



Annual Journal of the DMC Students'
Vol. 05 No. 02 | December 2024



SVD AUSTRALIA
Formation House

JOURNEYING IN FAITH

Students' Journal
December 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Divine Word Missionaries acknowledge
the Wurundgeri people of the Kulin nation
as the traditional custodians of the land
on which our residence and offices are located,
and where we live, work and pray.

We acknowledge the Australian and
Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation.
We pay our respects to Ancestors and Elders,
past, present and emerging.

We commit ourselves to actively work
alongside Indigenous peoples
for reconciliation and justice.

Table of Contents

Message from the Dean	7
Witnessing to the Light – From Everywhere For Everyone	9
Effective Communication Classes	16
Human Rights and Immigration	18
How <i>Hesychia</i> Shapes, or Could Shape Spirituality in the 21st Century	26
Witnessing to the Light - Formation and the Future Mission as an SVD	31
Meditations on the Word	39
The Discrimination Against Christians and Atheism in Indonesia	42
Exploring Benedictine Spirituality	49
Atheism: Varieties of Belief, Disbelief and Unbelief	53
Sacrosanctum Concilium and the Liturgy	61
Haiku	67

Dorish Maru College Community 2024

Christopher, Jakub, Yon, Gusty, Elmer, Rass, Albano, Linh, Thuc
Peter, Khanh, Luong, Mengjie, Khoa, Jacob, Krisna



Dorish Maru College Community 2024

Krisna, Luong, Thuc, Jacob, Linh, Rass, Albano, Elmer, Yon, Peter, Christopher, Khanh
Jakub, Khoa, Mengjie, Gusty



Message from the Dean

Albano Da Costa SVD



This has been both an exciting and busy year at the house of formation of the Divine Word Missionaries.

Welcome to the December edition of *Journeying in Faith* 2024, our established journal dedicated to the exploration and discourse of theology. In these pages, we aim to create a vibrant and inclusive platform where students can delve into the rich tapestry of religious thought, engage in critical analysis, and share their unique perspectives.

The study of theology is a journey - a quest to understand the divine, the sacred texts, and the profound questions that have intrigued humanity for centuries. This journey is not just an academic pursuit; it is a deeply personal and transformative experience that shapes our worldview, ethics, and sense of purpose.

In this December edition, we explore a diverse array of topics, each article reflecting the passion and scholarly rigor of our contributors. From the ancient wisdom of the scriptures to contemporary theological debates, our writers challenge us to think deeply and reflect on the

relevance of theology in our modern world.

One of the core missions of the *Dorish Maru Community* of religious missionary formation of the *Divine Word Missionaries* is to foster an environment of open dialogue and mutual respect. In a world often divided by differing beliefs and ideologies, we believe that constructive conversation is essential. Through respectful engagement with different perspectives, we can deepen our understanding and build bridges across divides.

One of the reasons why *Dorish Maru*, as the house of formation of the *Divine Word Missionaries*, has been successful over the years is its collaborative partnerships and relationships at an international level and beyond.

This year the seminarians of Dorish Maru College undertook three-hourly weekly sessions entitled: Effective Communications with Dr Cecilia Francisco-Tan. The reflections in this volume are the result of the multi-faceted work to engage students with understanding holistic communication as integral to authentic mission. The pieces, ranging from academic essays, personal reflections, prayers, and poems are a sample reflection of the challenging creative, and many times demanding work of moving

towards authentic communication always with mission in mind. The main goal is to develop good critical theological understanding via a variety of speaking, reading, listening, and writing skills.

As a Province, we have embarked upon the synodal journey process, which has helped us think through what we do well, what we could do differently, and what we could do better in the months and years to come as a religious missionary order for a *mission-centered* Church.

On behalf of all the formators at Dorish Maru, we thank you for your continued support and encouragement of the work that we do in preparing future *Divine Word Missionaries* for world mission. We could not do what we do without you. Please continue to keep us in your prayers, invite us to visit your parishes, and encourage prospective candidates in your local parishes - especially those considering a religious missionary vocation - to come and see.

As you navigate through the articles, we invite you to ponder the questions raised, engage with the arguments presented, and contribute your own voice to this ongoing conversation. Whether you are a seasoned theologian or a curious novice, there is something here for everyone.

Theological inquiry demands courage - the courage to question, to doubt, and to seek truth even when it challenges our preconceived notions. It requires humility, acknowledging that our understanding is always limited and that there is always more to learn. And it necessitates a commitment to the pursuit of wisdom, recognising that the journey itself is as important as the destination.

We are immensely proud of the work our contributors have done, and we are excited to share their insights with you. We hope that this journal will inspire you to embark on your own theological journey, to ask bold questions, and to seek deeper understanding.

Thank you for joining us on this adventure. I wish you and yours blessed Advent and Christmas seasons. Thank you for your ongoing support of the work we do at Dorish Maru Theological House of Formation of the Divine Word Missionaries.

Together, let us explore the boundless horizons of theology and discover the profound truths that await.

In the Word,
Albano Da Costa SVD

Witnessing to the Light – From Everywhere For Everyone

Sr Monica Cavanagh RSJ



“The light shines out in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it”. John 1:5

Gathering in this 150th year of the founding of your Congregation of Divine Word Missionaries, you are being invited to reflect on ‘Witnessing to the Light – from Everywhere for Everyone’.

Such ‘Witnessing’ is central to our call to be missionary, igniting the gift of our Baptism for becoming the hands and feet of Christ in the ordinariness of daily life and beyond. From many places, nationalities

and cultures we come, each called to let our light shine within our reality.

Both Scriptural Testaments testify to the call to all to witness to the living God. Isaiah reminds the people of Israel that they are “servants whom God has chosen” to be such witnesses. [Isaiah 43:10]. Then John the Baptist comes “to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.” [John 1:6], before Acts 1:8 calls all through the action of the Spirit to witness “to the ends of the earth”, as our theme says, ‘from everywhere for everyone’.

We learn that God does the calling, drawing people then sending them to be living witnesses to the tender, compassionate and merciful God they have encountered and learned to trust. So, it is everyone's call to share among the nations God's invitation to find life's fullness through living in transforming, light-revealing relationships.

St Francis of Assisi challenges us: 'You may be the only gospel some people will ever read'. It would be good for each of us to consider: What gospel would people read in our lives?

Pope Francis' message for World Mission Day 2022 is a wonderful summation of that:

"Every Christian is called to be a missionary and witness to Christ. And the Church, the community of Christ's disciples, has no other mission than that of bringing the Gospel to the entire world by bearing witness to Christ. To evangelize is the Church's very identity". [1]

We come to see that to reflect the light of Christ we need first to believe that the Christ light is active in our hearts. This belief can ignite the light in others too. Marianne Williamson in her book *A Return to Love* reflects that we are all meant to let our light shine and in doing so we enable others to let their light shine. [2]

Matthew 5:14-16 reminds us: *'You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.'*

The candle lit for us at our baptism is meant to light up the whole universe.

Pope Francis' words on St Stephen's witness to the light

Our beloved Pope Francis is a living example of being a witness of light both in our church and in our world. He writes often on this theme. On the feast of St Stephen in 2022, he challenged us to see St Stephen's witness continuing in this time and place.

Stephen is the first martyr... the first witness, the first of a host of brothers and sisters who, even until today, continue to bring the light into the darkness – people who respond to evil with good, who do not succumb to violence and lies, but break the cycle of hatred with meekness and love, in the world's nights, these witnesses bring God's dawn." [3]

BEARING WITNESS TO THE LIGHT

There are many encounters in which one experiences, bearing witness to the light. Three such experiences in my own life include working alongside catechists whose lives bore witness to the God of Faithfulness teaching Religious Education in our government schools, the death of my youngest brother and in the energy

and passion of Susan Selo, a synod participant from Fiji .

When my youngest brother Ted died earlies this year, I heard many stories of how he was a light for so many. One of my other brothers reflected that Ted had the great gift of sharing his time with his family, his workmates, his neighbours and by providing a listening ear to those troubled by life. Through his life he also bore witness to the light.

Recently I participated in a webinar where Susan Selo shared how she took the message of the first session of the synod back to the communities in parts of Oceania. Her enthusiasm and vision engaged the local communities, as she trained and facilitated people in the 'Conversation in the Spirit' process.

MARY MACKILLOP BEARS WITNESS TO THE LIGHT

On 15th January 1842, a light shone on the family of Alexander and Flora MacKillop when their first child Mary Helen MacKillop was born. Little did they know how this small child would influence the lives of thousands in this country and indeed in our world, nor that their daughter would one day be canonised as Australia's first formally recognised saint.

There were many experiences and influences that shaped her life – the reality of her family life, her giftedness as a teacher, her desire 'to serve God in the care of his little ones of his flock' (Letter to

her mother, 21 August 1867) whilst facing the many obstacles that came her way as she responded to the needs of the emerging Australian church and colony.

Life threw many different experiences at her. The way she responded formed her into the pioneering woman she has become for Australians and for the universal Church. Her sharp mind, her tender heart and her reflective nature are gifts to us all.

Mary MacKillop's work as a truly missionary one

In 1871 after experiencing the excommunication, Mary MacKillop was advised to go to Rome to seek approval for this new Congregation. She drew on her experience of living in Australia, for she had come to know its people and its story.

She had a real feel for this newly emerging reality, a land inhabited by its first peoples for thousands of years and a place where the first European people settlers were of convict stock. It was a place of beauty and isolation, a land of floods and drought. It was a land in which the establishment of the church required a different understanding. In October 1873, she writes a long letter to Monsignor Kirby explaining the necessity for the Institute.

As the Institute of the Sisterhood of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart was established to meet the many wants of the Australian colonies, and as these wants can hardly be realised by those who have not had some experience of

them, it follows naturally that a brief explanation of some may not be unwelcome to those charitably interested in the welfare of religion in that remote quarter. [4]

At times it meant that the Sisters went to live in towns and remote places in the bush where there was no regular access to the Sunday Eucharist or the sacraments. On these occasions she notes that the Sisters would gather the people and recite the rosary and read them some little meditation appointed by the pastor. Mary MacKillop took the heart of the Church into the midst of the people and there she built a Church of the heart in their midst.

She continues in this letter: 'The work is truly a missionary one'. She often reminded her Sisters that St Joseph's true children's mission was to 'seek first the poorest and most neglected parts of God's vineyard'. (6 March 1907) She also encouraged the Sisters to 'use every means at their disposal to lead others to life'. (12 March 1899)

Mary MacKillop took her Religious vows in response to what she perceived as a clear call from God to carry out a mission of love to those who were poor and isolated in the emerging Australian colonies. Mary and her Sisters lived among the people responding to the God of life whatever the circumstances.

Archbishop Mark Coleridge in his feast day homily on 8 August 2014 spoke these words:

Mary's action was all about immense practicality – the love that is hands-on, the love that has mud on its boots. Because she made that journey, which is the great journey of faith, Mary MacKillop stands for ever as a witness to Easter. [5]

She believed that participating in God's mission meant being ready to move to wherever the need was – to the mining towns and gold fields, living in tents if necessary to keep the word of God alive in the hearts of God's people. This led her across the highways and byways of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand serving those who were most in need through education and other charitable works.

Her life challenges us to commit ourselves to work to address unjust structures that keep people bound down and oppressed and to reach out in love to those in our neighbourhood who are forgotten, isolated and marginalized.

Mary MacKillop opened the window of her soul to the needs of our world, she sustained herself by a life of deep prayer, by a trust in a good God and by a deep sense that God was the source and centre of all that she undertook.

