

“Jesus could not
rise and ascend into heaven, until he had died on the cross. Our poor afflicted nature weeps and laments; well, let it weep and lament. This will finally cost it its life, but, as a compensation, we shall possess the life of our divine Jesus and his well-beloved Mother.” Libermann learned from the apostle Paul that if we would share in the glory of Jesus, we must begin by sharing in his cross and his shame. “He willingly bore his cross and finished the work his heavenly Father had given him to do; you must act likewise.”

Run to the foot of the cross and stand there beside Mary; there is no better place for us in this world. “There are a great many ways which lead to heaven, but there is none that is not strewn and bristling with crosses. We are covered with sins from head to foot—how, then, can we look for repose? No, dear friend, afflictions, sufferings, crosses of every kind [await us]. Jesus and Mary have been constantly on the cross; should we be spared? What we need is crosses, sufferings, heartaches.”

The Jesus we have in our hearts must be the crucified Jesus.

**ABNEGATION, DETACHMENT**

Attaching to God means detaching from all that is not God. When Libermann speaks about separation from the world, he is actually speaking about forging an alliance with heaven. We will not understand him if we restrict ourselves to an earthly ethic and ignore the heavenly society toward which he is pointing us.

*If we are not completely freed from all that is not God, it is impossible for us to be perfect. The Holy Spirit constantly knocks at the door of our heart. We most ardently desire to have him enter and by this desire open the door for him. But how can he enter if he finds no room, if he finds this heart, which should belong unreservedly to him, filled with adverse affections? He is then obliged to remain outside. But he is so unbelievably good that he waits until he finds a little place, which grows in proportion as we rid ourselves of those wretched attachments.*

The annihilation of self-will and the extermination of self-love is the beginning of making room for the triune God’s residence in his human temples, which are tiny, cluttered, unruly places. Scripture calls this disordered state “the world.” We flatter that world, and it flatters us; we divert ourselves with its trifles; we are captivated by its manners, its pleasures, its frivolous amusements, its spirit of pride and vanity, and its false judgments. To rescue us, Jesus approaches that world (but we know the reception he received). “Our kind Lord Jesus is at its door in order to enlighten it. He shines his great and wonderful
light before it; and yet it does not recognize the light but runs after darkness.”

Libermann’s first prescription for recovering health is to not cling to this world. But a second sickness comes out of the first, and must be attended to next. We can neither serve the kingdom of God while we cling to the world, nor can we serve the kingdom in peace so long as our self-love “makes us wish to be loved, esteemed and respected by everybody. Self-love always fears to lose something in the esteem of men. Self-love makes our heart vain and victim of caprice. It is pained, grows angry and discouraged as soon as anything happens that is not perfectly suited to its taste or wishes . . . ” We must be freed from both world and self: the liberation must be twofold. Christ has commanded us to despise the world so that it does not tempt us to self-love. There is nothing wrong with the world (Libermann is no Gnostic), but there is something wrong with our heart when infected with the spirit of the world. “This spirit inspires worldlings with a desire for display, for self-esteem, for self-love, a spirit that attributes everything to self, instead of directing all things to the love of God alone. It makes them seek their own interest, and not the interest of God alone, as Our Lord did and taught.”

It is not easy. Self-esteem is such a powerful force in our lives that Libermann must mock it gently in order to awaken us. Libermann is a shrewd observer of human nature in this regard. He knows that self-love rears its head even in our attempts at humility, and he smiles kindly at our human weakness.

In regard to vanity, it is a troublesome fly that you must drive away but without worrying about it. Bear patiently, before God, with his importunity, and look upon it as a cross. With regard to the esteem and affection of men, it is not worthwhile taking them seriously. Let us suppose that I come from a neighbor’s house. His little dog has shown me great affection and made very much of me. I esteem myself neither the better nor the happier for it. The same applies when people show this esteem for you.

Libermann is a shrewd observer of human nature in this regard. He knows that self-love rears its head even in our attempts at humility, and he smiles kindly at our human weakness.
be particularly resentful if others despised them for other reasons than those that have their approval. To give an example, if, in order to parade his humility, a person performed an action that would indicate a low degree of intelligence, he would be very annoyed if someone actually concluded from it that he is wanting in intelligence. To give a second example, a person may feel very sad if he were looked upon as possessing only ordinary holiness or even false notions of sanctity.52

Our self-love must pass through many crosses and dishonors53 before we no longer use the world to feed our self-love. The cross opens a route into the deep interior of each person, where he or she abandons the noise for quiet. When Libermann counsels us to abandon the world, he is telling us to abandon this noisiness. “If we want to speak the language of grace well, we must forget the language of our fallen nature. We forget the latter only by perfect silence,”54 “Replace self-love with the love of Jesus who is at the right hand of the Father.”55 When that has been done, then you will be willing to “Let him strike, execute, sacrifice, annihilate everything in you that does not belong to his heavenly Father so that his spirit of love may establish itself perfectly in you, and may keep you in continual immolation and sacrifice before him. Have a constant care to forget yourself, so that your interior may always turn toward God, who is your All.”56 Why is this necessary? Because our natural activity constantly blocks the action of grace.57 “The cross is a beautiful tree, a good tree planted in your soul and it is now producing beautiful flowers; at a later date it will yield beautiful fruit. ‘A good tree’, says the Savior, ‘can only produce good fruit.’ What kind of fruit? Those which he bore on Calvary. Jesus himself will be formed in your soul by means of the cross.”58

The cross leads to this end, and to reach this end two things must happen: abandon the world and overcome self-love. We have no life for anything outside of God. It is painful to the Old Adam, Libermann admits, but in the midst of speaking truth to our fallen condition he has flashes of tender encouragement. “Does a mother give a nice dress to her child in order to have the satisfaction of scolding her when, later on, the child soils it? And does the child who received the nice dress get upset because it was love that prompted the mother to give it to her? . . . You should act in the same way. Be pleased and feel happy about God’s infinite love for you, and do not insult his goodness and his great love for you by yielding to fears. It is not to make you fear him that he gives you graces.”59 Do not confuse remorse with reproach. Do not think that the compunction you feel is a rebuke from the
Lord. “No! Dear confrere. Jesus does not speak so harshly to your soul. He loves it too much for that . . . Don’t take the voice of the wolf for that of the lamb.”

Thus we can approach the apex of perfection.

We realize our baseness and abjection and how contemptible we are before God and man. But we are at the same time full of joy, realizing that He alone is all beauty, grandeur and perfection. We cast a peaceful and loving glance at our great wretchedness and even look at our miseries in detail, but far from being disturbed by the sight, we remain before our great Master in loving lowliness. When this sort of humility has reached perfection, we are delighted to be known and spoken of as the most despicable of all creatures. This degree is very perfect. Those who have reached this love of abjection do things that render them abject in the eyes of men.

You should from time to time “cast a glance without effort but with the intention of belonging to him, and accompany it by the awareness of your poverty and wretchedness. But all this must be done tranquilly with the peaceful desire of belonging to him in spite of your wretchedness. Don’t seek more than that.” Therefore he counsels those who write him to take courage and not grow despondent over their present weakness.

Grace is so powerful that any activity of the soul looks passive—and that is cause for our greatest hope. When Libermann admonishes us to abandon our self-will he is telling us to abandon ourselves—to Jesus. Abandon self-effort, abandon our own strength, abandon the interferences of a will that interposes itself between God’s grace in ourselves. He offers a risible comparison.

When Jesus wishes to reproduce himself in the soul, his divine image is much better executed if his own hand alone touches it. Any human hand meddling with it would only mar it. It would be like a monkey which wanted to finish a picture at which he saw his master working. You can imagine the results! He sees his master dipping the brush into the colors and then applying them to the canvas, but that is all. He is unable to distinguish the skillful strokes that the painter draws on the canvas. As soon as the master leaves the studio, he takes hold of the brush, dips it into the paint and applies it to the picture. Fancy the masterpiece his daubing would produce. Well, such is our work. We have not the slightest idea of what our divine and most adorable Master wishes to do in our souls; we cannot distinguish a
The reason for all this talk about abnegation, annihilation, indifference, and crosses is so that we will get out of the way! Become the image that the Great Iconographer wants to paint. Move over! Let God have his way with you. Become “a plaything, as it were, in his hands.”

THE DIVINE LITURGIST

And what kind of vase does the potter desire to throw on his providential wheel of salvation history? A liturgist. The High Priest comes to liturgize God for us, and in us. “Why does he come? He comes solely for the greater glory of his Father and for the sanctification of our souls. We ought therefore to establish the glory of his Father in ourselves, and sanctify our souls by a complete separation from every creature.” The traditionally named twin purposes of liturgy are the glorification of God and the sanctification of humans. Why does Jesus come? To accomplish his liturgy of glorifying God and sanctifying us. These, Libermann says, can be seen as the great principles in all Jesus’s activity on earth. “The first (is that) in all the works he accomplished on earth he looked only to his Father’s glory, before which everything else counted as nothing, everything yielded, everything was sacrifice, even his own life. His Father’s glory was what he had to accomplish in everything . . . The second principle of Jesus’s activity on earth is the salvation and sanctification of souls, particularly those who are dear to him, whom his heavenly Father specially gives him. He is not afraid to afflict and even overwhelm them with distress when he works to their sanctification.”

Libermann says the virtue of religion consists of three things: “[1] giving your whole being so that it may be completely immolated and sacrificed to God’s glory; [2] having sovereign reverence for him and for everything that concerns him; [3] and in loving him above all things.” In other words, religion is sacrifice, reverence, and love. Alas, we sinners have stripped religion of the first, are casual about the second, and have made the third into a painless state distorted to work our benefit. That’s why we must put self-love to death: because we even attempt to use the love of God to our own advantage. Libermann will restore vigor to religion by proposing practical union with God. “Practical union . . . is a state in which we have renounced all natural activities and reactions, so that the grace of the Holy Spirit is able to quicken and govern all our activities.
Once nature has ceased entirely to rule our life, and has been supplanted by the supernatural life of grace, we enter into a habitual state of union with God... This practical union, which gradually transfigures not only our religious activities, but every act of our life, resides in the intention.”

Liturgical abnegation is living beyond creatures, living with the Uncreated One, and as a result having a proper evaluation of creatures. The perichoresis of the Trinity hides in the kenosis of the Son when it extends itself. We can join that hidden life and become a hidden soul by having nothing but the Trinity occupy our attention. This is the definition of a liturgist. The abnegation of world and self makes liturgy possible.

**LITURGICAL SPIRITUALITY**

And this brings me to a concluding observation that not only does liturgy help us understand Libermann, but Libermann opens a door to a more profound understanding of liturgical theology. I am inclined to call it a liturgical spirituality.

The study of liturgy currently takes place under two types of investigation. The first uses the intellectual faculty. Work here is rational, academic, bookish. This study of liturgy does not require any performance of liturgical rite, or examination of liturgical environment. Ratiocination makes a grab at the substance of the liturgy. The second uses a number of bodily faculties because the focus here is on how ritual affects the person. Work here is observational, ethnographic, and pays attention to physical activities and experiences. But these two faculties do not by themselves adequately penetrate the reality of liturgy. The faculty for liturgical theology is not just the mind (the first method of academic study) or the body (the second method of ritual studies); the faculty for liturgical theology includes the spiritual faculty of an interior life. “To know such things, we need to live an interior life; we need the grace of the Holy Spirit and experience; we need an experimental, not a speculative knowledge of things.”

Libermann has been talking about the faculties of the soul, over which God “claims for himself the exclusive privilege of setting those faculties in motion and handling them in his way and to the extent of his wishes.” That’s why Libermann wants to train and strengthen it. “We ought to be completely dead to ourselves and all things; then our life will be hidden in God with Our Lord, with whom we shall be intimately united in all our spiritual faculties. When our soul is completely emptied of creatures and of self, the Spirit of Our Lord will be its only life.”

There is a difference between talking about the activity of liturgy, or watching the activity of liturgy, on the one hand, and experiencing liturgy, on the other. Experiencing Christ’s lordship means joining him on the altar of the cross. For liturgy to be
true, our heart must become “a pleasing victim in the sight of his adorable Majesty, offered in union of love with Jesus, the great Offerer, and the great Victim of his Father for the salvation and sanctification of his elect . . . Let us offer the sacrifice on the great altar of the holocaust, on the Cross of Jesus, and have it offered by the most pure and holy hands of this High Priest, who is always near the throne of his Father, interceding for his children.”72 All of Libermann’s spiritual direction has been leading us toward this end. He tells us that our suffering is sanctifying, our annihilation is oblational, our abnegation is patterned on Jesus’s kenosis. He tells us that liturgical abnegation is the act of leaving the world for heaven, darkness for light, fear for love, ourselves for God.

Prof. David W. Fagerberg
Notre Dame University, South Bend

ENDNOTES

1. A significant portion of this paper was presented at the Eighth Day Institute Symposium (Wichita, Kansas) in January, 2020, where I introduced the audience to some of Libermann’s life story and the themes of abnegation.


4. In 1962–66 Duquesne University published a selection of letters, translated by Walter Van De Putte: The Spiritual Letters of the Venerable Francis Libermann. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, Duquesne Studies. Spiritan Series 5–9. All references below will be made to this series so I will refer to them by the Volume Number of the letter, but please note that this differs from the Series number. Vol. 1 Letters to Religious Sisters and Aspirants is Spiritan Series Vol. 5; Vol. 2 Letters to People in the World is Spiritan Series Vol. 6; Vol. 3, 4, 5 Letters to Clergy and Religious are Spiritan Series Vols. 6, 7, 8. The other writings by Libermann include three volumes of his commentary on the Gospel of John, translated by Fr. Myles Fay: Jesus Through Jewish Eyes. Dublin, Paraclete Press, 1995, 1999, and 2005; his Instructions for Missionaries, appearing as

5. Quoted in Goepfert, 77–78.
16. Vol. 4, 168
17. Vol. 1, 152.
18. Vol. 1, 144.
28. Vol. 5, 290
34. Vol. 1, 49.
35. Vol. 1, 50.
37. Vol. 4, 145. Chattel is a slave, a point made in 1 Cor 7:22 and 9:19, Rom 1:1, Col 4:12, 2 Pet 1:1, Jas 1:1, Tit 1:1.
38. Vol. 5, 245
41. Vol. 1, 100.
42. Vol. 4, 309
44. Vol. 2, 244.
47. Vol. 4, 180
48. Vol. 4, 180
49. Vol. 4, 172
51. Vol. 4, 39
52. Vol. 5, 68.
55. Vol. 1, 35.
56. Vol. 4, 203–04
60. Vol. 5, 236.
63. Vol. 4, 247.
64. Vol. 4, 306.
65. Vol. 4, 151.

67. Vol. 5, 154
From Crisis to Commitment: Libermann’s Pilgrimage to the Holy House of Nazareth at Loreto

The Context

The pilgrimage was from November 13 to December 15, 1840. Libermann has been in Rome since the 6th of January 1840, in the hope of having his “Work for the Negroes” recognized and supported by the Holy See. He had taken a leap into the unknown by giving up his position as the novice master of the Eudists at Rennes. He knew this clearly himself, he was well aware of the great risk he was taking. He had written to his brother Samson on the 12th of December 1839 from Lyons:

I have left Rennes. I have now no man, no earthly creature, in whom to place confidence. I have nothing, nor do I know what will become of me, or how I shall even live... Many of those who loved and esteemed me will disapprove of me. I shall perhaps be treated as a senseless, proud man... Consider me as a man dead and buried. Pray to God for the good of my soul and for the accomplishment of his most holy will.

The tone of this letter shows that he was indeed going through a period of crisis and uncertainty, where nothing at all was clear to him regarding his future, and most importantly, regarding the “Work for the Blacks,” which many of those who knew him considered a hopeless cause already. Yet he writes in the same letter, “I am the happiest man in the world because I only have God alone, with Jesus and Mary” (L.S., II, 302.)

So often for Libermann, when outward circumstances were dire, he held on to a deep trust and confidence in God.

A serious setback for him came when his closest collaborator at the time, the one who accompanied him from France and who was helping to finance his stay in Rome, the sub-deacon Maxime de la Brunière, gradually also came to lose confidence in him and his project. While he was with Libermann they could afford to stay in a hostel for the clergy in 1 Via Magnapoli run by the Jourdan family, but when he abandoned Libermann at the end of March, the latter had to seek alternative and cheaper accommodation. He was in fact, on the point of going back to France due to lack of funds, when, in the beginning of June, he found the humble attic on the top floor of the house of the Patriarca family in Vicolo Pinaco 31, near to present-day Piazza Navona. It was this attic which in 1937 was re-constructed on the roof of the French Seminary in the Via
Santa Chiara when it was due to be demolished to make room for a new road. When the Congregation eventually decided to hand over responsibility for the seminary to the French bishops, the same attic was dismantled once again and reconstructed on the grounds of the generalate in Rome in 2010. The roof tiles and beams, the floor tiles, and the old door are original.

Already both Libermann and de la Brunière had been given a very brief audience with Pope Gregory XVI, an audience procured by his former acquaintance, Dr. Drach, another convert from Judaism who had been given a job in the library of Propaganda Fide. The audience, on the 17th February, 1840 was very short, but the pope is reported to have laid his hand on the humble acolyte’s head and foretold that one day he will be a saint—“Sara un santo.”

Libermann and de la Brunière had worked on a preliminary report seven pages in length outlining their project for the Black race. This was presented to Mgr. Cadolini, the Prefect of Propaganda Fide on the 27th of March for them to study. Meanwhile, the Prefect had sent a message to the Nuncio in Paris to find out more about Libermann and to ascertain if he was a man of integrity and if his proposed work was worthy of support. The report that came back was positive, so Libermann received a letter from Propaganda Fide in support of his project and encouraging him to seek ordination to the priesthood.

Curiously, it appears that even at this point the authorities at Propaganda Fide encouraging him to seek ordination were satisfied that Libermann’s epilepsy was not a problem. In fact, it had been over two years since he had recorded any seizures, so it must have been concluded that he was clear of the ailment. Libermann had, in fact, informed Cardinal Cadolini in his report of his “nervous illness which was a canonical impediment,” but he did not call it epilepsy as such.

It has often been remarked how quickly Libermann received such positive support for his project from the authorities in Rome. It may be because the Holy See was anxious to be seen doing something to respond to the emancipation of slaves which had already been enacted in the French and British colonies. On December 3rd 1839, Pope Gregory had issued an encyclical entitled, “In supremo apostolatus,” welcoming the movements for the abolition of slavery. He himself, as a former Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide, was au courant with the matter. It was after this highly encouraging letter that Libermann set out on the pilgrimage to Loreto.

THE HOLY HOUSE OF NAZARETH IN LORETO

Loreto is a town very near to the Adriatic coast of Italy, about 270 kilometres to the northeast of Rome. It had been a
place of pilgrimage since the Middle Ages, and during that time, in fact, was the most important Marian shrine in the western Church. Legend has it that the house in which Mary received the greetings from the archangel Gabriel had been transported miraculously by angels from the Holy Land in the year 1294, to protect it from desecration by the Muslims. Libermann would have believed this legend without question just as the generality of Catholics from the Middle Ages onward. In our modern and more skeptical times, it started to be questioned. A scientific approach was made to establish the authenticity of the story. Archaeologists established that the three walls that constitute the house (it backed into a cave) were indeed of stone from Nazareth, in contrast to all the houses in Loreto which were constructed of brick. In the walls, five red cloth crosses were found indicating the involvement of crusaders, for the red Cross was their sign and symbol as they fought to free the Holy Land from the Muslims. Coins of the thirteenth century were also found in the foundations. In 1900 a document was found in the Vatican archives stating that the Angeli family descended from the Empress of Constantinople were responsible for bringing the walls to Italy. Some confusion may have arisen, for the phrase in Italian that the house was carried by the angels, "trasportata dagli Angeli," is exactly the same as saying they were carried by the Angeli (family).

It is to be noted that the Holy House of Nazareth now enshrined within the great basilica at Loreto, is venerated as Mary’s maternal home, the place where the archangel Gabriel announced to her that she was chosen to be the Mother of our Savior—in short, it is the place where the Word became Flesh. This had a very strong attraction for Libermann himself, the very place where the immediate plan of God for our salvation was realised.

THE MOTIVE

It is interesting to analyze Libermann’s motives for wanting to go to Loreto. The place had a reputation for miraculous healings. It was here that Mgr. Olier, founder of the Sulpicians, while a student for the priesthood in Rome, made the pilgrimage there on foot in 1628; he went in order to seek healing from a serious eye ailment and was cured. In appreciation for this, he had a small replica of the house put up in the garden at Issy with which Libermann was very familiar. His fascination with the holy House of Nazareth must have stemmed from this. That it was also a tangible link with the land of his own ancestors had also a great influence on his desire to make a pilgrimage there.

At first he did not intend to go alone. Some supporters and acquaintances had provisionally agreed to accompany...
him, but for different reasons they pulled out and he had no other choice than to set out alone. This in itself had potential dangers from wild animals, such as wolves, as well as armed robbers, known to frequent the route. Add to this that he set out on 30th November 1840—in the middle of winter. He was prepared to face the rigors of cold days and nights as he crossed the long mountainous spine of Italy.

More importantly, perhaps, Libermann was still seeking confirmation of the next step in putting the work for the Blacks on a sure footing. The other big question for him now was whether he should seek ordination to the priesthood. He was still in quite a quandary about this and on several occasions expressed his deep desire to retire completely from the affairs of the world and live in total obscurity like a hermit, hidden from the world, spending his time in prayer and contemplation.\(^\text{14}\)

The supportive letter from Propaganda Fide indicated to him that he could go ahead with his foundation of a society of priests for the evangelization of the Blacks, as long as he got ordained to the priesthood. Still an acolyte in minor orders because of his epilepsy (a serious impediment to ordination at the time) he had nonetheless received the go-ahead from the highest quarters of the Church and felt this was a very positive sign in his discernment. What he was really seeking when he went to Loreto was, then, confirmation from Our Blessed Lady that he was indeed called, not to the contemplative life, but to take up the leadership of the new society whose rule he was in the process of composing. He was also desirous to know more clearly whether he was being chosen for ordination to the priesthood.

**THE JOURNEY**

After receiving the encouraging letter from Propaganda Fide concerning his project, Libermann had gone on to write what is now known as the *Provisional Rule of the Society of the Most Holy Heart of Mary*. From September 1840 until the middle of November, he had occupied himself in writing his *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*. His spiritual director back in Paris, Fr. Pinault, gave him the go-ahead to undertake the pilgrimage on foot. He would beg his food and lodgings as he went along. He had some money with him, also his passport to indicate that he was a bona-fide pilgrim and not a vagrant. There were police checkpoints to pass through on the way, so this was important.

Since Loreto was a popular place of pilgrimage, efforts had been made over the centuries to keep the road from Rome in good repair; even the popes made their contribution because, after all, Loreto was within the Papal States.
We know some of the barest details of Libermann’s journey, because he made some notes in pencil on some flimsy pieces of paper that still exist in the archives in Chevilly. However, the notes are incomplete and some places he names are not easy to recognize. In general, he would have followed a well-worn route: through Civita Castellana, Narni, Terni, Spoleto, Foligno, Camerino, San Severino, Recanati and then Loreto. On his return journey, he made an 80 km detour to Assisi to visit the tomb of St Francis. Some of this information I have taken from an account written by François Nicolas, C.S.Sp., who, together with Maurice Gobeil, C.S.Sp. (Canada) and Roger Heyraud, C.S.Sp. (France), the driver, attempted in November 1989 to retrace Libermann’s path to and from Loreto. It is estimated that Libermann set out from Rome alone on the 13th of November, the anniversary of his conversion. The delay in Libermann’s decision to “hit the road” was caused by one of his advisers, Fr. de Villefort, who said it was necessary for him to be in Rome while negotiations were going on between Rome and Paris concerning the setting up of the new society.

Once on the road, he seems to have averaged 30 to 35 km per day. One commentator remarked that he must have been well-fed in the Patriarca family’s house to have achieved such a speed. It is estimated he arrived in Loreto on Saturday, 21 November, the Feast of the Presentation. So the journey to Loreto took him nine days all told. He remained in the town for a week, spending the time there in the basilica, praying for guidance and for enlightenment in the great enterprise on which he had embarked, and seeking confirmation that this was the way forward for him. Cardinal Pitra, Libermann’s first biographer and someone who knew him in his lifetime, records the great happiness Libermann had in being in the same spot venerated as where the Word was made Flesh and of coming so close to elements of the land of his ancestors. Libermann himself gives no indication as to how he passed his eight days in Loreto. François Nicolas has opined that Libermann set himself a program of prayer very close to that which he proposed to the so-called “Bands of Piety” he set up while at Issy for those going on the pilgrimage to Our Lady of Chartres. These proposals are found at the end of the *Ecrits Spirituels du Vénérable Libermann.* He describes as follows the spirit in which the pilgrim is to journey.
Travel with the intentions of our Good Mother in mind, for she has called us to herself in what concerns her, to commend to her our own concerns, to co-operate with her immense charity for the sanctification of souls, by means of the attitude of abandonment in which we offer to her all our prayers and good works, uniting ourselves to her as good children, so as to become one with her . . . Mary is not ungrateful and she never forgets those who completely forget themselves for her.19

Each day is composed of daily Mass, prayer, the rosary, the psalms and scripture reading, as one might expect. Nicolas suggests that Libermann probably undertook one or two all-night vigils in the Holy House, as it was a facility that was regularly granted to pilgrims.20 An example of the proposals is no. 26: “On entering a town or a village, you will go straight to the church to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament . . . if the church is locked, you will adore Our Lord in a spirit of love and affection, kneeling down in front of the church door.”

Though seeking a definitive cure from his epilepsy was not the major reason for his undertaking the pilgrimage, Libermann was to confide later on to a close friend (Abbé Vaugeois, a one-time Spiritan who left us because of family reasons) that it was while he was there that he heard “an interior voice” telling him he was cured and that he felt this healing “in the depths of his being.”21 It is true that after the pilgrimage, he never had any more serious seizures or manifestations of his epilepsy, though he still suffered some minor nervous attacks which he was able to control and overcome. He was still to suffer migraine headaches and stomach problems for the rest of his life. 22

According to Pitra, the two intentions Libermann put before our Blessed Lady in Loreto and which he saw as being intimately connected, were approval for the new missionary society of the Most Holy Heart of Mary and the question of his priestly ordination.23 Being the man he was, he did not want to “force” any issue, or to seek any miraculous sign; he remained calm, confident and convinced that the path he was following was the correct one and that God’s will would be made manifest in due course.

THE RETURN

On Monday, 30 November, in the afternoon, Libermann began his return journey on foot back to Rome. Nicolas24 remarks on a distinctive change in the notes Libermann left of his return journey, which are more accurate in the place names given, the stops he made, the distances covered and the accompanying dates. This illustrates a greater confidence in
John McFadden, C.S.Sp.

himself and in the future path his life will take. At Foligno, he made a detour northwards to take in Assisi to visit the burial place of his patron, St. Francis, to whom he had a great devotion.25 He stayed in Assisi four days visiting the places associated with St. Francis as well as St. Clare and started his return to Rome on the 8th of December. He made another small detour to visit the tomb of another St. Clare, this time St. Clare of Montefalco, who died in 1308 and was canonized in 1881. According to Nicolas26 it was on this part of the journey that he actually took a carriage for about 50 kilometres, because, according to his calculations, he could never have covered the distances quoted on foot.

Reaching a small village called Strettura, after Spoleto, he could find no place to stay but was lodged by a poor family who took him in for the night. They had a child (it is not known if it was a boy or a girl) who was groaning in great pain and who was unable to swallow anything. Libermann calmly made a potion out of some leaves and seeds he had picked up at Clare of Montefalco’s tomb, and applied the salve to the child’s lips. Immediately it became calm and began to sleep. Libermann was anxious to stress to the family that it was their faith in St. Clare that healed the child and not himself. He left very early the next morning leaving some money to cover his stay.27

He arrived back in Rome on the evening of Tuesday, 15 December. Years later, (in 1853) Fr. Lannurien (who purchased the property where the French Seminary exists), interviewed Signora Patriarca concerning Libermann’s condition when he returned from his pilgrimage. She confirmed that his clothes were badly worn and his shoes in pieces.28

THE RESULTS

There were four letters awaiting his return to Rome. Our Lady of Loreto was answering Libermann’s prayers in a real and effective way. One of these, from his brother Samson in Strasbourg, told him that the co-adjutor bishop of Strasbourg, Bishop Raess, was ready to ordain him to the sub-diaconate. Another letter from the archdiocese of Paris confirmed that everything had been regulated properly for this step. A third letter from Eugene Tisserant, one of his closest collaborators in the whole concept of the project for the Blacks, informed him that he, Tisserant, was going to be ordained a priest and would soon leave for the Island of Mauritius with Fr. Jacques Laval. The fourth letter was from his spiritual director in Paris, Fr. Pinault, with 500 francs for him to pay for his return to France.29 It remained for Libermann only to put his affairs in order, complete the Provisional Rule and attend the Christmas celebrations in the city. He went with the Patriarca family for
the Christmas Mass at St Mary Major where a conserved piece of wood is reputed to be from the Manger of Bethlehem. A letter to Fr. Carron, written on New Year’s Day, 1841, gives us a clear picture of Libermann’s state of mind at this time.

*I confess to you, my dear friend, that I always doubted whether Our Lord wished me to be a priest, and that I cannot persuade myself of it even now that everything seems certain. Nevertheless, I believe I ought to abandon myself to Providence, and if events so shape themselves that I may be ordained, I will advance without hesitation . . . Let us leave all in the hands of Our Lord. These good men have engaged me in their holy undertaking. I must continue what we have begun. I must sacrifice my repose and my personal tastes. This is the only reason that impels me to seek ordination and actuates me now in setting out for Strasbourg. But I can assure you that it costs me much to plunge again into the midst of men and to expose once more my salvation. The best thing a poor fellow like me could do would be to hide himself in some corner of the world where he would be overlooked and forgotten by all, where he would have no social contact with anyone, and might thus pass this wretched life in retirement and poverty, waiting for the great day of Our Lord. That would be my greatest desire, but it does not seem to be the will of God. Though bruised and grieved, I must go on; the Master wills it.*

He finally left Rome on 8 January, 1841, taking the boat from Civitavecchia to Marseilles on the 9th.

Things moved fairly quickly after that. The above letter indicates clearly Libermann’s deep trust in divine Providence and co-operating with it. He waited for God’s moment, patiently and confidently, in prayer and peace, ready to accept whatever signs and indications would be sent his way. His pilgrimage to Loreto helped him put these things into greater clarity, so that now, on his return to France, he is assured that the work for the Blacks has received both divine and ecclesiastical approval, and the same goes for the question of him being ordained a priest. On Ash Wednesday, 1841, he became a seminarian again in Strasbourg. On 15 June he received the sub-diaconate; on the 10 August, feast of St Lawrence, the Roman martyr, he was ordained a deacon. Bishop Mioland of Amiens, on the other side of France, was encouraged to offer a diocesan country house (La Neuville) for the work for the Blacks and he was also keen to ordain Libermann to the priesthood. So it was, that on the 18th of September, he was ordained priest in the bishop’s private chapel in the cathedral of Amiens. On the 27th of September,
John McFadden, C.S.Sp.

the novitiate of the infant Society of the Most Holy Heart of Mary opened in La Neuville.
The rest is history!

John McFadden, C.S.Sp.
Community superior, generalate, Rome

ENDNOTES

1. This is a revised version of a talk given to the generalate community in Rome for the feast of Libermann, February 2, 2018 and which subsequently appeared on the Congregation’s Facebook page.


8. Ibid., 204.


10. Ibid., 20.

11. That Jesus hailed from Nazareth is attested by the notice affixed to the cross, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” However, Luke 2:4-5 has Nazareth as the home of Mary and Joseph before the birth of Jesus, while Matthew has Mary, Joseph, and the Child in Bethlehem, but moving from the flight into Egypt to Nazareth for fear of Archelaus. When Egeria (4th century) visited Nazareth, she was shown a cave in which Mary was said to have lived; the pilgrim of Piacenza (570 C.E.) spoke of the house of Mary that became a church. A rival Greek Orthodox tradition has the Annunciation to Mary fetching water at a well now in the Orthodox Church of St Gabriel built over a still active spring that leads to a well that pilgrims venerate as Mary’s Well. The Crusaders took Nazareth in 1099 and built a larger church, though the Mamlukes destroyed the town in 1263. It is possible that the Angeli family removed the house to preserve it from destruction or desecration.

12. Letourneur, Cahiers Libermann, I, 112.


15. Letourneur, Cahiers Libermann, I, 114.

16. Ibid., 116.


44
19. Ibid., 20.
23. Pitra, *Vie du Vénérable Serviteur de Dieu*, 382–4
28. Ibid.
Cornelius T. McQuillan, C.S.Sp.

ORDAINED IN 1975, Fr. McQuillan worked for thirty-seven years in Puerto Rico in parish ministry, recruitment, and formation, as well as four terms as major superior. He earned an MA in Counseling Psychology from the Interamericana University of Puerto Rico where he became a licensed psychologist. He taught theology and psychology at the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico and the Dominican University of Bayamon, and psychology at Columbia College at the Roosevelt Roads Naval Station. He earned his doctorate in Psychology in 2002 from California Coast University, specializing in the Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Children. He has published articles and books available through smashwords.com

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE AND MISSIOLOGY

Spiritans missionaries can learn a great deal of missiology from Our Lady of Guadalupe. Since so few Spiritans work with the Spanish-speaking peoples, many assume that the appearance of Our Lady in Mexico City is just one more that appeals to popular Marian devotion. However, a closer examination of the history and reality behind this devotion can lead us not only to a deeper appreciation of Mary’s love of the Church, but also to an awareness of her involvement in its very mission. Many consider Mexico to be a very Catholic country, but many may not be aware that the first missionaries that came from Spain were a dismal failure in their attempts to evangelize Native Americans. It was only through the intervention of the Virgin Mary that any success was achieved and that success is because Our Lady of Guadalupe had come to show the foreign missionaries how to communicate with her American born children.

A VERY SHORT SUMMARY OF THE HISTORY OF OUR LADY OF TEPEYAC

The Aztecs, an indigenous people, built an Empire consisting of three independently governed city states in Central Mexico, from 1428 until conquered by Spanish conquistadors led by Cortez in 1519. Like the Roman Empire they allowed the rulers of conquered peoples to govern themselves in exchange for annual tribute and men for their armies. They practiced polytheism and allowed conquered peoples to worship their own gods. The sun was considered a god and the moon its goddess, but they were anticipating their end as well as that of the world. Human sacrifice was practiced in an attempt to prolong the life of the sun. They developed a complex system of government and had a codified written law. Rulers represented particular gods and ruled by divine right which was inherited.

As stated above, the first missionaries that came to Mexico from Spain, after two years of evangelization among the Aztec people had baptized all too few. Those practicing the faith were some conquistadores (conquerors), their families, and their servants. There were also many mestizos or half-breed descendants of Spanish immigrants and their families. Among them was a pious young man named Juan Diego (today Saint Juan Diego) who while traversing the Tepeyac Hill in 1531, hearing a beautiful voice singing, approached in order to investigate its source. As he neared, he was startled by a vision of the Virgin Mary. She requested Juan Diego to carry a message to the Bishop of Mexico City and instruct him to
have a church built at the base of that hill where there had been an Aztec temple. Juan Diego agreed to deliver the message, but underwent a long wait before he was allowed an interview with the bishop.

The bishop on hearing Juan Diego’s story reacted as might any one of us—with suspicion. Why would the Virgin Mary use a man of such low standing? Suspecting Juan to be nothing more than a well-intentioned, but ignorant and perhaps deranged peasant, he dispatched him quickly with the admonition that the Virgin would need to send him a sign so that he could be sure that it was truly the Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ, making such an apparently absurd request.

Juan Diego returned to Tepeyac and informed Our Lady of the Bishop’s negative response. The Virgin then instructed Juan Diego to gather some flowers from a nearby rose bush and to carry them to the Bishop in his tilma (Native organic cloak made from a local plant). Juan did as he was instructed, surprised to find a rose bush in bloom in a place where rose bushes are not known to grow, and took them to the bishop.

Once again Juan Diego had to endure a long wait until finally he was ushered into the Bishop’s study to present the gift he was carrying. When he lowered his tilma, the roses fell to the floor, revealing the image of Our Lady of Tepeyac. Needless to say, the image surprised everyone present and was eventually put on display in the Basilica built under the orders of the Franciscan Bishop. It soon became necessary to build another church nearby in order to baptize those who beheld the image of Our Lady, renamed Guadalupe by the bishop, after a popular Spanish Marian devotion.

Today that image is still on display in the third temple built in the plaza at the base of the Tepeyac hill. Literally thousands come on a daily basis to behold and venerate the image which is on display behind protective glass, (after a bomb attack by some fanatics).

**THE ONGOING MIRACULOUS SIGNS OF TEPEYAC**

When one realizes that there is nothing in Juan Diego’s tilma that could explain the image it bears, one can only stand in awe. There is neither paint nor tints in the fibers which normally last a maximum of thirty years, but have endured over five hundred! Actually, there is no image in the tilma, rather the image floats in front of the cloth and it is possible to pass a laser light beam between the two. Studies on the temperature of the tilma have shown that it remains at a constant 98.6° F, regardless of the temperature in the Basilica.

The eyes are so life-like that they reflect the image of
the bishop’s office at the moment that Juan Diego opened his tilma. Clearly visible is the candelabra over the bishop’s desk, the surprised bishop’s face and others as well as the strap of a sandal on a kneeling figure’s foot. Also recently, an ophthalmologist discovered capillaries while examining the eyes under a microscope. Furthermore, the irises in the eyes dilate according to the intensity of the light in the basilica. Thus, we have an on-going miracle.

MISSIONARY CRITIQUE OF THE SPANISH FRANCISCAN MISSIONARIES

Vigilio P. Elizondo wrote a fascinating critical analysis of the failure of the Spanish missionaries versus the success of Our Lady of Guadalupe in his book entitled, La Morenita. He points out that the Spanish missionaries had planned the catechesis of the Aztec people while still in Madrid! They had actually devised a refined theological plan of doctrines to be presented to the people of America with absolutely no knowledge of those they wished to evangelize. They knew almost nothing of their history, customs, language, philosophy and religious beliefs. Horrifying were the stories of human sacrifice, but they had no clue as to its role in the Aztec culture and assumed that the indigenous peoples of America simply lacked a culture of their own. There was no thought of becoming one with those they hoped to evangelize. On the contrary, they were more like cultural colonizers bent on liberating pagans from their savagery by incorporating them into their own European way of life. This is exemplified by the name change the Spanish bishop gave to Our Lady of Tepeyac.

The reality of the Aztec nation however, was that they were a highly developed civilization. They were astrologists and their philosophy was quite advanced. They had developed a religion based on the belief that the sun is god and the moon his goddess. Unfortunately they also believed that they had to appease their god with human sacrifice. They believed in an afterlife, so human sacrifice wasn’t seen so much as a punishment as a reward. Sports were important to the Aztec people who also rewarded their champion teams with death!

Aztec philosophy was so well refined that it led them not to trust the spoken word. They were aware that each person has his own particular perspective on reality and tends to undervalue some aspects of the truth while giving other elements an exaggerated significance. The Aztec philosophers were well aware that it is ever so easy to take things out of context and distort the meaning of things.

The missionaries, who came to Mexico, failed to take into account the philosophy and cosmology of the people that they wished to Evangelize and thus sabotaged their own efforts.
Before learning and building on Aztec beliefs and values, they began to preach at them. The movie, *The Black Robe*, a must see for any future missionary, depicts the haughty and arrogant attitude by which the missionary is quick to condemn before he has gained the trust of those he hopes to evangelize.

If the missionaries had only taken the time to understand that the Aztecs communicated truth via poems, songs and hieroglyphics, they would have been so much more effective in their evangelization. The Aztecs understood that one cannot take a line out of a poem or song nor remove one of the symbols engraved in a hieroglyphic. Each symbol or word or verse’s meaning has to be interpreted within the context of all the other symbols, words and verses. It took the intervention of the Holy Mother of Jesus, who by her example taught the missionaries the importance of incarnating ourselves among those we wish to evangelize.

The Aztecs believed a prophecy that their gods were dying and at their death, the world would end. Therefore they didn’t resist the arrival of the conquistadores who seemed to be confirming that prophecy. However, when they contemplated the “Morenita” (dark skinned native girl), they immediately noticed that the maiden was not blocking the rays of the sun, but that the rays are depicted as passing through her. The message was clear: the old god was not dying but rather renewed through her. The Virgin stands on the moon which serves as her throne. She is not crushing the moon god under her feet, but rather using the old religion as a springboard into the new, much like the Old Testament prepares us to understand the New Covenant.

The Aztecs did not necessarily see the miracles that we note about Juan Diego’s *tilma* today, but they were able to read the image like the hieroglyphic that it is. They read the image as we read the written Gospel! I enjoy playing a small prank on Protestants that happen to come into my office by asking them if they believe that the Gospel should be translated into every language in the world. They always respond in the affirmative. Then, I point out the image of Guadalupe as I tell them that it is the Gospel written in Aztec. Typically, their faces go blank as they are unable to perceive anything other than another Catholic image.

The Aztecs, on the other hand, see one of their own, dressed as a virgin, but wearing the sash of a pregnant woman, two articles of clothing never worn together. They notice the cross worn around her neck and they especially notice the position of the stars which seem randomly placed to us, but in fact correspond to their position over Mexico City the day that Juan Diego opened his cloak. Their position however is not
Unfortunately, many artistic representations of Our Lady of Tepeyac present her with the white face of a European maiden.

Elizondo entitled his book, “La Morenita,” with the intention of emphasizing that Mary identifies with her children, as all missionaries who desire success in their preaching, must aim to inculturate themselves and identify with those they are called to serve. It may not be fully possible, but the ideal remains true.

Today, the devotion of Our Lady of Guadalupe dominates Hispanic American spirituality. Unfortunately, many of those who promote this devotion place too much emphasis on the care Mary has for each of her children, while neglecting to point out the missionary objective of her intervention. While Mary does undoubtedly care for each of her children, she is equally concerned for her son's body—the Church. The Church has the primary mission of preaching the Good News everywhere, therefore this is one of the Virgin Mary’s priorities, so she intercedes by example in order to show the well-intentioned missionaries how to use the very culture of the people to bring them to accept the Gospel. Agents of evangelization need to learn from the example of our holy mother to concern themselves not only with the message but equally important, the means or media that they employ to communicate the Word. As Marshall McLuhan stated in the sixties, *The Medium is the Message,* affirming that how we receive a message touches us just as profoundly, if not more so than the very message itself. Theologically, we can say that Jesus is the Word made flesh. His body is the means by which we receive the Gospel. His life and the way he treated people is as much a part of the message as his spoken words. A missionary who does not live the message he preaches is quickly recognized as a Pharisee. Our message is about the universal brotherhood and sisterhood of all peoples based on a common Father. Therefore a missionary must become the brother of all those to whom he wishes to announce the Good News.

**CONCLUSION**

Missionaries therefore need to ensure that the methods employed to communicate the message harmonize and affirm the truth of the Gospel. We cannot lack respect for the dignity of every person as we preach God’s love for them. Our preaching, our lives, must also express that truth in the very way we communicate it.

There are often elements in a peoples’ culture which
cannot be harmonized with the Gospel, but this should not blind the missionaries to the many more expressions of their values which are not only consistent with the Gospel, but in fact, facilitate its acceptance. A missionary must be open to the food, dress, music, customs, art, philosophy and seek out a peoples’ cosmology before he dare begin the process of pre-evangelization. Love of a people must be expressed in authentic respect for their culture and identity. Pope John Paul II calls us to evangelize their culture, which in no way implies its destruction, but rather complementing it by the light of the Gospel.

There is an all too common belief that immigrants should divest themselves of their own culture and adapt themselves to their new homeland. However, this is not only impossible, but is also a lack of understanding of the deep relationship between one’s own culture and one’s personal identity. Clearly, there is great value in immigrants learning the language of the dominant culture but they should never be expected to leave completely behind the culture which gave them their identity. However, in the case of the missionary, there must be a determined effort to become one with those he serves.

The Virgin Mother of Guadalupe shows us the importance of the mystery of Incarnation. She allowed Jesus to live not only in her womb, but also her heart and mind. Likewise she, following her son’s example, becomes one with the Aztec people and speaking to them via their language and customs, reveals to us the very basic principles of missiology.

Prior to preaching we must take the time to learn and to love the cosmology and the idiosyncrasies of those we wish to serve. We must reflect carefully on how we use the media to communicate the message of Incarnation and Redemption so that we facilitate rather than impede its acceptance. We must allow the Holy Spirit to effect within ourselves the Paschal Mystery through which we die to our own culture in order to be reborn in our host culture. We need to allow our new culture to evangelize ourselves as we attempt to communicate the Good News of resurrection. Incarnation is the prerequisite of Resurrection.

Cornelius T. McQuillan, C.S.Sp.
Hemet, California

ENDNOTES
The Challenges and Future of Spiritan Mission

We are living in a modern world with plenty of opportunities and lots of challenges. Modern society with advanced technology can help produce more foods, create more wealth and other convenient things, but we are also witness to many people suffering from abject poverty and experiencing a lot of crisis. In the church, signs of “spiritual desertification”1 have become manifest in recent decades, especially in European countries, vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life have dried up in some countries which used to be a source of missionaries. In Asia, although we can see that faith and vocation are vibrant, great numbers of people have not heard the message of the gospel yet. For these reasons, the missio ad gentes (Evangelization and New Evangelization) continue to be most urgent.

“In the midst of God’s people, among the numerous and varied vocations, we Spiritans are called by the Father and ‘set apart’ to follow Jesus and announce the Good News of the Kingdom” (SRL 1). Jesus’ voice still resonates in our hearts, calling us to reach back to the roots of our faith and to “go, make disciples of all the nations” (Matt 28:19). We are indeed very happy to participate in the mission entrusted by God to go forth and reach out to the peripheries, to “peoples, groups and individuals who have not yet heard the message of the Gospel, or who have scarcely heard it, to those whose needs are the greatest and to the oppressed” (SRL 4). Through many years, we have been faithful to the rich heritage of our Founders—Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann—and continued to carry on the legacy of our predecessors. Both Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann had a passion for the poor. To continue our mission in fidelity with the charism of our founders, we need to reflect on our consecrated life, rediscover the “apostolic life” as envisaged by our founders, and at the same time discern, in prayer with the community, new ways of doing our Spiritan mission, the Holy Spirit calling us to commit ourselves to the evangelization of the poor in the present reality of a globalized world.

1. Living Spiritan Mission in the Footsteps of Our Founders

Poullart des Places renounced a brilliant career and made a radical choice of self-giving to embrace poverty. It was his encounter with Christ who emptied himself and his fidelity to the Holy Spirit that led him in his initial efforts in favor of seminarians. He left his comfort zone and his family status in order to build a community with indigent seminaries who
were unable to pay for their studies. Seeing the clergy of his time as preoccupied with ambition and the desire for material wealth, he desired to prepare priests who, in obedience to the Spirit, would be willing throughout their lives to live a spirit of poverty and evangelical openness for the service of the poor and the abandoned. They would then be ready and available to take on the humble and difficult tasks of their ministry. For Poullart des Place, motivation for apostolic commitment is the glory of God and responding to his love in the situations around him. His aim for the seminary of the Holy Spirit was to “train young clerics to be detached from the goods of this world . . . their preference will be to choose the most difficult places and the most abandoned posts, in short, the tasks for which it is most difficult to find workers.”

The missionary orientation of Claude Poullart des Places was taken up by Francis Libermann. Libermann was willing to do the will of God in concrete situations. He knew much about the poor, the oppressed and the suffering of his time, especially the black slaves, of whom he heard from Levavasseur and Tisserant. When he was invited by these two Créole seminarians, he experienced a call to commit to the project to liberate the Black Slaves and to lead the group in the Work for the Blacks. It was this passion for the Work for the Blacks that inspired members of his Society of the Holy Heart of Mary to mission in Reunion, Haiti, Mauritius, and West Africa.

In 1848 came the fusion of Libermann’s missionary Society of the Holy Heart of Mary with the Congregation of the Holy Spirit that Poullart des Places founded. Libermann brought his youthful society to the Spiritans and widened the boundaries of the Spiritan Congregation to serve the poor and the most abandoned in the world. That missionary work brought the Congregation beyond France to other European and African countries, and currently to the other three continents of the world. The evangelization of the poor continues to be carried on by Spiritans all over the world.

Libermann described the missionary task of the Congregation to Dom Salier as follow: “To preach the good news to the poor, that is our general goal. Nevertheless, the missions are the principal object we aim at, and in the missions we have chosen the most wretched and abandoned souls.”

2. CHALLENGES FACING SPIRITANS MISSION OF EVANGELIZATION IN THE MODERN WORLD

2.1. Spiritan Demographic Shift

Society today has been changing greatly and continues to change due to technological advances and the digital
revolution; there is as well the phenomenon of international migration. In the context of our religious and missionary life, we also experience the joy and challenges of the older circumscriptions as well as the new ones in the modern world. In order to do our mission, we need to observe and read the “signs of the time.” We cannot “stick to the habits and spirit of former time” but “let us embrace the new order with honesty and simplicity and bring to it the spirit of the Gospel.”\textsuperscript{6} Indeed, there is a significant shift taking place in the church, and in our Congregation in particular, in the situation of mission. Times have changed. Due to a lack of vocations, gone are the days when Europe was a source of missionaries for the whole world. In our Congregation, there is a dramatic drop of vocations in Europe and North America. The reality today is that while there are declining numbers in the North, we are witnessing the blossoming of vocations and missionaries from the South, especially in Africa.\textsuperscript{7} On 16 November, 2018, the superior general and his council gave fifty candidates their mission appointments—most of them were from the South.

On the other hand, we are faced with the ageing of our confreres in Europe. In spite of the numbers of diminishing confreres, the needs of various missions and the needs within their own communities are not declining. Our confreres may find it hard to respond to them. Therefore, this situation will lead to some new challenges, indicating there is a need to plan for the future in terms of taking care of the sick and aged confreres, devising a strategy to maintain communities and apostolates, and handing on the Spiritan heritage to new generations. We see a number of missionaries from the South going as missionaries to Europe and North America. Our Congregation is more and more diversified, there are international communities. This will bring positive aspects as well as new challenges inherent in international community living. One of the concerns is how to maintain the unity of “one heart and one soul” in an increasingly diversified Congregation.

2.2. Community Life and Mission

Life in community is a gift of God inviting us to share the life of the Trinitarian communion. It is the community that helps us to listen to the Spirit and live out our religious vocation. We are called to live out our vocation in community (SRL 27) because it is an essential element in the Spiritan way of life and a privileged means for us to practice the evangelical counsels in the service of the Good News (SRL 28). While Poullart des Places considered community as the best place to form future apostolic workers, Libermann saw community as essential for
The cultural diversity of our members is a gift of the Holy Spirit of Pentecost who brings us together from different cultures, outlooks, nations.

Some confreres may feel uncomfortable by “a perceived African ‘take over’ of the Congregation and thus may respond inappropriately to the impending changes ahead.” Indeed, to be “one heart and one soul,” there should be “no us and them but only a community seeking to identify itself inclusively as we.”

2.3 Mission as ‘preferential Option for the Poor’.

In the opening of the Spiritan Rule of Life, we see the passage from the Gospel of Luke (Luke 4:18-19) affirming that it is the Spirit of the Lord who anoints and sends us to bring glad tidings to the poor. We have been called to participate in God’s mission on the frontline of missionary activity working with people at the margins of society. “Attention to the poorest and most abandoned is at the heart of the intuition of both Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann. This is an important criterion for our lifestyle and discerning the works we take on.”

Who are the “poor” we want to serve? In the Spiritan Rule of Life, descriptive adjectives give more explicit meaning to the term “poor”. They include the poor...
(SRL 4; 24.1; 70; 71; 71.1; 82), “oppressed” (SRL 4; 11; 12), “disadvantaged” (SRL 12; 71), “the weak” (SRL 14), “the little ones” (SRL 14; 30), “uprooted” (SRL 71). We can also find categories about “the poor” today in our official documents which are explicit regarding people and the groups. They are young people in difficulty, refugees, immigrants/migrants, the homeless, the landless, the unemployed, the victims of ethnic strife and corruption, the uprooted, the voiceless, and those marginalized by the phenomenon of globalization.\textsuperscript{14}

The poor are not anonymous people at the peripheries of society. They have faces and specific names and have their own families. Anthony Gittins expresses convincingly that “in order to be really committed to the poor and most abandoned people, we must endeavor to know them by name, to identify and relate to them in a personal way.”\textsuperscript{15} When we commit ourselves to them, it doesn’t mean that we just try to provide what they are lacking or what is necessary. It is not primarily a matter of doing things for people, nor can we presume to do what is best for them with our own mentality, but we should listen to them first to be in solidarity with them in order to know what is happening in their lives and understand their desires, needs, and dreams.

In the work of evangelization, we need to get rid of the mentality that we are the givers and the people are simply recipients who have nothing to share in return, that we are preachers who proclaim the message of the Good News and the people are the ones who need conversion. This mentality or attitude no longer conveys the authentic process of transformation towards sharing the Good News. Instead, we are evangelizers and are ourselves evangelized, preachers of the Good News and also recipients.\textsuperscript{16} In the process of sharing the Good News, “we are called to repent and be converted as much as we are called to call others to repentance and conversion.”\textsuperscript{17} Therefore, mission is not a one-way traffic, rather a mutual exchange between the missionary and the people in which both missionaries and the people have something to give and take. We are conscious of this challenging journey of evangelization that helps us to be more humble as we continue to learn, to share, and to open ourselves to people in the vast missionary field, especially to people on Asian soil.

3. SPIRITAN MISSION IN ASIA

3.1 Mission in the Asian context

Asia is the largest and most populated continent. Its current population is around 4,566,561,736 and is home to over 60% of humanity.\textsuperscript{18} Asia is the cradle of most of the world’s great religions, such as Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism,
Confucianism, Islam, and Taoism as well as local indigenous faith traditions. By mid-2018, the number of Christians in Asia was 397,252,000 people\textsuperscript{19} which made up about 8.7 \% of the Asian’s population. Many Asian people are vulnerable to poverty, degradation, violence due to the misguided and selfish power politics. Many tend towards indifferentism, consumerism, and materialism and the young become prey to various ideologies that claim to give liberation from injustice and poverty. Vast numbers of peoples are still thirsting for “the living water” while the presence of many religious traditions demands that the work of evangelization be done in a true spirit of receptivity, respect, dialogue, and humility. The evangelization of the church is not simply to convert people to an institutional church. The purpose of mission is in obedience to Christ’s command to proclaim the Good News of God to humanity. Among the challenges to our mission, we have to discern what the Spirit is saying to our mission in Asia.

3.2 Spiritan presence in Asia

Spiritans were present in Asia many years ago between 1730 and 1778. A dozen confreres entered the Paris Foreign Missions Society (MEP) in order to be sent to the Far East. In 1733, Fr. Guillaume Rivoal was the first Spiritan to set sail to Cochin China (Southern Vietnam), and Jacques de Bourgerie stayed in Macao.\textsuperscript{20} Several others followed; four of the six Bishops of the Foreign Missions in the Far East were Spiritans, namely Armand Lefebvre in Cochin, Vietnam; Louis Devaux in Tonkin (northern Vietnam) from 1746; Edmond Bennetat in Cambodia from 1748, and Jean-Baptise Maigrot, in Setchoan, China from 1753. Later, there were Bishops Guillaume Piguel in Cambodia and Francis Pottier in Setchoan.\textsuperscript{21}

In the nineteenth century, Spiritans were sent to Pondicherry and Chandernagor, India. Spiritans only remained there from 1863 to 1888. At present, Spiritans are working in seven countries in the Union of Circumscriptions of East Asia and Oceania (UCAO). In Pakistan, our confreres have been involved in mission since 1977. In Taiwan and the Philippines, our mission started in 1997. In 2007, confreres were sent to Vietnam to establish a community, and in 2009 the mission in India began. In 1846, the first Spiritans set foot in Australia; the presence of Spiritans in Papua New Guinea started in 1971. In the future, an outreach to China will be one of the challenges for our mission in Asia. The project for mainland China should be continued, though we can see its challenges. We cannot expect immediate results but “let us stay in his hands like empty vessels. If he deigns to make us serve the purpose of his house, he knows how to do it, in due course, when he pleases.”\textsuperscript{22}
3.3 Challenges for the Spiritans in Asia

We are called to explore and discover new methods and means of evangelization for transmitting the Gospel effectively. The challenge we are facing is “how to proclaim the Gospel to a vast multitude whose hunger for transcendence finds fulfilment in the bosom of ancestral religions.”

3.3.1 Mission as Inculturation

Our missionary services need to take into consideration the local situation, and the quality of our services depends on how much we understand it. Wherever we are doing our mission, we must be attentive to “inculturation.” We need to become one with the people to adapt and inculturate among them. It requires us to understand the realities of those among whom we work, such as local languages, cultural studies, and the specific anthropological, social, and religious traits of the people.

Libermann advised his missionaries to respect the local culture, adapt to local people and customs, respect people’s freedom: “Do not judge by first impressions. Do not judge according to what you have seen in Europe, according to what you have been used to . . . Become Negro with the Negroes and you will judge them appropriately.”

It takes time for us to immerse ourselves in the culture, to understand, appreciate, and adapt our preaching of the Gospel to the culture of the place we are sent, so that people can receive the Good News in a credible and fruitful way according to their distinctive character, group, and environment. Our evangelizing activities need to “work out a strategic plan in keeping with our charism and taking into account the social and ecclesial contexts.”

3.3.2 Mission as Interreligious Dialogue

In the context of religious plurality and diverse cultures in Asia, interreligious dialogue is considered one of our greatest challenges; we are called to dialogue with people of other religions and of no religion, because it is an important element of our mission. We take into consideration the four levels of dialogue, namely, dialogue of everyday life, the dialogue of collaborating in common projects, spiritual dialogue, and theological dialogue. In Asia, when we engage in dialogue with non-Christian religions, we should pay more attention to dialogue of life because it helps us to overcome the obstacles of fear and prejudice, and it helps to promote mutual understanding and appreciation. We also seek for dialogue of spiritual experience because it helps us to discover and explore each other’s spiritual ways in depth, in order to understand and respect the other’s point of view. Certainly, it requires our humility and “an attitude of openness in truth and in love” towards people of
other faiths and none in order to journey together, accept their different ways of living, share their joys and sorrows. At the same time, we “welcome them with joy, inviting them to share our spirituality and our apostolic life.” (SRL 24.3)

Other religions also contain “seeds of the Word” and “Rays of Truth.” Proclaiming Jesus needs to take into full account what is good and true in other religions and appreciate the values of the kingdom. Pope John Paul II tells us that narrating Jesus’ story can be a most effective way akin to Asian cultural forms to proclaim Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who opens the hearts of listeners and invites them to accept the values of the Gospel where people, especially the poor and the marginalized, can find mercy, compassion, and hope in Jesus’ story.

3.3.3 Mission as Promoting Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation

In SRL 12, we confirmed that in faithfulness to the intuitions and heritages of our founders, we give preference to an apostolate that takes us to those oppressed and most disadvantaged. The particular situations of Asian soil, especially our missions in the Province of Taiwan-Vietnam and India, challenge us to seek out new ways of doing missions, adapt and take on new initiatives to inculturate ourselves in order to dialogue with people, and empower them to hear and accept the Good News. At the same time, in some countries of Asia, where many people are victims of different types of injustice, it also challenges us to respond to the realities by living solidarity with the poor and oppressed and making ourselves “the advocates, the supporters and the defenders of the weak and the little ones against all who oppress them.” Bagamoyo reminded us of what Maynooth and Torre d’Aguilhia had asked each circumscription to do, namely “draw up a plan taking into account the local realities” in order to help promote justice, peace, and integrity of creation. SRL 14.1 reminds us that we need to make efforts to analyze social situations in order to understand structural problems as root causes of injustice and poverty. In our humble service, we should cooperate with others to be the voice for the voiceless, so that Jesus’ voice may be heard when we proclaim the Gospel and bring people closer to Jesus in the midst of injustice, oppression, or violence. Let us look to Mary for inspiration to draw on the apostolic spirit in our work of evangelization.

4. LIVING OUR SPIRITAN MISSION WITH MARY AS OUR MODEL.

Mary holds an important role in Libermann’s missionary spirituality; he devoted our mission to the protection of the
Immaculate Heart of Mary. He saw in her “a perfect model of faithfulness to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit” and confirmed that “we live our mission in willing obedience to the Holy Spirit, taking Mary as our model” (SRL 5). She gave us a marvellous example for our evangelization. By her saying “Yes” at the Annunciation “may it be done to me according to your word,” Mary exemplified her availability and openness to the Holy Spirit to commit herself to her Son and his mission. Mary didn’t keep the Good News for herself, but brought Jesus in her womb to her cousin and at that moment of the visit filled both Elizabeth and John the Baptist in her womb with the joy of the Good News, under the influence of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:39-45). At the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11), Mary’s solicitude and compassion for the other enabled her to see the host’s difficult moment and to act to remedy it by bringing their concern to Jesus and asking him to intervene. As a result, Mary brought people and their concerns close to Jesus. Evangelization is sharing the Good News, bringing Jesus to other people, and bringing people to Jesus.

Fr. Libermann contemplates Mary’s Heart as the perfect model of apostolic zeal: “her heart is eminently apostolic and burns with desire for the glory of God and the salvation of all people.” When our hearts are inflamed with the fire of ardent love, we will be able to spread that fire to those whom we have encountered. But “A fire can only be lit by something that is itself on fire.” How can we Spiritans bring the Gospel to other people if our hearts are not on fire like the Heart of Mary, or if our life is a counter-witness to the Gospel we want to bring? How can we ‘retell the story of Jesus’ to people convincingly, if we do not have a deep personal experience with Jesus or if our life is a counter-witness to the Jesus’ story? Evangelization is not a matter of doing things or doing something for people. Of course, effectiveness in our apostolic works is also important. However, if we do not conform our interior lives to that of Mary but think only in terms of activity, the good we can do for people will be very much less than it should be.

When our life of witness is consistent with our proclamation of the Jesus’ story, our preaching will become authentic and credible and then we can bring Jesus to people as well as draw people closer to Jesus or the Gospel’s values. In the letter to Fr. Charles Lairé, Libermann reminded him of the deep impact of a holy life on the work of evangelization. It is not clever or capable missionaries that people will listen to in order to follow the way of the Gospel, but our holiness: “Your most important preaching will be your holy life and the good example that you give and God will send grace to these people . . . It is holiness and the sacrifice of their priests that
will be the instrument of their salvation . . . Be holy and urge your confreres to be holy.”

CONCLUSION

The XX General chapter in Bagamoyo realized the challenges of our missionary life in our globalized, multicultural, and at times secularized world that requires us to renew our methods of evangelization. As we are facing challenges of evangelization, Pope Francis calls us to encounter and lay hold of the love of Jesus and share that love “marked by the fire of passion for the kingdom of God and the proclamation of the joy of the Gospel.” No matter how many good works we are committed to doing for the poor, we need to radically affirm that we are participating in God’s mission, not ours, that we are proclaiming the Word of God, not ours, and that the Holy Spirit to whom we are dedicated is “the principal agent of evangelization” and the “source of the apostolic spirit.” We, Spiritans, are called to become leaven, salt, and light in the world and continue our initiatives, and to work creatively and earnestly under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are participating in God’s mission. Our mission means trying to find out God’s will and simply being docile to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. In order to live the Spiritan charism authentically today, we joyfully surrender our will to God’s will and respond to the call of evangelization through our availability and docility to the Holy Spirit. “Divine Spirit, I wish to be before you as a light feather, so that your breath may carry me off where it wishes and that I may never offer it the least resistance.” No matter how many difficulties we may encounter on our missionary journey, we are not afraid because Jesus will always be with us (Matt 28:20) and we can say to the Lord with readiness and willingness, “Here I am. Send me!” (Isa 6:8).

Manila, Philippines

ABBREVIATIONS

E.S. Ecrits Spirituels. Spiritual writings of Venerable Francis Libermann.


N.D. Notes et Documents relatifs à la vie et à l’oeuvre du vénéré
François-Marie Paul Libermann. 16 volumes of the writing of the Congregation’s cofounder, Venerable François-Marie Paul Libermann

SRL  Spiritan Rule of Life.

ENDNOTES
5. N.D., XIII, 170.
6. Libermann, N.D. X, 151
7. General Chapter 1998 – Maynooth, Ireland, 0.1.2
8. N.D., VI, 438
9. E.S., 141.
10. General Chapter XX: Bagamoyo, 4.3.
11. Torre d’Aguilhla, 0.4.4.
13. Torre d’Aguilhla, 1.1.4
16. Ibid., 34.
22. N.D., II, 491–492.
24. General Chapter XX, Bagamoyo 1.14
27. Bagamoyo 1.11
30. Ibid., no. 11
33. Règlements, 1849; N.D. X, 517
34. Bagamoyo 1.22.
35. N.D. X, 568
38. *A Spiritan Anthology*, 273
42. N.D., X, 568
43. *A Spiritan Anthology*, 120.
MISSION WORKS, DONORS, CHALLENGES

INTRODUCTION

Fr. Jean-Marc Sierro’s article, “Money, Providence and Spiritan Mission,” *Spiritan Horizons* 14 (Fall 2019) caused me to reflect on the seven years that I have been working with the Spiritan Office for Mission Advancement (SOMA). The result of that reflection is my attempt to open a broader discussion on the long-term viability of the Congregation’s current mission outreach.

PROTECTING ASSETS

Circumscriptions are seeing their real estate patrimony diminish, to such an extent that we must consider the prospect of no longer having enough to live on in the next ten or fifteen years. Given this environment, it is prudent to extend the life of the Congregation’s hard physical assets and to utilize the distribution channels available to retain and grow those donor segments providing the funds for mission projects. The increasing requests from confreres in the South for assistance to maintain present structures or to support construction of new structures are not sustainable.

Spiritan mission structures, seminaries, residences, health clinics, schools, even churches all have a natural life span that are influenced by changing times. In order to assess that lifespan, it is necessary to have a broad understanding of the present and near-term needs of a circumscription. The life of these assets can be extended through timely maintenance and by fulfilling the intended purpose or the timely re-purposing of the structure for other needs. Neglected routine maintenance and improper purposing of structures can divert funds, preventing the completion of projects of a more immediate need.

There undoubtedly are examples that can be cited where lack of maintenance has resulted in almost uninhabitable structures. One seminary deferred maintenance, rendering parts of the building unsanitary and uninhabitable. Another example was the condition of the priests’ kitchen at that same location. In both cases one must ask the question, “are those acceptable conditions in which to place confreres”? Certainly, the morale of those living in such conditions can be negatively impacted, especially when help is not readily available or seen to be forthcoming.

Conditions such as these can be more efficiently addressed with the establishment of minimum standards of maintenance for structures and oversight responsibilities...
through the circumscriptions and provinces in reviewing these structures on a consistent, scheduled, basis. Such reviews allow for priorities to be established, re-purposing to be explored, and possibly combining facilities and even closing others.