The flame of faith ignited within Mary MacKillop, kept burning brightly within her as she walked this land and encountered its people bringing to all the message of their human dignity.

Mary MacKillop - Becoming a light for the world

Even when obstacles stood in her pathway and there were many, she simply reminded her Sisters to 'let no obstacle deter you from acting with courage'. One such obstacle was her relationship with some Bishops. This what Bishop James Quinn had to say to Bishop Reynolds in Adelaide:

'She is the daughter of a colonial seminarian, impossible for me to accept the government of a woman or to have a community of nuns governed by a lady from Adelaide. I won't allow any woman to make a disturbance in my diocese. [6]

Despite such judgements Mary MacKillop never lost sight of whom she was following. She encouraged her Sisters to trust the light that was shining within them so that they too would be light to the world.

"Ah, children of St Joseph's noble and generous heart we must be burning with zeal and courage in the service of our God". (10 March 1907)

Witnessing to the Light: From Everywhere for Everyone

Opportunities to 'Witness to the light' can emerge from anywhere to anyone through our encounters. This is often a mutual experience as we reflect the light from one to the other. In my own lived experience, witnessing the light often comes in surprising ways.

In the story of one of my Sisters ministering on Smokey Mountain in the Philippines, I was given the gift of 'looking for the decorations' amidst challenges of daily life. In one of her darker moments, a woman invited her to 'look for the decorations' in the rubbish dump that had become home for her. Inspired by this encouragement, the Sister began to see pieces of ribbons hanging of poles and small shoots of greenery growing amongst the rubble.

On a visit to Timor Leste, I marvelled at all, that the 51 Timorese staff of Mary MacKillop Today were achieving. I heard how a whole parenting program had grown out of the voice of a mother sitting under a tree in a rural community waiting to walk her daughter home. She did not have the literacy skills to support her daughter. As the support group of Mary MacKillop Today arrived, she used her voice to share 'I want to learn what my daughter is learning, so I can support her education'.

On another occasion, the staff in Timor Leste were involved in a retreat day. Using sand play as a way of engagement, one of the staff had used the symbol of Noah's ark. When asked to share his reflection he likened himself to Noah protecting the animals and shared 'I am a driver. It is my responsibility to keep the staff safe' just as Noah had done.

On reading the sign on his Woolworths trolley 'He was someone's son', caused me

to pause and reflect on the death of Peter, a homeless man in North Sydney whose gentleness and gratitude impacted many. He too had been a gift.

Attending international leadership gatherings has provided opportunities over the years, to hear stories of how people around the world witness to the light often from unexpected places and in unexpected way. Listening to these encounters brings alive the words of Isaiah 49:6:

"I will make you a light to the nations - so that all the world may be saved."

The Mexico-US Border [7]

The first such story was shared by Sister Teresa Maya who on visiting the Mexico-US border met Sister Norma Pimentel whose daily activity was to support the unaccompanied minors crossing the border. When asked what she was doing she simply replied [1] Restoring Dignity One Person at a Time – Teresa Maya UISG Plenary Assembly 2019 *"I am restoring human dignity – one person at a time"*.

Brother Herve in Cameroon [8]

On another occasion I participated in a webinar where Brother Herve shared his experience of working in a rural village in Cameroon. Here he assisted in the training of farm-breeding men from largely Muslim villages. One of the activities that was undertaken was the building of a village maize mill for women. On completion the

village celebrated. Later Brother Herve visited the Imam's home.

On this occasion the Imam spoke touchingly: *"Brother Hervé, I have seen you come to our villages for several years now, living with us, participating in our joys and our mourning, sharing our food and our nights: your simple manner of staying with us has helped me to live my faith as a Muslim better and I thank you for that!"*

Herve confessed that he did not expect such a statement, for the Imam's regular presence at meetings, even though he was an old man, had helped and encouraged him in his personal life.

A Journalist's Experience on the West Bank [9]

Another story comes from the New Zealand journalist Peter Arnett telling of a bombing incident when he was working on the West Bank. A man approaches him carrying a child. He urges Peter to drive them to the hospital under cover. When they arrived, the man and the child were rushed into hospital. Unfortunately, the little girl died. The man was visibly upset and Peter put his arm around him and said: *"I'm not married. I don't have any children. I don't know what it's like to lose a daughter."* The man turned his head and said: *"My daughter? That little girl is not my child. I'm an Israeli settler, she's a Muslim girl. But maybe the time has come for us to recognise every child as our child."*

Such examples give expression and meaning to Pope Francis' words on 6 January 2022:

Christ's Church will continue to "go forth" towards new geographical, social and existential horizons, towards "borderline" places and human situations, to bear witness to Christ and His love to men and women of every people, culture and social status." [10]

"Stand up. I appoint you as a witness of what you have seen." (cf. Acts 26:16)

So how might we who are gathered in this room give witness to the light from everywhere for everyone. Let's begin with the small everyday situations in which we find ourselves, for the mysticism of encounter happens everywhere. It begins

with a simple smile, an encouraging word of hope, a listening heart, a compassionate presence for it is often the small, unknown acts of kindness and love that will transform our world. It is the quality of our presence individually and in our communities, that matters above all, so that people can see the light of Christ shining in you.

Witnessing the Light from Everywhere for Everyone

In every corner of the world, the light shines brightly, reminding us that no matter where we are, we are all connected by our shared humanity and the universal quest for hope and meaning. Then you too will be 'Witnessing of Light from everywhere for everyone'.

ENDNOTES:

1. Pope Francis *World Mission Day* 6 January 2022. www.vatican.va
2. Williamson, Marianne: *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of a Course in Miracles*, Harper Collins, New York 1992:165.
3. Pope Francis: *Feast of St Stephen – Angelus* 26 December 2022. www.vatican.va
4. Letter Mary MacKillop to Monsignor Kirby August 1873 Resource Material from the Archives of the Sisters of Saint Joseph North Sydney Issue No 3, 2026.
5. Archbishop Mark Coleridge: *Mary MacKillop Feast Day Homily* 8 August 2014. www.brisbanecatholic.org.au
6. O'Brien, Lesley: *Mary MacKillop Unveiled* Garratt Publishing, Melbourne 2088:158.
7. Maya, Teresa CCVI, *A Vision for the Future of Religious Life* UISG Plenary Assembly 23 May 2019.
8. Br Herve Hanso FPJ, *Consecrated Life at the Service of Fraternity in a Wounded World* Webinar UISG/USG 26 May 2021.
9. Campolo, Tony: *Let Me Tell You About A Story from Unexpected Places and Unlikely People*, Thomas Nelson Nashville 2020:120.
10. Pope Francis: *Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord* 6 January 2022. www.vatican.va

Effective Communication Classes

Bhumbodin (Christopher) Hiranrattanajinda SVD

The Society of the Divine Word (SVD) invited Dr. Cecilia Francisco-Tan to organize a comprehensive course on Effective Communication to teach twelve SVD students at Dorish Maru College in Box Hill. The course was designed to go beyond basic communication skills and focused on actively engaging with others. Dr. Cecilia emphasized the importance of listening attentively, thinking critically, reading thoroughly, speaking passionately, and writing reflectively. This approach was particularly valuable for the students, as English is our second language, and improving our proficiency in the language is a significant benefit of the course. We were able to develop both our communication abilities and improve our English proficiency. The course challenged us to think critically, expand our vocabulary, and gave us the confidence to engage in meaningful conversations within our community.

The course was thoughtfully designed using a variety of engaging activities. One of the primary methods used to achieve this was the integration of debates and case studies. These activities provided a dynamic platform for students to not only practice their communication skills but also engage deeply with complex and sometimes challenging topics. The debates, in particular, encouraged

students to question long-held beliefs and assumptions, sparking thoughtful discussions among the group. For instance, one debate focused on the significance of referring to Mary as the 'Mother of God'. This theological concept, deeply rooted in Christian tradition, prompted the students to explore the historical and doctrinal implications of the title. Many students had grown up with this belief but had never critically examined its meaning. Through the debate, we were able to articulate our thoughts, challenge one another, and arrive at a deeper understanding of why this title is used and what it means for our faith. Another debate centered on a more contemporary issue: whether fast food should be sold in schools. This topic required the students to think critically about health, education, and social responsibility. While it may seem unrelated to theology at first glance, this discussion was a valuable exercise in applying critical thinking skills to everyday issues. The students had to research both sides of the argument, construct persuasive arguments, and engage in a respectful exchange of ideas. This pushed us to consider broader ethical implications and understand how our values and beliefs could be applied to real-world scenarios.

In addition to debates, the use of case studies allowed us to engage theory with realistic situations requiring us to apply our theological knowledge and communication skills. These exercises were designed to mimic real-life ministry challenges that the students might face in the future. For example, one case study asked the students to consider how they would communicate the message of the Gospel in a community that had experienced significant loss and trauma. This required the students to think critically about their approach, considering not only the theological aspects but also the pastoral aspect such as the emotional and cultural sensitivities of the situation.

As a non-native English speaker, I initially found the course challenging, particularly in understanding and articulating theological language. The terminology and concepts were new and difficult to grasp, which made participation in discussions and debates somewhat intimidating. However, as the course progressed, I began to gain confidence in my abilities. The structure of the course, combined with the supportive environment created by both Dr. Cecilia and my fellow students, helped me overcome these initial difficulties. I found myself improving not only in my English proficiency but also in my ability to communicate more effectively and confidently in theological discussions.

Dr. Cecilia's passionate and critical teaching style was a key factor in my personal development throughout the course. She had a unique ability to challenge students while also encouraging them to think deeply and reflect on their beliefs. Rather than simply providing answers, she guided us to find our own, pushing us to reflect on why we believe what we do. This approach was instrumental in helping me, and many others, to not only improve our communication skills but also to gain a deeper understanding of our own faith. Her method of teaching left a lasting impression, encouraging us to continue questioning, reflecting, and growing in both our communication and our beliefs long after the course had ended. Overall, the course provided invaluable lessons that extended far beyond communication skills. It equipped us with the tools to think critically, engage thoughtfully, and express our beliefs clearly and confidently in both personal and professional settings. For me, the course was particularly transformative, helping me to overcome the language barriers I initially faced and emerge with greater confidence and competence in my communication skills.

Human Rights and Immigration

Ngoc Khanh Nguyen SVD

Migration is one of the great issues of our time, especially in countries where conflict, war, and evil are occurring. This issue has long been a concern of the Church. Many of the Church's teachings show that standing with migrants reflects the Church's fundamental choice for the poor. Choosing to stand with migrants is a Gospel choice. This essay examines the issue of migration in the context of human rights and in the light of the church's teachings.

1. What are human rights?

Human rights are natural rights humans have from birth to death which cannot be taken away by anyone or any subject: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights"¹. Human beings endowed with reason and conscience have the right to live with others in a spirit of brotherhood.² Human rights are not earned, given, or inherited from another person. They belong to individuals not because they are citizens of a country whose laws confer these rights, but because they are human beings.³ So, human rights are inherent, fundamental

¹ United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1949), 2.

² United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 2.

³ Nigel Biggar, *What's Wrong with Rights?*, First edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 190.

rights to be protected by organizations, governments, and individuals. Everyone is bound by law to recognize and respect others' human rights. The fundamental freedoms allow people to fully develop their human qualities. Moreover, Human rights have moral value even if no actual legal system recognizes them.⁴ They arise from the sense of injustice that people experience when their humanity is denied or mistreated. They are based on the growing human need for a life: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person"⁵. Fairness, therefore, is part of the natural order of the world, thus giving human existence a higher sense and purpose.