Provincials and circumscriptions should have information on each structure, what the operating costs are, and the future financial needs for each, assuring that they are properly maintained. Certainly, donors expect the Congregation to be good stewards of the gifts they provide, and efficient management of structures is evidence of that good stewardship.

It is important to ensure the long-term viability of a mission project. That continuity and sustainability can be compromised by the rotation of superiors / provincials, and bursars. Projects thought important by one leadership group can take on a lesser priority by the succeeding leadership team.

An example: in a parish, a few years ago, a pastor was faced with the presence of several widows in his congregation who had no means to support themselves and their families. The solution was to create a sewing cooperative where the women would make clothing for their families, and produce garments, such as school uniforms that would provide them with income. When inquiring about the progress of the project a few years after its inception, the “founding” pastor, now in another location lamented the fact that the project had not been continued by his successor, even though it had demonstrated the desired positive, tangible results.

**DETERMINING NEEDS**

The question to be asked always is, “what is the best use of donated funds to build and animate mission projects?” Decisions to build a structure should be made based on real data as to how the planned structure will serve the priorities of the Congregation. Construction costs should include the furniture, fixtures, and equipment to be installed in the structure. Likewise, an operating plan for the facility should include provision for timely routine maintenance and resources to sustain the project. Armed with this acquired information and well-articulated, consistently communicated Congregation priorities, circumscriptions can make competent decision on how to proceed.

**DETERMINING VALUE**

The following is a useful tool for assessing the viability of a proposed project. As needs are determined, they can easily be plotted on an effort/impact matrix, as a means of graphically estimating the cost of a project and of the potential number of
lives to be affected with its successful completion. This is a useful tool for provincials whose confreres have requested approval for multiple projects, allowing all projects to be ranked in a similar fashion, and province priorities established.

A recent example of a low cost, high impact project may be useful. Holy Ghost College in Sankera, Nigeria lacked enough nighttime electrical supply, and relied solely on a costly, fuel driven generator. A project was completed at a cost of $4,700 to connect the campus to the neighboring electric grid providing a continuous source of electricity for the 300 students and staff, during the typical, daily 12 hours of darkness. The project is also sustainable as the cost of electricity is well below that of generator fuel. In this case the project would be placed in the lower right-hand box.

**GRANT PROCESS**

The present process begins with a confrere or confreres living in situ and recognizing a need that would better serve those to whom they minister. The idea is shared with the provincial, and with his concurrence, and written approval, a project application for funding is developed.

The confrere project owner reaches out to known sources of potential or past funding. Those sources include foundations, governmental or NGOs, as well as the regional Spiritan development offices of the Congregation, such as SOMA, CESS-Kibanda, etc.

There are things that the development offices can do, and donor applicants must understand those parameters. For example, a $50,000 grant application may represent a third of a development office’s annual giving budget.

For the most part, however, I have experienced a steady realization on the part of grant applicants that they, too, must do more of the heavy lifting when it comes to fund raising.

When funding is approved by SOMA, CESS-Kibanda, etc. those development offices should place consistent funding conditions on the use of the grants, namely, to apply the monies only to the intended project as designated by the donor. A
signed statement of acknowledgement from the applicant and superior should also be requested. The grant recipients also have a responsibility to provide progress reports, with time-dated images, as well as a final report evaluating the effectiveness of the project. Failure to provide this valuable feedback damages our relationship with donors and jeopardizes our ability to assist future grant applicants.

These foregoing activities engender credibility in the eyes of our donors and provide information that can be shared with them as to how their donations are being spent.

All projects begin with the best of intentions, yet some begin and remain uncompleted for months or years. One church project was started in 2013, and almost seven years later, it remains a shell, with an incomplete exterior and interior. The funds for completion were “promised,” but not received. In another case, a youth center was started with only 50% of the project cost in hand. It sits in an unfinished condition, open to the elements awaiting funds to complete the project. With hindsight one might question whether these were the best uses of those funds, and how much of a project’s total cost must be in hand before the approval is given to commence.

Societal needs continue to spike upward making it difficult for any single non-profit to accomplish its mission single handedly. Increasingly, agencies will choose the option to act in partnership with other like-minded organizations.

DONORS

The global multitude of worthy causes has reached staggering proportions, resulting in heated competition for funding.

Job number one for provinces and circumscriptions is staying close to present donors and widening the net to those who have not heard the Spiritan story.

Although the study from Fidelity Charitable, on The Future of Philanthropy was conducted in the U.S. in 2016, the following findings remain relevant today.

- An increasing number of donors are becoming results-focused. Donors are also more discerning about where their dollars go, what programs will their donations serve? What percentage of their gifts will be used to deliver the intended result? Do the non-profits have compelling stories demonstrating a need that their money can quickly impact? What type of feedback are they providing me as a donor?

- Donors also take advantage of social media connections to learn more about causes and to connect to issues they
care about—another empowering tool for individual donors.

Studies indicate that the #1 reason that people donate is that the cause or organization is important to them (59%). Causes become important to people when they become aware of them, and they are compatible with their individual or family values.

The operative word, then, is “awareness.” How do we get the mission work of the Congregation in front of potential donors?

Not surprisingly, communication is the key to gaining friends of the Spiritans and retaining them. Today that means using various modes of communication, including emails, newsletters, direct mail and social media. In another five years new modes will emerge requiring the Congregation to continuously invest in technology as well as the on-going education of key staff members working in this area.

Fundamentally, the Congregation must shift from a passive development attitude, relying on government subsidies, annual novena, mission appeals, etc. to a more aggressive and realistic one. Simultaneously, the burden of fund raising should be one stressing that the grant applicant must be actively engaged in some form of collaborative fund raising.

Additionally, grant applicants would benefit from a broader understanding of what is realistic to raise in challenging economic times, living within their provinces’ means. One aspect of that process might call for the Congregation’s development offices to inform applicants of the annual budgets of each of those offices, and the average amount granted over past periods. An example can be found on the “grants” page of the U.S. Spiritans website.

Every circumscription should be planning towards a sustainable future. Measurable goals should be established for growth and funding to support their confreres, and their ministries. That can be achieved, provided decisions are made to organize and leverage the resources of the Congregation towards a common goal and move away from operating in separate silos. The silo mentality can impact cooperation and results, reduce morale, and may contribute to the overall failure of this organization and its culture.

As mentioned earlier, there is tremendous competition for discretionary monies, i.e., donations from individuals and foundations. Retaining loyal donors is far cheaper than the cost to develop new donors, although efforts in both areas are essential for growth. We must stay connected to our donors, provide opportunities for them to “touch” the beneficiaries and results of their gifts, communicate with them consistently, and
provide them assurance that our work is achieving our shared goal, namely: to change lives for the better.

**CHALLENGES**

Currently we are experiencing an historic global pandemic which results in additional economic and social upheaval, added to the existing crop failures and locust infestations in sub-Saharan Africa.

COVID-19 ushered in a near global economic collapse. Personal wealth vanished for many; unemployment in the U.S. reached depths not seen since the Great Depression of the 30s. It may be years before the non-profit community returns to pre-January 2020 donation levels.

As a result of the recession of 2008–2010, total giving in the United States was reduced by 7.0% in 2008 and by another 6.2% in 2009.

The most recent data show that the growth rate in charitable giving between 2009 and 2011 was the slowest of any two-year period since 1971 with only one exception: the recession of 2001 in the wake of the 9/11 attack.³

At this writing, the first quarter of 2020 experienced the largest drop the Dow Jones experienced since 1987, and the World Monetary Fund was predicting the worst global recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

For the first time, U.S. based international outreach entities that historically bring relief to developing countries are delivering their unique services here at home in America in the wake of the coronavirus. Doctors Without Borders, Feed the Children, Direct Relief MediShare, and Samaritan Purse International are but a few of them.

CARE, an international humanitarian and development organization, announced its first-ever domestic aid initiative in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The program will provide monetary assistance, food, and essential supplies to individuals in need and at risk, including essential workers, frontline medical personnel, and caregivers, in the form of CARE Packages.⁴

It is uncertain as to how long countries like Ireland and Germany will provide taxpayer funds for international mission projects. Fr. Michael Begley, C.S.Sp., Director of CESS-Kibanda is forecasting a 50% funding drop over the next two years from these countries.
This situation has obvious implications for continuing the historic level of U.S. charitable funds moving from North to South.

Not all U.S. non-profits will suffer equally, however. Those with a history of transparency, successful delivery, and well communicated, compelling stories of need will continue to find support for their missions. These include local food banks, churches, and other community social service outreach providers.

The winners during this period of recovery will be those non-profits that have cultivated recognized brands over decades and remain close to their donor bases through ups and downs in the global economy.

Time will tell what the impact on charitable giving the 2020 recession will have. However, there is historic economic evidence that indicates that local social service agencies (food banks, churches, proven non-profit programs, etc.) are the first focus of donors as the economy recovers from recession. The arc widens to regional and national causes (St. Jude Hospital, March of Dimes, Feed the Children, etc.) as the recovery advances. Finally, as the economy shows real staying power international causes (SOMA, CESS-Kibanda, Doctors Without Borders, religious orders, CARE, Catholic Relief Services, etc.) receive the consideration of potential donors.

Unfortunately, support for Spiritan mission work clearly falls within the latter group. Additionally, the work of the Spiritans is often in remote locations many thousands of miles away from prospective donors.

One way to bridge this geographical expanse is to create tours, made available to our contributors, to travel to locations such as Tanzania and Kenya where they can meet local Spiritans, visit completed projects, and interact with project beneficiaries.

Another way to bridge the geographical expanse is to leverage the resources of the most important, unused constituency available to us. I refer to the vast number of people who were evangelized, educated, or in other ways had their lives changed by their relationship with a Spiritan or group of Spiritans. Many have immigrated from their countries of origin, and are now in the United States, Canada, and Europe. Identifying and reaching these “Spiritan Alumni” may be impractical now, however, consideration should be given to ways we can reach them in the future.

Two other challenges continue to loom on the horizon. The first deals with human resources. While Africa and Asia continue to attract and prepare men for the priesthood, Spiritan vocations in Europe and the Americas have been in decline since the 1970s. Many priests are ageing or retiring, having reached their 70s. Is it time and feasible to initiate a Spiritan Lay...
Missionary Initiative? Ultimately, the current situation requires conversations around how long the Congregation can maintain the present scope of mission works faced with declining resources, both human and financial.

Lastly, perhaps the greatest challenge organizations face is remaining relevant, staying current, up-to-date, reliable, and evolving. Relevancy requires a conscious striving for continuous improvement in an ever-changing world. It requires the organization’s presence and promotion in its category. Commitment to employing these disciplines will be key to the Congregation’s long-term relevancy.

Mr. Ray Sylvester  
Grants Coordinator | Communications  
Spiritan Office for Mission Advancement  
Houston, Texas

ENDNOTES
2. The Future of Philanthropy, 2016 Fidelity Charitable
3. Reich, Rob & Wimer, Christopher, Charitable Giving & Great Depression October 2012, The Russell Sage Foundation and the Stanford Center on Poverty & Inequality
INTRODUCTION

Models prove inspirational for career choices in every field of endeavor and every aspect of life. They inspire many of their admirers to greatness. Jesus Christ is a model, in fact, a super model, who has inspired innumerable admirers and followers. As “the ‘Sent’ of the Father” (cf. John 17), he is the missionary par excellence, the embodiment of mission. After his ministry on earth and before he returned to the Father, he commissioned his disciples as missionaries in his footsteps: “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” (John 20:21). He instructed them saying: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . baptizing them . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you . . .” (Matt 28:19-20). Christ’s words and actions have inspired Christian missionaries, his life serving as model for them.

In the footsteps of Christ, some missionaries, like Paul, have also become supermodels. Everyone does not have the opportunity to encounter such “super models” directly, but can still be influenced by them through those who emulate them or champion their causes. Across centuries, many Christians (especially missionaries) have inspired many and modelled life to those who encountered them. Such inspiration has led to the founding of different Religious Orders and Societies (the Spiritan Congregation among them), that are fascinated by different approaches to the Gospel as expressed in their charisms. These Orders in turn raised model missionaries and Christians who have contributed much to the growth and success of the Church. Model missionaries inspire people and the Church itself. They manifest in their lives the Church’s ideals of mission, while echoing the specific concerns of individual missionary institutes. For instance, a missionary:

... must be prepared to remain faithful to his vocation for life . . . In preaching the Gospel . . . he will proclaim with confidence the mystery of Christ . . . so that in him he will dare to speak as he ought . . . not being ashamed of the scandal of the Cross. Meek and humble, following in the footsteps of his master, he will show that his yoke is sweet and his burden light . . . By a truly evangelical life, with great patience and longanimity, in kindness and unfeigned love . . . he will bear witness to his Lord . . . (AG, 24)

The Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritans), considering its mission objectives and demands which give preference to...
working among “those who have not yet heard the gospel message or who have scarcely heard it; those oppressed and most disadvantaged . . . where the church has difficulty in finding workers” (SRL, 12) has many such models from its various circumscriptions. In the Nigerian context, Fr. Peter Oduenyi Dike, C.S.Sp. (God rest him), was such an outstanding Spiritan missionary.

EARLY LIFE, 1948–1976

In Urualla, situated currently in Imo State, Nigeria, a farmer, Nlebemuo Dike, of Amanato-Ozuakoli and his wife, Nwabumma, received with great joy on May 15, 1948 news of the birth of their second son whom they proudly named, Oduenyi (elephant tusk). The elephant tusk in traditional Igbo society was very dear, unique, and rare, and its sound very loud. It was a symbol of greatness. The Igbo believe that “one’s name is an omen” and that was true of Oduenyi. In the 1940s, Urualla was one of the prominent mission towns under the Holy Ghost missionaries in Nigeria. The late Archbishop Charles Heerey, C.S.Sp., sited there the novitiate of his then young Religious Institute of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Mother of Christ. The Sisters packed into the novitiate on July 30, 1943, and it was officially blessed by Bishop Heerey on August 7, 1943.1 The presence of the Holy Ghost missionaries and the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary helped to shape the person of Peter Oduenyi Dike and his missionary life.

Oduenyi’s parents were Igbo traditional religionists and this explains why he was not baptized until nearly nine years after his birth, on January 15, 1957, when he had started his primary education at St. Michael’s School (the Catholic Mission School), Urualla. He was given the name Peter and the character of Saint Peter is reflected in his life. While at St. Michael’s School, the life of the Holy Ghost missionaries in their white cassocks girdled with black cords caught his fancy, firing him to seek the priesthood and the missionary life. His parish priest easily recommended him to the Holy Ghost Juniorate, Ihiala, the minor seminary of the Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers in Eastern Nigeria. He began his secondary education there in 1963 and finished in 1967. He distinguished himself there as a soccer player. His philosophy studies were during the Biafra Civil War at Awo-Omamma from 1968 to 1969; when the Holy Ghost Novitiate, Awo-Omamma, reopened in late 1971, he did his novitiate year and was professed into the Holy Ghost Congregation on September 25, 1972.2 He studied Theology at Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, Nigeria until 1976, and earned a Bachelor in Divinity. Peter was ordained a priest of the Holy Ghost Congregation in June, 1976.
PRIESTLY MINISTRY, 1976–2010

The priestly and missionary life of Father Peter Dike, C.S.Sp., lasted thirty-four years—thirty years on pastoral engagement, four years on further studies. His first missionary engagement as a priest was to assist Father Simon Emeanuo, C.S.Sp., (God rest him) in a first evangelization mission recently being opened in Toto, then Plateau State of Nigeria. For three years, they built up that mission together until he was withdrawn for further studies in 1979.

In 1979, the Province of Nigeria-East sent him to study Biblical and Systematic Theology at the Institut Catholique, Paris, France. To facilitate his studies in France, Fr. Dike did Diploma programs in French and German languages. He was captivated by, and was very enthusiastic for, Fr. Libermann’s “l’Œuvre des Noirs” (Work for the Blacks) as his outstanding academic interest. He acquired an M.A. from the Institute in 1982 and proceeded to the University of London where he obtained a Diploma in Education, 1983. He returned home the same year.

On his return from further studies, he was appointed to the Zambian mission then a mission field of the Spiritan Province of Nigeria. He worked for three years in St. Dorothy’s Parish in Solwezi Diocese of Zambia. Confreres who shared in the Zambian mission of the 1980s testify to his great zeal. He was recalled to Nigeria towards the end of 1986, and early in 1987 he embarked on his second missionary journey to Toto. This marked the peak of his missionary career. Under his charge, Christ the King Parish, Toto, ministered to over fifteen outstations. An extract on him and Toto mission reads:

Faithful to the Spiritan mission, he preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the area. He established schools in the area for Bassas and Igbirras alike, as well as for the other tribes in the area and even beyond . . . irrespective of religion, tribe or color . . . . Fr. Peter Dike is very much instrumental for the light, including the NEPA (National Electricity Power Authority) line that Toto people are using today. Honest people in Toto know how much they are grateful to him and to the Spiritan mission for the pipe-borne water, and the good roads they are enjoying . . . the Gospel of Jesus and the accompanying social development through popular education which Fr. Peter stood for has enlightened and fired the Bassa people.³

With his “all-round approach” to this mission, his activities, especially his effort to educate and enlighten the Bassa, clashed with the interests of the Igbirra ethnic group in
his effort to educate and enlighten the Bassa, clashed with the interests of the Igbirra ethnic group in the area, who would prefer that the Bassa remain unenlightened and be exploited. The crisis that ensued made Fr. Dike a ‘wanted-man’ by the Igbirra. The crisis finally engulfed the entire Spiritan missionary activity at Toto, leading to the forceful withdrawal of Spiritans from Toto in 1998. He was recalled to the South-East of Nigeria and was posted to the Spiritan School of Philosophy, Isienu Nsukka in 1999, primarily as a spiritual director. Though appointed to the seminary, Father Dike was very actively engaged in several pastoral activities in Nsukka Diocese. His death came quietly on his bed at Isienu while he was taking a morning rest on Monday, November 15, 2010.

HIS MISSIONARY LIFE, DISPOSITION, AND APPROACHES

In his three mission placements of Christ the King Parish, Toto, Nigeria, St. Dorothy’s Parish, Solwezi, Zambia, and the Spiritan School of Philosophy, Isienu Nsukka, Nigeria, Fr. Peter’s disposition, approaches, and life as a missionary, were consistent and said volumes of him. One may isolate some of his qualities and shadow side dispositions as a missionary.

Fr. Peter excelled in service/work availability. According to the SRL, no. 25 “One basic characteristic of the Spiritan calling is an availability for the service of the gospel, a readiness to go where we are sent by the Congregation. We accept to free ourselves from an engagement in order to respond to new and different calls . . .” Fr. Peter’s former superiors and many who knew him closely attest that throughout his life as a religious and priest, he presented himself readily and willingly for any appointment deemed fit by his superiors. One such former provincial superior, Fr. Luke Mbefo, said of him, “Unflinching availability remained his basic disposition.”

This view manifested itself in Fr. Dike’s zealous acceptance of his appointment to Toto mission in 1976, a typical mission of primary evangelization seen by many as a very challenging mission. Again, on his return from further studies, he probably expected to be appointed to a formation house where he would teach what he studied, but he was rather asked to go to the Zambian mission that was begging for personnel. Without argument, he accepted and embarked on his mission to Zambia with utter zeal. While longing to achieve more in Zambia, he was recalled towards the end of 1986 and asked to go for a second missionary journey to the difficult Toto mission. Yet again, he willingly accepted and threw his whole being into it. Furthermore, when he would have preferred to remain in parish pastoral work, he was withdrawn from Toto and appointed a spiritual director in the philosophy house at Isienu. That again,
he accepted without complaints. This disposition of Fr. Dike reveals his high regard for the vow of obedience. Availability could be said to be the hallmark of living out this vow. This is very important for every missionary, especially Spiritan missionaries. The SRL (nos. 77.1; 77.2) has it that “As members of a Congregation, we do not give ourselves a mission; rather a mission is given to us or confirmed for us . . . We therefore submit our personal plans to the community for discernment and to our superiors for their decision. Should the community require us to give them up, we are prepared to do so.” Fr. Dike subscribed perfectly to this rule. The availability of a missionary to his mission and the demands of the Church is crucial for both the contentment of the missionary and the success of the mission. Fr. Dike enjoyed this to a great extent.

In his missionary life, Fr. Dike exuded enormous pastoral zeal. He was very eager to reach out to every possible group and individual around the locality of his engagement to bring the Good News with its attending succour to such group or person. Such was the picture of his engagement for so many years in Toto mission where he employed every possible legitimate strategy to aid different peoples. Despite all adversity, he zealously and continually engaged in expanding the frontiers of his pastoral engagement. Relating to Fr. Dike’s zeal, Most Rev. Francis Okobo, bishop of Nsukka Diocese, once wrote of him:

*Though primarily working in the seminary, his pastoral zeal has made him a household name in all nooks and crannies of our Diocese. In fact, Fr. Dike is more popular in our Diocese than many of our diocesan priests. Father Million million is a bundle of talents: simple, humble, energetic, humorous, and ever ready as far as pastoral demands are concerned.*

Besides pastoral zeal, Fr. Dike was a missionary with great strength, endurance and commitment. When he set himself on a task, he never rested until it was achieved or until he realized there was nothing more to be done at that moment. Fr. Augustine Onyeneneke, a former provincial of the Province of Nigeria and one of Fr. Dike’s successors in the Zambian mission, commenting on this commitment to his tasks, remarked:

*Fr. Peter would insist on doing TODAY what needs to be done or what should be done . . . rather than postponing action to TOMORROW. By the time he would have gone the rounds of attending to the needs of other people, it would practically reach night time for him to begin to attend to himself.*
The core of the missionary focus of Fr. Dike was **alleviation of poverty and making life better for the less privileged**. He could not work in a place and leave the people among whom he worked the way he met them. His hallmark was **charity**. In him and in his actions echoed steadily the words of Father Francis Libermann, co-founder of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit: “above all charity . . . charity above all . . . charity in Jesus Christ. Charity through Jesus Christ . . . charity in the name of Jesus Christ; fervour . . . charity . . . union in Jesus Christ . . . the spirit of sacrifice . . .” (SRL, no. 38). In his Zambian mission, Fr. Dike provided clothes for the naked, food for the poor, and support for many to establish means of livelihood. He used his vehicle to take people to the hospital or help move people’s goods to the market. He wrote projects that provided a tractor and other implements to help cultivate their farmlands. His successor in the Zambia mission, Fr. Jude Ogbenna, C.S.Sp., relating these facts, recalled how on his first outing for a Mass in one of the stations after Fr. Dike had left Zambia, many people who came for the Mass were unhappy that he had not come with gifts for them, unlike Fr. Dike who usually brought loads of gifts.

Fr. Dike showed the same dispositions in Nigeria. In Toto, he gave much support to the less privileged of different categories. Fr. John Anyaegbunam, a contemporary of his in Toto of the late 1990s, said of him that he had:

> . . . the option for the poor and the abandoned as his priority . . . He built many schools and churches among the Bassa and Gwarri peoples. He engaged in advocacy for the marginalized. He ran mobile health clinics for poor people who couldn’t afford hospital treatment. He took care of poor pregnant women till delivery. His pick-up van, bus, and truck were always available to help take people and their products to and from the farms to the markets, the schools, or to bring sand and stones to help them construct their homes . . .

Fr. Dike, himself, in a write-up, told of the nursery and primary schools he established in the various stations of the parish which cared for Catholics and non-Catholics, including Muslims. The indigent pupils in these schools were more or less on scholarships. He intended to use education to enlighten the uninformed.10

Different groups and persons who experienced him while he lived at the Spiritan School of Philosophy, Isienu, had similar tales about Fr. Dike. He went about reaching out to
the less privileged. He began a nursery/primary school near the seminary for the benefit of the less privileged. He went about reaching out to the sick and the needy, men and women, young and old. And like in other places, the reaching out was usually followed with his pronouncing of blessings, imploring God to grant them wealth in millions and millions. This gave him his popular alias, “million-million!” In fact, the seminarians who were at the Isienu formation community with him summed it up in an oration written on their behalf. An extract from it reads:

**Your option for the poor, the less privileged and the downtrodden was without compare. Most striking was our last encounter with you at night prayers on the eve of your eternal voyage . . . . Your very last words to us were, “I want to change the face of the seminary, and I want to launch a new idea. I don’t know why, but this one disturbs me so much . . . I am making it known to you that from . . . the month of October, I will be giving two thousand naira (₦2000) to Caritas . . .”.**

The students wondered why he would announce such a “little” donation when he was practically doing more than that already. When news of his death broke the next day, they understood that he was calling them all to charity, no matter how little one could give.

Fr. Dike was equally known for the **vow of poverty.** Those who knew him closely attested that he was not out for undue gain and whatever he got; he was so ready and willing to give away to those more in need. Considering the way he used his earnings and belongings for the seminary community, a confrere who was a seminarian while Fr. Dike lived at Isienu, remarked that it was difficult to “know the difference between his pocket and that of the community.”

The Rector of the Diocesan junior seminary at Nsukka, where he often rendered pastoral assistance, also said of him, that, “As a priest, he was transparently honest, materially detached, pastorally available, and profoundly committed to his work.”

It was said that his style of life was very modest. In an era when most other priests used personal electronic gadgets, he was content with what was available in the community living room; and where many priests and religious would prefer the comfort of private cars, he preferred utility vehicles that would enable him assist in carrying people and their goods.

Fr. Dike was known for his **courage and outspokenness.** He criticized whatever he felt was not going fine in the society, in the government, and in the community. For him, truth was no respecter of persons. Someone eulogizing him wrote; “you
had no reservation in speaking out the truth, no matter whose ox is gored. You had no respect for corrupt politicians in Nigeria as you openly castigated them fearlessly.”

Unfortunately, his outspokenness pitched many against him.

As a spiritual director in the seminary, Fr. Dike was formidable. He was seen by his students as one “that practically influenced the hearts of many young seminarians.”

Comments from some of his students at Isienu better define his qualities as a spiritual director. Fr. Sylvester Oyeka saw in Fr. Dike, “a father who was available and ready to accompany his son to overcome challenges in life, this was conspicuous in his actions and his life of availability as a spiritual director.”

For another, Fr. Dike “understood the uniqueness of everyone and was ready to let people grow gradually in the spirit . . .” And another echoed it saying that he “believed in showing the students the right direction and allowing them to mature and develop along those paths, while occasionally admonishing those who may be slipping away.”

Very many saw him as a father, so eager to share his missionary zeal with the seminarians, very close to the students, and someone with whom they were much relaxed. He was indeed a spiritual guide to many of them.

Fr. Dike was indeed a man with many missionary qualities. Summarizing his qualities, a religious community that he frequented for pastoral services, extolled him thus:

You lived a very altruistic life; your preoccupation was to minister to the needs of God’s people. For this reason you went about caring for pregnant mothers, taking women in labor to hospital, settling disputes between husbands and wives. You became a dumping ground for people’s problems and you did all with the love of Christ. There was no word like No in your dictionary when requests were made of you so long it had to do with the good of others. You were an epitome of humility, a humourist, an embodiment of self-sacrificial love, a true missionary and an icon of a religious priest.

With the above qualities, Fr. Dike, like all of us, had his shadow side. The missionary that he was, he was unmindful of time. For most things in which he was concerned, time was a flexible commodity that began and ended at his disposition. Many who worked with him as seminarians said that the time frame was of little importance to him. One of them appraised his attitude to time as follows:

A scheduled Eucharistic celebration could start more than an hour late because he remembered along the way, other
things that he would love to attend to, including paying a visit to a family to address one spiritual matter or the other. His homilies lasted as long as he remembered other things to say; meals had no specific times, so they began when he finished his rounds. Usually, while in the mission at Toto, the seminarians working under him would wait for him to return any time in the night before they could have their supper. Even when they accompanied him to some pastoral outings which usually lasted till night, breakfast and lunch were usually suspended to be taken with supper. And before that supper would be taken that night, they would have to pray together, the Lauds, Office of the Readings, Midday Prayer and Vespers.\footnote{}``

No wonder that some considered him sometimes \textbf{insensitive to those under his authority}. He believed everyone around him to have the same stamina and capacity. Concerning flexibility with time, the author recalls a journey with Fr. Dike in 1995, from Toto to Mbaise, Nigeria, for the burial ceremony of the mother of Fr. Ambrose Akalawu, C.S.Sp., Fr. Dike’s co-worker at Toto. Normally, the journey would last about eight and half hours. The Toto contingent was scheduled to leave at 7:00 a.m. since the Vigil Mass was at 5:00 p.m. That morning, Fr. Dike excused himself “just for a moment” only to return to the parish house around 2:30 p.m. The journey began after 3:00 p.m. and the contingent arrived at the burial venue at about 2:00 p.m. the next day when the interment was already over. He had stopped here and there for different reasons; barely three hours into the journey the vehicle had a tyre burst and Fr. Dike had no spare tyre! The passengers were left on the lonely road for another two hours while he went to repair the tyre.

With the attitude towards time goes Fr. Dike’s flexible attitude and \textbf{seeming disregard for strictly fixed and rigidly planned evangelical work structures}. He lived from day to day and by whatever came along by way of inspiration; he had no highly fixed schedule. Fr. Ogbenna remarked that; “Despite Fr. Dike’s good missionary zeal and qualities, the manner in which he handed over to us in Zambia simply gave him away as quite disorganized. No proper written down handover, things picked from here and there as he had forgotten what was where.”\footnote{}`` His nature was such that he would get up at any moment and begin one task or project without prior preparation. He could begin a building without prior plan or sketch; the plans would come later. Such a disposition sometimes resulted in failures or chaos.

One may see this tendency in his missionary life as \textbf{imprudence}. But for Fr. Dike, it was openness of spirit to

\textit{He lived from day to day and by whatever came along by way of inspiration}
the “needs of the moment,” to supply for the needs of people suffering and abandoned as against sticking to a set of strictly arranged structures of events as a pattern of life. The inspiration to respond to the needs of people at the moment, day or night, carried a lot of weight for him, with little or no regard for his own personal comfort. For him it was total and unreserved self-giving, by day and by night. He took up many tasks at the same time and sometimes left some unfinished. That was evident in the structures he was erecting here and there in Toto Parish. He hardly knew where to begin and where to stop. This reflected also in his outspokenness which brought him into confrontation with people, especially the Muslim communities in Toto Local Government Area. He was not always tactful in the use of words even among his confreres. Furthermore, he seemed not to have always paid necessary attention to his physical health. Nwauzor observed that, “he failed to realize the importance of rest as he could be said to have overworked himself.”

The legendary Achilles’ heel for the hero in Homer’s *Iliad* points to the weak points in normal human persons. A similar feature could be said of Fr. Peter Oduenyi Dike, C.S.Sp., as a normal human person. The picture of him painted above shows that he was not flawless as a missionary religious—and who is? Flexibility with time and undue spontaneity with the organization of work structures and routines can constitute considerable obstacles to the “wheel” of any missionary endeavor. Some suggest that such disposition may have contributed to what appears as his unexpected death in November 2010. Barely two weeks before his death, he was diagnosed of, and treated for, pneumonia and was advised to take a long period of bed rest while recuperation continued. Perhaps, he too soon judged himself fit to recommence his busy pastoral activities. It is possible that a sudden relapse of the situation overwhelmed him and cut short his life. His less organized attitude and way of doing things perhaps created confusion for those who worked with him and those who succeeded him. In today’s world, proper planning is necessary to ensure a great measure of missionary success; prudence is a watchword.

**CONCLUSION**

Successful actors in the different fields of life are those who successfully manage their grey and shadow areas. Fr. Peter Oduenyi Dike, C.S.Sp., thus was a great missionary, an inspirer, a model missionary in many ways. He may seem imprudent and short in organizational skills, but, sometimes, what is seeming prudence can camouflage deceit, and this jeopardizes missions. A good planner without the courage and strong will
He was a light to many

Father Dike preached what he believed, lived what he taught, and died the way he lived

to execute his plans (as Fr. Peter obviously had), turns them to mere dreams. Prudence and organizational skill count, but so do zeal, availability, obedience, charity (love), generosity (selflessness), courage, strong will, and humility. These are all marks of missionary greatness and Fr. Dike, as his name ‘Oduenyi’ implies, was greatly endowed with these. He was a light to many. An admirer’s tribute says: “His life stood like a burning candle that gives light to others yet burning away. Fr. Million burnt for the young, for the elderly, for the rich, for the childless, for the pregnant women. He was a pastor, par excellence, always on the move for the needs of his flock.”25 Like his Master, Jesus Christ, the Super Model Missionary, his missionary activity unsettled the wicked, giving them restless days as we saw in the Toto case. In fidelity to the Spiritan calling, he readily responded wherever the Church needed him most, bringing liberation, peace, and gladness to the less privileged and the most abandoned. Father Dike preached what he believed, lived what he taught, and died the way he lived. He was truly Spiritan, and an outstanding missionary of our time.


College of Education, Nsugbe, Anambra State, Nigeria

ENDNOTES


4. Ibid.

5. Much of the information here was gathered from A Short Biography of Rev. Fr. Peter Oduenyi Dike, found in his funeral brochure of 29th November, 2010.


12. Nwauzor, James, C.S.Sp. e-mail message to author, April 03, 2019.


23. Anyaegbunam, John, C.S.Sp., e-mail message to author.

24. Nwauzor, James, C.S.Sp. e-mail message to author.

Most Rev. Fernand J. Cheri III, O.F.M.

Bishop Fernand Cheri has a Master’s in theology from Xavier University of Louisiana’s Institute for Black Catholic Studies. After ordination on May 20, 1978 and many pastoral assignments, he joined the Franciscans of the Sacred Heart province in 1992. He served as director of campus ministry at Quincy University in Quincy, Illinois (2011–2015). He was ordained auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of New Orleans on March 23, 2015 at St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans. Bishop Cheri has written articles and books on Black Catholic liturgy, and is an archivist of Black religious music.

WHAT NOW?¹

On June 5th, the Archdiocese of New Orleans held a prayer protest rally from its Chancery Office to the front steps of Notre Dame Seminary. The idea was suggested by chancery officials who wanted to publicly do something in response to the death of George Floyd. Instead of a public rosary with 8 minutes, 46 seconds of silence (to commemorate the length of time that officer Derek Chauvin had his knee on Floyd’s neck), I wrote a “Requiem for Black Children of God,” a confession and a moment of remembrance of 47 Black men and women from across the country killed in recent years by police violence. This powerful Catholic witness and call for justice touched and surprised us all. With only two days of advertisement on social media, about 300 people were in attendance. A news reporter asked me, “What are you feeling at this moment?” I said, “The church showed out; let the church roll on.”

While I grew in a spirit of confidence, compassion, and integrity as a Black Catholic leader amid this COVID-19 pandemic, I watched chancery officials becoming more anxious, bewildered, and restless as the challenge “what now?” rang through the building and across the diocese. The unsettled tension of church leaders reminded me of the reactions to the statement made by the members of the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus in 1968 when they said,

“The Catholic Church in the United States, primarily a white racist institution, has addressed itself primarily to white society and is definitely a part of that society.”²

Here we are in 2020 and I find myself saying, as my daddy would say, “You can’t make it up.”

“The Catholic Church in the United States, primarily a white racist institution, has addressed itself primarily to white society and is definitely a part of that society.”

The church is in the same place, the same space, with new faces. Our Catholic identity is so wedded to our American ideals and systemic racism that Catholics scratch the surface—do
good things, but don’t get too deep into systemic issues. The system keeps protecting itself.

We are comfortable with death, weapons of violence and greed, but not the profound revolutionary life of Jesus Christ! The USA is the greatest producer of weapons in the world. We are the most violent society. We are a country that baptizes greed. These things put a heavy load on Black/Brown bodies. Churches, with our actions or our silence, sanction what is going on. Where is the church? How do we stop the killing of Black/Brown people? Racism promotes violence. Hence, the violence on Black bodies is okay. There is a theological position and tradition that gives permission to shoot Black bodies in the name of protecting a system that favors the privileges enjoyed by white people. Our church operates with a bias that forces Black people to question her catholicity. A substantial conversion and subsequent conversation cannot happen until this local, American, and global church reconciles with her God-given mission.

We have a responsibility as faith communities to lead the way to God. Therefore, we must TELL THE TRUTH—REPENTANT TRUTH. Not just mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa, but the truth that then compels us to action, to do something different. Truth that leads to metanoia, truth that protects the human dignity from the human condition. Truth that reveals where we stand with God who appears when humanity is being denied. We need to tell the truth of the past and our complicity with what undergirds white supremacy, so we can understand all its complexities that strike out against Black/Brown bodies that don’t conform to Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism. This notion of what it means to be a faithful citizen fits the mold of what has been described as the default setting for American white male heterosexual—and this feeds white supremacy. Systemic racism is an immoral monster. The root problem is our incapacity to confront this brutal immoral monster who violates Black people and people of color.

The church must lead all to God, but when church leaders speak of one body in Christ, they only support white male heterosexuality as the norm of true Catholicity. The Catholic Church has a knee on the neck of Black people and people of color. Now, if what I’m saying is unsettling, good, you are listening. Listen! Listen, the church, the Body of Christ, the people have taken to the streets crying out, “Enough is enough!” “I can’t breathe” in this perfect storm of COVID-19 and this unjust systemic racism. The church has taken to the streets; do we join them in solidarity or do we hold them in contempt? It begs me to question just who is wrapped in error and who is standing in truth? What do we see and what do we
If you are a pro-lifer, you don’t get to pick and choose what pro-life issue to defend!

Most Rev. Fernand J. Cheri III, O.F.M.

hear? The Catholic Church leaders of New Orleans in that rally stood in solidarity, calling for gospel values and truth. The risk outweighed the cost. We were no longer silent, afraid, but resolved to work for justice and truth, not in violence, but in peace. Let the church roll on.

After the June 5th protest, a woman called me complaining about who George Floyd was. During her tirade, she confessed to being a pro-life advocate. I asked her, “Did you see the same video I saw about what happened to George Floyd?” Didn’t you see that his life was publicly aborted? If you are a pro-lifer, you don’t get to pick and choose what pro-life issue to defend! Either you are or you are not for life. There was a dead silence.

WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO VALIDATE WHO WE ARE?

The church’s teaching on human dignity states:

*Created in the image of the one God and equally endowed with rational souls, all men (and women) have the same nature and the same origin. Redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ, all are called to participate in the same divine beatitude: all therefore enjoy an equal dignity (CCC no. 1934).*

It is so easy to get choked up in the darkness of racial discrimination, the gloom of blunders committed by the Catholic Church, and the systemic evils of racism in America and beyond. *OPEN WIDE OUR HEARTS* calls racism America’s original sin and evil. One easily can get cynical, especially when two bishops stated publicly at our USCCB meeting that “we (the bishops) don’t even know what racism is; we can’t define it.” I had to emphatically state, “Everyone in this room can identify incidents of racism; to identify it, one has to be able to define it; so, don’t insult my intelligence.”

The author, James Baldwin, liked to talk about Black people achieving ourselves, finding who we are, what we’re for, and making that possible for others. Black Catholics have to do this in the church. Are there some things that are even deeper that we are meant for, meant to be, meant to do, meant to achieve?

Sr. Thea Bowman, when asked, “What does it mean to be Black and Catholic,” replied:

*It means that I come to my church fully functioning . . . I bring myself, my black self; all that I am, all that I have, all that I’m worth, all I hope to become. I bring my whole history, my traditions, my experience, my culture, my African-American song and dance and gesture and*
movement and teaching and preaching and healing and responsibility as a gift to the church.  

We see how this experience of Black Catholics is a gift to the Church. Does this scare you? What will it take to validate who we are? Might I suggest the movie BLACK PANTHER? The film centers around the question, “Who are you?” The answer was not only for the main character to answer, but for each person in the film. The discovery of who you are was not only in what you said about yourself, but also what you showed to others. It is the quest of everyone to define and redefine who you are in encountering each situation before you. Relationships were vital in the decisions made throughout the film. Don’t we believe that same thing in the church? The Sacraments are relational.

A BLACK MAN’S JOURNEY TO THE PRIESTHOOD

I was reminded about my journey toward the priesthood. I decided that to be the Black priest I needed to be, I needed to do my Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) not in a hospital, but in a prison. I applied at 10 prisons and was accepted at 9. The chaplain at the last one wrote me a letter criticizing my Black Catholic identity. My honest response to his criticism and racial bias, simply saying who I am, was received with a welcome to join the program. He wanted me to know clearly that I would be challenged. I ate, played sports, went to therapy sessions, shared Scripture readings, counseled and prayed with the inmates for 10 solid weeks. I returned to the seminary knowing I was ready for ministry. I was ready for ordination, not because I was successful in everything, but because of how God made a way. Six months later, before the formation committee, I was criticized for being too independent as a Black man. The archbishop refused to ordain me. That day I went to the all-Black boys’ high school, St. Augustine, to tutor a football player. He saw that I was distracted, so I explained my plight. Out of the mouth of a child, he declared, “Well, I know that you are a good minister. God knows that you are a good minister and it is God who ordains anyway.”

Many Black Catholics who have survived in the Catholic Church through the Middle Passage, slavery, the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation, Reconstruction, Jim Crow Laws, Redlining, Civil Rights, not to mention being treated like 2nd class Catholics, can say like Paul to the Church at Corinth:

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always
Most Rev. Fernand J. Cheri III, O.F.M.

carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body (2 Cor 4:8-10).

THE GIFTS OF BLACKNESS

Black Catholics need to have a healthy dialogue about the church as a white supremacist, patriarchal institution and decide if the church remains the right vehicle for Black Catholics to love God, to serve and to worship God in the world, so that we may be happy with God in the next life. In this present climate, Black people can and are able to respond to the call to be the signposts of new possibilities for the church? The humanity of Black people is our contribution to society, and to our church. Our gift is the resilience against systemic oppression. African people are the face of God, and, until Black people are free, no one is free.

In their Pastoral Letter of 1984, What We Have Seen and Heard, the Black Catholic Bishops of that time told their Black brothers and sisters that we were called “to the work of evangelization,” but as we see all around us, that evangelization is not just to other Black men and women. As Paul VI said to the people of Africa, in 1969, “You must give your gifts of Blackness to the whole church.” Today we must understand that the people who learned to resist the utter dehumanization of forced separation and enslavement, who developed strategies, both spiritual and social, to persist on their way out of the Hell of their bondage to the freedom found “way up in the middle of the air,” as prophets and messengers of hope—these, my brothers and sisters, are brothers and sisters to all who find themselves at the crossroads, facing either the destruction of all we have held dear or the smallest hope of a light that will guide us out of darkness. We must choose to “walk together, children,” ask the guidance of those who have been on this journey for centuries.

BLACK LIVES MATTER

The Black Lives Matter movement, its rallying cry, has branched into the undocumented and into the global struggle for the human dignity of all people of every race, language and way of life. Black Lives Matter should be no issue for our church, if we believe in respecting the dignity and personhood of each individual, the first principle of Catholic Social Teaching, and know, without a shadow of a doubt, that each of us is made in the image and likeness of God. Black Lives Matter, where do we go from here? Bishops and church leaders have to go beyond the Black Lives Matter Movement itself and capture and claim the rallying cry of the church on the streets. That means:
Stop saying “all lives matter”—for you belittle the present reality of racial injustice.

Investigate Black Lives Matter and define it as we are called to live it in our individual dioceses, religious communities, and communities of faith.

Don’t try to create another slogan.

We need accountability. Work with a community—listen—develop what is right and of Christ. The immoral monster lives in us; but also, the revolutionary love of Jesus Christ lives in us. We have to move to that radical LOVE space, place, and grace. Develop a new language that speaks more clearly.

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO TOGETHER?

This is our moment, this is our question. What are we going to do together is a question that demands a faith-filled answer. An answer from a people who believe in the unity created by and required by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. What are we going to do together as people baptized into this union? What are we going to do together as formatters of those to whom this mission has been entrusted? What are we going to do together not only in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, but more deeply, what are we going to do together as God is calling and leading us to do what he obviously wants done?

Remember the story of Zacchaeus—the story of truth-telling from different places bombards the structures upon which people stand. “Prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (James 1:22). When Jesus invited himself to dine at Zacchaeus house and the people complained, Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:8-10). Jesus changed the structure of behavior and Zacchaeus responded to the Word of transformation, being repentant and offering restoration and reparation to others.

CMSM, the church on the streets is calling you, “Come out of that tree—your provincial offices, motherhouses, and friaries—and come join us. Stand up, confess your complicity with systemic racism. Speak up about your conversion, your repentance. Offer restoration and reparation. The church on the streets is calling you.

All Catholics need to recognize the virus is in our church.
Look at the protest, isn’t the church on the streets? The knee on the neck, isn’t it more than a Black issue—an immigration issue, a DACA issue, a LGBTQ issue, a Women’s issue, a health care issue, an economic issue, a voter suppression issue, an essential workers issue, e.t.c.

Does not the fact that racism infects every piece of our past and present make it a Catholic issue that needs a Catholic God, a Catholic people, and a Catholic prayer?

Does not the fact that our shared history has no stories of how we got over or how we have overcome this most basic sin make this a Catholic issue?

Does not the fact that the truth of American history is not taught in our schools make this a Catholic issue?

Does not the fact that we are still talking about the Negro problem and have yet to admit that there has always been a white problem make this a Catholic issue?

Does not the fact that the calls and cries for justice continue to come from the oppressed and not the beneficiaries of the oppression make this a Catholic issue?

God created us equal six million years ago.
Science has considered us evolved for 200,000 years.
Politics has deemed us civilized for 6000 years.
Economics has defined us as industrialized since the 1800s.
Jesus rose from the dead 2000 years ago.

Was not the entire point of coming from heaven to earth in order to empower a global institution to correct a global problem? Did not Jesus rise from the dead so that someone could tell a white boy and someone could tell a black boy, y’all are equally brothers? Because God knew that the only place, for the foreseeable future, they could live out that truth would be the church?

**OUR MOMENT TO LEAD OR GET OUT OF THE WAY**

This is our moment to lead or get out of the way. It will not go well for us if we continue to throw holy water on the lies instead of simply blessing the truth. The salvation of the world depends on a church that is more pastoral and spiritual than she is complicit. We need to ask:

- In what ways has the virus affected us?
- What issues have surfaced for action?
- What can we do as we live with the virus over the next year?
- What have we learned from the virus that should guide our advocacy for election?
To have this dialogue, we need church leaders to:

- **Listen more, talk less.** “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger” (James 1:19).

- Resist the need to respond with a better or different insight about something.

- Be an ally. Being an ally is different than simply wanting not to be a racist. Being an ally requires you to educate yourself about systemic racism in this country.

- Try not to repeat, “I can’t believe that something like this would happen in this day and age.”

- Ask when you don’t know—but do the work first—educate yourself.

- Stop talking about color-blindness.

- Be about transformation, restoration, and reparation, and the Resurrection.

Scripture states Jesus says to the young man: “Go sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me” (Matt 10:21). Can you let go of your white privilege; your white male norms? Then, listen to the people of color God sends your way? God is sending you prophets!

Like the historian Vincent Harding, I call you to work with the so-called marginalized young people. We need to help them stand in that gloom and deep hurt, and open up new possibilities. They can be the candles, the signposts, bringing forth truth. “If My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chr 7:14).

How do we work together? How do we talk together in ways that will open up our best capacities and our best gifts? Let me give you two examples:

*When I was first ordained in 1978, my first assignment was at a church that had a Sunday Mass with 50 people, the average age was 65. I took a group of boys who were playing basketball in the gym each Sunday, called them to go to church. They got their girlfriends, made a choir, and within one year we had 500 people in church, average age was 24.*

*In 2002, when the Franciscan Friars wanted to live in East St. Louis, Bishop Wilton Gregory built a friary in the heart of the city. We moved into the city while residents*
were looking to move out. We fortify the Catholic Church’s presence in the city still today. With a handful of young people we brought forth truth. Many thought we were crazy, like that magnificent madman Jesus, who was really talking something very truthful and powerful when he said if you allow yourself to really hunger and thirst after the right way, then if you just keep after it, then you will find the way.

CONCLUSION

Let us pray for a day when more people will think we are crazy because we are doing something with faith, not fear. The key is in the “we.” Not the “we” who are Black or the “we” who are white. Not the “we” who are poor or the “we” who are rich. Not the “we” who are female or the “we” who are male. Not the “we” who are in charge nor the “we” who are falsely charged. But the “we” who are not afraid, the “we” who believe, the “we” who are united and refuse to be divided, the “we” who shall overcome, the “we” who are Catholic. Let us pray and let us be faithful for life. The key is in “the we”.

“Prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (James 1:22).

LET THE CHURCH ROLL ON . . .

Bishop Fernand J. Cheri, III, OFM
Auxiliary Bishop of New Orleans

ABBREVIATIONS

CCC Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1998.

USCCB United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

ENDNOTES

1. Talk given to the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) USA, August 04, 2020.
“LET US NOT CLIP THE WINGS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT”

QUERIDA AMAZONIA

Pope Francis’ response to the synod represents a pivotal moment in his papacy. It has captivated some, disappointed others, and frustrated many. But for one of his biographers his purpose is clear: to guide the Church on the path of enculturation, towards becoming a Church of the Amazon.

While the world was waiting with bated breath for a historic decision on whether to ordain married men in the Amazon region, Pope Francis was busy moving fast in a very different direction—one he had clearly marked out at last October’s synod. Yet even after days of digesting Querida Amazonia its reception remains overshadowed by the idea that the synod’s main purpose was to resolve that question, thus illustrating—with splendid irony—the need for the Pope’s deeper move. The reactions of relieved conservatives and disappointed progressives share the assumption that the Pope chose not to accept the majority vote at the synod in order to avoid deepening divisions. It was, it has been said, his Humanae vitae moment: like Paul VI, Francis had dared to put the issue on the table, but like him, had snatched it back again after trembling before the tribunal of history.

QUERIDA AMAZONIA: DISCERNMENT BY POPE FRANCIS

Whether or not that is a fair depiction of what Paul did, it is certainly not what happened last week. Querida Amazonia did not rule against ordaining married men in the Amazon, as so many headlines claimed. There was no reaffirmation of the celibacy rule. In fact, he did not mention celibacy at all. Nor did he reject the Amazonian synod’s call for such a move in its final report. Indeed, he praised the final report, recognizing it as the discernment of the local Church, and urged everyone to read it.

Querida Amazonia is, rather, the Pope’s own discernment in response to that discernment. What it offers is a hermeneutic key—a lens, a mindset, a way of seeing—that for Francis is the grace that God is offering at this time. It is the means offered by the Holy Spirit to save a people, land and creatures facing extermination, and by extension to save a world whose survival depends in turn on Amazonia’s. Only by receiving...
this grace will the Church be able to undergo the conversion it needs to be a means of that salvation. The grace is that of the Incarnation, which calls for enculturation: to contemplate Amazonia, not analyze her; to love her, not use her; “to feel intimately united to her and not just defend her,” as Francis puts it early on.

INTERIOR CONVERSION

The task, in short, is an “interior conversion” in which believers are invited to hear from the burning rainforests where God is calling. That conversion risks being avoided or diluted by the false consolation of a functional response. Just as the real challenge of an integral ecology—a call to conversion of mindset and lifestyles—can be avoided or postponed by focusing on the political or juridical, so can the Church avoid the call to an enculturated evangelization by becoming consumed by a sterile polarization. That, at least, is what Francis seems to suggest at the end of the document, when he offers a revealing window on to his thinking. He is not ducking a necessary choice nor avoiding conflict, neither of which he is afraid of; he is responding, rather, to the call he sees the Spirit making to the Church, and not letting the Church be distracted from hearing it.
In paragraph 104, the Pope observes that when pastoral workers propose “opposed forms of ecclesial organization” in response to challenges, the true answer likely lies in “transcending the two approaches and finding other, better ways, perhaps not yet even imagined.” Solutions, he goes on to say, often come in the form of a “greater gift” that God is offering from which “there will pour forth as from an overflowing fountain the answers that contraposition did not allow us to see.” This is vintage Bergoglio: the devil distracts Christ’s followers from their mission by consuming them in a false choice. Of course, sometimes there is a real choice, a genuine contradiction—good vs evil—and we must choose the former; but more often it is a false polarization between two paths that are not bad in themselves but may be more or less good, and must be discerned. But discernment cannot occur in a context of false polarization, because discernment is always a choice between goods.

In a context of false polarization the greatest mistake a leader makes is to resolve it by allowing one side to defeat the other. Rather, the task of the leader is patiently and lovingly to hold together the polarity—positions that pull in a different direction, but are not per se in contradiction, as in the case of a celibate and a married priesthood—and thus open the space for a “third way” that the Holy Spirit will in time reveal.

TRUTH AND MERCY

This is exactly what the Pope did at the twin family synods that led to Amoris laetitia in April 2016. The false polarization was between “truth” and “mercy”: a blanket exclusion of the divorced and remarried from the sacraments in order to defend indissolubility, or a general relaxation of sacramental law in order to enable a blanket integration of the divorced and remarried. Francis held together the warring teams until a solution peacefully emerged that he would develop in Amoris: the truth (law and doctrine) was upheld, but applied mercifully, case by case.

At last October’s synod, it was clear that positions over the so-called viri probati were becoming more, not less entrenched. Around two-thirds of the Amazonian bishops arriving in Rome favored in principle a move to ordain married men to enable the Eucharist to reach far-flung communities, but were cautious about the impact of the change. Opposition from the curial cardinals, meanwhile, was intense.

Some of this opposition was hysterical; but much was thoughtful and heartfelt. Moderate curial cardinals closely aligned with the pontificate or appointed to the synod by Francis himself lined up to warn that the precious gift of
that the precious gift of celibacy could not be suspended in one area of the Latin Church without undermining it in the rest. This had to be a worldwide decision of the bishops, not just of a region.

By the second week of the synod, the Pope was troubled by the deepening divide. Although the synod final document’s paragraph 111 got more than two-thirds (128) of the votes, it also attracted the largest number of negative votes (41). In Jesuit “discernment in common”, a sign of the Spirit is a peaceful consensus that results from conversion of hearts and minds; there is movement, and deeper understanding. In the family synod of October 2015, for example, the two-thirds majority reflected a real shift on the part of synod fathers to seeing the Eucharist for the divorced as a matter of case-by-case discernment, not solely of law and doctrine. There was no such conversion in the October 2019 synod on the viri probati issue.

As Francis recently told a visiting bishop from the United States, he didn’t see the Holy Spirit “at work” in that issue. Without such a sign, Francis was never going to move either way on a disputed question. Yet Querida Amazonia does not close off the possibility in the future, and even points a way to it: Francis notes the need for enculturated liturgy and the synod bishops’ call for an Amazonian rite, which—he does not need to spell out—could enable a married clergy without undermining Latin-rite celibacy.

ATTACKED BY THE BAD SPIRIT

But overall, Querida Amazonia punts down a very different stream, the one that Francis saw the Spirit lighting up throughout the synod. He saw it clearly because it was where the synod was most aggressively attacked by the bad spirit. The attack came exactly in what he calls “a renewed enculturation of the Gospel in the Amazon region”.

This was the real task of the synod, as Francis came to see it. The mission is prior to the Church, which is a means not an end. The mission is the enculturation of the Gospel. As the Gospel spreads, the hermeneutic (the way the world is seen) changes: we begin to love, not use; value, not exploit; serve, not dominate. For Francis, the battleground of Amazonia is epitomized in the call of Christ in the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, which Satan seeks to undermine by tempting Christ’s followers with riches, honor, and pride.

A TALE OF TWO SIDES

Thus we have the technocratic or colonialist lens that sees Amazonia as “an enormous space to be filled, a source of raw
resources to be developed, a wild expanse to be domesticated,”
that leads naturally to exploiting and enslaving the people,
destroying their resources for profit, despising their culture. On
the other, we have the Gospel hermeneutic which draws close to
the people and their lands, admiring and understanding their
culture, awestruck by the beauty of their place, and listening
to the poorest among them. What is “foreign,” to be used and
despised, becomes “ours,” to be cherished. We no longer see
the peoples of the Amazonia as pagan savages, but—as we learn
about them and from them—start to see the wonderful things
God has done for them.

Only then can we imagine and work for an alternative
future: other methods of herding and agriculture and sources of
energy; other ways of earning a living that do not destroy people
and the environment. This new future can only come about in
partnership with the poor of the region, and with the native
peoples whose ancestral connectedness with the natural world is
where God’s summons can be heard.

This is the hermeneutic shift that Francis sees the Spirit
calling us to, the shift that—in its beauty and lyricism, its
epideictic language, its use of dreams—Querida Amazonia
brilliantly performs. And it was this “renewed enculturation
of the Gospel” that came under intense attack at the synod,
when right-wing American media became obsessed with the
notion that enculturation was a fancy word for syncretism, and
accused the synod of surrendering to paganism and idolatry.
The frenzy of fears and accusations eventually found a focus in
some innocent statuettes of a native pregnant woman brought
from a market in Manaus that missionaries included in some of
the liturgies, along with canoes and fishing nets. The hysteria
ended—as the timeless rituals of scapegoating demanded—
with an Austrian traditionalist throwing the “Pachamama”
statues into the Tiber, from which some were later discreetly
rescued by police.

Francis dedicates only a gentle paragraph to the issue,
and in the most indirect fashion. “It is possible to take up an
indigenous symbol in some way, without necessarily considering
it idolatry,” the Pope notes, adding that “a myth charged with
spiritual meaning can be used to advantage and not always
considered a pagan error.” In a sign that the “Pachamama” furor
was simple hysteria, the paragraph was barely noticed in the
same media congratulating Francis for not agreeing to ordain
married men.

PERFORMING INCARNATION

Yet the furore in October showed the real action was
there, in the question of enculturation. Why else would the
Preaching must become incarnate, spirituality must become incarnate
devil bother, if the Gospel itself were not at stake? As Francis constantly makes clear in *Querida Amazonia*, to enculturate the Gospel is to perform the Incarnation. “Preaching must become incarnate, spirituality must become incarnate, ecclesial structures must become incarnate,” he notes right at the start. His entire text can be read as an attempt to move that process along, and to identify the obstacles and temptations that impede it.

It is against this background that Francis’ move over ministries can best be understood. The greatest impediment to enculturate the Gospel would be to fail to see what the Spirit is already doing in the Amazonian Church. In paragraph 94, Francis notes that “wherever there is a particular need, [God] has already poured out the charisms that can meet it.” He then points to the way almost all of the region’s Catholic communities are run by lay people, 60 per cent of them women; only a tiny proportion have resident clergy. Meanwhile, in the most discreet way possible, he notes in footnote 132 how “in some countries of the Amazon Basin, more missionaries go to Europe or the United States than remain to assist their own Vicariates in the Amazon region.” In other words: what is the real problem here? Is it really lack of clergy?

Francis, who has followed the synod process intensely, is in no doubt where the Spirit is pointing. A Church with Amazonian features capable of newly enculturating the Gospel requires “the stable presence of mature and lay leaders endowed with authority,” he notes, adding that such people are “familiar with the languages, cultures, spiritual experience and communal way of life” of the region. A Church “open to the Spirit’s boldness” will allow “the growth of a specific ecclesial culture that is distinctively lay,” he suggests.

Of course Francis calls for greater access to the sacraments, quoting *Amoris laetitia*, along with more vocations and missionaries. But he is quick to add that a greater presence of ordained ministers would be a “very narrow aim were we not also to strive to awaken new life in communities.” The mission is a new enculturation of the Gospel, not to build up the institution, and sacraments alone are not sufficient to evangelize. The objective is to “promote an encounter with God’s word and growth in holiness” for which “various kinds of lay service” are necessary. “Let us be fearless,” he says earlier. “Let us not clip the wings of the Holy Spirit.”

**GOD’S GIFT: CREATIVE NEW THINKING**

Then come paragraphs 99 to 103, which is where Francis discerns the grace: God’s gift of creative new thinking. The synod final report had called for bishops to be able to endow
lay or religious men and women with authority “through a ritual act” on behalf of the Christian community, such that their authority would be recognized also “at the civil and local levels.” At the time, one of the synod’s organizers told me that this was “much bigger than the female diaconate”, given the number of women who lead Amazon communities, and better reflected the desire of those women to have their authority recognized but without being clericalized.

In Querida Amazonia Francis takes this idea and copper-bottoms it, stamping it with his approval—specifically for women who play a central role in Amazonian communities. They should be given leadership roles that do not require ordination, he says, adding that “these services entail stability, public recognition and a commission from the bishop.” This, he says, “would also allow women to have a real and effective impact on the organization, in the most important decisions and in the direction of communities, while continuing to do so in a way that reflects their womanhood.” (The Vatican translation misses something of the Spanish: “. . . but without ceasing to do so with a distinctively female stamp.”)

In other words, the Spirit is raising up from the Amazon something the name of the great river itself suggests: a strong female leader, not a cleric manqué but endowed with charisms our times call for. Two paragraphs later he notes how “in this historical moment, the Amazon region challenges us to transcend limited perspectives and ‘pragmatic’ solutions mired in partial approaches, in order to seek paths of enculturation that are broader and bolder.” Proclaiming an enculturated Gospel, in other words, calls for the enculturation of ministries.

EMBRACE CHANGE: SPIRIT CALLING

Perhaps the greatest paradox of Querida Amazonia is that, just at the moment when it appears to reject an anticipated change in the Church’s practice, it asks the Church to embrace another change—the one the Pope hears the Spirit calling for, which is far more radical than the one the world thinks Francis has nervously avoided.

So far the exhortation has captivated some, disappointed others, perplexed many and frustrated not a few. But one thing is clear: this is a Pope who takes seriously government of the Church by discernment. And who will follow the Spirit when it blows where it wills, along the great river.

Dr. Austen Ivereigh
Oxford University, England
INTRODUCTION

The book’s occasion was the Synod of Bishops for Amazonia (October 2019) and the debates there concerning the discussion of ordaining married men priests. There are two parts to this review: first, presentation of the chapters of the book, then assessment.


WHAT DO YOU FEAR?

“While the world was echoing with the din created by a strange media synod that overrode the real synod, we met together. We exchanged our ideas and our anxieties. We prayed and meditated in silence” (19). The authors cannot be silent since “on every side, the waves of relativism are submerging the barque of the Church . . . Jesus is asleep in the barque” (21, 22). They offer their search for truth to the people of God “in a spirit of filial obedience, to Pope Francis” (20) and invite everyone to complete or critique it.

THE CATHOLIC PRIESTHOOD (BENEDICT XVI)

A defective theology of worship leads some to reject the necessity of an authentically cultic priesthood in the New Covenant. The crisis in the priesthood results from this perceived opposition between ministries and cultic priesthood. Although in a conference on the priesthood immediately after the Vatican Council Benedict XVI himself “thought that [he] had to present the priest of the New Testament as the one who meditates on the Word of God, and not as a ‘craftsman of worship,’” (38) he long came to see that such bypasses the cultic foundations of the priesthood that explain celibacy. Newness in Christ transforms institutions
The crisis in the priesthood results from this perceived opposition between ministries and cultic priesthood of the Old Covenant: “From now on, the cultic act proceeds by way of an offering of the totality of one’s life in love” (26). The cleansing of the temple action announced a new form of divine adoration, and thus the new nature of worship and the priesthood—the building of stone was to be replaced by Jesus’ own body as the new Temple.

For ministers, the New Testament employs the terms, *apostolos, episkopos* (in gentile settings)/*presbyteros* (in Jewish milieux), and *diakonos*. Already in Clement of Rome, *First Letter to the Corinthians* (96 C.E.), we see *episkopos*, *presbyteros*, and *diakonos* designating, respectively, the high priest, the priest, and the Levite. Such Christological and pneumatological interpretation of the Old Testament “is the expression of a historical transition that corresponds to the internal logic of the text” (35). In the new worship: “the love of Christ, which is always present in the Eucharist, is the new act of adoration. Consequently, the priestly ministries of Israel are ‘annulled’ in the service of love . . .”

“In the common awareness of Israel, priests were strictly obliged to observe sexual abstinence during the times when they led worship and were therefore in contact with the divine mystery . . .” But, “Since the priests of the Old Testament had to dedicate themselves to worship only during set times, marriage and the priesthood were compatible.” With regular and even daily celebration of the Eucharist now essential for the Church, “their [priests] entire life is in contact with the divine mystery. This requires on their part exclusivity with regard to God. Consequently, this excludes other ties that, like marriage, involve one’s whole life. From the daily celebration of the Eucharist, which implies a permanent state of service to God, was born spontaneously the impossibility of a matrimonial bond” (41). Sexual abstinence that was functional transforms into ontological abstinence. Since “the married state involves a man in his totality, and since serving the Lord likewise requires the total gift of a man, it does not seem possible to carry on the two vocations simultaneously” (42). In fact, in the early Church, “married men could not receive the sacrament of Holy Orders unless they had pledged to observe sexual abstinence . . . like the marriage of Saint Joseph and the Virgin Mary” (42).

Three texts clarify the Christian notion of priesthood. *Ps 16:5-6*: “the Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.” This was used for the tonsure ceremony that marked entrance into the clergy. The Levite was allotted no land, he lived only by God and for God. In the New Covenant, the privation of land is transformed: “priests, because they are radically consecrated to God renounce marriage and family.” The disciples “left
Without such a forsaking on our part there is no priesthood (Luke 5:11). “Without such a forsaking on our part there is no priesthood” (46). Only on the foundation of this total being for God can be understood “celibacy, which applies to bishops throughout the Church, in both East and West, and, according to a tradition going back to a time close to that of the apostles, to priests in general in the Latin Church.” The second text is Deut 10:8; 18:5-8. The essential cultic role of the Levite is to carry the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord and to stand before the Lord to serve him and to bless in his name. The inner nature of the priesthood of the New Covenant is “a life in God’s presence, and with this also a ministry of representing others” (51). Located just after the consecration, this “standing” “points to being before the Lord present, that is, it indicates the Eucharist as the center of priestly life.” The liturgy is the central duty of the priest (54), even if it includes learning to know the Lord in his Word, making it known to all, and drawing near, in obedience. The last text is John 17:17: consecrate [sanctify] them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” Jesus asks the Father to include the Twelve in his mission, to ordain them priests (58). In the Old Testament, they washed and purified the priest candidate before he put on the sacred vestments; in the New, the only washing that can really purify man is truth, Jesus himself. So, Jesus is asking the Father to immerse them completely in himself.

LOVING TO THE END: AN ECCLESIOLOGICAL AND PASTORAL LOOK AT PRIESTLY CELIBACY (CARD. SARAH)

“During the Synod on Amazonia, I took the time to listen to people on the ground and to talk with experienced missionaries. These exchanges reassured me in the thought that the possibility of ordaining married men would be a pastoral catastrophe, lead to ecclesiological confusion, and obscure our understanding of the priesthood” (65–66).