2. Human rights as Universal Moral Rights

Human rights must be respected without distinction to sex, skin color, religion, age, ethnicity, class, and political views.⁶ They are natural rights that belong to all people simply because they are human.⁷ However, equality does not mean equal levels of enjoyment of the rights. Furthermore, human rights are not to be subjected to discrimination based on political status; are not subject to the

⁴ Nigel Biggar, *What's Wrong with Rights?*, 190.

⁵ United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 2.

⁶ United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 2.

⁷ Nigel Biggar, *What's Wrong with Rights?*, 190.

jurisdiction or international jurisdiction of a country or territory; are not imposed or curtailed by the independence or non-independence of the country to which a person belongs.⁸ National recognition, with the provisions of law, recognized, respected, and protected by all people, organizations, and society, confirmed by an international consensus measure and further strengthened by international courts⁹ is crucial. The basic idea of such rights exists in all cultures and societies in some form. Even if national laws do not recognize or protect these rights, the people of that country still have inviolable human rights that cannot be denied by anyone. Moreover, the human interests which human rights seek to protect are values of a universal nature concerning human development.¹⁰

Catholic Social Teachings (CST) and Human Rights

In CST, human rights occupy a very important place, since the time of Pope John XXIII. He was the first pope to officially accept the idea of human rights based on human dignity. Pope John XXIII addressed human rights thematically in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, 1963,¹¹ where they were deemed officially by the Church as being “universal, inviolable, and inalienable”. The Encyclical of Pope John

XXIII repeats the most important points of the Universal Declaration of 1948, but unlike the Declaration, John XXIII's text links rights with duties. Although it is a religious document, human rights are based primarily on natural law.

Natural dignity

Natural dignity is what human beings possess within themselves. Again, like rights, dignity is not given by society or any human authority. It is natural dignity human beings have, although part of the material world, which allows for human transcendence through intelligence and freedom. Therefore, humans by virtue of their reason should have the capacity to recognize natural dignity. However, some ignore others' dignity for a variety of reasons. Furthermore, all humans, according to Catholic tradition, are created in the image and likeness of God so faith gives humans a firmer foundation to uphold human dignity¹² for “God intends us to be immune from all slavery, manipulation, or exploitation”¹³.

The notion of equality

Additionally, one of the important aspects of human dignity guided by the Catholic tradition is the notion of equality.¹⁴ According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “All are equal before the

⁸ United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 2.

⁹ Nigel Biggar, *What's Wrong with Rights?*, 190.

¹⁰ Nigel Biggar, *What's Wrong with Rights?*, 218.

¹¹ Thomas Massaro, *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, Third Classroom edition, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 83.

¹² Massaro, *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, 81.

¹³ Massaro, *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, 81.

¹⁴ Massaro, *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, 81.

law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law”¹⁵. Therefore, all human beings have the right to equal political, social, cultural and economic opportunities and resources. This is “extending the Christian theological doctrine of equal human dignity to the concrete realm of social existence,”¹⁶ into all areas of life. The right to equality before the law is the principle rule expressed through specific provisions of the law, aimed at establishing the right to equal and fair treatment of all citizens. Accordingly, all citizens, men and women of different ethnicities, beliefs, religions, social classes, and statuses in a country must not be discriminated against. Therefore, when vast inequalities prevent people develop their lives, the CST states: “People of faith must speak out against these injustices”¹⁷.

Immigration: Definition and Rights

Migration is the phenomenon of people moving from one region to another. Migrants are those who leave their place of residence in the country of their nationality or permanent residence to reside long-term or settle in another country. However, people who leave their country for a limited period of time to carry out purposes such as working or studying are not considered migrants.

¹⁵ United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 3.

¹⁶ Massaro, *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, 81.

¹⁷ Massaro, *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, 82.

Migrants who have to flee to another country to escape danger, persecution or arrest by a power in the place of residence are often referred to as asylum seekers. Migrants who have crossed the border to another country because of instability caused by natural disasters, war and civil unrest are called refugees. Both refugees and asylum seekers are protected and assisted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Migration flows can increase or decrease the population and labor force of both the original or receiving country. The international community has continuously built and improved a solid legal corridor through the promulgation of international conventions, and multilateral agreements for the protection of the rights of migrants, principally by the UN Declaration of Human Rights. In addition, migrants and their family members also enjoy several special rights: the right to life, liberty and security of the person; the right to be free from discrimination; the right to be protected from abuse and exploitation, to be free from slavery, involuntary servitude, torture, and from cruel, inhuman; the right to a fair trial and to legal redress; the right to protection of economic, social and cultural rights; and other human rights as guaranteed by the international human rights instruments to which the state is party and by customary international law,¹⁸ ratified by the International Labour

¹⁸ International Commission of Jurists commission members, *Migration and International Human Rights Law - A Practitioners' Guide* (Switzerland: International Commission of Jurists, 2014), 36-37.

Organization (ILO), namely Convention 97 (1949) and Convention 143 (1975) on migrants.

Saint Pope John Paul II summarized that: “A person has the right to leave his native land for various motives – and also the right to return – in order to seek better conditions of life in another country”¹⁹. Everyone deserves to enjoy these rights regardless of their citizenship, employment and any particular status. No person or organization can be deprived of their human rights because they have entered or remained in a country in violation of the immigration rules of the country. Furthermore, no one can be deprived of these rights based on age, gender, sexuality or for any cultural reasons including speaking their native language or adhering to traditions. This principle, the universality of human rights, is particularly valuable for migrants.²⁰

The Catholic Social Teachings and Migrants.

CST has evolved in addressing issues of the dignity and rights of migrants, but also in defending migrants forced to seek a living abroad. Vatican Council II in its *Encyclical Gaudium et Spes* views migration as a sign of the times. Popes John XXIII and Pius XII stated that, “It is necessary to treat all [migrants] as human beings, not as

¹⁹ Donald Kerwin, and Gerschutz J. Marie, *And You Welcomed Me: Migration and Catholic Social Teaching* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2009), 71. <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10361349>

²⁰ International Commission of Jurists commission members, *Migration and International Human Rights Law - A Practitioners' Guide*, 37.

instruments of production, and to help them bring their families to live with them” (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 66).

All people have the right to enter a country where they hope to be able to provide adequately for themselves and their families. CST has reiterated this on many occasions and in different forms. Human beings have the right to live in a way worthy of being made in the image of God, fulfilling their vocation through the duty of honest work, to participate in God’s creative work, by being fruitful. Work is not only about earning a living but also about developing personal talents, family, culture, and socio-political life. CST states that the three-fold value of work is to ‘achieve fulfillment as a human being’, a way to provide ‘a foundation for the formation of family life’, and a way to contribute to the common good.²¹ Based on these reasons, CST insists on “the ethical responsibility of an organized society to promote and support a culture of work”²². Accordingly, every human person has an inalienable right to life and to the activities necessary to support and develop life. Thus, if these rights are continually impeded, people have the right to go to a place where they hope to start a new life more worthy of the human person.

The protection of human dignity and life becomes even more evident in tragic

²¹ Kerwin and Gerschutz, *And You Welcomed Me: Migration and Catholic Social Teaching*, 70-71.

²² Kerwin and Gerschutz, *And You Welcomed Me: Migration and Catholic Social Teaching*, 71.

forms of migration, especially in the case of refugees. While it is acceptable to place restrictions on immigration, the right to asylum must never be denied when life is seriously threatened in one's own country. CST also accepts that states have the right to control immigration and their borders. States have the right and duty to protect their sovereignty and internal order to ensure security, fundamental rights, and freedoms. States can therefore adopt pragmatic decisions to control immigration. However, it is necessary to remember the foundational principle of respecting the human dignity of all migrants. In controlling immigration, the protection of the common good cannot override this principle. It is a great challenge to reconcile the welcome due to each person with the assessment of what is necessary to ensure the security and well-being of both the local population and the newcomer.

'Family' and migrants

Family is one of the central themes of social catechetical teaching because family is the original cell of social life. Today the family is impacted by many factors including migration. Pope Pius XII recognised this more than half a century ago when he promulgated the apostolic Encyclical *Exul Familia* on migration, in which a significant place was reserved for the family to migrate as a family unit, with family rights at the place of destination.

The Church considers the problem of migrants from the standpoint of Christ, who died to gather the dispersed children of God (Jn 11:52). So, the church acts in continuity with Christ's mission. CST is particularly concerned with some of the difficulties that migrants face: discrimination and racism, frustration with work conditions or contracts, and being treated as commodities rather than as persons. The church's message to governments and public authorities is that they have to protect all citizens. They also have a duty of care for immigrants to their lands. The local churches have the duty to show solidarity with migrants and to form public opinion to fight for justice for them.

The church acknowledges that respecting the human dignity of migrants means creating conditions for them to live with dignity. This means examining and warning against unjust policies or regulations so that these policies and regulations can be amended to avoid discrimination and prejudice against migrants. Thus, there are no 'illegal' immigrants because immigrants are human beings, and no human being is 'illegal'. Human beings can commit illegal acts, but the Creator does not commit illegal acts when he created humanity, so all are to be welcomed. (Mt 25, 35). Saint Pope John Paul II stated that an undocumented immigrant "is like that stranger in whom Jesus asked to be recognised. To welcome them is to show solidarity, a Christian duty of hospitality

and fidelity, part of Christian identity itself”²³ This is a challenge for most of the Global North. The Church’s response is to listen respectfully to migrants, help them to become acquainted with their situation, and, whatever their legal status regarding state law, to provide them with the necessary means of subsistence.²⁴

Immigrants as recognized and accepted by the church.

The church “is the place where ‘illegal’ immigrants are also recognised and accepted as brothers and sisters”²⁵. Therefore, dioceses, parishes, and communities around the world must work to ensure that migrants find safe and secure social environments within the Christian community of fraternity and solidarity.

The Church acknowledges that “the most appropriate choice, which will yield consistent and long-lasting results is that of international cooperation which aims to foster political stability and to eliminate underdevelopment.”²⁶ The Church respects the laws of the state, including those governing immigration, but demands that those laws be just. The

Church, therefore, is called to cooperate with the state in improving the law, especially in the case of migrants who cannot return to their country of origin without risking their lives. This includes political, social and legal activism. It is incumbent on all Christians to help migrants in irregular situations find shelter. The aim is not “lawlessness” but the protection of those who are not treated fairly by the law or whose cases deserve to be reconsidered.

Respect for migrants’ culture

Migrants bring their unique culture and experiences. The issue of integrating families and individuals into a new society, a new culture, and a new experience of church is complex.. This becomes urgent when globalisation is often accompanied by the tendency to impose a dominant culture, to force other cultures to conform as in the case of migrating to the West. The rivalry between cultures is real.²⁷ “Western cultural models are enticing and alluring because of their remarkable scientific and technical cast, but regrettably there is growing evidence of their deepening human, spiritual, and moral impoverishment.”²⁸ Social evangelisation requires respect and acceptance of the cultural practices of immigrants, if they do not contradict the universal moral values

²³ Kerwin and Gerschutz, *And You Welcomed Me: Migration and Catholic Social Teaching*, 72.

²⁴ Catholic Church, and John Paul, *Undocumented Migrants, Message of Pope John Paul II for World Migration Day* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996) n. 3.

²⁵ Catholic Church, and John Paul, *Undocumented Migrants, Message of Pope John Paul II for World Migration Day*, n. 5.