A Pastoral Catastrophe. In revealing in his person the fullness of the priesthood, Jesus shows that “a priest is not only a man who performs a sacrificial function. He is a man who offers himself as a sacrifice through love, following Christ” (66). “Pope Benedict XVI demonstrates that priestly celibacy is not a welcome ‘spiritual supplement’ in the priest’s life. A consistent priestly life ontologically requires celibacy” (67). In this sense, priestly celibacy is necessary for a correct understanding of the priesthood. I fear that the plan to ordain married men as priests might generate a pastoral catastrophe—“how would a Christian community understand the priest if it is not obvious that he is ‘removed
from the common sphere’ and ‘delivered over to God?’ Is the intention to prevent these poorly evangelized populations from discovering the fullness of the Christian priesthood? The Christians of Guinea continued teaching the catechism and reciting daily prayers and the Rosary the ten years (1967–76) missionaries were expelled. “I think that if they had ordained married men in each village, the Eucharistic hunger of the faithful would have been extinguished. The people would have been cut off from that joy of receiving another Christ in the priest” (70). “The ordination of married men would deprive the young Churches that are being evangelized of this experience of the presence and of the visit of Christ, delivered and given in the person of the celibate priest” (71). For some bishops from the West or even from South America, celibacy has become a heavy load. Yet, “as a son of Africa, I cannot in conscience support the idea that people who are being evangelized should be deprived of this encounter with a priesthood that is fully lived out. The peoples of Amazonia have the right to a full experience of Christ the Bridegroom. We cannot offer them ‘second-class’ priests” (72). “A few theologians, or rather sorcerer’s apprentices” wish to use the poor as an experimental laboratory, and deprive them of the fullness of the priesthood. “A community that was formed according to the idea of a ‘right to the Eucharist’ would no longer be a disciple of Christ” (75). True, “many married men were ordained priest during the first millennium, but from the day of their ordination on, they were obliged to abstain from sexual relations with their wives.” It is intellectual dishonesty to assert there were married priests, but not to add that they were obliged to complete continence. That is why there was no opposition when the Council of Elvira (300 CE) excluded from the clerical state bishops, priests, and deacons suspected of engaging in sexual relations with their wives. Is there a vocation to be the wife of a priest? What about the children who would have the right to all resources necessary for their flourishing? Will married priests have to be paid accordingly as a consequence? (79) “To ordain a married man a priest would amount to diminishing the dignity of marriage and reducing the priesthood to a job [fonction]” (79). At a late date, in the Council in Trullo (691), the East allowed sexual relations to married men who had become priests, but this novelty was result of an error in transcribing the canons of the Council of Carthage (390 CE). Even now, the Eastern married clergy is in crisis, and divorce by priests has become a cause of ecumenical tension.4 “Many Orthodox Christians would never go to confession to a married priest. The sensus fidei causes the faithful to discern a form of incompleteness in the clergy who do not live out consecrated celibacy” (81). Yes, the Catholic Church
allowed married clergy in some Eastern Churches in union with Rome, but the purpose is to foster a gradual development toward the practice of celibacy, not by law, but for spiritual and pastoral reasons.

**Ecclesiological Confusion.** In *Pastores dabo vobis* (1992), John Paul II presents Christ as the Head of the Body that is the Church-Bride: this Bride “desires to be loved by the priest in the total, exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ the Head and Bridegroom loved her” (no. 29). Point is, “without the presence of the celibate priest, the Church can no longer become aware that she is the Bride of Christ” (83). So priestly celibacy is necessary to the identity of the Church.

There is a true analogy between the sacrament of Matrimony and the sacrament of Holy Orders, both of which culminate in a total gift of self. This is why the two sacraments are mutually exclusive . . . The priest’s capacity for spousal love is entirely given to and reserved for the Church. The logic of the priesthood excludes any ‘other spouse’ than the Church” (84–85).

Priests point out to spouses the meaning of the total gift. Spouses, by their conjugal life, point out to priests the meaning of their celibacy. Hence, “interfering with priestly celibacy is tantamount to injuring the Christian meaning of marriage” (86). Debates about celibacy have given rise to questions about the possibility of women being ordained priests or deacons. As representing Christ the Bridegroom, the priest is male. “Promoting the ordination of women amounts to denying their identity and the place of each sex” (88). “The government of the Church is a loving service of the bridegroom for the bride. Therefore it can be carried out only by men who are identified with Christ, the Bridegroom and Servant, through the sacramental character of priesthood” (90). As to women deacons, “we know, for example, that the women who were called ‘deaconesses’ were not recipients of the sacrament of Holy Orders. Ancient sources are unanimous in forbidding deaconesses to have any ministry at the altar during the liturgy.” In Syria, their role was the pre-baptismal anointing of the entire body of women. Besides, “the deaconesses were not ordained, but only blessed, as the Chaldean Pontifical specifies explicitly” (94). We must give women their entire place as women and not just grant them a little bit of the men’s place! Speaker after speaker in the Amazonia Synod called for transition from pastoral care by visitation to pastoral care of presence, ordination of married permanent deacons to the priesthood. Why reserve to clergy alone the task of proclaiming
We must give women their entire place as women and not just grant them a little bit of the men’s place. Jesus and witnessing to him? The laity, by dint of Baptism and Confirmation, are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord himself (AA, no. 3). “The ordination of married men would give an unfortunate signal that the laity is being clericalized” (98). After Francis Xavier evangelized Japan in 1549, persecution meant that Christians lived for two centuries without a priestly presence, yet they handed on the faith. They gave three signs by which each generation would recognize the return of priests: “they will be celibate, they will have a statue of Mary, they will obey the Pope of Rome” (97). Serious harm would be done to the universal church if it was left to each episcopal conference to opt for married priests in its territory.

Confusion in Understanding the Priesthood. It is no argument to say there already are exceptions by which married men ordained priests continued the use of marriage. By definition, an exception is transitory, “a rupture, a wound in the consistency of the priesthood” (108). The lack of priests does not justify such a rupture; the ordination of married men in young communities would prevent them from giving rise to the priestly vocation of celibate priests (109). To achieve their aim, some theologians reduce the priesthood to the administration of the sacraments alone (a functionalist concept of priesthood) or call for a married clergy side by side with a celibate clergy, which runs the risk of inculcating in the minds of the faithful the idea of a high and a low clergy. As Paul VI wrote: “the consecrated celibacy of the sacred ministers actually manifests the virginal love of Christ for the Church, and the virginal and supernatural fecundity of this marriage.”6 Every time a priest repeats “this is my Body,” he offers his body, as a man, in continuity with the sacrifice on the Cross (112). At mass the priest “does not become only an alter Christus, another Christ. He is truly ipse Christus; he is Christ himself . . . clothed with the person of Christ” (113). As to inculturation or the idea that the peoples of Amazonia do not understand celibacy or that it will always be foreign to their culture, I find “this sort of argument a contemptuous, neo-colonialist, and infantilizing mentality that shocks me” (117). Celibacy will always be a scandal to the world because it makes present the scandal of the Cross. Some people are projecting their doubts onto the Amazonian peoples. The Salesian, Father Lasarte,7 had this to say: “the proposal of the viri probati as a solution to evangelization is an illusory, almost magical proposal that goes nowhere near to addressing the real underlying problem.” Under the pretext of inculturation, people are defending the rights of the indigenous peoples, working to promote their economic development. We have become specialists in the fields of social, political, or economic...
activity. But this is not the heart of the mandate that Jesus gave us. The faithful expect us to be specialists in promoting the encounter between man and God. Some argue that celibacy is the distinguishing feature of religious life and should be reserved to it. I am convinced that the future of priesthood lies in Gospel radicalism: “the full concept of priesthood includes a life led according to the evangelical counsels”—even though it does not require the profession by vows of the evangelical counsels (see LG, no. 44)—italics mine. “Celibacy is the sign and instrument of our entrance into the priestly being of Jesus” (137). St. Paul VI thus declared, “I would rather give my life than change the law on celibacy.” And Pope Francis too: “personally, I think that celibacy is a gift for the Church. Second, I don’t agree with allowing optional celibacy, no.” Hence, “to diminish [the ontological-sacramental connection between priesthood and celibacy] would be to call into question the Magisterium of the Council and of Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI. I humbly beg Pope Francis to protect us from such a possibility by vetoing any attempt to weaken the law of priestly celibacy, even limited to one particular region” (138).

IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS (THE TWO AUTHORS)

They write that their decision to take up the pen was prompted solely by love for the Church (145). For, wrote they: “it is urgent and necessary for everyone—bishops, priests, and lay people—to take a fresh look with the eyes of faith at the Church and at priestly celibacy, which protects her mystery” (146), for “no one is prevented from proclaiming the truth of the faith in a spirit of peace, unity, and charity.”

A FEW QUESTIONS

Here begins assessment of the book.

The Pull of Celibacy. The celibacy of ministers has been a phenomenon in many religions. Celibacy can also be practiced on philosophical grounds (Stoics) or mistaken theological grounds (Gnostics who consider the body evil). Already 1 Tim 4:3 spoke of those who “forbid marriage and require abstinence from food that God created to be received with thanks . . . .” The magnet of the celibacy of Christ himself draws the church (“some have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven,” Matt 19:12). The Blessed Virgin Mary became theotokos, God-bearer, and without ever knowing man, she shared fully in her Son’s work of redemption. Paul was celibate: “I wish everyone to be as I am, but each has a particular gift from God” (1 Cor 7:7). He even counseled widows and the
unmarried to remain as they were, unless they could not exercise self-control (1 Cor 7:8, 9). In fact, some Christians in Corinth believed that “it is good for a man not to touch a woman” (1 Cor 7:7—euphemism for sexual intercourse). Fired with the possession of the Spirit, expecting imminent resurrection, they may have considered that “even those believers who are married should not have sexual relations with their spouses.” Tatian and the Enchatites (enkrateia = self-control) forbade marriage and imposed abstinence from meat and wine. It appears that celibacy was a requirement for Baptism in the early Syrian Church! No wonder if priests called to live the ideal of discipleship would be attracted to celibacy.

But does Priesthood ontologically require Celibacy? The magisterium of the church has consistently seen celibacy as not demanded by the very nature of the priesthood.

Perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, commended by Christ the Lord . . . is held by the Church to be of great value in a special manner for the priestly life . . . Indeed, it is not demanded by the very nature of the priesthood, as is apparent from the practice of the early Church and from the traditions of the Eastern Churches . . . [where] there are also married priests of highest merit. This holy synod, while it commends ecclesiastical celibacy, in no way intends to alter that different discipline which legitimately flourishes in the Eastern Churches. It permanently exhorts all those who have received the priesthood and marriage to persevere in their holy vocation . . . Indeed, celibacy has a many-faceted suitability for the priesthood.

Suitability is not necessity. In saying, “it is not demanded by the very nature of the priesthood,” the very text cites ancient authorities. “This holy synod . . . in no way intends to alter that different discipline which legitimately flourishes in the Eastern Churches.” Cardinal Sarah considers it an aberration resulting from error in transcribing the canons of the Council of Carthage of 390 CE; if tolerated for Eastern Rites in union with Rome, it is only so they may evolve to celibacy. Pastores dabo vobis, no. 29 mentions the priest’s spousal relationship to the church, yet calls celibacy a law. It does not affirm celibacy as ontologically necessary to the priesthood—that would invalidate any married priesthood, both in West and East. PDV, no. 29 says:

In this light one can more easily understand and appreciate the reasons behind the centuries-old choice which the Western Church has made and maintained . . . of conferring
This synod strongly reaffirms that the priesthood be conferred only on those men who have received from God the gift of the vocation to celibate chastity.

Inasmuch as it is a law, it expresses the Church’s will, even before the will of the subject expressed by his readiness. But the will of the Church finds its ultimate motivation in the link between celibacy and sacred ordination, which configures the priest to Jesus Christ the head and spouse of the Church. The Church, as the spouse of Jesus Christ, wishes to be loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her head and spouse loved her . . .

The Question of the Sensus Fidei. The Synod of Bishops is an exercise of discernment by the whole church on behalf of a particular church. The sensus fidei of some 200 bishops, clergy, religious, and laity from all parts of the church declares in nos. 110, 111 of the Synod document, which garnered 128 votes (more than the required two-thirds), with 41 against.

The community has a right to the celebration of the Eucharist, which derives from its essence and its place in the economy of salvation . . . flourishing communities truly cry out for the celebration of the Eucharist . . .

. . . Sometimes it takes not just months but even several years before a priest can return to a community to celebrate the Eucharist, offer the sacrament of reconciliation or anoint the sick in the community. We appreciate celibacy as a gift of God (SC 1967 1) to the extent that this gift enables the missionary disciple, ordained to the priesthood, to dedicate himself fully to the service of the Holy People of God . . . We know that this discipline “is not demanded by the very nature of the priesthood” (PO 16) although there are many practical reasons for it . . . Considering that legitimate diversity does not harm the
we propose that criteria and dispositions be established to ordain as priests suitable and respected men of the community

Pope Francis did not even mention celibacy; he bypassed the sharp polarities, while praising the final Report, recognizing it as the discernment of the local church, and urging everyone to read it. Ivereigh wrote:

_In a context of false polarisation the greatest mistake a leader makes is to resolve it by allowing one side to defeat the other. Rather, the task of the leader is patiently and lovingly to hold together the polarity—positions that pull in a different direction, but are not per se in contradiction, as in the case of a celibate and a married priesthood—and thus open the space for a “third way” that the Holy Spirit will in time reveal._15

A married clergy was the normal feature in the early church

Sexual Continence and Ministry at the Altar. Peter was married (Mark 1:29-31). With the rest of the apostles, he took along “a Christian wife” (NABRE, 1 Cor 9:5) on his apostolic journeys.16 Bishops, presbyters, and deacons of the early church were mostly married, with children (1 Tim 3:2). A married clergy was the normal feature in the early church. Pope Hormisdas (514–23) was father to Pope Silverius, his successor.17 For the early times, we speak of clerical continence (non-use of marriage), not yet celibacy as such. We have no historical record of when and how clerical continence began.18 We only know that from the fourth century councils (local and ecumenical) began to prescribe continence in marriage for clerics, for example, the Spanish Council of Elvira19 (300 CE), some indicating such tradition as apostolic.20 The First Council of Aries (314) attempted a motive: “we exhort our brothers (in the episcopate) to make sure that priests and deacons have no (sexual) relations with their wives, since they are serving the ministry every day [emphasis mine]. Whoever will act against this decision, will be deposed from the honor of the clergy.”21 The Council of Nicaea (325) debated making this compulsory for all clergy, also the Council of Carthage (390). Sozomen22 reports that it deferred to the view of Paphnutius, a confessor, that marriage being honorable and chaste, cohabitation with their wives was chastity. Such a law would be difficult to bear...
and might provoke incontinence; according to the ancient tradition of the church, those who were unmarried before sacred orders were required to remain so, and those who were married were not to put away their wives. Some modern historians assert that historically Sozomen was mistaken about the decrees of the Council of Carthage. But, truth is not measured by the historical accuracy of supporting documents. The Eastern Church hardly relied just on Paphnutius. The theology of marriage, as sacred and chaste, is faultless. Concrete experience raised human and moral difficulties. If the wife refused to live like a sister? Or they agreed at first but then claimed marital rights? Council after council returned to the minutiae of policing such practice. The decretal, *Ad Gallos episcopos* of Pope Innocent I (401–17) or perhaps Pope Damasus, has it that “. . . if intercourse is defiling (*pollutio*), it is obvious that the priest must be ready to carry out his celestial functions so that he himself not be found impure.” The Old Testament is clear on pollution.

If a man has sexual relations with a woman, they shall both bathe in water and be unclean until evening (Lev 15:18). If any one of you . . . dares while he is in a state of uncleanness, to draw near the sacred offerings which the Israelites consecrate to the Lord, such a one shall be cut off from my presence. I am the Lord (Lev 21:3).

Eph 5:25-27 could hardly regard marital union as pollution yet present it as sacrament of the love of Christ for his Bride, the Church! If daily celebration of the Eucharist imposes permanent clerical sexual continence in marriage, what about daily communion of Christian couples? Some Councils sought the biblical foundation and the apostolic origins in 1 Tim 3:2: “a bishop must be irreproachable, married only once . . . He must manage his own household well, keeping his children under control with perfect dignity.” Other translations of *mias gunaikos andra* are: “faithful to his wife” (NIV), “husband of one wife” (KJ). We work with this last, as it corresponds to the Vulgate’s *unius uxoris virum*, as cited in the later councils. This stipulation occurs for all three groups of ministers—the *episkopos*, the presbyter, and the *diakonos*—and never for other Christians. Tradition came to see this as prohibiting the ordination of remarried laymen. Continence in marriage would be an impediment to subsequent marriage, for there could be no real marriage unless it was potentially open to sexual consummation. Pope Siricius interpreted “husband of one wife” in terms of clerical continence, alluding to the purity required of those approaching the altar—this, of course, has no connection with the text of 1 Tim 3:2. Some fathers related the *unius uxoris vir* of 1 Tim 3:2 to *uni viro* of...
2 Cor 11:2: “for I am jealous of you with the jealousy of God since I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” “Marital love between Christ the bridegroom and his bride the Church is ever a virginal love.”

Ironical that Eph 5:22-23 portrayed this marital union of Christ to the Church in the real union of a Christian man with his wife! The exclusive love of the Christian couple models the minister’s exclusive love for the bride, the Church.

East and West quickly upheld sexual continence for bishops. Council after Council re-imposed this law for lower clergy—difficulties were normal for married couples living in a “brother-sister” relationship (see above). They went into details of sleeping arrangements to avoid scandal. Some recommended or sometimes required (Lyons, 583 CE) physical separation.

In the fifth century, the Persian Church, which became Nestorian, legislated against clerical continence and authorized those already in orders to contract marriage. The Synod in Trullo (691) set the current practice of the Eastern Church. Bishops are to separate from their wives, by agreement, before consecration (canon 12). Married priests and deacons may have marital relations, except in periods they serve at the altar (canon 13).

As to the West, the Lateran Council of 1123 finally mandated clerical celibacy: “We absolutely forbid priests, deacons, or sub-deacons to live with concubines and wives, and to cohabit with other women, except those whom the council of Nicaea permitted to dwell with them solely on account of necessity, namely a mother, sister, paternal or maternal aunt, or other such persons, about whom no suspicion could justly arise.” Priesthood is now separated from marriage, “that which in the past was continence for married ministers, in our day becomes the celibacy of those who are not.”

What pulls Priestly Life and Ministry Together? Benedict XVI affirms that “The liturgy is the central duty of the priest” (54). He noted that rejection of the necessity of an authentically cultic priesthood induced a crisis that pitted ministries against the cultic priesthood, some seeing the priesthood as a function not a state of life. To be noted, however, is that in New Testament times the Eucharist was not as yet thought of as sacrifice. In fact, Christians continued worshiping in the temple. Christian cultic priesthood could emerge only when Christians constituted a new religion. The rite Jesus established at the Last Supper would (in early second century) be seen as sacrifice and consequently its celebrants as priests.

Hebrews speaks of the high priesthood of Christ without associating this with the Eucharist or the Last Supper.
and ministry—teaching, sanctifying, and ruling as aspects of shepherding the flock.38

Duquesne University, Pittsburgh

ENDNOTES
2. In an open letter of January 14, 2020, Cardinal Sarah sought to tamp down the firestorm that erupted when the joint publication appeared. He outlined the consultations he had with Benedict XVI over the matter, particularly Benedict XVI’s approval on November 25, 2019: “For my part, I agree that the text should be published in the form you have proposed.” The two men are close friends.
3. The 2011 English version of Eucharistic Prayer II simplified the image of “standing” for “be in your presence.”
4. Note 8, page 80: some years ago, the president of an Orthodox association of priests observed that fewer and fewer emancipated women agree to lead the demanding life of a cleric’s wife.
5. Note 14: In fact, a student of the Ratzinger circle of former students, Marianne Schlosser, at a symposium in Rome on September 28, 2019, cited an 8th-century Syrian author: “the priest is the father of all the faithful. And so if . . . he marries, he can be compared to a man who marries his own daughter.”
7. He organizes the 47 Salesian mission communities, within 62 different ethnic groups, in all 612,000 Christians.
10. This chapter cites Benedict XVI, sometimes extensively, 26 times; Pope Francis is referred to 4 times.
16. The Greek is “a sister, a woman.” Some argue that the reference must be to a virgin who lives with an apostle, not as wife, but as a housekeeper.


19. “Bishops, presbyters, and deacons, and all other clerics having a position in the ministry, are ordered to abstain completely from their wives and not have children. Whoever, in fact, does this shall be expelled from the dignity of the clerical state” (canon 33).

20. For example, the Council of Carthage, 390 CE.


23. Ibid., note 55.

24. Many moderns hardly understand this notion of pollution or impurity. Such impurity was not ethical, rather cultic—prevents concourse with others and presence in holy places. Loss of body fluids was considered as small dyings (they did not yet know that the semen replenished itself by millions every night of youth). Death, as opposed to Life (God), was the ultimate uncleanness.

25. Episkopos is literally “overseer.” Pauline communities were under presbyters/elders who in their capacity of pastoring the community were called overseers/bishops.


28. Potterie, “Biblical Foundation,” 2. The complementary “wife of one man” is used in 1 Tim 5:9 for widows at least sixty years old.

29. Second marriages were always thought of in the early Church as a concession to incontinence, see Cholij, “Priestly Celibacy,” 13, note 7.

30. Ibid., 2.


33. Ibid., 5. Cholij mentions the Council of Beth Lafath (484) that, though recognizing the antiquity of this tradition, to eradicate or regularize clerical incontinence, abrogated the tradition, rather than the West that continued to reinforce it.

34. See Cholij, “Clerical Celibacy,” 8. The East regards this Synod as part of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (681–2), thus having supreme legislative authority. It presented “temporary” continence as what the Synod of Carthage (390) as “what the apostles taught and what antiquity itself has observed,” when that Synod had declared perpetual continence (continentes esse in omnibus) so.

35. Ibid., 9.


37. Ibid., 13.

38. “Thus, by assuming the role of the Good Shepherd, they will find in the very exercise of pastoral love the bond of priestly perfection which will unify their lives and activities. This pastoral love flows mainly from the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is therefore the center and root of the whole priestly life” (PO, 14).
INTRODUCTION

The suggestion at the Synod for Amazonia (October 2019) of ordaining married men (viri probati) already serving the pastoral needs of isolated communities raised a storm. One of the most vocal opponents was Cardinal Robert Sarah. His book, written with the collaboration of pope emeritus, Benedict XVI, has just been published. Cardinal Sarah writes,

>Celibacy is for the priest the means of entering into an authentic vocation as spouse . . . . There is a true analogy between the sacrament of Matrimony and the sacrament of Holy Orders, both of which culminate in a total gift of self. This why the two sacraments are mutually exclusive . . . The priest’s capacity for spousal love is entirely given to and reserved for the Church. The logic of the priesthood excludes any ‘other spouse’ than the Church.

Without necessarily understanding marriage and holy orders as essentially “mutually exclusive,” this article takes the position that despite its challenges, the Catholic Church cannot afford to do without clerical celibacy.

The Church of Christ, the founder himself, the Eucharist, and the ministerial priesthood are mysteries; they require faith for understanding. They all have intrinsic links with the one message of Christ, the arrival of the kingdom of God. Celibacy is a state or lifestyle full of mystery and necessarily linked to the ministerial priesthood that is a service to God’s people. Today, the charism of celibacy challenges the church. But God’s mysteries are above merely human reasoning and cultures. Being above does not mean being against; because God is the author of both the human reason and his mysteries, reason can open itself up to mystery through the gift of faith. Faith and obedience will appear strikingly in this reflection.

THE KINGDOM MAKES DEMANDS ON THE DISCIPLE

Jesus heralded the Good News with a war cry challenging the status quo: “Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand” (Matt 4:17). Repentance is the watchword. John opened his gospel with the advent of the Word as a duel between light and darkness: “the light shines in darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it” (John 1:5—New Living Translation). We
know that the witness of faith can never succumb to the darkness of any era or culture.

When Peter blurted out, “we have given up everything and followed you. What will there be for us?” (Matt 19:27), Jesus answered, in the version by Luke:

Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not receive [back] an overabundant return in this present age and eternal life in the age to come” (Luke 18:29-30).

Luke includes “wife” and “children” among what an itinerant disciple of Jesus leaves. Peter was married when called (see Mark 1:29-31) and with the rest of the apostles took along “a sister, a woman” (1 Cor 9:5) on his apostolic journeys.⁵ The phrasing, especially as Paul had himself chosen celibacy, must refer to a virgin who lives with an apostle, not as wife, but as a housekeeper.⁶ This suggests that the apostles gave up the use of marriage.

In this, they would be assimilating to Christ who preached the kingdom of God in celibacy. When his disciples objected to his teaching on marriage and divorce that, “If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry” (Matt 19:10), Jesus proclaimed, “some are incapable of marriage because they were born so; some because they were made so by others; some because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 19:12). “For the sake of the kingdom” is missional, it calls for total self-donation in order to build it up. Jesus both defended his own choice of celibacy (“eunuch”) and “asked them to give up the family and conjugal life . . . an existence totally committed to the service of the kingdom.”⁷ So, Cardinal Stickler argues for the “apostolic origins of clerical celibacy and its observance from the very beginning,”⁸ in that Jesus in Luke 18:28-30 laid down “the commitment to continence in the use of marriage after ordination.”⁹

Paul too pursued a celibate lifestyle. To the Corinthians asking about the married life, he said, “Indeed, I wish everyone to be as I am, but each has a particular gift from God . . .” (1 Cor 7:7). He received the charism of celibacy for the exercise of ministry among the Gentiles.

The apostolic Heart of Mary was steeped in celibate love. The divine motherhood of the Blessed Virgin illustrates the powerful fruitfulness of celibate self-giving by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). Virgin and Mother, she is the spouse
The celibate priest becomes spouse of the church, father of God’s people of the Holy Spirit, the mother of God who serves the divine plan of salvation. The celibate priest becomes spouse of the church, father of God’s people, serving the same plan of salvation.

**INTIMATIONS OF CELIBACY AMONG THE EARLY CHRISTIANS**

A faction in Corinth already held that “it is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman” (1 Cor 7:1). “Touching a woman” is euphemism for sexual intercourse, that is, this faction rejected all intercourse of man and woman.\(^{10}\) It appeared that for them “even those believers who are married should not have sexual relations with their spouses.”\(^ {11}\)

Tertullian of North Africa (circa 153–230) clearly preferred celibacy to marriage, which for him was only a lesser evil—marry we may, because marry we must—to avoid the greater evil of burning in hell. In *An Exhortation to Chastity* addressed to his wife, Tertullian plotted three degrees of holiness of Christian life: remain a virgin from birth, live a life of virginity after baptism, and one and only one marriage—a second marriage after the death of one spouse he equated with polygamy.\(^ {12}\)

1 Tim 3:2-3 decreed that “a bishop\(^ {13}\) must be irreproachable, married only once . . . He must manage his own household well, keeping his children under control with perfect dignity.” These presbyter-bishops, forerunners of bishops and priests, clearly had children. However, excluding remarriage after the death of the wife indicates that the church was straining for ways of evangelical radicalism for its clergy. Eusebius of Caesarea (was present at Nicaea) interpreted 1 Tim 3:2 as meaning that those dedicated to the service of the divine cult must abstain from sexual relations with their wives.\(^ {14}\)

In fact, Cardinal Stickler argues that celibacy is not just “suitable” to the priesthood, rather “really necessary and indispensable to [it].”\(^ {15}\) Long before it was first codified as written norm (*lex*) in early fourth century, celibacy was obligatory custom or legal practice (*ius*, law).\(^ {16}\) The first written norm, an isolated move at the time, the Spanish Council of Elvira (300 CE), imposed the obligation of continence:

> It has seemed good absolutely to forbid the bishops, the priests, and the deacons, i.e., all the clerics engaged in service at the altar, to have [sexual] relations with their wives and procreate children; should anyone do so, let him be excluded from the honor of the clergy (canon 33).\(^ {17}\)

The Council of Nicaea (325 CE) debated making celibacy compulsory for all clergy—bishops in both East and West were
already bound to continence in marriage. Sozomen (375–477) reports that Paphnutius, a confessor, argued that marriage being honorable and chaste, cohabitation with their wives was chastity. Restriction might lead to incontinence, besides, the ancient tradition of the church prescribed that those unmarried before ordination remain so and the married not to put away their wives. Some consider this intervention of Paphnutius unhistorical. This story about Paphnutius perhaps undergirds the Eastern tradition which in the Council of Trullo (691) legislated that bishops must practice perfect continence (if married, they must separate from their wives); others who have received orders may not marry, but ordained married men may enjoy the use of marriage. Nevertheless, during their “time of service” in the sanctuary, they would, like Old Testament priest, give up the use of marriage.

Be that as it may, only one canon has come down from Nicaea on this:

*The great Synod has stringently forbidden any bishop, presbyter, deacon, or any one of the clergy whatever, to have a subintroducta dwelling with him, except only a mother, or sister, or aunt, or such persons only as are beyond all suspicion (canon 3).*

*Subintroducta* means a woman furtively introduced. Does a wife not being mentioned among women permitted to live in a cleric’s house suggest that the fathers took obligation to continence for granted? Canon 2 of the Council of Carthage (390 CE) reported that “the bishops declared unanimously: it pleases us all that bishop, priest, and deacon, guardians of purity, abstain from [conjugal intercourse] with their wives, so that those who serve at the altar may keep a perfect chastity.”

Pope Innocent I (401–417) received questions among which was the chastity and purity of priests. His answer to the third question was clear:

*It has been decided with respect to bishops, priests, and deacons, who are obliged to participate in the divine services . . . that they are bound not only by us but by the divine Scriptures to chastity; to which effect the fathers have also enjoined corporal continence.*

Eventually in the West, Lateran I (1123) made into general law the prohibition of cohabiting with wives (canon 7). Lateran Council II (1139) decreed Holy Orders an impediment to marriage, making any attempt at marriage by an ordained cleric
invalid. The monk Gratian in 1142 initiated the beginning of canon law. His collection of all laws of the first millennium, called the Decretum of Gratian, accepted the Paphnutius story at the Council of Nicaea and canon 13 of the Council of Trullo (691), though not binding on the Latin Church, yet as explaining the diverse legislation in the East as regards celibacy.

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The foundations for a mystical theology of priesthood are found in the interconnectedness of Christ with the mystery of Holy Orders and the Eucharist. Christ is the priest of the New Covenant. He offers a new sacrifice in his own blood. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (John 15:13). On the cross, our high priest made a total self-donation to the Father and for us. On the cross, he proved himself the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep, the celibate loving Bridegroom of his Church. “ Ordination elevates the man ordained into a supernatural organic union with Christ.” Characterized by character he acts “in the person of Christ.” “Character” translates the Greek word, sphragis, which denotes a seal, an impress, or imprint that “conforms his person to Christ and impresses his [Christ’s] likeness on him.” These acts flow from who/what he is, agere sequitur esse. He is thus Christ’s ambassador and steward of his mysteries (2 Cor 5:20; 1 Cor 4:1). He too is called to total self-donation, to celibate love. The Church expects from the ordained priest a spousal love as the Head himself: “A pastoral love in his duty—24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year (even when he is not actively involved in ministerial tasks).” St. John Paul II writes: “the Church, as the Spouse of Jesus Christ, wishes to be loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her Head and Spouse love her. Priestly celibacy, then, is the gift of self in and with Christ to his Church . . .” (Pastores dabo vobis, no. 29).

THE EUCHARIST AND THE MINISTERIAL PRIESTHOOD

The celebration on Christ’s Cross on Calvary was his total self-gift to God for sinners. It speaks of celibate love on the cross. It happened on Calvary, but its institution was the night before at his Last Supper where he also instituted the priesthood. He made the apostles priests to celebrate for the priestly people and hand on the event to posterity. “Through it [the sacrament of order] priests, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are signed with a special character and are conformed to Christ the Priest in such a way that they can act in the person...”
to pronounce “this is my body,” “this is my blood,” means that “the self of the priest is totally transparent to the self of Christ.” Bread and wine are symbolic of the priest-victim Christ; they are changed to be his body and blood, the victim on the cross. For the priest to pronounce “this is my body,” “this is my blood,” means that “the self of the priest is totally transparent to the self of Christ.”

Such transparency includes total self-donation to redeem humans and form Christ’s spouse, the Church, the kingdom of God on earth. The revealed kingdom makes demands on, and challenges for, the disciples.

Benedict XVI draws an argument for celibacy by assimilation to Old Testament priests who abstained from sexual union whenever they were ministering. Now we have daily Mass:

_This requires on their part exclusivity with regard to God. Consequently, this excludes other ties that, like marriage, involve one’s whole life. From the daily celebration of the Eucharist, which implies a permanent state of service to God, was born spontaneously the impossibility of a matrimonial bond. We can say that the sexual abstinence that was functional was transformed automatically into an ontological abstinence._

**THE SPIRITUALITY OF CELIBACY**

Clerical celibacy is a matter of faith, to be accepted as a gift from God. One must have eyes fixed on Jesus and trust completely in him. Peter could walk on the water to Jesus, only if he kept his focus on him. Any presumption or lack of dependence on Jesus and he begins to sink. “You have so little faith . . . why did you doubt?” said Jesus (Matt 14:22-33).

The human person is necessarily a being-in-relation, physically, socially and spiritually. “It is not good for man to be alone.” Celibacy makes crucial demands on sexuality. One experiences “loss of fulfillment of the sexual instinct” or “loss of fulfillment in the sexual area.” “How can anyone resist the frequent vehement urges for [sexual] pleasures?” asks Kiesling. Chastity calls for the integration of sexuality into our lives as humans, both in the married state or single. Since sexuality must be integrated into human living, the celibate has to have good knowledge of sexuality. The wise celibate acknowledges, affirms, and accepts his sexuality. One can be at home in one’s sexuality without abusing it. Even with temptations and the tendency to sin (vitium concupiscendi), St. Augustine advises: “Adopt a patient and loving struggle against that never-tamed habit of the flesh.” This experience teaches humility. The celibate should not pretend to be a superman. Without faith, no miracle; the miracle of celibacy requires faith, obedience, and humility.
Sexual potency or energy can be at the service of marriage and of celibacy. The celibate knowing and accepting his sexuality has to know how to sublimate its energy. Conscience is an enormous area for study and formation in the celibate. St. John Cardinal Henry Newman called it the “aboriginal vicar of Christ.” East African Swihili calls it “malaika wa roho”—angel of the heart. All moral action demands consulting conscience. Conscience enlightened by faith is the ultimate norm to guide celibate life style. Mahatma Gandi of India rightly called “pleasure without conscience” one of the seven capital sins of our age. Lived from conscience, celibate living is celebrated as a joyful feast when it enjoys insight and freedom. Celibacy imposed from outside the conscience becomes an unbearable burden. Conscience, the ultimate norm guiding man, is not absolute. With its spirit power, conscience can be open to something more than itself. Grace comes to conscience to help its upliftment. When this happens sexual nature opens to a happy coexistence with celibacy. An open dialogue is presumed such that fruitful cooperation results.

Both sexuality and celibacy are gifts, of nature and of grace respectively. They are gifts for love. Our divine master, Jesus, is both sexual and celibate. He is God and Love; his message is love, the kingdom of love. He invested all of himself, all his gifts, time and opportunities into making this kingdom a reality for us.

CONCLUSION

Sharing “a supernatural organic union with Christ,” the ordained is also priest and victim. This victimhood is manifest in his sacrificial celibate love and service. With Christ on the cross, in the Eucharist, the ordained stands on the vantage point to have a sense of sin. In the light of the Eucharist he sees what sin did to God and repents more. The celibate grows in the sense of God by frequent celebration of the Eucharist. This inspires in him the need for frequent confession of his own sins. It is no accident that on rising from the dead the first gift to the disciples was the Holy Spirit; Jesus gave the power to forgive sins in his hour of the Paschal mystery. This experience teaches the celibate humility and courage to keep striving for sinlessness.

It is unchristian to be discouraged by our sinfulness and failings. Jesus came for sinners. The scene of the wedding banquet he described was peopled with wounded and handicapped guests. We attend, ready to receive what he provides, including the wedding garment. He forgives and prays for our forgiveness. The celibate is aware of all this, and is not careless with all the Lord provides.

We see Christ’s life as goal directed—towards Jerusalem
to proclaim the kingdom of heaven by love. There we see his priesthood and his last supper. These are all connected and in service of the kingdom; they require faith, not rational or cultural experience. Likewise, celibacy which is not normal or in any cultural experience requires faith.

It is here one can consider the beauty of celibacy. Situated and connected with the Paschal mysteries for the kingdom of heaven, celibacy is beautiful. Detached and isolated, celibacy is ugly. The eye in its socket and hallowed by eyelashes is beautiful; pluck it from its place and put it on a dish, what a sorry site! The analogy may limp, but the point is that celibacy, dedicated for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, is beautiful.

Granted a proper spirituality, the celibate life style still remains painful, a challenge. Can the Church relax it for her priests? But the bride of Christ expects a bridegroom’s service of love from her ordained priest. Pope Francis listened compassionately as a pastor to such difficulties in the Church of Amazonia in current days. The response of the Church remained the same: fidelity to the apostolic tradition of celibacy. Every age in church history had felt the stand hard, a challenge in difficult atmosphere. However, the worst of times turns out the best of times for God. For God, nothing is impossible; his grace abounds. With sufficient integral formation and adequate spiritual life, the clerical celibate will yield abundant spiritual fruit.

Francis Edumalichukwu Okonkwo, C.S.Sp.
Holy Ghost Haven, Mgbidi, Nigeria

ENDNOTES
1. The opposition was eventually relieved when the Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father did not mandate such ordination. However, the matter may come up in another platform, as Pope Francis entrusted the bishops of the area with the task of coming up with solutions adequate for their pastoral needs.
3. Ibid., 84, 85.
5. NABRE translates as “a Christian wife,” but the Greek is literally, “a sister, a woman.”
7. Ibid., 237.
9. Ibid., 12
11. Ibid., 9.
12. Ibid., 20–21.
13. Episkopos is literally “ overseer.” At this point Christian communities were under presbyters/elders who in their capacity of pastor ing the community were called overseers/bishops.
15. Stickler, Clerical Celibacy, 106.
16. Ibid., 17.
17. Ibid., 22.
19. Stickler, Clerical Celibacy, 63; Galot, Theology of the Priesthood, 249, note 47 concurs: “the intervention of Paphnutius at the Council of Nicea . . . may not be considered as historical”
20. Galot, Theology of the Priesthood, 242. See also Stickler, Clerical Celibacy, 47.
21. Stickler, Clerical Celibacy, 62. However, there is no direct statement of this.
22. Ibid., 24.
24. Ibid., 45. This Council is wrongly interpreted as having introduced for the first time the general law of celibacy, with only unmarried men being admitted to the priesthood. It merely reemphasized the law of continence, though later legislation would still deal with married men ordained according, not contrary, to law. See Cholij, Roman, “Priestly celibacy in Patristics and in the history of the Church,” at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_01011993_chisto_en.html accessed May 12, 2020. Cholij is Secretary of the Apostolic Exarch for Ukrainian Catholics in Great Britain.
25. Stickler, Clerical Celibacy, 47. Cholij, “Priestly Celibacy,” note 64; “The Decretum Gratiani, part of the Corpus Iuris Canonici, gave inaccurate information on the background to Eastern discipline.”
30. From the Depths of Our Hearts, 41.
Priestly Formation in Africa in the Light of the Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis

This chapter reflects on the particular challenges facing priestly formation in Africa in dialogue with the new Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis. First, it explores the reception of the new Ratio in Africa. Then it exposes the challenges facing seminary formation in Africa, with particular reference to Nigeria and Cameroon. Finally, it focuses attention on the future of priestly formation in Africa and what values, especially African, can be mobilized for genuine formation of priests in the years to come.

1. African Reception of the Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis

The new Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis renews the last one, which dates back to 1970, though updated in 1985 with footnotes in the light of the new Code of Canon Law (1983). It has to be read in connection with other major documents, especially, Optatam totius (OT), Presbyterorum ordinis (PO) and Pastores dabo vobis (PDV).

When I told a conferee formator about the promulgation of a new Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis (RF) by the Congregation for the Clergy, he exclaimed: “Another document on formation? We have not finished reading the older ones.” This is very similar to the reaction of other formators in Nigeria and Cameroon with whom I have spoken.

Nevertheless, seminary formators and bishops in Africa generally welcome the new Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis. They underline that it upholds and confirms the concern for the transformation of seminary formation which has occupied the major part of reflection of different Episcopal conferences as well as national and regional seminaries’ commissions in Africa for the past ten years. Three major documents published by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria testify to the work done so far ... The Catholic Bishops of Cameroon dedicated their 41st Seminar (8–13 January 2018) to reflection on seminary formation and the study of the new Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis.

I was privileged to be present in Yaounde at the same time for the 1st Symposium and General Assembly of the Conference of Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar (COMSAM) under the title Consecrated Persons, Identity and Mission. It was enriching to confront the different visions of formation between bishops, religious superiors, and formators.
In line with their various experiences, African formators and pastors identify two major emphases of the new Ratio that are very relevant for priestly formation in Africa, namely, the emphasis on the pastoral dimension of formation and the value of the community in priestly formation.

**The Priest as Pastor**

The new Ratio underlines the pastoral identity of the priest. The unifying element in the formation is to help the seminarian develop “pastoral charity” (RF 42). The priest is being trained to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and has been constituted to be a pastor and leader (RF 32). Hence, initial formation should be of a missionary character meant to help the seminarian configure himself to Christ in pastoral ministry (RF 57).

This explains the simplified structuring of the different stages of formation: first cycle: “discipleship stage”; second cycle: “configuration stage” and the third stage, which is the diaconate ministry or “pastoral synthesis.” It is noted also that formation does not end with initial formation. Every priest remains responsible for his “ongoing formation” (RF 80–88). This ongoing formation as well “implies a continuous conversion of heart, the capacity to see one’s life and its events in the light of faith and, above all, of pastoral charity, by way of a total gift of self to the Church, according to the design of God” (RF 56). This is an added advantage compared to the 1970 Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis which seemed to give the impression that the priest is primarily a man of the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

The new emphasis on the pastoral dimension of priestly formation is important for Africa because, as Jordan Nyenyembe9 rightly argues, African Catholic priesthood inherited two viruses: the “virus of Christendom,” inherited from the West, and the “virus of Chiefdom” or the “Igwe syndrome,” inherited from African traditions. The virus of Christendom refers to the Tridentine emphasis on the priest as “an administrator of the sacraments and the teacher of the faith.” This definition favors sacredness. The priest is set apart from the rest of the faithful, superior in holiness. This gave rise to a “destructive clericalism . . . Priests behave as if they are bionic superhumans . . . They tend to be judgmental, hypocritical and insensitive to the sufferings of lay people.”10 They form a caste class among the people of God. The chiefdom virus, or the Igwe Syndrome, accounts for the priests comporting themselves as family or village chiefs. This gives rise to personality cult. The emphasis on the priest as pastor helps to avoid the tendency to clericalism and personality cult.
The Value of Community in Priestly Formation

Generally, it is taken for granted that religious priests live in community, hence formation for community living is central in their formation. This has not always been the case for diocesan clergy. However, the new *Ratio* insists on the community dimension of the formation of priests. The different stages of formation take place in community. “Community life during the years of initial formation must make an impact on each individual, purifying his intentions and transforming the conduct of his life as he gradually conforms himself to Christ” (RF 50). Hence the “Seminary community is indeed a family” (RF 52).

Emphasis is no longer on the formator but on the community of formators preparing future pastors of the Christian communities. This is in line with OT that says the community of seminary administrators and teachers constitutes one family with students under the leadership of the rector (OT 5). PDV calls the seminary “an educational ecclesial community” as well as “a particular educating community.”

Since the priest is called to be responsible for a community, he should be a man of communion. Right from the propaedeutic stage, the seminarian is inserted in the pastoral parish community, which provides help for the educational journey toward a mature, responsible freedom. This resolves the problem of individualism. Priestly ordination is not lived as triumph of the individual but as the fruit of a community accompaniment. In the community, the seminarian is accompanied to contemplate Christ the Pastor. He is called to configure himself to Christ, becoming a disciple of Christ the Pastor. Vocation is not a personal project but a gift to the community.

African formators and bishops appreciate the emphasis on community because it corresponds to the African vision of the human person. In African traditions, the human person is understood as part of a network of relationships within a community. The best word to define this network is “relatedness.” This is embodied in the Igbo proverb, “Ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya” (something stands and something else stands beside it). Eastern and Southern Africans call it *ubuntu*. Our existence is bound together. “My humanity is inextricably bound up in yours.” This means that to exist is to be related in a multiplicity of ways. On the other hand, what is not related does not exist.

As Uzukwu rightly stated, “the fundamental assumption that reality is plural—dual or twinned, multiple or a combination of twinned components—structures the human access to the universe.” The realization of one’s life follows the logic
of a harmonious vision that encompasses the individual, the community and the cosmos. The society is ready to fight any disorder that endangers this harmony. However, the community itself is not absolute. The Igbo name for community is: ohaneze, that is, oba-na-eze (the multitude and the kings). The community is constantly checked and structured by the ancestors, chi (the other of the human person) and the gods. The identity of the human person is not fixed; it is not given once and for all. It is always a process and a task to be accomplished. The human person is in becoming and his or her possibilities are beyond the present conditions of his or her existence. The truth of one’s identity unfolds in the process of communion with others.

African formators and pastors think that bringing the sense of the community into seminary formation gives a sense of solidarity. This is in line with the notion of church as family of God, which constituted a major option made by Ecclesia in Africa. While recognizing the importance of biological blood ties within families and ethnic groups, it noted that the baptismal ties transform and transcend ethnic divides. Even beyond baptismal ties, the church recognizes “creation’s new and integral sense of kinship with God derived from its relationship with the Son of God who has become the Son of man,” ingeniously designated as the ofiliance by Archbishop Anthony Obinna of Owerri. While African seminary formators and pastors welcome the emphasis on the pastoral and community dimensions of priestly formation as being in consonance with the practice in African seminaries, they also search for ways to address other major challenges facing formation in their respective seminaries. I will present some of them here with special reference to Nigeria and Cameroon.

2. PARTICULAR CHALLENGES OF PRIESTLY FORMATION IN AFRICA

Accompaniment in Overcrowded Seminaries

Africa is blessed with vocations. Many young men want to give their lives to Christ as priests. In fact, some dioceses and religious congregations do not conduct vocation drives as such. Their major headache is how to manage the numbers that come. The Spiritans in Southeast Nigeria alone have to discern how to take only 30 candidates out of the more than 500 applications they receive in a year.

The other side of the coin is that seminaries in Africa are over-crowded. The statistics of different major provincial seminaries in Nigeria for the 2017/2018 academic year are very interesting in this sense. Bigard Memorial Seminary,
Enugu (832); Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri (533); Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Ariam Campus (190); Michael Iwene Tansi Seminary, Onitsha (291); St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary Awka (397) and Sts. Peter and Paul Bodija (579); St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary Makurdi (397); and St. Joseph’s Seminary Ikot-Ekpene (462), etc. This is without counting many other seminaries that belong to different religious institutes. In a good number of these seminaries, students live two or sometimes three per room. The major seminaries in Cameroon have lesser populations: Nkolbisson (109), Bafoussam (98), Douala (100). Yet the bishops and formators feel the weight of the numbers.

The population of the major seminaries has to be viewed in line with the demographic factor of African local churches and Christians in general. African church leaders appeared to have been taken unaware, and most of them found themselves unprepared to handle the overwhelming increase and rise in population of African Christians in their local churches.

In these contexts, close accompaniment of seminarians as required by the new Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis (RF 44–49) becomes very difficult. In an attempt to measure up, some formators are obliged to adopt a policing approach based on fear and intimidation. Sometimes they may be tempted to use some student functionaries to spy on their fellow students. This can create a submarine mentality in students and hinder proper accompaniment.

Formation by Example

Accompaniment requires that formators be good models. PDV states that “the priests, as the ministers, the ‘elders’ of the community, will be in their person the ‘model’ of the flock, which for its part is called to display this same priestly attitude of service toward the world—in order to bring to humanity the fullness of life and complete liberation.” It insists that “the greater or lesser degree of the holiness of the minister has a real effect on the proclamation of the word, the celebration of the sacraments and the leadership of the community in charity.”

To train such priests, the formator himself will have to be a model to those placed under his charge. Having been a formator for fourteen years in France and in Nigeria and now Councilor for formation in our congregation for six years, I can confidently attest that a good number of formators are good role models. They accept their weaknesses and try as much as possible to give a good example of life to the seminarians. Many priests run away from this ministry because they know that it is very demanding. A seminary formator is a “seminarian” because he is the first to submit himself to the
rules and regulations of the formation community. Seminarians watch formators very closely. Before endorsing any principle or value, they consider the credibility of the person representing or transmitting the value. Is he authentic, sincere, coherent, available and competent? Can I entrust my destiny to him? This means that they expect the formator to risk his own personal experience while taking into consideration their own individual experiences. Pope Paul VI put it right: “Modern man does not listen to masters but to witnesses, if he listens to masters it is because they are witnesses.” It is equally true that some formators do not measure up to the expectation associated with their noble task.

**Lack of Trained Formators**

Good accompaniment depends also on the competency of formators. We have to remember the saying that *nemo dat quod non habet*. “No one gives what he/she does not have.” Many priests are thrown into these seminaries as formators without adequate formation. A good number of them have distinguished themselves academically in many disciplines and have Masters degrees and PhDs, but this is not sufficient to be a formator. A good number are simple, good and prayerful priests. This is equally not sufficient. Formation requires some specific skills that have to be acquired through a specific formation. Formators suffer because of lack of skills. Seminarians suffer as well because they expect to be accompanied by formators who know the art. How can one guide others on the road if he does not know how to read the road map?

**Correspondence between Formation Values and Influence of the Outside World**

The big problem is the counterproductive influence of parish and diocesan priests on the seminarians. One of the greatest challenges of formators is to face the questions of students regarding the difference between what is taught in the seminary and the lifestyle of certain priests they encounter in the parishes and chaplaincies where they go for apostolic work. One of my colleagues once took the risk of making the analogy of driving school. Briefly, he said that in driving school people are taught to hold strictly to the rules, and they have to follow them, but when they get their driver’s license, they can decide to drive the way they like at their own risk and peril. In other words, as long as they are in the seminary, seminarians have to strictly adhere to the rules; what they do after ordination is at their risk and peril. This perilous analogy even complicated the embarrassment and confusion. My answer is always that seminarians should look up to those priests who
are doing well. A good number of priests are making honest efforts to uphold the dignity of the priesthood. One who freely decides to be a disciple of Jesus, the pastor, should not allow himself to be carried away by any counterexample he encounters around him.

It is important to note also the influence of the larger society on both seminarians and their formators. Both come from the same society like the rest of the citizens of their countries and are all in one way or the other under the same sociopolitical, economic and cultural influences. During holidays, they all return to their homes, families, parishes, towns and cities under the same “spells” that control the variables of every other member of society. They are also affected by interreligious or inter/intra-ethnic conflicts or other situations of near-war conflicts.

Of great influence on priests and seminarians today is the form of ministry proposed by the new religious movements—for example, the prosperity Gospel and healing ministry. These are copied by most Nigerian powerful priest-healers whom the seminarians and young priests nowadays tend to imitate.

The family background of the seminarians is equally important, especially the dependence culture of African societies. How do seminary formation and church leaders handle the question of financial maintenance of the clergy, especially diocesan and future diocesan and religious priests in an African context? This is one of the cogent factors that is causing a lot of anti-evangelical behaviors of not only priests but, especially, seminarians. Most of the seminarians and some of our young priests fear that their bishops or dioceses have no stable and sustainable financial arrangement for priests’ maintenance, especially, in sickness and old age. Hence the tendency to strive for self-survival. On another note, a good number of bishops evaluate their priests by their capacity to generate significant funds for the diocese. Those who do not measure up in this regard are relegated to the background or even transferred to poor parishes. The search for money becomes part of survival strategy.

Again, seminary formation in Africa, till now, has yet to emphasize the aspects of skill acquisition and the need for personal initiatives on the part of individual candidates for the priesthood so that they become more “self-sustaining.” Seminarians view priesthood as a profession in the church where things are provided for them, as and when due, without much personal input other than the normal ministry of celebration of sacraments and parish management as pastors. The dependence culture is also seen in the seminary formation and training of future priests, where things are to be provided for them without any effort on their part.
Intercultural Living in Formation Communities

Intercultural living is not easy to handle in formation communities. We have noted above that Africans appreciate community living and, in fact, life is lived in community. However, African solidarity is undermined by a strong sense of tribalism and ethnicity. This can undermine genuine formation in seminaries which are generally provincial or interprovincial. It happens often that there are strong rivalries among people from different cultural groups or ecclesiastical provinces. Some staff members may be tempted to protect people of their diocese, province, culture, or country and filter confidential information to them.

In some extreme cases, congregations are slow in accepting people from certain cultural backgrounds because they are afraid of intercultural encounter. Unfortunately, some of these congregations toe the line of some myths surrounding the history of relationship among different cultures in a given country. Some cultures could be tagged as domineering; others are tagged as immoral or laissez-faire, and so on. It can also happen that some people from a particular culture take it for granted that it is their right to rule others and therefore would not accept leadership of someone else from another group. Other people who identify with the minority may adopt the posture of resistance to the “dominant culture.” This type of tension undermines the building of brotherhood in the formation community and in the wider community of priests in the ecclesiastical provinces.

The Use of Modern Technologies

Formators constantly face the dilemma of how to control the use of modern communication systems in formation communities. The candidates coming to the formation communities are already “digital natives.” They are absorbed in the internet culture of the here and now. Their culture is that of the “interruption technologies” because of instant messages, e-mail alerts, SMS alerts, video chatting alerts, etc. The individual is enticed to be present to all these solicitations. The desire to live in the present leads to situations of stress and internet addiction. The “digital natives” in the formation communities are constantly connected to the web, television, internet, smartphone, Facebook, Skype, and Twitter. This has an influence on their concentration on the formation being proposed to them as well as the formation of their identity. This has resulted in an increased individualism and a weakening of community life and community spirit. Another consequence of the culture of immediacy is the crisis of long-term commitment. Many young priests and religious are finding it difficult to stay for a long time in a particular mission or apostolate.
The Nigerian Seminaries’ Commission banned the use of cell phones in diocesan major seminaries in order to help the seminarians concentrate on their formation. However, the seminaries belonging to religious congregations decided to allow seminarians to use their cell phones. First, because they believe that the ban was useless since the seminarians used their phones in secret and that created more headaches for the formators. Second, they think that it is better to reflect with them on the reasonable use of such means and on the consequences for their freedom, character formation, and growth.

*Lack of Funds for Formation*

Bishops and religious superiors do not have sufficient funds to take care of the formation communities in Africa and in Nigeria in particular. The lack of finance is seen in the poor quality of infrastructure, the poor quality of the food given to the seminarians and formators as well as the inadequacy of staff welfare. In some cases, seminarians are asked to make financial contributions to the seminaries and take care of part of their upkeep. This makes them victims of some rich benefactors and benefactresses, thereby compromising their moral integrity. Seminaries find it difficult to pay external staff who come in to teach some courses required by the different universities to which they are affiliated. This affects the input of those external lecturers. On the same note, resident staff are tempted to look elsewhere for money to take care of themselves. This creates the situation whereby some formators transform themselves into “daylecturers”: they deliver their courses and spend the rest of the time outside looking for money to complement the meager resources offered to them. This weighs down negatively on the quality of formation.

In the light of the above-mentioned challenges, what would be required for a more genuine priestly formation in Africa? What might seminary formation in Africa look like in the years to come?

3. TOWARDS A MORE GENUINE SEMINARY FORMATION IN AFRICA IN THE NEXT TEN YEARS

In order to prepare quality priests, seminary formation in Africa in the next ten years should strive to overcome the two above-named viruses of “Christendom” and “Chiefdom.” In addition to the recommendations of the new *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, I would add that seminary formation needs to be done in connection with a critical dialogue with good African cultural values. Moreover, more effort needs to be made: to
reflect on the ethical use of modern technologies; to ensure that the number of trained formators matches the number of students; and to strengthen rigorous discernment.

**Incorporating African Values in Formation**

Formation takes place in a particular culture. Vatican II defines culture in the general sense as: “all those things which go to the refining and developing of humanity’s diverse mental and physical endowments.” Whether we like it or not, people reflect their cultural heritage and human context; their knowledge and experience are mediated to them through their language and culture. Anyone wishing to communicate in an adequate fashion absolutely must take these things seriously. It is always delicate to know to what extent cultural values have to be integrated in seminary formation. The relationship with the culture is delicate because formation can copy the positive and negative dimensions of a particular culture. For example, the chiefdom mentality has been absorbed by priests without much questioning. However, avoiding cultural insertion of formation is not a lasting solution. What is required is a critical encounter with African cultures. This involves identifying within the same culture with values that serve as constant critique and correction of the chiefdom mentality.

This is what the whole question of inculturation of the Christian faith is about. Inculturation is a term used in theology to define the encounter of the Christian message with a particular culture in which the Christian message is expressed through the values of that culture and the same culture is transformed by the Christian message. The best definition to date is that given by Fr. Pedro Arrupe, former superior of the Jesuits:

> Inculturation is the incarnation of the Christian life and message in a concrete cultural milieu in such a way that not only is the Christian message expressed through the elements of the culture in question but also this experience becomes a principle of inspiration and at the same time a unifying norm which transforms and re-creates this culture, being by consequence at the origin of a new creation.  

What are those African cultural values that help foster more genuine priestly formation? I will underline three among others, namely, *servant leadership*, the value of an oath, and confidentiality.

**Servant Leadership**

The priest is called to build up the community of the children of God beyond ethnic, sociocultural, and political
divides. He does this by totally consecrating himself to the entire church. Despite the abuses of power and the noise made by dictators, traditional African leadership comprises the critique of the chieftdom virus. One of the highest offices in African traditions is that of the elder and manager of spiritual affairs. Nsukka people in Eastern Nigeria call him Onyeisi or Eze Muo (Leader or King-manager of spiritual affairs). He must demonstrate human and spiritual maturity. He consults and dialogues patiently. He arbitrates litigations, takes decisions when necessary, and speaks the truth without fear or favor. His goal is always to create harmony and unity in the community of the living and the dead, community of the visible and invisible beings.

In order to excel in the art of good leadership, seminarians will be taught to be leaders who uphold the fraternity of the people of God beyond ethnic divides. In response to this challenge, the Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria insists on servant leadership. It states that to avoid clericalism a priest should lead a Christian community by radically conforming to Christ’s teaching by his own mode of leadership.28

Respect for a Covenant

Another dimension of the African sacred tradition is the respect for a covenant, which the Igbo tradition calls “Igba-ndu.” Traditional African religion chooses and commissions priests who minister at the traditional “shrines” in the villages and families before the advent of Christianity, and even today. This commits the person to the destiny of the people through the process of oath taking. A given word is respected. It is sacred. When a priest, an initiated person, or a titled person takes an oath, he or she keeps it. It means that before entering the covenant, the person has examined himself/herself and has weighed his/her capacity to keep the oath. He or she passes through a process of initiation during which experienced and titled persons weigh the person’s capacity to keep an oath. This capacity can also be built up during this process of initiation, which involves learning, understanding the history and tradition of his or her people, the bonds and boundaries, the secrets and taboos.

Traditional African priests remain faithful to their calling not necessarily because of the oath but primarily because of the respect for the tradition which the ancestors have left for society’s continued existence. Called by the community through the process of divination performed by the elders, the priests in African traditional religion are chosen to officiate as representatives of the living and the ancestors themselves. They
do so by offering prayers and sacrifices to the Creator through the mediation of the same ancestors.

Bringing the traditional value of the covenant into the training of Catholic priests helps one to understand the value of the vows and promises priests and religious make. A vow or a promise is a commitment of oneself before God and the entire community. Such a commitment, which involves giving one’s word, cannot be broken without consequences for the person and the community. This is why the preparation for priesthood is long (ten to eleven years). Enough time is needed for initiation into the mystery of the priesthood and to help the candidate build up the capacity to endure in the covenant. He learns to understand that his vocation is not for himself but for the good of the people of God. His destiny is tied to that of the people of God through his configuration to Christ, the mediator between God and man.

**Confidentiality**

Very close to the value of an oath is confidentiality: the capacity to keep a secret. In African traditions, initiated people should keep secrets. The breach of confidentiality is regarded as a serious offence and often leads to severe punishment and even ostracism when it concerns the community. Bringing the value of confidentiality into seminary formation demands that candidates be schooled in the virtues of prudence, honesty, gentleness, patience, endurance and, above all, self-control. Somebody who cannot control his mouth cannot make a good priest. How can he keep the secret of confession? How can he protect the privacy of those who confide in him? How can he build up a healthy community?

**Reflect on the Ethical Use of Modern Technologies**

In the spirit of Pope Francis’s Message for the 48th World Communications Day, the formation of priests and religious should face the challenge of the new technologies. In a presentation at the Seminar for Formators at the Bigard Memorial Seminar, Enugu, on 8 May 2010, Martin Yina rightly pointed out that the church has always upheld the importance of social communication in the task of evangelization. Instead of banning the use of cell phones, what is needed is to form the consciences of the candidates in formation on the ethical use of all forms of communication. These include ethical issues such as lying, misrepresentation, secrecy, disclosure, and the right to privacy, which often surface not just in organizational, mass, and computer-mediated communication but in the most informal and intimate contexts as well. Formators and students have to
reflect on the ethical question of whether a particular act or form of communication contributes to authentic human development and helps individuals and communities to be true to their transcendent destiny. Does their participation in the digital environment help them to grow in humanity and mutual understanding? Do the new technologies really offer them opportunities for authentic encounter and solidarity?

**Ensure the Number of Trained Formators Matches the Number of Students**

While Africa owes immense gratitude to God for the increasing number of vocations, bishops and formators should seriously reflect on the connection between the number of seminarians and quality formation/accompaniment. It is not responsible to simply declare that it is God who gives vocations. The number of students should be manageable in such a way that they receive an acceptable accompaniment. The church has a moral responsibility to give every candidate a proper formation. Consequently, if a student offers himself to become a priest, the church has the moral obligation to help him reach that objective. There should be a good ratio of trained formators to the number of students. This means that the formation of formators should be programmed and adhered to. Trained formators are needed to ensure the one-on-one accompaniment of the students. This is the heart of the accompaniment process. It is within this forum that many issues for growth come up for the individual student and are subsequently followed up.

Accompaniment in big formation communities should be better structured, by creating smaller communities/fraternities within a bigger community. Each fraternity should be accompanied by a community of formators and a spiritual director. Bishops may have to courageously consider breaking down the population of vertiginously populated seminaries. This can be done by building smaller formation communities in the form of a *collegio* outside the seminary compound—either for each diocese or for multiple dioceses, to maintain the interdiocesan character—and placing each of them under the care of a certain number of trained formators. The students can attend lectures in the seminary and return to their communities for specific formation. This has already been attempted by Bishop Anthony Gbuji, bishop emeritus of Enugu, who built Nchatancha community from where the seminarians of Enugu Diocese go to the Bigard Memorial Seminary Enugu. This was equally the goal of Archbishop Albert K. Obiefuna when he insisted, against the wish of some members and clergy of his diocese, on the creation of another major seminary at Onitsha, the Blessed Tansi Major Seminary, to
reduce the number at the Bigard, Enugu. He did a similar thing as bishop of Awka, when Sts. John and Paul Major Seminary was built, to decongest the faculty of philosophy of Bigard, Seat of Wisdom and Ikot-Ekpene seminaries. As he explained in his pastoral letter, he did so in line with the local church’s contextualization and actualization of the recommendations from the Synod of Bishops on Priestly Formation, which John Paul II presented in the post-synodal exhortation, PDV.

**Strengthen Rigorous Discernment**

For discernment to be genuine in the seminaries, especially, in intercultural contexts, formators, bishops and religious superiors have to stick to certain principles. First, it must be noted that though people are influenced by their cultures, it is not the culture that is called but the individual person and each person is unique. In the assessment/evaluation, formators should try to be as close as possible to the church’s directives. It is necessary therefore to verify whether the motivations of the young candidates correspond to the demands of Catholic priesthood. They will verify particularly the availability of the candidates to live out the evangelical counsels in total submission to God. They will verify the suitability of the young candidates: good health, absence of incompatible engagements, right intention and readiness to allow oneself to be guided by another in the process of formation.

The effectiveness of this assessment/evaluation will depend on the follow-up bishops and religious superiors provide. If a bishop or a religious superior simply overrules the recommendations of the formators, the whole dynamic of formation is weakened. Some students could feel untouchable and protected by their superiors/bishops and by consequence become resistant to the formation process in the community.

**CONCLUSION**

The new *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* offers a good opportunity to renew priestly formation in Africa. The emphasis on the pastoral and community dimensions of formation is highly appreciated by African seminary formators and pastors. They recognize this to be in consonance with the practice of formation in their different seminaries.

The *Ratio* also help store visit some challenges of priestly formation in Africa. These include: an insufficient number of trained formators in overcrowded seminaries, the personal witness of formators in the seminaries and of priests in the pastoral field, intercultural living and the use of modern technologies in the context of formation.
A more genuine formation, in the light of the new *Ratio* will require that the above identified challenges be faced and addressed. Moreover, efforts need to be made to mobilize some tested African cultural values, like servant leadership, the value of an oath and confidentiality in the training of future priests.

*Bede Uche Ukwuije, C.S.Sp.*
*First Assistant, Rome*

### ENDNOTES


4. Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Training of Priests *Optatam totius*.


8. I am very grateful to Msgr. Benoit Kala, the secretary general of the Conference of the Catholic Bishops of Cameroon, a veteran formator, who accorded me a long interview at the end of their meeting. I am equally grateful to Fr. Vitalis Anaehobi, assistant secretary general of the Regional Episcopal Conference of West Africa (RECOWA), for making time to share his experiences as formator.


11. PDV, nos. 61, 66.

12. Ibid., nos. 60–64.

13. Ibid., no. 44.


17. Uzukwu, God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness, 10.
19. PDV, no. 21.
20. Ibid., no. 25.
22. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii nuntiandi, no. 41.
INTRODUCTION

As the new Dean of the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts, I came to Duquesne University in July 2019 committed to advocating, celebrating, and promoting the important role of liberal arts disciplines in fostering the University’s Catholic Spiritan Mission. For that reason, I was delighted when Fr. James Okoye, C.S.Sp., editor of Spiritan Horizons, invited me to contribute an article for the journal related to the topic of “education for human dignity.” Such a topic was one that could highlight the importance of the liberal arts in the twenty-first century at a time where the concern among students and their families about employment prospects can make the choice of a liberal arts degree admittedly a “hard sell.” As I had planned to write, however, the liberal arts are the hallmark of any undergraduate education in their emphases on ethical decision-making, creative problem solving, and rhetorical communication skills to promote a culture of civil discourse and respect for human dignity and difference within and across cultures. Indeed, the liberal arts are aligned with the tenets of Spiritan education, notably, as Fr. Jeff Duaime, C.S.Sp. asserts by, “responding to the most pressing educational needs of the people of their times” through “global vision,” “a sense of community,” “commitment to service,” and “high academic standards.”¹ This includes both educating our students’ minds, hearts, and spirits, and understanding, as Fr. Duaimi writes, the role of Spiritan, and I would contend liberal arts, education, in which “every human person journeying toward becoming fully alive, humanly, spiritually, intellectually, and socially . . . possesses a specific vocation in and through which the personality unfolds and character is developed.”² In my short time at Duquesne, it was clear that the University and the McAnulty College embodied these goals. They were palpable in our emphasis on community engagement and social justice curricula and in our core educational foundation to prepare students for a hopeful future dedicated to the public good.