²⁶ Catholic Church, and John Paul, *Undocumented Migrants, Message of Pope John Paul II for World Migration Day*, n. 5.

²⁷ Catholic Church, and John Paul, *Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2001*. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2001), n. 8-10.

²⁸ Catholic Church, and John Paul, *Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, n. 9.

of the natural law or the fundamental rights of the human person. Respecting and strengthening the cultural identity of migrants, provides stability and comfort in a strange society that is often secularised. However, the Second Vatican Council warned that without the Creator, creation would be meaningless. So “a culture which no longer has a point of reference in God loses its soul and loses its way, becoming a culture of death”²⁹. To approach this goal, people should dialogue with migrants to protect the distinctiveness of cultures.³⁰ Dialogue between cultures leads to a recognition of diversity and opens the mind to the rich diversity of peoples. Dialogue with migrants is the mutual acceptance and genuine collaboration demanded by the human family’s basic vocation to unity.

Conclusion

Overall, CST sees human rights as rooted in the human person, prioritises and protects justice, dignity, and solidarity from being usurped by ideologies and policies that carry their own agendas. Accordingly, CST on migration aims to put into action the consequences of faith, based on the word of God and expressed in the Bible: “Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt” (Ex 23:9). Each generation must learn this lesson, rooted in the collective history of the people of God: “when a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt” (Lev 19:33). The foreigner, loved by God, is a kind of “sacrament” of the beloved Son of God who stated: “for I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Mt 25:35). Migrants come before us as “strangers”. To welcome the stranger, show them solidarity demonstrates hospitality and fidelity to Jesus. It is central to Christian identity itself.

²⁹ Catholic Church, and John Paul, *Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, n. 9.

³⁰ Catholic Church, and John Paul, *Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, n. 10.

Bibliography

- Biggar, Nigel. *What's Wrong with Rights?* First edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=262888>
- Catholic Church, and John Paul. *Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. 2001.
- Catholic Church, and John Paul. *Undocumented Migrants, Message of Pope John Paul II for World Migration Day*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. 1996.
- International Commission of Jurists commission members. *Migration and International Human Rights Law - A Practitioners' Guide*. Switzerland: International Commission of Jurists, 2014
- Jacques, Maritain. *The Rights of Man and Nature Law*. Translated by Doris C. Anson. America: Gordian Pres, INC. 1971.
- Kerwin, Donald, and Jill Marie Gerschutz. *And You Welcomed Me: Migration and Catholic Social Teaching*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2009. <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10361349>.
- Maritain, Jacques. *The Rights of Man and Natural Law*. Translated by Doris C. Anson. London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1944.
- Massaro, Thomas. *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*. Third Classroom edition. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.
- United Nations. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1949.

How *Hesychia* Shapes, or Could Shape Spirituality in the 21st Century

Bhumbodin (Christopher) Hiranrattanajinda SVD

Introduction

Hesychia is a form of Christian spirituality with roots tracing back to the 4th century. It is referenced in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (Sayings of the Desert Fathers), a collection of more than a thousand brief stories and sayings attributed to the early desert monks. Traditionally, those who practiced *hesychia* sought isolated places to escape from the distractions of the world and seek God's peace. Many individuals today are always in a hurry, often using busyness as an excuse to neglect prayer. While it is true that prayer often requires time and space, this does not mean that people do not long for peace in their hearts. Many work tirelessly to fulfill their desires, believing, whether consciously or unconsciously, that achieving these desires will bring them peace.

In the 21st century, *Hesychasm* offers another way to shape Christian spirituality. *Hesychia's* simple, practical, and flexible mode allows individuals to cultivate a sense of peace with God anywhere and at any time, to recognise that the sacred is not confined to specific places or times. It is accessible whenever one is open to *Hesychia* as inner prayer. As a spiritual practice, it draws insights from the desert monks while remaining relevant to 21st

century practitioners. I will focus on three key aspects: building self-awareness, being conscious of God's presence, and rebuilding a relationship with God. Each of these aspects plays a vital role in understanding hesychastic spirituality.

What is *Hesychia*?

Hesychia (ἡσυχία) a Greek word means stillness and silence. This sought-after silence is not simply the absence of noise; rather, it is a silence filled with the divine presence. *Hesychia* began with the desert monks, later spreading as an early Eastern monastic practice. It also gained popularity among virgins, celibates, and devoted followers living in cities, evolving into what we now call *hesychasm*. Kallistos Ware, a scholar of Eastern Orthodox theology, explains that 'hesychasm' has five distinct meanings. A solitary, hermit-like lifestyle practiced since the 4th century, became a practice of inner prayer aimed at achieving a deep, wordless union with God. This spiritual journey often involves the Jesus Prayer, a key element in seeking this divine connection. Additionally, *hesychasm* includes a specific technique combining physical and mental focus alongside the Jesus Prayer, with roots tracing back to the 13th century. It is associated with the theological teachings of St. Gregory

Palamas, a 14th-century Orthodox saint who greatly influenced its development.

Traditionally, a monk seeking to experience *hesychia* would seclude himself in a cell. This practice is rooted in scripture: “Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. When you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words” (Matthew 6:6-7). 1 Corinthians 14:19, and 1 Thessalonians 5:17, and Psalm 46:10 additionally underscore the essence of this practice.

How might one apply *hesychia* today? Is it necessary to lock oneself away in a cell, or must one be a monk or nun to engage in this practice? Over a thousand years ago, Abba Isaiah answered this question, stating that *hesychia* simply means to humble oneself in the presence of God and to resist every distracting thought instigated by the enemy. This, he said, is how one flees from the world.

Building Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is essential for staying attentive to our thoughts and filtering out distractions. To cultivate self-awareness, we should start by identifying which thoughts are unnecessary or disruptive. We can do this by asking ourselves questions like, “What else is there? Is it good to be with God alone?” The desert

monks recognised that human thoughts are often unpredictable and restless. Germanus, a disciple of Abba Isaac, observed that the mind tends to wander aimlessly, even during sacred moments like prayer. This constant mental drift makes it challenging to focus deeply. Abba Rufus advised us to be vigilant, reminding us to let go of grudges and pride, which can cloud our inner peace. In their teachings, the desert monks encouraged watchfulness, advising us to remain aware of the steady stream of memories, desires, and fears that frequently fill our minds. Evagrius Ponticus, another desert monk, suggested ignoring thoughts that stir up concerns or anxieties. By resisting these intrusions, we can ‘deafen’ the mind to distractions and quiet it, creating space for a more profound focus on God. This practice of watchfulness calms both the intellect and emotions, allowing worries to fall away.

As we learn to set aside unnecessary thoughts, self-awareness naturally grows. We become more centered, experiencing a state of calm, silence, and stillness. This focus not only enhances our prayer life but also enriches our everyday experiences, allowing us to be more intentional and discerning about what truly matters in life.

Being Aware of God’s Presence

God is always present, but we often overlook God’s presence in our busy lives. Building awareness of God’s presence begins with self-awareness, but then

extends beyond it. By shifting our focus from ourselves to God, we come to recognise that God is truly with us. This awareness itself becomes a form of prayer, as informed by Psalm 16:8 "I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."

For Evagrius Ponticus prayer is 'an ascent of the spirit to God', while Abba Isaiah sees prayer as "never to release one's heart from the memory of God". Saint Basil of Caesarea similarly taught that we should guard our hearts to keep 'the thought of God' alive within us, free from distractions or trivial imaginings, so that holy thoughts become a seal on our souls, growing stronger with continuous recollection. John Cassian also urged that we be clear about where we direct our thoughts:

"We ought to know where we should fix our mind's attention and to what goal should always recall our soul's gaze. And when our mind has been able to seize it, it should rejoice, and when it is distracted from it should mourn and sigh...and it should judge as fornication even a moment's separation from the contemplation of Christ."

This continuous awareness of God's presence is especially vital in today's chaotic and fragile world. Being mindful of God brings a transformative depth to our spirituality and keeps us rooted in God's

presence, no matter where we are, or what we are enduring.

Rebuilding Relationship with God

Hesychia nurtures a deeply personal and profound relationship with God. Awareness of God's presence is important, but to truly shape one's spirituality, it must be accompanied by a genuine love and desire for God. George A. Maloney observes that the desert monks were powerfully moved by this love for God, which drove them into the desert in search of deeper communion. Ultimately, it is God who takes the initiative, loving us first (1 John 4:19). As we respond to this love, we grow in understanding and begin to return this love back to God. For Abba Isaac, "every love, every desire, every effort, every undertaking, every thought, everything that we live, that we speak, that we breath, will be God." When we are fully aligned with God, everything in our lives becomes a reflection of God.

This profound unity transforms not only how we live but also how we experience the world, drawing us into a complete, intimate relationship with God, where every aspect becomes infused with God's loving presence, making us more aware of God's love and guiding light in all things. We are drawn into a silent surrender where words and images fall away, and we meet God in stillness. Simple forms of prayer sustain and deepen this connection. Abba Isaac used the phrase,

“O God, incline unto my aid: O Lord, make haste to help me,” while Gregory of Sinai taught the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.” Such prayers help maintain a continuous bond with God, fulfilling the call to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Bishop Theophan explains that ‘feeling towards God—even without words—is a prayer’. This continual prayer keeps us centered on God, transforming everyday life into a steady communion.

Hesychia also emphasizes humility, an openness to God’s grace that clears away pride and ego. Turning to God in repentance softens the heart, allowing for a closer, more trusting relationship rooted in dependence on God’s love. *Hesychia* opens the way for a life deeply rooted in divine grace.

Conclusion

Hesychia offers a timeless Christian spirituality, suited for both the ancient desert and the modern world, that emphasizes a deep, interior journey toward God’s peace. By fostering self-awareness, awareness of God’s omnipresence, and a profound, loving relationship with God, *hesychia* transcends the need to escape from daily life. Instead, it invites practitioners to cultivate inner stillness, turning ordinary moments into spaces of divine encounter. This spirituality shifts focus from mere ritualistic techniques to authentic relationships, reminding us that God’s presence is accessible wherever we are willing to quiet our minds and hearts. For 21st century Christians, *hesychia* is a simple, adaptable, and transformative gift in troubling times.

Bibliography

- Basil. "Regulae Fusius Tractatae." PG 31, 920C-921B. In *Praying Always and the Doctrine of the Greek Fathers*, cf. I. Hausherr, Hesychasme et Priere. Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1960.
- Belda, Mael. "The Concept of Continual Prayer according to John Cassian." In *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*, edited by Paul Allen, 126-143. Brisbane: Watson Ferguson & Company, 1999.
- Consiglio, Cyprian. *Prayer in the Cave of the Heart: The Universal Call to Contemplation*. Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010.
- Evagrius Ponticus. "The Praktikos: Chapters on Prayer." Translated by John Eudes Bamberger. In *Cistercian Studies Series*, vol. 4, edited by Basil Pennington, 43-52. Massachusetts: Cistercian Publications, 1970.
- Gill, John F. *To Call on His Name: Perspectives on the Jesus Prayer*. Durham: Sacristy Press, 2019.
- Gregory of Sinai. "Instruction to Hesychasts." Translated by E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer. In *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, 74-75. London: Faber & Faber, 1951.
- Harmless, William. *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3.
- John Cassian. "The Conference." Translated by Boniface Ramsey. In *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 57, edited by Warter J. Burghardt and John Dillon, 369-387. New York: Paulist Press, 1997.
- Maloney, George A. *Prayer of the Heart*. Indiana: Ave Maria, 1981.
- Theophan the Recluse. "What is Prayer," Translated by E. Kadloubovsky and E. M. Palmer. In *Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*. Edited by Timothy Ware, 51-74. London: Faber and Faber, 1966.
- Ware, Kallistos. *Act out of Stillness: The Influence of Fourteenth-Century Hesychasm on Byzantine and Slav Civilization*. Edited by Daniel J. Sahas. Toronto: The Hellenic Canadian Association of Constantinople and the Thessalonikean Society of Metro Toronto, 1995.

Witnessing to the Light - Formation and the Future Mission as an SVD

Gusty Siga SVD



The Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) is celebrating the jubilee year of 150 years with the theme "Witnessing the Light: From Everywhere to Everyone". As a student of SVD in Australia Province I want to use this opportunity to reflect on my journey as an SVD Seminarian and the importance of formation in helping the seminarians grow in readiness for our mission - to be rooted in the call to spread the light of Christ universally, across cultural, social, and religious boundaries.

I have been in formation for the last eight years (half the time in Indonesia and the other half in Australia). I personally believe my formation is crucial in shaping me spiritually, intellectually, and personally, so as to be a true witness to the light of Christ. This formation process is not just about acquiring knowledge or skills, but about becoming a living witness to the light—someone who can carry the Gospel to "everyone, everywhere." As I continue my journey, I am deeply grateful for my SVD formation and the way it continues to

help me grow into the missionary life God has called me into.

Embracing Interculturality

One of the primary characteristics of the Divine Word Missionaries is their intercultural ministry approach. As a student preparing for missionary service, the SVD's diversity and commitment to intercultural living provide a strong witness. Interculturality will become increasingly important as the world becomes more interconnected. Pope Francis constantly refers to the Church as a "field hospital concerned more with those who suffer than with defending its own interests, taking the risk of novelty, in order to be more faithful to the Gospel."³¹ The SVD's multicultural communities have the opportunity to respond to the urgent needs of those on the margins. Understanding and respecting diverse cultures, languages, and traditions, as well as living testimony to the universality of Christ's love, allows us to transcend divisions.

My SVD formation has introduced me to a vibrant, intercultural community, reflecting the diversity of God's creation. Living with seminarians from various cultural backgrounds has helped me appreciate that witnessing the light of Christ means embracing diversity and learning to work in harmony with others. This experience mirrors the mission of the Divine Word Missionaries, where intercultural living is

³¹ <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-05/pope-francis-audience-village-of-francis.html>

an essential aspect of our witness to the Gospel. This formation challenges me to grow in humility, openness, and adaptability, which are all crucial for the mission field, where understanding different cultural contexts is key to effective evangelization.

Personal, Spiritual, Theological Understanding, and Missionary Spirit

The formation I have received provides me with the tools to deepen my relationship with Christ and to grow in my theological knowledge. Regular spiritual exercises such as prayer, meditation, and the Eucharist help me connect with Christ, the true light that I am called to witness. Furthermore, the theological education I receive enriches my understanding of the faith and equips me to explain and defend it in various contexts. I am constantly called to examine myself, my motivations, and my vocation. I am offered opportunities for personal growth, challenging me to confront my weaknesses and allowing God's grace to transform me. In doing so, I am being prepared to not only witness Christ's light but to *become* that light for others. This ongoing process of transformation is integral to my future mission, to live with integrity and embody the message I am proclaiming each and every day, through my interactions with others.

This is what the SVD missionary spirit is about. Being a missionary is not just about preaching or doing social work; it is about

living the Gospel every day, in every context, and with every person. This missionary spirit calls me to go beyond myself, to serve others, and to bring the light of Christ to the peripheries of society, whether they be geographical, social, or spiritual. My formation continues to help me cultivate this spirit through the SVD emphasis on service, community living, and pastoral experiences.

Marginalization, Ecological Awareness and Digital Mission

The theme of "witnessing the light" calls us to be present to those on the margins of society—whether they be the poor, refugees, indigenous peoples, or those who are excluded because of racial, sexual or ethnic discrimination. As future missionaries, we students are being prepared to advocate for justice, peace, and the dignity of all people. Our response to human suffering and injustice will be critical in showing that the Gospel of Christ is alive and relevant today.

The mission of the Church includes a focus on ecological justice, as emphasised in Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*. The Divine Word Missionaries, as caretakers of creation, must witness the light by advocating for the protection of the environment and supporting sustainable living, particularly in communities affected by environmental degradation. For me this involves understanding how the Gospel message calls us all to care for and protect God's creation through educating

communities on ecological practices, advocating for climate justice, or simply living out a lifestyle that reflects respect for the Earth and its resources.

Technology has reshaped communication, including how the Gospel is shared. The future mission of the Divine Word Missionaries will increasingly involve digital evangelisation—reaching people through social media, online platforms, and digital communities. I find it crucial for me to develop the skills to engage and communicate meaningfully in this digital mission space, where many people, especially younger generations, encounter different ideas which form their beliefs for good or ill.

Contemporary Missionary Challenges

In many countries, particularly in the West, the problem of secularisation is significant. It is critical for a missionary to understand how to share the light of Christ in a world that is more disinterested in religion. The challenge becomes greater in pluralistic societies, where as a missionary I will have to respect religious differences while remaining firm in my Christian identity. The Divine Word Missionaries have a strong tradition of dialogue, particularly in the context of interfaith relations. As a future missionary I will need to engage in meaningful dialogue with people of other faiths and beliefs, including secularists and non-religious persons, to seek common

ground while also sharing the distinctive hope found in Christ.

As society becomes more secularized and pluralistic, the role of a missionary becomes more complex. By engaging with current social issues, digital evangelization, and interreligious dialogue, I am being prepared to witness Christ's light in a way that is relevant and meaningful to modern society.

To conclude, I firmly believe that the formation process I continue to receive, involves not only deepening my

theological knowledge but also fostering an openness to intercultural dialogue, learning from others, and embracing new contexts of mission. Ultimately, the theme "Witnessing the Light from Everywhere to Everyone" reminds me that the Gospel of Christ transcends boundaries. As a future missionary in a foreign land, my task is to carry this light, showing the world that it shines in every culture, language, and context, for the salvation and dignity of all people.

As A Farmer In God's Garden

Peter Tran Luong SVD



Have you ever raced against the sun and rain during each harvest season? Have you ever waded through mud to catch crabs or bailed water to catch fish? Have you carried a 20-litre spray bottle on your shoulder to spray pesticides on plants? Or even scoop cow and buffalo manure to fertilise the fields, while covered in mud? I have, and I am proud of and cherish those moments, for they connect me deeply to God's creation.

Born and raised in a small farming family in the countryside of Vietnam, I was exposed to farm work, helping my parents from a very young age. Like many of my friends in the village, I spent a lot of time in the fields, with the herds of cows and buffaloes, or following the flocks of ducks, in addition to doing my studies. The time in the fields was not just about labor. It was also a significant part of the childhood of rural kids such as myself. From chasing

mice and catching fish to roasting corn and potatoes, making kites, lighting fires, swimming in dikes and streams, to more adventurous games like buffalo fighting or "going to raid villages" (stealing fruit from gardens), those memories weave together a healthy childhood (without the internet), worth living, because of how they shaped me to be the person I am today. As I grew older, I found it "hard to end" the sharing of stories while sitting down to reminisce with friends from childhood, or those similar in age.

When I studied abroad, many people often asked, "What is your job background?" I would never answer that I hold a psychology degree (which I graduated from eight years ago). Nor would I mention philosophy (which I honed in at the Dominican College in Vietnam), or theology (which I am currently studying here in Australia). Instead, I would simply state, "I was a farmer." When asked what kind of agriculture I did, I would reply that my family engages in various types of farming: growing rice, corn, potatoes, and vegetables, and raising livestock. People often think our farm is like a zoo. In reality, we engaged in small-scale farming, seasonal cultivation, and self-sufficiency - a common practice in many rural areas of Vietnam. This background has given me the experience of integrating and adapting to natural environments, caring for many types of animals and growing various plants, and I am richer for it.

For farmers, life in river or mountain areas can somewhat shield them from the pollution, noise, and rush of urban life. However, while spending time, effort, and diligence to care for the farm, farmers also face the risk of losing everything when extreme natural disasters strike, such as storms, flash floods, and droughts. For example, Typhoon Yari recently claimed many lives, swept away many properties, and especially devastated most farmers' farms and plantations. In years with good harvests, farmers must still contend with the pressure of low prices set by traders.

This is not a complaint, but an understanding that agricultural products are not merely commodities for trade; they are gifts to be received. As Pope Francis emphasised in *Laudato Si*, agriculture is an essential contributor to the common good. In the other honest words of Eliot Coleman- a farmer, author, researcher, and educator: "Farmers are the ones who feed us all, and if we want a sustainable world, we need to support sustainable farming practices." Awareness about the role of farmers, allows both producers and consumers to acknowledge the value in each other and the natural products.

For me, my time living in Melbourne, Australia, has been spent on academics, prayer, and other community activities. Gardening, letting my hands get dirty with the soil (*from which I was created and to which I will return*), has been a source of sustenance for my meals and a form of relaxation as I immerse myself in nature.

Alfred W. Crosby, a historian and geobiologist, once stated: "Farmers are the backbone of our food system, and their stewardship of the land is vital to the health of the planet." At these moments, I feel great joy knowing that I have contributed in some way through my farm work while being a part of the universe and nature. Additionally, each time I harvest produce from the soil, and share it with others, it gives me a sense of connection with the Creator, humanity, and Nature. My agricultural products become more than the fruit of the earth. They are sacred offerings.

Gardening has profoundly shaped my sense of responsibility toward the environment. It goes beyond just planting seeds and nurturing plants. It is an ongoing commitment to understanding and respecting the natural world. The practice of gardening encourages me to engage directly with the earth, fostering a deeper appreciation for the ecosystems around us.

One of the most rewarding aspects of gardening is the ability to recycle organic waste. It transforms what would otherwise be discarded into valuable nourishment for plants, and ultimately for human beings. By composting kitchen scraps, yard waste, and other biodegradable materials, we can enrich the soil while simultaneously reducing the amount of waste sent to landfills. This practice not only enhances soil fertility but also helps mitigate greenhouse gas emissions

associated with organic waste decomposition in landfills. It's a simple yet impactful way to contribute to a healthier planet. Wendell Berry, an influential American farmer, poet, writer, activist, and scientist, encapsulated this sentiment when he said, "Caring for the earth is our oldest, most valuable, and ultimately most enjoyable responsibility." His words resonate deeply, reminding us that our connection to the land is rooted in history and tradition. As stewards of the earth, we inherit a legacy of care that spans generations.

Ultimately, gardening is not just a hobby, it is an expression of love for the earth and its creatures. It compels us to rethink our consumption habits and to make choices that prioritise sustainability, if we really pay attention. By growing our own food and caring for our gardens, we take small but significant steps toward reducing our ecological footprint. In doing so, we cultivate not only plants but also a greater sense of community and connection both with nature and with one another.

As I continue my gardening journey, I find that each seed planted and every plant nurtured deepens my commitment to environmental responsibility. It's a path of learning and growth, one that I hope inspires others to engage with the land and embrace their role as caretakers of our precious earth. Environmental stewardship doesn't begin with grand actions from individuals but requires the collaboration of many people. It is starting

something, and waiting to see miracles happen. Let us all become stewards of nature, getting our hands dirty in the soil. Let us immerse ourselves in nature to discover beauty and wonder, not only from famous landscapes but also from the handfuls of soil in our gardens.