And then the world changed. In mid-March 2020, Duquesne University, like almost every educational institution across the country, announced its decision to migrate all courses to completely distance delivery in response to the rampant, uncontrollable spread of COVID-19, after having canceled some, but not all of its spring break study abroad programs earlier in the month. In the case of the McAnulty College, this meant that hundreds of courses had to transition to
remote instruction in less than one week, and that internships and other field-based experiences either had to be completed remotely or concluded early. While the University canceled courses for several days to expedite this transition, to say that College faculty, students, staff, and yes, their Dean, weren’t fully prepared for this would be an understatement.

As a teacher-scholar whose research agenda has focused on the teaching of writing in digital and fully online environments, and as an administrator who had created and migrated several programs at the department and university level online, including a fully online Masters of Arts in English as a Department Chair at Bowling Green State University and an online degree completion option for a Bachelors of General Studies as a Dean at Youngstown State University, I was familiar with best practices and an increasing need to create innovative new online programs to appeal to a broader range of students. This included more transfer, veterans, and global learners, in light of the predicted significant downturns in traditional college-age populations, referred to as the demographic “cliff” or “storm.” But an entire College? In a week’s time? While I had advocated more online delivery in the College and the development of new programs in addition to our Masters of Leadership and our two undergraduate programs in Organizational Leadership and Computer Systems Technology, I hadn’t planned for this. No one had.

Inevitably, it could and would be done, with the initial priority of maintaining instructional continuity and upholding course and program learning outcomes. As Dean, I was heartened by the way our faculty and staff came together to support each other and our students. From impromptu College Blackboard learning management training sessions, to identifying faculty super-users in departments, to unit-specific sessions on technology that all faculty could attend, to gathering extra laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots for those without devices and network access, to touching stories of faculty mentoring faculty, our community made the transition to remote learning in five days, working to identify faculty who would need extra assistance because of their inexperience with digital delivery. Throughout my career, I have advocated the necessary connection between pedagogy and technology and the need to not integrate technology for its own sake, but in ways that align with curricular outcomes and that enable access to diverse learners through diverse, multimodal communication processes. Yet I have also addressed the larger rhetorics of online learning that promote narratives of convenience and 24/7 delivery models that may benefit students, but don’t always benefit faculty because of the invisible labor associated with online instruction. Other tropes
I have addressed include the “rhetoric of loss,” typically among faculty, that online delivery will never approximate its face-to-face counterparts in areas such as richness of class discussion, instructional delivery of content through the lecture mode, or in maintaining academic integrity. As we know from the online migration of university curricula across the country, the students forced to leave their campuses have also felt what Peter C. Herman quoted one student as stating “a profound sense of loss,” unaccustomed to online delivery and missing the importance of immediate contact with students and their professors. And faculty here and elsewhere have viewed their initial efforts as emergency online triage rather than carefully planned online course delivery created via a team-development model of faculty experts, instructional designers, and educational technology specialists.

In such a moment of crisis, the typical instructional design process for migrating courses online was more cursory, though we benefitted greatly from the University’s Educational Technology unit, which offered individual assistance, provided documentation, and embedded consultants within the College and the University’s other schools. However, it has become clear that as federal guidelines and state mandates impact the delivery of instruction, we have to move beyond the technological what’s and how’s of online and blended delivery of liberal arts curricula to the “why,” and how we maintain that emphasis that Fr. Okoye initially asked me to address, “education for human dignity.” For that reason, the remainder of this discussion will focus on the possibilities and constraints of this process in the midst of a pandemic. Based on our experiences in the liberal arts, any emphasis on human dignity must include an enhanced ethic of care, both for students and faculty, in ways that align with both Spiritan charism and the University’s Strategic Plan, and that enhance and sustain the efficacy of online learning in the age of COVID and beyond. As I shall stress, many of the longstanding issues and concerns about fully online learning continue to be relevant, including issues of access to technology infrastructure, faculty development about best practices, shared expectations between students and faculty, and more proactive strategies to accommodate various students and faculty populations whose access to online education are mitigated by a range of material and social conditions.

**STUDENT ACCESS**

Perhaps the greatest aspect of educating for human dignity involves the guarantee of reliable, equal access to education regardless of cultural and socioeconomic background. For many institutions, there is often a presumption that students, in part because of their generation and their enhanced skill...
sets in navigating digital life through social media, have broader access to and comfort with technology. In a now controversial labeling, Marc Prensky identified students as the “native speakers of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet” or “Digital Natives,” with faculty, by contrast, depicted as “Digital Immigrants,” “instructors, who speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age) . . . struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language.” 6 One challenge with Prensky’s binary is that it embraces metaphors of colonization 7 in subordinating one group to another in terms of their value and is ultimately reductive and invalid, conjuring rhetorics of conquest over individual groups and cultures. The binary is inevitably grounded in ageist and generational assumptions, but also is based on class and potentially race-based assumptions about a typical generation of students and their access. A recent Pew Research Center report, in response to the pandemic, provides a more nuanced understanding of student access, referring to it as a “digital homework gap,” 8 based on unreliable access to both a computer and an internet connection. The report concludes these gaps in access are frequently tied to race, ethnicity, and family income, with greater disparity among African-American and Hispanic youth.

Duquesne University’s 2019–2023 Strategic Plan (2020) 9 acknowledges the institution’s origin story of educating the underserved populations whose families had emigrated to Pittsburgh for work in the steel mills and the new opportunity that America represented. That mission stands as a historic legacy and has expanded to include students beyond the traditional college-age populations whose access to technology cannot, as we learned during the transition to online learning, be taken for granted in the way that Prensky originally suggested. In a unit as large as our McAnulty College of Liberal Arts, a one-size-fits-all model for its nearly 1900 students was not viable and required a far broader sense of empathy toward both undergraduate and graduate students whose technological challenges in some cases became a barrier to educational access. Perhaps the greatest access issue for students involved sufficient data plans to access the prolific number of Zoom meeting sessions now part of our daily routines for both instruction and business operations. Faculty in such instances displayed a strong willingness to accommodate students in some form of backup access, including posting lecture notes and other materials online, especially in consideration of those returning to homes in different national and international time zones.

Similar access issues impacted graduate education
as well, as doctoral students in Clinical Psychology had difficulties meeting with campus clinic patients via Zoom, clearly impacting the Spiritan and strategic commitment to community engagement and to “serving God by serving students who serve others.” But access to technology had other unexpected facets. As students returned home, in some cases there were competing needs, younger siblings suddenly needing to “do school” online, not to mention parents now tethered to email and those daily, sometimes hourly Zoom meetings. As we learned, our students were not a homogenous group; instead, we heard of the challenge of the veteran student having to find alternative access to computer networks with relatives, or the realization that some of our students were themselves parents. Thus another significant access issue was ultimately time and space to work.

Teaching some of my first online courses in the early 2000s, I learned that students with such access problems frequently sought out public spaces for technology access, including the county library and their own workspace settings, spaces not available during a pandemic. And while synchronous activity via Zoom was stressed as a viable way to enhance delivery of course content, faculty deploying these tools soon realized that a much needed balance was required between mandated synchronous with flexible asynchronous instruction, the latter a standard of online best practices. This balance ensured students had multiple points of entry into the online course and paths to successful completion by fostering a rhetoric of convenience that promoted 24/7 access to content and communication via tools such as Blackboard discussion boards. But access to technology is more than about convenience. Much research on online learning and andragogy has long recommended that such flexibility was necessary to accommodate the students for whom such learning modes were intended, frequently place-bound adult working professionals. But this flexibility also reflects an important ethic of care. As bell hooks has written, “To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.”

Understanding that our students were no longer just our students, that they were sisters and brothers and sons and daughters, and in some cases mothers and fathers, mandated a more flexible model that sustained hooks care for the soul and Duquesne’s commitment to educate the mind, the heart, and the spirit. Part of that commitment, as Duquesne University President Ken Gormley and Fr. James McCloskey, C.S.Sp. powerfully assert, must include “the polestar of all decision-making: listening to our
students,” and attending to their well-being and focusing “upon individual attention to students’ needs and aspirations.”

**FACULTY DEVELOPMENT**

The same access challenges impacted faculty as well. Not unlike other larger liberal arts colleges, the McAnulty College may have a full-time faculty base of 140, but relies just as heavily on nearly 200 adjunct faculty per semester, as well as graduate student instructors. Many of these individuals are among the most vulnerable populations in the academy in terms of the contingency of their labor and the decades long compensation compression for that labor. As a result, the same concerns about technology access arose, including the lack of a laptop or desktop device for home use, the lack of Wi-Fi and/or the lack of appropriate bandwidth, with the access issues spanning multiple generations for both part and full-time instructors, some with child and eldercare responsibilities, and some who had not only never taught a fully online course but in some cases because of a lack of perceived pedagogical necessity had never used the campus learning management system, Blackboard. These challenges spanned many aspects of the curriculum, from areas such as English and Philosophy that had substantial numbers of graduate student instructors, to areas like Modern Languages and Literatures, with large numbers of longtime adjuncts. Given the faculty numbers, I knew I had a challenge in identifying the diverse needs of faculty. Under normal circumstances, preparing faculty to teach online involves strategies such as curricular and pedagogical needs assessments, ongoing training, and the labor-intensive process of migrating existing content and creation of new content through digital audio, video and other more visual, multimodal genres that enhance both teaching style and learning styles, appealing to diverse visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities. In this typical design stage faculty have the opportunity to develop a sense of the affordances of various tools in reaching student audiences. Regardless of the demographics, what was clear is that we had very little time, and the impact on faculty labor would be significant.

The Spiritan charism reflects the commitment to working and walking with those on the margins, and this ethic of care was reflected in the short-term strategies we deployed to help identify faculty and offer both individual and group opportunities to migrate instruction online. Even before the transition to remote delivery of the liberal arts curriculum, I asked department chairs to conduct their own internal needs assessment in the areas of technology access and faculty development, and to be proactive about reaching out to those
who would have challenges, something we did at the College level as well. Because we knew some faculty had never used Blackboard in as robust a way as it afforded, we scheduled multiple open sessions led by the College’s Associate Dean for faculty to drop in with questions, both technological and pedagogical, about Blackboard, Zoom, and other tools such as VoiceThread for presentation development. As Dean, I began applying for the limited number of Wi-Fi hotspots for most adjunct faculty who did not have internet access at home, and we scrambled to locate extra laptops in the College and loaners through Central Technology Services for the numbers of faculty without home computers. Other strategies promoting mentoring and even intergenerational learning, as some faculty were paired with or supported by those department faculty or graduate students with more experience and expertise, helping as many people “get up to speed” as quickly as possible through efforts that reflected an ethic of care as we attempted to equalize knowledge and experience to benefit the faculty and their students. These pairings often defied Prensky’s native/immigrant binary in that the faculty lacking experiences teaching in blended environments were in the minority. Department chairs in both in Mathematics and Computer Science and Media suggested a Blackboard community space for all Chairs to share resources and pedagogical strategies. These latter efforts modeled communication strategies at the national level, based on social media communities such as the Facebook group “Pandemic Pedagogy,” but they also meshed with the best practices in training that included team development and train-the-trainer models. “The College also scheduled specialized workshops for units, such as for the Modern Languages and Literatures faculty who had never used Zoom, and the Mathematics and Computer Science Chair scheduled a workshop initially for her own faculty, and then included others, in the use of Zoom. These and many other efforts represented a profound community charism to support our colleagues and ultimately our students.

Through my own experiences as an educator and a faculty developer, I have deployed various types of heuristics to help faculty self-assess the relationship between technology and pedagogy, including the following questions: How do you deliver content to students; how do you communicate with students and have them communicate with each other; and how do you assess and evaluate students? As a result, some of our preparation efforts became more individually consultative, listening to faculty talk about their reliance on lectures, group discussions, and writing assessments. I talked with individual faculty about the need for flexible models that honored our commitment to student success; for example, a faculty member expected students
to login in to Blackboard at the same time to participate in a synchronous conversation in the discussion forum. In this instance, I recommended a more asynchronous approach that gave students time to read and reflect upon students’ written commentary, and also gave them time to develop more robust responses of their own, particularly because of the new challenges of mandating real time interaction that would disadvantage some students returning to their home country or those with lessened or shared computer access from the family residence.

Naturally, it is important that faculty expect similar academic rigor in ways that hold themselves and their students accountable and that standard deadlines for completing responses and other assignments was part of that process. Other concerns were related to academic integrity for exams even when robust digital assessment tools including Respondus were available. New strategies included students taking language exams proctored through Zoom, yet there was a point where faculty, in the spirit of mercy and grace, had to presume the best of students rather than the worst, although other options, especially in future semesters, could include weighting exams differently so that they not comprise so much of the final grade. Ultimately, by the end of the spring semester reported instances of academic integrity violations on exams or written assignments were in the single digits and no more prevalent online than they would have been face-to-face, which counters the presumption that going online represents a loss to academic rigor.

Overall, we encouraged faculty to create flexible structures that kept students engaged as a community co-equally responsible for their learning. As hooks writes, “It is rare that any professor, no matter how eloquent a lecturer, can generate through his or her actions enough excitement to create an exciting classroom. Excitement is generated through collective effort. Seeing the classroom as always a communal place enhances the likelihood of collective effort in creating and sustaining a learning community.”14 Inevitably, hooks’ emphasis on community aligns with Spiritan educational philosophies and pedagogical practices. For Durbin, Martin, and Margolis, “This idea of students and teachers having a reciprocal role in learning, requiring ongoing interaction, is evident in the Spiritan and other spiritually based pedagogies we have examined. The Spiritans encourage students and teachers to experience learning together in a mentor/mentee relationship.”15 Although many faculty and students feel such reciprocity is more fully realized in the traditional brick and mortar classroom, with technological access and training, along with faculty development about the potentially powerful
relationship between technologies and pedagogies, it is possible, and I would argue vital, to sustain the integrity of both academic curricula and Spiritan values.

**STUDENT-FACULTY EXPECTATIONS**

Once the semester fully migrated to online learning, the greatest challenges came through these various gaps in expectations for both faculty and students, often tied to the level of engagement of either group in the delivery and continuity of the course. Because of the experience levels, teaching styles, and curricular materials of our diverse faculty, a continuum of delivery models evolved. On one end, faculty and departments made extensive use of Zoom for classroom lectures, discussions, and student presentations. The most common level of faculty in the middle of this continuum utilized other interactive tools such as the discussion board, with some synchronous activities for office hours and other more individual and small group activities. At the other end of the continuum were more independent styled delivery modes, instructors often relied on study guides, intensive reading and writing activities, and more individualized interactions with students through email or telephone. Because of those gaps in needs assessment, it was not always clear what modes would benefit most students, and for every student who expressed concern that they had technology challenges accessing Zoom and thus had difficulty completing assignments and projects, there were others who expressed dissatisfaction with the perceived presence of the instructor not relying on such synchronicity. We were definitely caught in a Goldilocks syndrome, but regardless of modality, some faculty reported the challenges of actually motivating students to participate, in part because of students’ unfamiliarity and discomfort with fully online delivery. Although many faculty demonstrated considerable concern by reaching out to students just to check in (a common best practice in online learning), in numerous instances when there was non-response, they had to reinforce more traditional forms of accountability and mandate check-ins regarding receipt of course announcements and assignments.

As national educational media reporting documents, some students and their families across the country perceived and deployed that rhetoric of loss into a rhetoric of litigation, with class action lawsuits at institutions such as Drexel, Purdue University, and the University of Colorado. In these cases, education is a business and they are dissatisfied customers wanting a refund for coursework and other fees.
accountability for both students and faculty. The challenge of migrating courses online for many faculty represented a significant amount of visible and invisible labor to move beyond that “pedagogy of triage” to as bell hooks has advocated, a “pedagogy of love.” As she states, “When teachers teach with love, combining care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust, we are often able to enter the classroom and go straight to the heart of the matter, which is knowing what to do on any given day to create the best climate for learning.”

Despite these gaps in expectations between students and faculty, I can report far more instances of not only shared accountability between the two groups but also shared charism, regardless of the technology involved. A political science forum involving three faculty panelists went forward via Zoom, creating intellectual dialogue among the faculty experts and allowing students to organize and plan the session by facilitating dialogue and generating questions and moderating questions, a testament to the important of mentoring students and allowing them to shape the learning space. Equally significant, another professor shared with me his surprise and comfort in the check-ins he had received from many of his students, to let him know they and their families were well and that he realized that his communication was as equally consistent and mutually supporting in online courses, perhaps more so given the time and space to connect out of class. This aligns with Margolis, Durbin, and Martin’s contention that that there are material constraints upon the teacher-student relationship, including class size. Just as there is a rhetoric of loss, there is a similar rhetoric of community that, despite the important emphasis on the power of the collective, can lead us to discount the power of older technologies, including email, in maintaining what was perceived to be lost for students and faculty across country: much needed human connection. This is an important reminder that we are brought together by a love of learning. In past research, I have stressed that “successful online instruction must include a range of interactions between students and instructors that extend the more public concept of community to better acknowledge the importance of personal, private interaction.” These interactions foster reciprocal roles that enable listening and empathy for students and faculty as individuals and that emphasis on education for human dignity.

CONCLUSION
Throughout the process, and even now as we prepare for the 2020–2021 academic year, our Educational Technology unit has
continued to offer both technical and pedagogical workshops remotely, including on topics such as Universal Design for Learning, an approach often aligned with the need to make instruction accessible for students requiring accommodations based on physical disabilities or neurological challenges. These are vital considerations, and moving forward, the McAnulty College is working at the unit level to create more opportunities to make instruction less dichotomous and provide a stronger sense of consistency in the frequency and quality of faculty-to-student and student-to-student interaction in a model where students will be accessing a portion of their classes remotely. The faculty have more time to reflect on strategies that proved more engaging, and as we come back together in a HyFlex model\textsuperscript{19} that provides choices to students in how they engage the classroom, as well as fosters social distancing and protection of vulnerable students, faculty, and staff through a limited percentage of students in classrooms.

These and other efforts will certainly move the curriculum beyond a correspondence course model, though admittedly the history of distance education is rooted in an epistolary modality when Isaac Pittman first offered shorthand courses in 1840s Britain by mailing postcards with directives to remote students to transcribe Biblical passages.\textsuperscript{20} Such an example documents the ability and necessity of available communication technologies, however high or low tech, in a particular historical moment to foster learning and professional advancement of students then and now, to design learning environments that meet their needs so that we maintain that emphasis on educating the mind, heart, and the spirit. There were undoubtedly challenges to meeting this goal as some of the hallmarks of Duquesne’s Strategic Plan and the Spiritan mission, including community engagement and field experience components within courses and programs, were postponed and canceled. These are important “third space” applied learning venues that, according to Margolis, Durbin, and Martin represent a “zone of transformation.”

Nevertheless, we must attend to the ways that the hybrid and fully online learning models in which we will continue to engage can become those transformative spaces. Our continued development of online pedagogies can and must provide access to the Spiritan mission and meet the unique teaching and learning needs for our faculty and students in what Gerald Beyer has referred to as a “pedagogy of the present”\textsuperscript{21} that balances the communal aspects of our curriculum and liberal arts experience with the health and safety of our campus environment. Just as President Gormley and Fr. McCloskey stress the importance of listening to students, it is imperative to listen to faculty as well,
especially now that they have firsthand experience of the reality of transitioning to remote learning. A recent Chronicle of Education report (June 2020)\(^2\) of national survey data results from faculty and administrators concluded that both students and faculty are not as technologically adept as administrators assume and thus mandates greater flexibility and understanding of the diverse needs of both groups in areas such as access and training.

Margolis, Durbin, and Martin rely upon an interview with Fr. Okoye, who concludes that some of the barriers to Spiritan pedagogies include “prejudice, politics, and society itself.”\(^2\)\(^3\) I contend that one of those barriers includes the ever-present rhetoric of loss not only for online learning but also for physical and emotional well-being, economic prosperity, and a now heightened sense of social justice and equity in a moment where citizens are protesting for racial justice, civil liberties, and police reform, even in a pandemic. In an historical moment where students and their families desperately want a “return to normal” in all aspects of their personal and professional lives, we have both an obligation and an opportunity to reflect on the delivery of the Spiritan educational mission in a digital age, for our students need that education now more than ever to foster both a pedagogy of the present and a pedagogy of hope and resilience. Undoubtedly, this involves aligning technology and pedagogy to reinforce those constant liberal arts’ emphases on ethical-decision making, creative problem solving, and rhetorical communication strategies with the goal of promoting social justice in local and global contexts, and to ensure our online and soon to be HyFlex models have as much efficacy for our students as our face-to-face counterparts. In this way, the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts extends and sustains Spiritan educational values not despite our move to more online delivery but because of its equal ability to meet the needs of diverse learners in our present and future, and to honor our nearly 150-year commitment to education for human dignity.

**ENDNOTES**

2. Ibid., 107.


MISSION AS A DIALOGIC UNITY
OF CONTRARIES

INTRODUCTION
Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit assumes a particular orientation to Catholic education: a mission that is dialogic, responsive to uniqueness of localities, and attentive to ecumenical spirit. Leonardo Franchi, who has devoted much of his career to Catholic education and is the author of *Shared Mission: Religious Education in the Catholic Tradition*, provided a thoughtful set of guidelines for understanding Catholic education from a macro and global perspective. Franchi stated that “the Holy See’s teaching on education . . . purposes ‘intercultural dialogue’” as an overarching theme of Catholic education. Franchi defines intercultural dialogue within the framework of conversation between and among different religious traditions. Franchi indicates that *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love* emerged from the Second Vatican Council and its Declaration on Catholic education, *Gravissimum educationis*, which framed a seven-point plan for Catholic education from an intercultural perspective: (a) Catholic identity, (b) common vision, (c) responsible globalization, (d) grounded identities, (e) self-knowledge, (f) respect for other religions and cultures, and (g) an ongoing commitment to shared responsibility. The aim of *Gravissimum educationis* was to invite intercultural dialogue as a creative force for social harmony. Franchi’s article indicates two major presuppositions—(a) intercultural dialogue requires knowing the ground of one’s own faith before engaging another in dialogue; and (b) intercultural dialogue requires attentiveness to the formation of Catholic educators and teachers. Key to the formational process are knowledge of the importance of liturgy and an active love of education within church tradition. Franchi asserted that intercultural dialogue clarifies mission, which strengthens Catholic identity. Dialogue begins with knowledge of the faith tradition composed of embodied Catholic culture flowing from liturgy and art, music, and humane reflection. Such an understanding of intercultural dialogue jettisons participation in culture wars for a willingness to learn from contrary perspectives. Franchi cites Pope Benedict XVI’s “Courtyard of the Gentiles” initiative as an effort to reach out to proponents of atheism beyond pathways of safety in order to understand God’s world more fully. Emerging insight comes from dialogue between and among historical issues within a given culture, doctrine, and tradition—education is fundamentally a dialogic task. In the interplay of Catholic faith and culture and the

intercultural dialogue
clarifies mission,
which strengthens
Catholic identity
meeting of difference, knowledge naturally develops. A Catholic understanding of education begins with deep knowledge of the foundations of one’s own faith and a willingness to meet Otherness. Dialogue presupposes a Catholic culture, an ongoing conversation taken into an emerging exchange.

Pope Francis claimed dialogue as the educational heart of learning, connecting a Catholic tradition with a pluralistic society. Franchi explains, “Catholic educators are called to appreciate and learn from the famed Benedictine union of learning and service of which they are the inheritors.” One of the bases of formation is a liturgy that embraces the Trinity, while turning away from self-centeredness. Liturgy is not a mere construct of community but “a truly Trinitarian action that looks beyond the circle of the worshipping community.” Such a perspective counters the golden calf of today’s education, a focus on the self. The liturgical embodies mysteries of the faith, navigating Catholics from sadness through joy, acting as everyday reminders of death and resurrection.

Liturgy points to the good of the faith, with the teacher generalizing this focus in nuanced participation of grace with others. Augustine termed this conception of education as movement toward God and away from ourselves in acts of service to others. As Franchi writes, “The liturgy has no space for superficiality, banality, and self-centeredness.” Emphasis on liturgy moves one from trifles to points of signification. Catholic educators, engaging in an intercultural dialogue, love the tradition of the church as they engage modern insights. This dual focus is the dialogic fulcrum of Catholic education and learning. This position coincides with the work of John Henry Newman (1801–1890), where science interacts with doctrine and tradition, which act as “curators of a museum.” Catholic educators enrich love of tradition through prayer, reflection on sacred texts, and engagement in pastoral practice, bringing together a Christian anthropology of “faith-reason.”

Loving church tradition and education requires meeting the reality of the world in a moment facing an ever-increasing antireligious sentiment within the West. One is met with a dialogic narrow ridge of embodiment of tradition with a willingness to encounter and potentially learn from new insights and positions. The dialogic task is to resist a refusal to learn from difference and to resist a dismissive response to one’s own tradition.

**THE GROUNDS OF DIALOGUE**

Education centered within an intercultural dialogue assumes respect for one’s own tradition and that of another. Intercultural dialogue situated with the faith describes
mission as a unity of contraries, composed of deep knowledge of one’s own tradition accompanied by a simultaneous willingness to venture into the new and the different. Dialogue does not presuppose adherence to or agreement with another’s position, but it does necessitate a genuine effort to understand another viewpoint. This position of dialogic learning is akin to Buber’s work as a Jewish philosopher and theologian of dialogue, as in Arnett’s 1986 work. Buber emphasized that dialogue begins with the ground under one’s feet, not with the immediate conversation itself. Long before a given exchange transpires, one has been in dialogue with ideas and events fundamental to one’s own narrative formation. The movements of Buber’s dialogue are threefold: (a) know one’s own narrative ground; (b) attend to the position of another; and (c) seek to understand, not necessarily to condone. Intercultural dialogue is far from relativistic; it stands upon narrative ground and tradition with a willingness to learn from the other as one tests one’s own presuppositions. This understanding of dialogue contrasts significantly with psychological dialogue, as represented by the clinical framework of Carl Rogers in the United States. Where Rogers assumed that dialogues begin without presuppositions, Buber and the educational orientation of intercultural dialogue assume that the narrative ground of self and the other shape both the direction and substance of an exchange. Dialogue is not an act of conversational neutrality. The stress on presuppositions that undergird one’s dialogic contribution shapes the philosophical hermeneutic dialogic project of Hans-Georg Gadamer, which commences the interpretative process with bias and prejudice, such as tradition, culture, and knowledge of the church. Such a position on intercultural dialogue recognizes that, ultimately, the goal of education begins with traditional ground and the courage to learn from dissimilar perspectives. Dialogue is a unity of contraries of both traditional ground and a willingness to meet the new, situated within revelation, not relativism.

A UNITY OF CONTRARIES, EX CORDE ECCLESIAE AND CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

The theme of a unity of contraries undergirds Michael Rizzi citing of Ex corde Ecclesiae, which frames participation of Catholic and non-Catholic faculty and students within a Catholic university. The religious sentiment that directs Catholic education is a willingness to search for truth both within and outside of one’s own tradition. The community of the faith nourishes itself in knowledge of its tradition and in a willingness to reach out to the powerless, the stranger, and the
outcast; venturing out to otherness comes from assurance situated within a tradition of faith.

Rizzi’s analysis of Catholic education in the United States is centered on five periods: the Frontier Period (1789–1862), the Morrill Act/Land-Grant Period (1882–1920s), the Inter-War Period (1920–1945), the GI Bill Period (1945–1967), and the Land O’Lakes Period (1967–present). In the Frontier Period, the Catholic presence was often one of few educational options. As the number of Catholic colleges increased, one practice was constant: lack of discrimination against contrary beliefs. Many of the early Catholic schools from that period closed. More than 70% shut down by the 1800s, with only 305 remaining in 1965 and closer to 200 remaining today. In the Morrill Act/Land-Grant Period, one witnessed a large introduction of land-grant universities that stressed practical sciences to assist the economic needs of the middle class. Catholic schools increasingly emphasized business and the professions, including education, medicine, and law. This era found many of the Catholic women’s schools now re-chartered to deliver a four-year baccalaureate education. The first men’s school to enroll female students was Marquette University in 1909. A number of the Catholic orders sent clergy to earn graduate degrees, with Notre Dame’s Theodore Hesburgh, CSC, being a prime example; he earned his doctorate from Catholic University of America. The GI bill, with its multiple grants and loans, required expanding Catholic personnel as schools increased in numbers. The dramatic rise in student numbers resulted in priests, brothers, and sisters no longer being able to fill all the necessary roles on a campus. The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) inaugurated two significant changes—elevating “the role of the laity in Catholic institutions” and embodying less involvement “by church authorities.” Additionally, independent boards of trustees became common. The Land O’Lakes statement of 1967 largely frames the nature of the Catholic educational mission to this day. The goal of the statement was to transform small teaching academies into modern research universities without losing their Catholic identity. Ownership and management of Catholic schools continued connections with the Church but became more informal, consistent with Article 1 of the Land O’Lakes statement that emphasized academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

The Land O’Lakes statement consists of 10 major points that propel the contemporary Catholic university:

• A Catholic university is an authentic university defined by distinctive characteristics. The Catholic university is a
unity of contraries, embracing the full range of academic disciplines important to a society while working from a clear Catholic perspective.

• A Catholic university must respect and support theological disciplines.

• A Catholic university must elaborate a Catholic and Christian anthropology and also attend to the larger religious heritage of the world.

• A Catholic university must foster interdisciplinary dialogue by supporting multiple disciplines and academic fields of study. Nourishing creative dialogue among different areas of study limits the danger of “theological or philosophical imperialism,”17 making space for multiple scientific and humanities methods of inquiry in the pursuit of knowledge on a Catholic campus.

• A Catholic university must act as the reflective intelligence of the Church. Catholic universities, according to the document, must increase their counsel to the larger Church to address a complex and demanding future. Such dialogue is essential for the university, Church, and larger society.

• A Catholic university must embrace a public commitment to research to attend to a world spinning increasingly out of Christian control.

• A Catholic university must engage in public service, assisting the inner city, government activities, society, the Church, and the larger world.

• A Catholic university must foster an undergraduate education nurtured by ultimate questions, theologically and philosophically. The campus environment should assist students in their full development both spiritually and socially, encouraging responsive responsibility in examination of historically relevant social issues, such as shared rights, the pursuit of international peace, and the ongoing issue of human poverty.

• A Catholic University must nourish special characteristics of a Catholic community of learners, encouraging students to move their learning and insights into ongoing commitments attentive to application of faith and knowledge to promote the flourishing of others.

• A Catholic university must be flexible, shifting Catholic organization and administration characteristics to
address historical changes. What must remain is a profound commitment to service, to people, to respect for others, and to an ongoing responsibility for God’s world.

The current president of the University of Notre Dame, Fr. John Jenkins, CSC, revisited the Land O’Lakes statement in a piece titled “The Document that Changed Catholic Education Forever,” published in *America*. He reminded readers that Land O’Lakes is a property owned and operated by the University of Notre Dame, composed of 7,000 wooded acres of trees, vegetation, and approximately 30 lakes. Land O’Lakes is on the border of the upper peninsula of Michigan and Wisconsin. In this natural setting emerged a powerful and, for some, controversial document that set the tone for the contemporary Catholic university. The background for the Land O’Lakes statement was the reforms of the Second Vatican Council and the International Federation of Catholic Universities, with Hesburgh serving as the head of the federation at that time. Major leaders of Catholic universities gathered in response to a significant document of the Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et spes*.

The goal of Land O’Lakes statement was to work within a unity of contraries of institutional autonomy, protecting academic freedom and, simultaneously, enhancing Catholic identity. Jenkins states that the Land O’Lakes setting was tranquil, which stands in contrast to the reception of the document in the years since its release. Some indicated that the document introduces confusion into Catholic education and creates controversy over its direction. Critics suggested that perhaps the Land O’Lakes statement originated from a personal desire for academic prestige, which necessitated asking the Church to remain outside the influence of academic work. Hesburgh, who chaired the gathering, had experienced interference from the Church in 1957, when he attempted to publish an edited book of papers for the International Federation of Catholic Universities, an organization he headed. He was asked to withdraw a number of the papers from publication “because of one paper on religious freedom, written by the eminent theologian John Courtney Murray, S.J, who was at that time highly controversial . . . later a highly influential contributor at Vatican II.” Hesburgh wanted to protect the academic freedom and integrity of Catholic universities. Without such fortification, the Catholic university could not assume the role of a contemporary research university. The Land O’Lakes statement did not seek absolute independence from the Church; the task was to underscore public recognition of two competing responsibilities: academic
The Land O’Lakes statement stressed a Catholicism that could infuse an academic community with learning that was no longer dependent upon one location and that was capable of encouraging learning and dialogue between and among diverse disciplines. Conversations about God, the notion of the good, and the ultimate ends of human life accompany academic excellence at a Catholic university. Critics claimed that the Land O’Lakes document moved too closely to secularism; Jenkins countered with a reminder that the charge of Catholics is to participate in all of God’s world. The Land O’Lakes statement framed the “why” for Catholic universities to compete with the finest secular institutions. The statement encouraged Catholic universities to maintain their commitment to both academic excellence and Church tradition.