**The enchanting
and tender Water
Lily symbolises
perfect beauty.**



**Nurture what
matters, prune
what doesn't.**

Meditations on the Word

Mengjie Li SVD

Meditation #1

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet (Matt 22:1-14)



Today's Gospel presents a parable of a wedding banquet. In this heavenly feast, it is evident that the Lord extends His invitation to everyone, even when they are faced with

rejection. However, the seemingly severe punishment described in the parable is a result of the guests' own foolishness. Some were cast into darkness because they did not fully prepare their wedding garments. This parable brings a sense of urgency, yet it also reassures us that God has given each of us ample time to prepare. Mary, the mother of Jesus, serves as the perfect example of this preparation.

Today, the Church commemorates the Queenship of Mary, a title she earned through her lifelong preparation of her own "wedding garment." When Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel and invited to take part in God's plan of salvation, she didn't immediately accept. She was

hesitant, even fearful, but with Gabriel's persistent encouragement, Mary eventually embraced this daunting task and began her journey of preparation. It wasn't until she stood at the foot of the Cross, witnessing to the crucifixion of her Son in profound sorrow, that her wedding garment was fully prepared. From a human perspective, Mary's life was filled with suffering. She fled from danger, lived in constant concern for Jesus, and ultimately watched Him die. Yet through it all, she remained with Christ, lived in reliance on God, and attained deep inner joy, a joy she proclaimed in her Magnificat even while experiencing uncertainty and fear.

Similarly, the Lord has extended His invitation to us, giving us a lifetime to prepare. This preparation isn't about a physical garment, but about cultivating inner purity and spiritual maturity. In this journey, Mary stands as a powerful example, reminding us to humble ourselves, to be still, and to prioritize our spiritual growth and relationship with God amidst the busyness of life. By following her example, we can make ourselves worthy of the wedding feast that God has prepared for us and be mindful that 'many are called, but few are chosen.' May we count ourselves as among the few.

Meditation #2

On Anzac Day



Today is Anzac Day, which is a very important day for Australia and New Zealand. It is a national day to recognise and commemorate the contribution of all those who have served Australia (including those who have died) in times of war and conflict. Generally speaking, today is meant to commemorate peace.

Today's gospel (John 12:23-26) is about sacrifice and peace which is very suitable for Anzac Day. The seeds that were planted in the soil bore a lot of fruit, but their meaning and value comes with sacrifice. In the context of ANZAC Day, the former soldiers dedicated their lives in exchange for the peace we enjoy today in Australia. This day is not to encourage us to be actively participating in war, but to tell us that we must dare to speak out and act against injustice, so that justice itself can spread like fruits. There is a good example to be found in the SVD tradition and history. St. Joseph Freinademetz, when he first entered China as a missionary, disliked everything about China. He writes: *"China really is the Demonic Realm!"* He even reached a crisis

moment in his vocation. In time, he came to realize the need to change his inner self will bring inner peace. He learned to only see good things in the Chinese people. *"I have come to love my Chinese. I take China and its people and its language as my native country... I would die for them a thousand times over."* His dedication and love for the Chinese was so deep that after his death, the faith was spread widely, and even some non-Christians were willing to listen to his teachings. He truly became a seed buried in the ground. In class on Wednesday morning, Fr. Brendan Connelly, CP, our lecturer, mentioned that when a missionary enters a new environment, he must be changed by the day he leaves. If not, we cannot imagine how bad it must be for himself.

We always say that God is kind, full of compassion and patient towards us. We can also say that God has never punished us, and those bad results are caused by us. Just like Anzac Day the lives lost during the war happened because of human selfishness and greed. So, like Joseph, we must be willing to change the world by personal changes. Although we live in groups and do not wish to contribute to wars, excessive desires can cause chaos in our lives, as "those who love their life lose it". We need to purify ourselves in prayer and realize that as Christians peace must be a goal in our lives.

Meditation #3

No Pain, No Gain

I was born to a traditional Catholic family. In my village all of the people are Catholic. So, for me I have a great environment of my faith. I remembered when I was child, I used to play a game with my friends where I would wear a sheet and pretend to be a priest and celebrate mass. As I started second school and left the village, the religious atmosphere weakened, and I gradually forgot these childhood games. But the important point is that the seed of faith has been planted in my heart, just waiting for the time to grow.

The schoolwork in second school and high school was very heavy for me, and I could only have some time to relax during the holidays. One day, my playmate called me to join a seven-day faith promotion program with him. During that event, I felt very happy to make some new friends. It was very interesting that one night a few of us sat together and chatted, sharing our own faith experiences.

One boy said, "If you feel something makes you happy, why not try to live that life? If you are not happy, then find a new life." Then I started to think to myself, since I felt that this experience of faith was very attractive to me, so why not go and experience it in depth? With this idea in mind, I tried to ask some priests for advice, and of course they were all encouraging me to give religious life a go.

After high school, I began my attempt to live a life with a new mission. I entered the seminary to study philosophy. Those two years were painful but also fruitful. In the first semester of my study, I had a culture shock because this seminary was located somewhere else. I began to find that other people's living habits and thinking were very different from my own. I even had a lot of arguments with others, including my spiritual teacher. I began to have the idea of giving up. My spiritual teacher, over several conversations, guided me to look at things from a different perspective. Gradually, through these arguments, I began to understand other people's lives and thinking. This understanding also helped me to have a deeper understanding of faith.

I also started encouraging my friends to live a life of mission. Some of them told me that they were not ready, and my answer to them was that I too was not ready either, but the experiences along the way are helping prepare me. If I waited for the right time to be ready to start, I don't believe I would start.

I came to Australia to start my new journey. It was full of challenges. I couldn't even speak a complete sentence at the beginning. The challenges of the first semester of theology included doing endless homework I couldn't understand. But all these, I realize, are pushing me to grow. In English, I like the saying, 'No pain, no gain.' That is a motto I apply to myself.

The Discrimination Against Christians and Atheism in Indonesia

Krisna Papalesa SVD



Introduction

Discrimination against Christianity is a challenge in Indonesia, due to many factors, including Christianity being a minority religion practiced by 11 % of the population. Another factor is inequitable laws discriminating against religious minorities. The oppression of religious minorities has led to a growth in atheism in Indonesia since the suppression of minority religions creates ignorance of God's existence. Insights from Thomas

Hobbes help provide a clearer understanding of discrimination against Christianity in the Indonesian context. This essay draws from Hobbes' *Leviathan* to the issue of discrimination against Christianity leading to atheism in Indonesia.

The Context

On September 21, 2017, Indonesia's Vice President Jusuf Kalla expressed that religious toleration in Indonesia is

“growing better than in other countries”, making Indonesia a model for countries regarding religious tolerance. Jusuf Kalla’s expression reveals the Indonesian government’s formal policy on the issue of religious tolerance. However, the statement belies the actual situation *because of* the ongoing discrimination, harassment, and inequality against minority religions. In Indonesia Islam is the dominant religion. Journalist Andreas Harsono reported that since 2000, there have been more than twenty legal cases of discrimination against religious minorities, including Christianity. This has caused some Indonesians, to adopt an atheistic stance, for self-protection. There is a growing sense of disillusionment among some Christians who feel abandoned by God and perceive no assistance or protection from their faith in times of oppression. Many are increasingly distancing themselves from the Christian community, identifying instead with non-believers due to the lack of perceived salvation or support. In Indonesia, a country with one of the world’s largest populations and the second-largest Muslim majority, religious discrimination against Christians remains widespread, despite nearly 69 years of independence. This discrimination stems from a lack of understanding of religious tolerance, with Muslims often opposing the establishment of Christian places of worship and religious activities causing a rise in atheism. Etienne Borne argues that atheism arises when people acknowledge

the concept of an ultimate God but reject belonging to any particular religion. He describes religion as an "*alpha privatum*," a belief that is private and not necessarily meant to be publicly revealed.

Religious Discrimination in Indonesia

The regulation of religious freedom in Indonesia has fluctuated with each presidential administration. After President Soeharto's fall in 1998, Abdurrahman Wahid, former leader of Nahdlatul Ulama, championed religious freedom and openness, allowing Indonesians the right to freely practice and express their faith. However, during the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) from 2004-2014, the approach to religious freedom changed. The national government largely refrained from intervening in local governments' regulation of religious freedoms, leaving the control of religious expression to local authorities. This decentralization made life more difficult for religious minorities, especially in regions where Muslims are the majority, where restrictions on the freedom to practice faith became more pronounced.

Under SBY's leadership, the semi-official Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) gained significant influence over religious matters. In 2005, MUI issued fatwas (religious rulings) banning interfaith activities, such as interfaith prayer, mixed marriages, interfaith inheritance, as well as

prohibiting religious pluralism, liberalism, and secularism. A year later, the government enacted a 2006 “Joint Regulation on Houses of Worship,” which imposed further restrictions on religious minorities, especially Christians, in establishing places of worship. This regulation made it increasingly difficult for religious minorities to build houses of worship in areas where Muslims are the majority.

The strong relationship between the government and MUI during this period reinforced the control over religious expression, particularly Christianity. MUI’s influence contributed to the creation of an environment in which Muslim-majority regions, such as Aceh, saw discriminatory practices increase dramatically. At the same time, Muslims in these areas faced fewer obstacles to building mosques or implementing strict Sharia laws.

A notable case of religious discrimination in Indonesia was the prosecution of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), the Christian governor of Jakarta. In 2016, Ahok was accused of blasphemy after quoting a verse from the Quran during a campaign speech. The Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) investigated the case, ultimately leading to Ahok’s conviction and two-year prison sentence for “spreading hostility and hatred against Muslims.” His case is a clear example of how religious laws, such as the blasphemy law, have been used to target religious minorities, despite his intent to promote positive messages.

Religious discrimination is particularly widespread in regions such as Aceh, West Java, and South Sulawesi, where over 80% of religious discrimination occurs, according to Paul Marshall, Senior Fellow, *Center For Religious Freedom*. He further observed that:

“Despite prominent calls for moderation and inclusion, Indonesian culture has in recent times become increasingly intolerant and ideological. Constitutional democracy has not been matched by intellectual and social flexibility. While more tolerant Islam is still hegemonic, the potent viruses of radicalism and extremism are now endemic.” (June 21, 2023)

The root cause lies in the national and local regulations that fail to uphold equality, justice, and human rights for religious minorities. Such policies reduce religious freedom and undermine individuals’ basic rights. Klaus Krämer, Managing Director at Sight and Life Foundation, argues that religious freedom is a fundamental human right, and limiting individuals’ ability to express their faith is a violation of these rights.

Discrimination against religion in *Leviathan*

Declaring oneself a Christian often leads to oppression, harassment, and

discrimination. In *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes explores the underlying reasons which can explain the discrimination Muslims may hold against Christianity, through concepts such as human nature, the social contract, fear, power, and the tension between order and equality. Although Hobbes does not directly address discrimination in *Leviathan*, his ideas on these four themes provide insight into the dynamics of religious discrimination.

First, Hobbes' view of **human nature** presents humans as fundamentally self-interested and competitive. He argues that people act out of fear and self-defense, often against those with similar desires or interests. Discrimination can arise when individuals or groups sacrifice others in pursuit of their own goals or desires, particularly when there are no laws to regulate their competition

"If two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end, (which is principally their conservation, and sometimes their delectation only,) they endeavor to destroy, or subdue one another."

— *Leviathan*, Chapter 13

By suppressing Christianity, Muslims may seek to eliminate the perceived threat to their own religious identity. This discrimination leads to a crisis of faith for

some Christians, who, in the face of oppression, may eventually lose their belief in God. As a result, atheism can emerge as a reaction to this loss of faith, when individuals can no longer see the value in Christianity or perceive any divine assistance in their oppression.

Second, Hobbes' concept of the **social contract** suggests that, in order to avoid conflict in a state of nature, individuals within a community must agree to a common social contract, granting authority to a sovereign or government. This authority is meant to ensure justice and security. However, when the social contract is unevenly applied or ignored, it can lead to the oppression of minority groups, including Christians as in Indonesia's case, as:

"The nature of justice consists in keeping valid covenants. But the validity of covenants begins not with the constitution of a civil power sufficient to compel men to keep them; then it is also that propriety begins."

— *Leviathan*, Chapter 15

For Hobbes, justice is achieved when people honor their agreements, upheld by a central authority that can enforce them. Discrimination against Christians in Indonesia reflects a breakdown in this social contract. Muslims, as the majority, often disregard the agreements meant to ensure equality and religious freedom, feeling empowered to override them in favor of their own interests.

Hobbes argues that without a strong legal framework to prevent conflict, society will descend into chaos. Atheism, in this context, can be seen as a result of this breakdown—a consequence of religious minorities, like Christians, being persecuted or ignored by the state and majority religious groups, leading to a loss of faith in oppressed groups that no longer see the value of maintaining their religious identity.

Third, **fear and power**. Hobbes argues that humans are driven by fear and the desire for power to secure their self-interest. Discrimination stems from these two forces—fear of others and the desire to dominate or control. For Hobbes, fear is a central component of human existence and morality. Fear, according to Hobbes, is the root of justice, virtue, and social order. The abuse of power based on vanity, also leads individuals to act in corrupt and unjust ways. To prevent chaos and ensure justice, all power, according to Hobbes, should be vested in a sovereign authority, a government that has the legitimacy to enforce laws and maintain peace. This central authority is supposed to be based on the collective agreement of the people, ensuring that no one group can dominate or oppress others. J.W.N. Watkins elaborates on Hobbes' view, arguing that fear may similarly be an essential tool for preserving control, to serve as a check on people's impulses, helping prevent chaos from spiraling out of control.

For individuals in the minority, the absence of a protective legal framework and the oppressive actions of the majority can create an environment where they feel powerless. In such an environment as in Indonesia, atheism may emerge as a coping mechanism—an attempt to reject religious identity altogether in order to escape from persecution.

Fourth, **the stability of law and order versus the spirit of equality**.

Hobbes contends that in society, maintaining the stability of laws and the community is more important than the pursuit of equality. For Hobbes, order takes precedence over the equal treatment of all individuals, which can justify the marginalization or oppression of certain groups. In *Leviathan*, he asserts that the pursuit of equality, where everyone seeks the same things in the same way, naturally breeds competition and discord. In his view, the more people desire the same things, the more quickly they will come into conflict with one another. Hobbes identifies two key principles that often lead to quarrels and threaten the stability of society: competition and glory. He writes:

"Competition makes men invade for gain; Glory makes them invade for reputation."
— *Leviathan*, Chapter 13

Competition for resources, wealth, or power, is tied to power and dominance and the pursuit of glory, fame or social status. This can lead to violence when individuals or groups are willing to harm

others to achieve personal or group goals, disrupting societal harmony.

In Hobbes' view, order is essential to prevent these destructive tendencies. The focus should be on creating a stable environment where laws are respected and conflicts are minimized, rather than insisting on strict equality of outcomes. However, when the principle of order is violated—such as when a dominant group disregards the rights of a minority—discrimination and inequality can flourish.

Application of *Leviathan* to the Indonesian context.

Leviathan offers significant insights into issues of governance, social contracts, and human nature, which can be applied to the Indonesian context.

a) The Government's Role in Regulating Religious Freedom

Laws need to be well-defined and equally enforced, to prevent conflicts and ensure that all religions are treated justly. The current system in Indonesia does not promote peace or justice for all - reflecting a certain weakness in governance. By reforming these laws to guarantee religious equality, the government can foster a more harmonious environment that discourages discrimination and its negative consequences, such as the rise of atheism.

b) *Leviathan* and Muslim Awareness of the Impact of Discrimination

Adopting a strong social contract where Muslims agree to allow Christians to practice and express their faith freely, as long as they do not incite harm or insult others, might lead to better inter-religious dialogue, create social and religious confidence among minorities and prevent the move towards atheism arising from fear, persecution, and a weak sense of religious identity. Establishing a mutually respectful contract between religious groups might reduce the likelihood of conflict and foster a more peaceful, tolerant society.

If people's rights to express their faith is upheld and discrimination is curbed, the conditions that lead to atheism are minimized. In this way, Hobbes' theories provide valuable guidance on how to preserve the authenticity of faith and protect individuals from turning away from religion in response to discrimination.

Conclusion

The discrimination against Christianity by the Muslim community in Indonesia is perhaps a direct result of the laws and government system surrounding religious freedom. These issues are influenced by the period of unstable political leadership, shaping the uneven regulation of religious rights. Hobbes' reflections on human nature, the social contract, fear and power, and the importance of order over equality offer essential insights for religious

tolerance in Indonesia. Atheism, in this context, is a reaction to religious discrimination and injustice. By adhering to Hobbesian principles of fairness and his

social contract theory, the government can create a more just society that protects the rights of all religious groups, for a more harmonious future for Indonesia.

Bibliography

Borne, Etienne. *Modern Atheism: A Faith and Fact Book*. London: Burns & Oates, 1961.

Hobbes, Thomas. "Leviathan." *Chapter XIII of the Natural Condition of Mankind, concerning their Felicity and Misery*, edited by A. D. Lindsay. London: J.M. Dent & Sons LTD), 1914.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Enlightenment Birth of Modern Nations*. Adapted by John McDowell, Melbourne: YTU, 2024.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Hobbes' Fearful Wisdom chapter 7*. Adapted by John McDowell, week 4, *Readings*. Melbourne: YTU, 2024.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Religious Liberty and Toleration*. Adapted by John McDowell, week 4, *Readings*. Melbourne: YTU, 2024.

Krämer, Klaus. "Religious Freedom Foundation: Reflections and Models" in eds. Krämer and Vellguth. *One World Theology*. Quezon City: Claretian Publication, 2014.

Marshall, Paul. "The Ambiguities of Religious Freedom in Indonesia." *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 16, no.1 (2018):85.

Religious Minorities in Indonesia Face Discrimination | Human Rights Watch

Watkins, J.W.N. *Hobbes's System of Ideas*. London: Hutchinson University Library, 1973.

Exploring Benedictine Spirituality

Zouchuan (Jacob) Yang SVD



Helen Lombard's paper, "Benedict's Balanced Lifestyle: Is This Your Life?" presents a nuanced understanding of the balance of the Benedictine tradition with its unique perspective. Benedict's balance integrates all aspects of life—prayer, work, community, and service such as hospitality—into a unified whole. This balance is dynamic, based on recognizing the complexity of life and then constantly adjusting to various complexities. As Lombard emphasizes, the Rule of St. Benedict aims to embrace all elements of real life and shape an intimate relationship

with God in the depths of the heart through the practice of seeking God, public life, and service ("Benedict's Balanced Lifestyle," 6-34).

Questions that arise in reading Lombard's Paper

Question 1: Today, spiritual leaders of the Church are often faced with overloaded ministry pressures. In this context, how should the dynamic integration of balance proposed by Benedict help us face

and adapt to our situation of ministry overload?

Observing the living and spiritual state of many clergy and pastoral workers in the world today, it is not difficult to find that due to the particularity of the ministry, we need to work hard to maintain spiritual vitality to face the pressures that can be overwhelming. The Benedictine concept of balance is not static but dynamic, encouraging continuous and appropriate adjustments in this dynamic. "Balance is not any sort of static moment. It is dynamic, and you must continue to work at it to hold it in place" (Lombard, 7). In contemporary pastoral ministry, most clergy not only have to implement spiritual care, but also must take care of many tasks such as administrative duties.

So, how can they apply Benedict's dynamic principles to adapt and avoid burnout in this busyness, while shaping their own spiritual life and responding to the needs of the congregation? This is a very realistic problem. Benedictine spirituality emphasises a dynamic integration. For example, in stressful pastoral work, one should always be aware of one's own inner views and attitudes toward this pressure and transform this passive pressure into a positive driving force for pastoral recipients. At the same time, pastoral workers can also gain the strength they need through a practice of Benedictine spirituality for sustainable pastoral ministry, indirectly alleviating the pressures faced by modern clergy.

Question 2: In today's highly individualistic society, how can community life advocated by Benedict be integrated and have a positive impact?

In St. Benedict's teaching, communal or monastic life is emphasised as a core element of spiritual growth. In today's highly individualistic society, people prioritise self-consideration, which indirectly leads to the fact that Christian communities often find it difficult to cultivate deep and meaningful relationships. The contemporary parish environment needs to reintroduce and adapt the Benedictine principles of communal life, mutual accountability, and collective support. "The work of cenobitic living means working at seeking God, at cenobitic living, and at hospitality and service" (Lombard, 9). Incorporating monastic practices, such as shared spiritual practice experiences and communal decision-making, in the community or parish group increases the interconnectedness and spiritual vitality of the congregation.

Question 3: How can the rhythm of the liturgical year, which is at the heart of Benedictine life, be meaningfully integrated into the busy secular life of the laity?

Benedictine spirituality is deeply tied to the liturgical calendar, with its cycles of feasts, fasts, and sacred time structuring monastic life. Benedictine spirituality is based on the liturgy, through which

spirituality is practiced and deepened. This is not limited to celebrating festivals, but to deepening inner spirituality through such external liturgy. Although worship ceremonies are often performed through external rituals, it is precisely because of the guidance of these external rituals that people can gain inner strength from faith. In today's context of increasing secularisation, people's time is often dominated by work and external distractions, and the time for inner solitude seems to be getting less and less. In this case, can this spiritual life model full of sacred rhythms bring people motivation to enrich and enrich their lives? In particular, how can lay people adopt and accept this life model, and how can the various liturgies of the church's liturgical year be skilfully integrated into daily life to create a sense of continuity and spiritual depth? This is indeed an issue worth chewing carefully.

Impact on Understanding of Spirituality Today

After parsing and understanding Benedict's concept of dynamic balance and his central idea, my understanding of spirituality has deepened. Benedict's concept of dynamic balance provides an important correction to modern spiritual approaches, emphasizing that the focus of modern spiritual approaches should be integration rather than division. In today's world, personal time and energy are pulled in multiple directions by work, family and social expectations, and the

inner spiritual life tends to rely on external things for superficial strength. For example, getting superficial pleasure through electronic products. Benedict's vision of balance, with its focus on continuous adjustment and integration, very practically illustrates the innovation and need for a more holistic spiritual approach. For example, when negative emotions arise due to stress, it is crucial to realise it in time, to make adjustments and find a balance in how one lives, work, and pray.

For ministry, dialogue is one of the effective ways to deal with the tension between spiritual growth and pastoral responsibilities. Benedict's model of balance suggests that pastors should find the right balance and integrate their spiritual practice into their ministry, so that the two complement each other rather than exist in isolation. "Benedict is continually adjusting and indicating where you could adjust, aware of the reality of the wave he is riding" (Lombard, 8).