Jenkins asserted that since the 1967 Land O’Lakes statement, the world decreased reliance upon a faith stance. Thus, Pope John Paul II (1920–2005) in his 1990 *Ex corde ecclesiae* reinforced the Land O’Lakes statement with autonomy and academic freedom but, in addition, stressed the necessity of upholding connections with the local Church and the bishop in a given region. *Ex corde ecclesiae* was a wakeup call about a changing historical moment, a reminder that both parts of the unity of contraries (academic freedom and commitment to Church tradition) require constant support. Catholic leaders must discern shifts in a historical moment, emphasizing “the correct balance between autonomy and communion.”

The Land O’Lakes document was a public praising of academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and high scholarship standards. In the 1998 *Fides et ratio*, Pope John Paul II directed bishops to focus on faith and reason. Pope John Paul II, now Saint John Paul II, underscored the importance of inquiry as fundamental to Catholic tradition. Faith and reason work hand in hand within the mission of Catholic education. If there was a limitation of the Land O’Lakes document, it was having too much confidence in the institution of the Church, which unleashed undue hope for Catholic education with increasing emphasis on educational autonomy. Both academic freedom and commitment to church tradition are essential, and at various times, one emphasis requires greater attention.
than the other. A unity of contraries is far from the notion of a “golden mean” (Aristotle).

In the introduction to the *Apostolic Constitution of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on Catholic Universities*, Pope John Paul II (1990) specifically addressed Catholic universities as being born from the head of the church, stating, “I would like to manifest my deep conviction that a Catholic University is without any doubt one of the best instruments that the church offers to our age which is searching for certainty and wisdom” (parag. 15). Catholic universities are central for human progress and for the development of the church itself. John Paul II (1990) avowed that the Catholic university possesses the “institutional autonomy necessary to perform its functions effectively and guarantees its members academic freedom” (p. 3). Additionally, every Catholic university needs to have, according to John Paul II, four major characteristics: (a) individuals in each Catholic university capable of Catholic inspiration; (b) ongoing research within the light of the faith; (c) a fidelity of message, uniting church, faith, and academic inquiry; and (d) an institutional commitment to being of service to God’s people. These four characteristics undergird teaching, research, and service.

In a Catholic university, research needs to privilege “(a) the search for an integration of knowledge, (b) a dialogue between faith and reason, (c) an ethical concern, and (d) a theological perspective” (John Paul II, 1990, p. 4). Knowledge is revealed to the human person, carrying moral and ethical implications. With a deep commitment to the tradition and the faith, Catholic universities have sufficient ground to welcome those without religious belief but who are capable of advancing disciplinary insights. Every Catholic university must advocate for the Church and for the advancement of knowledge in society. Academic participation on a Catholic campus needs to respect the Church and Catholic doctrine in order to speak a truth that much of society rejects. Ethical religious principles must guide every aspect of a Catholic university. Pursuing organizational excellence in Catholic universities in creative responsiveness with the Holy See and the International Federation of Catholic Universities necessitates a cultural dialogue between the gospel and the world with active participation in ongoing conversations within the culture.

Responsibility to and respect for faith tradition, persons, family, and society are dialogic signatures of Catholic education. The Church recognizes that Catholic universities offer an interplay of dialogue between faith and culture, which, ultimately, enhances faith about God’s world. In the *Apostolic Constitution, Ex corde ecclesiae, of the Supreme Pontiff*
John Paul II on Catholic Universities, John Paul II summarized five general norms that should establish the coordinates of a Catholic university: (a) having a commitment to a holistic education of research, teaching, and service; (b) situating research and teaching within the spirit of Catholic ideals, which nurtures and preserves Catholic commitments and identity; (c) nourishing and preserving Catholic identity and mission; (d) appreciating conscience in teaching and research, respectful of the coordinates of the Catholic identity, and (e) embracing the autonomy of the Catholic university within its distinctive Catholic mission.

The nature of the Catholic university includes a community of scholars committed to research, teaching, and service within Catholic ideals. The Catholic university must preserve its Catholic identity, as it both protects scholarly conscience and acts as the caretaker of official university statements that sustain a Catholic identity. Maintaining a public Catholic identity is largely dependent upon the university community: the chancellor, the president, and the board of trustees, all charged with recruitment of personnel capable of contributing to the identity of a Catholic university. Teachers and administrators at a Catholic university have a “responsibility to promote, or at least to respect, that [Catholic] identity.”

To maintain a Catholic identity at a university, non-Catholic teachers should not be the majority. In each of the academic areas, there should be a commitment to an ethical formation. Each Catholic university should maintain communion with the universal Church, respect the responsibility of the bishop, and willingly communicate appropriate information about the university to the Catholic authorities. Pastoral care involves religious and qualified practitioners committed to the church and to the university community. Catholic universities cooperate and work with international and national organizations on issues of “justice, development and progress.” Catholic universities are an important mission of the Church. With great hope, the Church “entrusts to Catholic universities . . . cultural and religious meaning of vital importance because it concerns the very future of humanity” (ibid.). The sacred task of Catholic universities is the promotion of scholarship and teaching through the arts and the sciences, embedded within the faith tradition of the Church. The mission of a Catholic university is a demanding unity of contraries: contributing to ongoing debates about research in all areas of study while fostering Catholic values throughout the institution. The lives of students and future generations in a society require an ongoing commitment to inquiry and faith.
Indeed, the ongoing renewal of Catholic universities is intimately connected to a mission that carries faith to culture and society through research and inquiry. Hahnenberg revisited Hesburgh’s contribution to the Land O’Lakes conference 50 years after its conception. Hesburgh placed theology in a dialogic role, mediating the move of Catholic universities into contemporary academic centers of scholarship, pursuing excellence under the umbrella of academic freedom. Hahnenberg argued that the Land O’Lakes document continues to be a touchstone, igniting both positive and negative responses, particularly in regard to its uncompromising emphasis on autonomy. However, unlike the case of Protestant campuses, theology is a defining element of the Catholic campus itself. Hesburgh contributed to a comprehensive understanding of a Catholic university, with the theology department being essential to Catholic identity, supported by philosophy. Hesburgh understood the incarnation of Christ as the mediating function between a Holy God and sinful humanity, mediating between the human and the divine. According to Hahnenberg, “[F]or Aquinas, this mediation was not the linking of two opposed realities that did not belong together. Instead, the priestly mediation of Christ implied a fundamental unity of the two, a non-competitive union of the human and the divine,” a unity of contraries. Theology, which had been relegated to the seminary alone, becomes a central touchstone for all college students. The Land O’Lakes statement’s shift from philosophy to theology was more akin to a harmonious accord; for Hesburgh, theology’s mediating role required that it influence all disciplines.

At 35 years old, Hesburgh became the president of the University of Notre Dame, with just four years of administrative experience. Hesburgh’s first presidential address in the fall of 1952 did not stress theology; nevertheless, he repeatedly referred to John Henry Newman’s classic work, *The Idea of a University*. He also referred frequently to Leo R. Ward, who was a Holy Cross priest and a professor of moral philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. Hesburgh believed that the Catholic university and its theological foundations could integrate research in an era propelled by a pragmatic Enlightenment spirit. Confidence in Catholic tradition impelled Hesburgh to speak of the reality of Catholic academic excellence. Hesburgh wanted to move beyond Catholic parochialism and mediocrity, energized by a courageous conviction that on a Catholic campus there are no conflicts between theology and science, or between theology and other fields of study. Catholic universities, in his eyes, were the guiding hope of an enlightened faith. By
1958, however, he was no longer using the term “integration.” He then stressed mediation, a unity of contraries that refuses total integration. Theology and Catholic universities were to be “a mediator facilitating a sorely needed exchange between Christian wisdom and the world’s most pressing problems.”

In order for the Catholic universities to function as mediators, they had to match the excellence of secular and state universities without abandoning theological wisdom. One of the key elements of the university, for Hesburgh, was a spirit of engagement and openness. The focus on Catholic as universal emphasized engagement of information via a mediating dialogic role of standing between “the realm of human knowledge and the saving message of Christ.” Hesburgh’s appreciation for the world (humanity, the Church, and the incarnation) framed the Catholic university as mediator, “neither simply church, nor simply academy,” a bridge between the two. The goal of the Catholic university and of theology is to function as a mediator across multiple domains of inquiry and issues.

Catholic universities function as mediators in unique ways through their particular Catholic identity and charism, which work in dialogue with a larger Catholic commitment. Michael Galligan-Stierle and Jeffery R. Gerlomes Jr.’s essay on a founding order assumes that mission and identity have a dialogic character, keeping them far from tribalism. They point to the importance of institutional vocation—just as individual persons have a particular calling, so do institutions, specifically Catholic institutions. At a Catholic university, reason and faith are inseparable, and “reason absent from faith becomes nihilistic.” Catholic identity necessitates being part of the body of Christ as universities in intellectual contributions to the culture. The charism of a given university is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which gives particularity of Catholic expression. A Catholic institution finds identity via practices and story, charism, and mission engagement. The Catholic university undertakes a mediating role of dialogue that bears witness to its vocational calling. Members of a community of learning testify to the power of a given charism, as colleagues from Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit can attest.

Darlene Weaver’s discussion of mission and identity stresses intellectual traditions, with an emphasis on Pope John Paul II in _Ex corde ecclesiae_ identifying four hallmarks of a Catholic university: “a shared vision, a commitment to service, inquiry conducted in the light of faith, and fidelity to Catholic tradition.” The Catholic tradition of faith and reason is a dwelling capable of meeting the struggles of secularism and social fragmentation, as disciplines discern both amoral and
moral foundations that explicate the particularity of Catholic ethics—illuminating distinctiveness of a Catholic approach to academic disciplines. There is encouragement in faithfulness to a Catholic tradition driven by longstanding, not immediate, litmus tests. Catholic universities draw from a Catholic intellectual tradition, finding phenomenological inspiration from “previous generations of the Catholic thought and practice.” The Catholic intellectual tradition manifests both continuity and responsiveness to change. The tradition of the faith addresses the demands of the given historical moment, rooted in dialogic reflection between past and emerging questions. This emphasis on a unity of contraries is the explicit theme of the work of two Duquesne University professors, Janie M. Harden Fritz, Ph.D., and John Sawicki, C.S.Sp.

THE SPIRITAN CHARISM AND DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

Fritz and Sawicki’s essay articulates the importance of the unity of contraries on a Catholic campus from the Bluff at Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit. They emphasize the unity of academic excellence in teaching and publication and, simultaneously, the necessity to care for the whole person of the student, in order to “serve God by serving students” (p. 53). Fritz and Sawicki cite the dual nature of the Duquesne campus as pragmatic and mission driven. Pragmatism pays the bills of the institution and assists students in their pursuit of successful careers. Practical elements of an academic campus include educational training and the possibility of career opportunity, as well as institutional support and survival, all within the background of a Catholic mission. The Second Vatican Council’s directive for Catholic universities called for constant renewal of mission. Catholic universities contribute with a faith background for direction of scholarly inquiry, with Duquesne’s emphasis on the pragmatic and the Spirit offering a unique sense of guidance on its campus.

An exemplar of Duquesne University’s pragmatic and spirit-led mission was Henry J. Koren, C.S.Sp., head of the Department of Philosophy and Theology in the early 1950s and a prolific author. The university created the Henry J. Koren, C.S.Sp. Chair in Scholarly Excellence, with a stress on mission. Duquesne University’s mission frames a unity of contraries within the practices of the Church and responsiveness and flexibility to the historical moment. Fr. Koren’s mission at a Catholic university within a Spiritan heritage embraced a unity of contraries within the tradition of the Church and attentive flexibility to the historical moment. Koren emphasized the importance of Fr. Francis Libermann, a co-founder of the

the necessity to care for the whole person of the student

163
Prof. Ronald C. Arnett

Congregation of the Holy Spirit, the Spiritans. He came from an orthodox Jewish family and stressed the integration of the Holy Spirit and practical work in God’s world: “Libermann asks us to live the gospel in a way that is not marred by the time and place of its origin but is valid for the universal man, for human beings anywhere and at any time, because it is sufficiently flexible to become inculturated wherever the Spirit blows.” This responsiveness to the historical moment permitted Libermann to stress an individual sense of salvation inclusive of the salvation of the world.

Spiritans listen to the needs of a given moment in God’s world and work with people in accordance with their own unique, specific, and historically driven needs. A Spiritan can understand the dialogic literacy campaigns of Paulo Freire (1921–1997). Freire did not begin with an introduction to great literature; his work with literacy began with the needs of the people before him. He helped people read what was central to their lives, including information on farm implementation and crop rotation, pamphlets on local politics, or directions for medicine use. The people drove the literacy agenda; he did not impose an abstract view of learning upon the people. Spiritans follow a similar educational course, walking consistently in dialogue with the needs of God’s world.

To define a Spiritan charism, one must offer examples of Spiritans in action. It is difficult to supply a theoretical framework for a group that has flexible responsiveness to the historical moment and the needs of God’s people as its mandate. Spiritans bring a pragmatic conviction to help in the midst of an undenied sense of despair. This unity of contraries is a dialogic standard that permits the needs of a given moment to meet the living power of a tradition of faith. Spiritans congregate when hope vacates a given place; only then do Spiritans walk against a current hopelessness, bringing little attention to themselves as they address the needs of a people. A dialogic sense of a unity of contraries invites revelation in the meeting of despair and conviction of the faith in action. As a Spiritan walks into centers from which others flee, crisis meets a pragmatic certainty; no matter what the time or moment, this is still God’s world. The Spiritan mission deals with the particular needs of the people without entrapment and without assurance of secular success. A Spiritan enacts a responsive faith that begins with the needs of God’s world. Duquesne University states that it is the task of the campus to serve God by serving students. The mission of a Spiritan is to serve all of God’s people, ever responsive to changes in the demands of a given historical moment. Duquesne University serves God by serving students, for God’s people are forever students in that each one must learn from and
respond to changes in God’s world. Their pragmatic mission is to serve in a given time and place, finding revelatory dialogue in the demands of today and the conviction of the faith in action.

Prof. Ronald Arnett,
Duquesne University, Pittsburgh

ENDNOTES
5. Ibid., 125.
6. Ibid., 127.
7. Ibid., 129.
8. Ibid., 130.
9. Ibid., 130–1.
15. Ibid., 163.
16. Ibid., 166.
19. Ibid., parag. 7.
20. Ibid., parag. 11.
21. Ibid., parag. 30.
24. Ibid., 17.
26. Ibid., 950.
27. Ibid., 955.
28. Ibid., 959.
30. Ibid., 117.
31. Ibid., 61.
32. Ibid., 65.
BEGINNINGS

On a sabbatical after eight years of mission in Kenya, I arrived at Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit, Pittsburgh, on August 26, 1975. The provincial administration was advising us to think about continuing our studies. Following the completion of a Masters in Educational Psychology, a request came from Nairobi to take up the job of mission appeals for the archdiocese. I was at first not too sure whether to accept this or not, but after some persuasion from the Nairobi diocesan chancellor and discussion with the pastor of the parish where I lived and his acceptance that I could continue to live there, I agreed. For the next two years, I lived in the parish, then transferred to the Spiritan residence in Long Island City, New York. But living in New York did not sit right with me, so after 6 months I returned to the parish in Pittsburgh.

In 1980, the new Spiritan president, Fr. Donald Nesti, C.S.Sp., asked if I would come and work at Duquesne. He agreed that I could continue to make the mission appeals. My first job was as Assistant Director for a Capital Campaign, titled, “Strategies for a Second Century.” The goal was to raise $20 million. The campaign raised $24 million. I was then asked to found the Office of International Education to help increase the number of international students. We had only fifteen of them then. Years ago, as seminarians, we heard, “Join the Holy Ghost Fathers and see the world.” I certainly have seen the world. It is easier for me now to tell where I have not been than list the countries I visited recruiting students for Duquesne. This was a great experience, even though I found the travel sometimes tiring and had a few bouts of food poisoning. I do not think I can do so now.

Following a series of events in August 1986—a family death in Ireland, the death of an assistant, a series of ill-matching temporary secretaries, preparing for a month’s travel in South America—I did not feel well. My doctor told me I had pneumonia and got me into Mercy Hospital. I have no recollection of what happened in the next few days. I eventually woke up in a strait jacket and on life support. I wrote on a pad, “Have I been anointed?” “Yes,” came the reply, “seven times!” I had Legionnaire’s disease, but during the procedure to find out what type of pneumonia I had, I also got Hepatitis B. It took quite some time to recover.

One Saturday morning after recovery, a call came from the President’s office to come and see him. The Vice President
It was a long six weeks, stretching to twenty-seven years! for Student Life had resigned and he needed an Interim Vice President for six weeks. It was a long six weeks, stretching to twenty-seven years! I acted as Interim Vice President for Student Life for one year. A new President decided to make my position permanent. There was so much to do. Reporting to me as Vice President for Student life were the following offices: Residence Life, Greek Life, Health Services, and Commuter Affairs; Freshmen Development, Career Services, Judicial Affairs and Special Services; Recreation, Athletics, Multi-Cultural Affairs, and the Tamburitzans. Reporting also to me was the Assistant Vice President for Student Life who supervised Community Service and Programs and Activities, the Student Government, and Student Organizations.

The initial problem I had to deal with was staffing. Much had to be done by way of inculcating the Duquesne spirit among staff, and through them, to the students. In July 1988, I had only one staff member in Residence Life. Some staff in the various departments were not greatly committed to the values of Duquesne and had to be released. But we were ready for the opening of the new academic year at end of August.

WINDS OF CHANGE

The Student population then was about 10,000, with some 3,300 living on campus. The late 1980s was a time of great change on campus. In 1987, the president resigned, followed quickly by an interim president. In May 1988, Dr. John E. Murray, Jr., became the first lay president. There were many cultural changes as well as changes in personnel. Mobile phones were everywhere. In 1989, the President of Student Government asked for TV’s in the student rooms. Fortunately, I found out that the city’s contract with the TV company required free installation in educational institutions. Next was the internet in the rooms. A friend of mine had a cable company in the area. He offered me the cable at cost. Coincidentally, the president had received a million dollars’ donation from a Foundation. I asked for $67,000 for this project and he graciously agreed. The cable company agreed that they would pull the internet cable along with the TV cable and we could connect as needed. Both installations became great recruitment points for the next ten years. At that time, Duquesne University was one of the most cabled universities in the country.

STUDENT CHALLENGES

The usual issues with students continued and increased. The needs of students from very different backgrounds demanded much attention. Psychological problems seemed to increase on
a daily basis. To help with these issues we decided initially to reinforce the presence of the Mission Statement, the values that flow from it, and our expectations of a Duquesne Student. In cooperation with some members of the Board of Directors, we produced a wallet-sized card that had the Mission Statement on one side and the expectations of a Duquesne Student on the other.

1. Read, understand, and live out the values contained in the Mission Statement.
2. Build on the values you have received from those who love you and strive to meet their expectations.
3. Be diligent and sincere in your education, open to learning and change, and strive for academic excellence.
4. Be honest and have integrity in all that you do.
5. Recognize the importance of service to others and our community.
6. Grow spiritually, preparing for life not just a career.
7. Appreciate diversity, be welcoming to others.
8. Respect your body and avoid addictions.
9. Develop a sense of self around your ethical and spiritual values.
10. Develop friendships and know the value of teamwork.
11. Be proud of Duquesne, show school spirit and support university activities.
12. Be at peace, love God, your neighbor, and yourself.

Quickly the word “Duquesneable” became a slogan on campus. This led to a great increase in the number of students doing service work off campus—called Duquesne University Volunteers (DUV)—for which Duquesne received recognition for several years from the White House. “We serve God by serving students” from the Mission Statement quickly became part of the language of the student body and the parents. Each year at Parent Orientation, the university presented these values to parents, giving each parent a copy of the card. One result of this emphasis was the decrease in damage in the Residence Halls and throughout the campus. As I listened at the various student meetings, the word ‘respect’ became part of the Duquesne student vocabulary. I attend wedding receptions of
alumni regularly and I usually find alumni who proudly show me that they still have their cards in their wallets.

Many students bring psychological problems with them and all colleges have seen a great increase in such issues. Students and parents expect the ready availability of counseling services for students. Initially we fought against this and had instead a policy of dealing with immediate issues on campus and addressing long-term problems through off campus treatment. The Department organized therapy with local psychological agencies to deal with deep and ongoing counseling issues. As this policy became less acceptable, a large increase in staff and facilities was required. The Counseling Department was moved to a larger area in Fisher Hall to help with the increasing numbers and the demands on the staff.

The use of marijuana and other drugs, though present, was not a major issue during my term. Today, with the legalization of the use of marijuana in many states, it can be a real issue. I always felt amused when students were surprised at being caught smoking marijuana in their rooms. The unmistakable smell came through the ventilation! Today, there is a campus wide no smoking ban and this has helped to decrease the smoking of marijuana.

The misuse of alcohol, particularly by freshmen, was a big problem. Many started drinking in high school. If I had a few dollars for every time I went to a police station to bail out a student in the middle of the night, I could do a world tour! In the early 1990s, Residence Life set up a program called “CARES” to help with these issues and the program has achieved great success and received several large state grants to help control the problem. This continues to this day. I have contact with several students who had alcohol problems as students and who through the counseling of “CARES” now live great family lives.

Depression is a major problem for many students. Duquesne is academically challenging and with the freedom of College, some students can quickly get behind. Some find that they are not well prepared for college and, besides, have money problems. Many students bring preexisting sickness conditions with them to college and frequently fail to inform our Health Services until these conditions raise their ugly head, leading to hospitalization and major bills. The need to belong and get involved can bring social problems with excessive partying, alcohol consumption, and frustration. Beginning at freshman orientation, we tried to link freshmen with the Orientation Staff to help with their continuing orientation. We were not too successful in this effort.
STUDENT BONDING AND SOCIETIES

There is an argument that Universities should ban Greek Life (social organizations at colleges and universities that continue through life). Accepting the problems that are part of the system, I nevertheless believe the sororities and fraternities do much good. The bonding that occurs, the contributions to the social life of the campus, and the friendships that build up are beneficial, and of course, the marriages and baptisms that follow are all very positive. Greeks are among the best groups to support their University or College after graduation. Greek Life adds a tremendous lot to the social life on campus, which is a positive. In current American society, with small families the norm—where students are often without a sister or brother—Greek Life helps students overcome whatever they lack in this area; it also help them develop leadership skills.

We made a strong effort to link student events to the celebration of Holy Mass and this led to the tradition of the various Greek organizations sponsoring a Mass in which the whole group would be present in their Greek colors. Members greeted the students as they entered church, did the readings, and served at the altar. Student events, like the induction of student leaders, were always held as part of Sunday liturgy.

The student body can be split into commuters and residents. The small Commuter office on the third floor of the Union did not serve the students adequately. President Murray had the idea to extend the Union and give more space to the commuters on the ground floor. This initiative has proved very successful as a facility for the building of relationships among commuter students.

NEW BUILDINGS

The Residence Halls were not in good shape. The colorful plastic chairs in the student lounges and the dangerous plastic chairs in the dining room all needed to be changed. The accommodation of students from for-profit schools down town was also problematic. One morning, after a confrontation between Duquesne Students and the non-Duquesne students during the night, I bluntly told the President that the latter had to go. He agreed, provided I convinced the Vice President for Business and Finance. This was not easy, but I promised him that I would have all the beds full within a year. This happened. In fact, we quickly needed more Residence Halls. Since then Duquesne has built two residence halls and acquired an apartment complex adjacent to campus.

The University has spent over $100 million dollars on the Commuter Center and the Residence Halls in the last decade. Regularly I hear from alumni and prospective students and
Regularly I hear from alumni and prospective students and their parents that, having visited other schools, they found our facilities much better. Nevertheless, students today want their own private apartment from their first semester, but that is something that has many dangers. They come from a home where they have their own private room and often their private bathroom, but I believe that, with the problems that can arise during the first year, single facilities are not suitable for freshmen.

We made many efforts—new painting, new chairs, painting and a new menu—to improve the conditions of the dining room. I remember vividly accompanying the Director of Residence Life to tour the bathrooms in the Towers Building. I met her at the entrance and she asked me to visit the Dining Room first. There was a gathering there, including the president and members of the university administration and I was informed that it had been decided to name the facility, “The Hogan Dining Room,” in my honor. I was speechless. Unfortunately, this seemed to make some students think I was responsible for the food and such regularly confronted me about issues in the dining room!

The Palumbo Center, built in 1987–78, was to include a recreation center for the students, but we could not get the funds to do both. I was like a stuck penny at administration meetings advocating for the building of a recreation center. It eventually came with the building of the Power Center, called after the first President of the University, Fr. William Power, C.S.Sp.

PRESIDENT OF DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIP ASSOCIATION

Tuition costs are rising at alarmingly high rates and the scholarship money available cannot meet the needs. Duquesne is very generous with scholarship grants, but there is not a bottomless pit. Freshman students can be very upset when the family does nothing to support them and they find themselves with a big bill to pay at the end of their first semester. As Vice President for Student Life, I was regularly frustrated when a student had to leave because the family could not or would not support them, or they had not completed the family tax returns to submit to FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). This was necessary to get grants from the State or Federal Government, Stafford Loans, etc. To afford the high price of college tuition, many students must get jobs, often two or three, and then they begin to spread themselves too thin.

After twenty-seven years in Student Life, I told President Dougherty that I would like to retire. He was not receptive to the idea and eventually came back to me with the idea of starting an office to provide support for students in financial difficulties. On
the death of my parents, my assistant had already established a scholarship in their name and subsequently some friends on my birthday and on other anniversaries fund-raised in my name. That scholarship is one of the largest I now control as President of the University Scholarship Association. On taking up the challenge, I thought it would be only a part time position. However, the need is great and I am busy. It has gone well. I have been able to add three new large scholarships, while continuing to increase the scholarships I had initiated while in Student Life or had inherited through a previous President, Fr. Henry McAnulty, C.S.Sp. It is certainly no part time job!

It is tough to deal with the emotions of a student when they know they have to leave the University because of outstanding bills, but there is no bottomless pit. International Students experience many problems trying to continue their education in America. Once they receive a grant from Admissions when they are accepted, they cannot get tax-free money after that, and they cannot work except in the University. The Scholarship Association is now able to help many of these students each year as a fund has been established to help them.

My years in Student Life were the happiest years of my life. I had a tremendous staff who put up with me, and the demands I made of them. My present position does not have a large staff but the ones I have are a great support and add a lot to the office.

The giving culture, the Spiritan presence, and the dedication of the staff and faculty are obvious at Duquesne. It has been a great honor to work here, to get to know many people, and continue the friendship with the many students with whom I have come in contact. I have had the honor and privilege to officiate at their weddings and, of course, to baptize their children and to have a continued relationship with them. It has been a great honor and I am now welcoming these children to study at Duquesne. And I have officiated at several weddings of these students.

The confreres at Trinity Hall, the Spiritan Residence on campus, have been most supportive and I wish to thank them for their fraternal love and understanding over the years.

Sean Hogan, C.S.Sp.
Duquesne University, Pittsburgh

ENDNOTES
1. A multi-cultural song and dance company.
The Our Father is primarily a prayer for Jesus’ disciples, itinerant with him in proclaiming the kingdom of God. “It is a dangerous prayer for anyone who prays it” (2). Lohfink shows how in this prayer, “Jesus summarized all that he wanted and hoped for” (12) and how it takes up substantial facets of the Old and New Testament. Trusting and free of ceremony, it addresses the urgent crisis and need of God’s people. But God’s interest comes first, marked by three “thou” askings; then follow three or four “we” petitions. The petition for the hallowing of the Name depends on Ezekiel, where God hallows the divine name by freeing his people from idols and giving them a new heart and new spirit, so “the nations will know that I am the Lord.” The petition for the coming of God’s reign recalls Daniel 7 where everlasting dominion is given to one like a son of man, who represents a society that God eternally gives the rule and reign (45). This implies a radical exchange of ruler, the end of our world, and the ushering in a God’s new world. “Thy will be done,” based on Isaiah, calls not just for obedience to God’s commands or submission to God in adversity, but that God make his plan of salvation “conceived in heaven from all eternity, become reality now on earth!” (69). The petition for daily bread recalls Israel in the wilderness fed daily by manna, also Jesus and his itinerant disciples sent out with no money, and Jesus’ saying “do not worry about tomorrow . . .” Asking for forgiveness as we have forgiven recalls Jesus’ saying about forgiving seventy-seven times and leaving our offerings at the altar to go and first reconcile with the brother/sister. Jesus was tempted against his very calling and mission. We pray that God lead us not into situations of testing in which the power of evil, stronger than we are, perverts our call. The evil from which we ask to be delivered can be the evil one, though the embolism at mass picks it up as “from every evil” understood as sin, distress, and lack of peace. In summary, “God’s care for the world is to be the disciples’ concern, and the disciples’ worry about their existence is something that has long been part of God’s care for creation” (74).

Interfaith dialogue includes all forms of positive encounters and relationships between persons of different faith experiences. Those involved share and witness from their own religious identity. Such dialogue enhances understandings of reality and the pursuit of truth about religion and life in general (52). The author discusses the four forms of interfaith dialogue, as well as strategies for enhancing it. The book has three parts: Christianity, Religion, and Dialogue; Scripture and Tradition; and Theologies and Praxes.

The Christian tradition was never a monolithic tradition, always had many centers. In 1900 more than 82% of Christians lived in the global North; by 2010, about 61% resided in the global South. “Global Christianity” (term coined early 20th century) refers to how the Christian faith of Europe expanded through the globe; “World Christianity” refers to the diverse forms of Christianity, with each “home” producing its own brand of Christianity (23). Transcultural and international religions, usually classified as “World Religions” are: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism; Confucianism and Taoism (42). Varieties of indigenous or tribal religions are usually not included—hence the lack of mention of African Traditional Religion, for example.

The Christian Bible, both Old and New Testaments, contain exclusive and inclusive points of view, particularity and universality. Texts like Acts 4:12, “There is salvation in no one else . . .,” are to be understood as “love proclamations” internal to the Christian dispensation. Used outside of Christian circles “they are not only meaningless but also dangerous, especially if used to pass judgments on those who are not Christians” (85). Asian Christianity, a minority amidst vibrant Asian religions that antedate Christianity, has been on the forefront of interfaith dialogue with its triple dialogue: dialogue with the cultures of Asia, dialogue with the religions of Asia, and dialogue with the poor of Asia. Seeing that other religions are part of God’s design for salvation, Christians have to engage with them as a fundamental element of the mission of the church. Hence, both dialogue and proclamation are integral to the church’s mission of evangelization (147).

Part 3, “Theologies and Praxes,” is replete with insights and challenges. Eight contemporary theologies of religious pluralism are profiled: Raimon Panikkar, Paul Knitter, John Hick, Peter Phan, Kwok Pui-Lan, Michael Amaladoss, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Aloysius Pieris. Pannikkar portrays internal intrareligious dialogue in his statement, “I ‘left’ as a Christian, I ‘found’ myself a Hindu, and I ‘return’ a Buddhist, without having ceased to be Christian” (173). “Interfaith Reasoning, Hermeneutics, Theology, and Worship” (191–206) is challenging. The group for Scriptural Reasoning, formed in 1995, study religious texts together without seeking consensus or a common ground, rather greater understanding of how each tradition interprets a particular life or religious theme. Dogmatic attitudes about the truth of one’s own religion or religious scriptures are proscribed. The Bible is read with the other native scriptures of Asia. The question is, why should Asian Christians not supplant the Old Testament with their own
scriptures as preparatory to the revelation of the New Testament. Comparative theology (different from comparative religious studies) ventures to learn from one or more faith traditions about faith, truth, sin, grace, salvation, community, and worship. In *interfaith worship* one participates in the rituals of a tradition different from one’s own; in *multi-faith worship*, different faith communities are together but praying mainly on their own. “Christian-Muslim Dialogue of Theology” (207–223) confronts the Christian doctrine of original sin and redemption with Muslin faith. Muslims see God’s revelation as embodied in the Qur’an, Christians as embodied in Jesus, the human face of God. Islam highlights God’s graciousness and the goodness of the human person. God accepted the repentance of the first couple and children are born free of sin. It is blasphemous for the eternal God to die on the cross, unjust for an innocent man to die for the guilt of another, unworthy of God to abandon his prophet. Such dialogue makes Catholics emphasize that “original sin can be appreciated only if one has faith in the redemption brought about by Christ” (218). Further, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #404 has it, original sin is “contracted” not “committed,” a state and not an act. The final chapter traces some challenges of religious pluralism, especially in theological education. Besides study of world religions and Christian theology of religions, one may envisage integrating interfaith learning and study of the world’s religions into the entire course, even consider having the seminary itself as interfaith, seminarians of different religious traditions learning alongside one another.

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

Editor: Dr. James Chukwuma Okoye, C.S.Sp., Director, Center for Spiritan Studies, GM Libermann Hall, 600 Forbes Avenue, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA 15282, U.S.A.
Telephone: (1) 412 396 4824
E-mail: okoyej@duq.edu

Editorial Board: James C. Okoye, C.S.Sp., Dr. Janie M. Harden Fritz, Dr. Sara Baron, Dr. Marinus Iwuchukwu, Dr. Fintan Sheerin, Dr. Gerard Magill, Dr. George Worgul.

Spiritan Consulting Committee

Spiritan Horizons is an annual publication. ISSN: 1933-1762. It is also published online at http://www.duq.edu/spiritanhorizons ISSN: 1935-0759

Subscription rate: $10.00 (postage included)
Published by the Center for Spiritan Studies, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA 15282, U.S.A.

Cover design: Dr. Matthew J. Walsh, Community Engagement Coordinator, Counseling Services, Duquesne University.