The principle of cenobitic living also reshaped my understanding of how Christian communities can function more healthily today. While modern society is characterized by a high degree of individualism, the Benedictine Rule emphasizes that true spiritual growth is grounded in a community context in which individuals are responsible for one another. "The wholeness of life involves all these elements working together in a dynamic relationship" (Lombard, 9).

Similarly, the rhythms of the liturgical year offer a fresh framework for modern spirituality. In a world where time is fragmented and hurried, aligning personal rhythms with the Church's sacred calendar can create a sense of spiritual rootedness. Following the Church's prompting to intentionally set aside time for regular reflection, such as during Advent or Lent, will not only enrich daily life but also allow for the experience of deeper spiritual rhythms that sustain life.

Conclusion

Lombard's reflections on the Rule of St. Benedict and his interpretation of the concept of dynamic balance offer a unique perspective and profound insights into the spiritual development of the Church today. The central idea of this article is to encourage Christians to rethink how to integrate faith into daily life and how to establish a deeper relationship with themselves, others and God in the model of community life. By adopting Benedict's principles of dynamic balance, monastic life, and liturgical rhythm, the Church can provide a spiritual model that is deeply rooted in tradition but closely related to the challenges of modern life to enrich our self-cultivation.

Atheism: Varieties of Belief, Disbelief and Unbelief

Van Thuc SVD

Introduction

Atheism is the denial or lack of belief in a god. Atheism took root particularly during the Age of Enlightenment. René Descartes (1596–1650), frequently called the founder of modern philosophy, played a crucial role in how this ideology took hold. He aimed to provide a philosophical framework for the presence of God, yet this extreme focus on reason and skepticism unintentionally aided in the development of contemporary atheism. His epistemological approach, which prioritized reason and empirical evidence and was typified by methodical skepticism and the cogito argument (*Cogito, ergo sum*, or “I think, therefore I am”)³², transformed Western thinking. Despite his theistic objectives, the intellectual instruments he created made it possible for succeeding thinkers to contest and even reject theistic ideas. This essay explores Descartes’ epistemology, examining how his views on reason, dualism, and the mechanistic understanding of nature contributed to a secular outlook that ultimately influenced the emergence of modern atheism.

Context

Galileo’s work on Copernican theory significantly impacted Descartes’

³² René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Meditation II, 17.

philosophical investigation of how humans see the cosmos. Galileo challenged the Catholic Church’s geocentric doctrine, claiming that his astronomical discoveries proved that the Earth is not the center of the universe.³³ He maintained that biblical verses like Joshua 10:12 should be viewed as metaphorical rather than taken literally in relation to astronomical assertions. This nonliteral approach makes for a more logical reading of scripture possible, consistent with Augustine’s interpretation of Genesis.³⁴ According to Carriero and Broughton, “when scripture seems to make a claim regarding celestial events, and this pertains to a matter that is still up for debate, but may ultimately be ‘proven by sense experience and required proofs,’ then we should not interpret scripture overly literally on this point, on pain of making scripture look foolish.”³⁵ Descartes, who respected Galileo’s acceptance of uncertainty in the search for truth, found great resonance in this empirical reasoning and logical discourse. He thus came to see human experiences of doubt as essential to the path of philosophy leading to certainty.

³³ Galileo Galilei, *Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina*, trans. Maurice A. Finocchiaro (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 67–68.

³⁴ Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, vol. 2 (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 73.

³⁵ Janet Broughton and John Carriero, eds., *A Companion to Descartes* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 203.

Moreover, Descartes was profoundly influenced by mathematics, which he saw as the final embodiment of absolute truth. In “Rules for the Direction of the Mind,” Descartes maintained that “geometry and arithmetic are the only subjects that are untarnished by falsity or doubt.”³⁶ He argued that mathematical facts, like the claim that one plus one equals two, are apparent and within the reach of human reason. They offer a degree of certainty not present in other types of knowledge. Therefore, mathematics aided Descartes’ search for indisputable sources of knowledge, reinforcing his skepticism. Descartes’ philosophical investigations were greatly influenced by these two opposing forces—Galileo’s empirical rationalism and the indisputable nature of mathematics. In particular, his technique of doubt and his quest for truth through distinct and unambiguous concepts were particularly noteworthy.³⁷

Methodic Doubt

René Descartes, presents a new strategy for the philosophical search for truth, starting with what he terms “methodic doubt”. His seminal work *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) is the most well-known explanation of this tactic. Descartes formulated a rigorous and deliberate process of systematic skepticism in which

he questions the veracity of every belief he holds, especially those open to any plausible doubt. His goal was to remove all potentially false ideas so that only opinions are left beyond the shadow of a doubt.³⁸

Descartes begins by questioning the veracity of sensory perceptions, which he notes are frequently misleading. For example, sensory perception might result in incorrect conclusions when one has intense, real-feeling dreams or encounters optical illusions when objects look curved in water. He concludes that we cannot entirely rely on the senses as sources of specific information if they are capable of tricking us in such circumstances.³⁹ Because of his mistrust regarding the senses, Descartes begins to consider the possibility that an “evil demon” or other robust and malicious entity is controlling his thoughts and tricking him into thinking that the outside world exists when, in fact, it does not. Even if it may appear excessive, this radical uncertainty is not a goal unto itself but rather a means to clear the ground for discovering truths that cannot be doubted. By imagining this extreme scenario, Descartes can question even the most fundamental beliefs—such as the physical world’s existence and the truths of mathematics—until he finds a foundation of absolute certainty.⁴⁰

³⁶ René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), vol. 1, 10.

³⁷ René Descartes, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (New York: Dover, 2003), 6.

³⁸ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 13.

³⁹ Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 14.

⁴⁰ Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 15–16.

Descartes' method of doubt differs significantly from the scholastic philosophy of the Middle Ages, which usually tried to bring faith and reason together. The scholastic tradition saw reason as a support system for divine revelation and ecclesiastical authority. On the other hand, Descartes sought to transcend all religious sentiments and establish the ultimate intellectual foundation of knowing. The foundation of Enlightenment philosophy was to be built upon a totally human-reason-based system of knowledge. He held the view that everything had to be questioned including faith, tradition, and authority as trustworthy sources of information revolutionized European philosophy by inspiring other thinkers to base all of their conclusions only on reason. This tactic opened the door for a more empirical research style, which would substantially impact the role of religion in intellectual life.⁴¹

Cogito Ergo Sum

Cogito, ergo sum, or "I think, therefore I am,"⁴² is ultimately achieved through the use of doubt. Descartes questioned everything, including the truth of the outer world, the precision of his senses, and even the fundamentals of mathematics, before concluding that there is only one thing that is definite. His reasoning capacity is one thing. The fact that he doubts and ponders shows that he is a

⁴¹ Stephen Gaukroger, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 222.

⁴²

thinking being, even if all of his beliefs are wrong and if a malicious demon is tricking him about the world's existence. This conclusion is undeniable since a thinking subject must exist to be duped or harbor doubts.⁴³

'*Cognito*' is the earliest and most significant certainty in Descartes' theory of knowing. It functions as the foundation upon which all other knowledge is built. Descartes asserts that *cogito* is an unquestionable, self-evident notion that is "clear and distinct." Since it is obvious and unambiguous, this idea is an excellent place to start for his method of knowing. It demonstrates that reason may still be utilized to identify certain truths, even when sensory experience is unreliable. Descartes' understanding of *cogito* not only sets the foundation for knowing but also exemplifies his rationalist philosophical position. He asserts that reason is superior to all other faculties, including faith and sensory perception since reason alone is capable of producing certain and indisputable knowledge.⁴⁴

The Enlightenment, a period when individuals thought human reason could advance society and help people understand the outside world, came to symbolize a time of over reliance on reason. A contributing element to the gradual secularization of European philosophy was Descartes' conceptual shift from tradition and religion to reason as

⁴³ Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 18.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Descartes' Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2007), 112.

the ultimate arbiter of truth. His methodology cleared the path for a more critical and independent research approach where reason, not religious authority, became the primary source of knowledge about the outside world.

Clear and Distinct Ideas

According to Descartes, an idea is clear when it is immediately present to the mind and distinct when it is sharply separated from other ideas. He argues that only ideas that meet these two criteria can be trusted as true. This principle becomes the cornerstone of Descartes' entire epistemological project, allowing him to rebuild knowledge on a solid foundation after subjecting all prior beliefs to doubt.⁴⁵

This focus significantly reduces the medieval reliance on tradition and authority as sources of knowledge for distinct and clear concepts. Within the scholastic tradition, a great deal of information about the universe came from the Church's dogmas or the teachings of classical figures such as Aristotle. However, according to Descartes, knowledge cannot be established on the basis of authority but rather must be based on concepts that are obvious to the rational mind. This change prioritizes reason and intellectual clarity over all other forms of knowledge, such as religious beliefs and sensory experience.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 20.

⁴⁶ Gaukroger, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography*, 231.

This rationalist method challenged religious faith and sensory experience, focusing on self-evident logic and intellectual clarity. For centuries, the Church has depended on revelation and the inspired word of scripture as its primary knowledge sources. However, Descartes' approach demanded that all concepts be put to the test of reason, even those pertaining to religious truths. This rationalism helped to accelerate the secularization of thinking in Europe.

God as Guarantor of Knowledge

Descartes maintained his belief in God despite strongly focusing on skepticism and reason. To ensure the veracity of knowledge, Descartes really maintained that the presence of a kind and truthful God was required. He provides several arguments, including an ontological one, in his *Meditations* to support the presence of God. The idea of a perfect being presupposes its existence by definition since life itself is a form of perfection and a perfect being devoid of existence would not be genuinely flawless.⁴⁷ For Descartes, the existence of God is crucial because only a benevolent and truthful God could guarantee that clear and distinct ideas are reliable sources of knowledge. Without such a guarantor even the most certain truths could be subject to doubt.⁴⁸

Descartes' insistence on God as the source of knowledge has come under fire for encouraging circular thinking, an issue

⁴⁷ Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 44.

⁴⁸ Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 46.

known as the “Cartesian Circle.” Although Descartes employs distinct and unambiguous concepts to support his claim that God exists, he also uses these same ideas to demonstrate God is real. This apparent circularity has drawn criticism from later philosophers, such as Immanuel Kant and David Hume, who challenged the coherence of Descartes’ system.⁴⁹ Despite these criticisms, Descartes’ project continues to be a keystone of contemporary philosophy because it signifies the change from medieval to contemporary conceptions of knowledge, reason, and the place of God in intellectual pursuits.

Descartes’ Contribution to Modern Atheism

Even though René Descartes was a fervent theist, the philosophical ideas he popularized unintentionally helped to establish contemporary atheism. Modern atheism, according to Michael Buckley, emerged not just from rationalism but also from a growing individualism that separated reason from its communal, theological foundations, whereas Descartes advocated reason as a means of enhancing religious knowledge. Thinkers of the Enlightenment, such as Descartes, shifted away from conventional, and experienced faith, creating a philosophical culture in which religious teachings that were not immediately testable by reason were considered suspect. Descartes helped create a new

⁴⁹ Gaukroger, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography*, 245.

intellectual climate where the role of theology became increasingly marginalized within intellectual discourse. This shift to rationalism contributed to the development of a more secular worldview, which eventually paved the way for the growth of atheism.⁵⁰

Later philosophers followed to question religious beliefs and seek knowledge outside of the jurisdiction of the Church. Philosophers such as Voltaire posed a threat to the Church’s dogmas. Denis Diderot, in a similar vein, expanded on Descartes’ rationalist framework by advocating a materialistic and secular viewpoint and an outright rejection of religious ideas.

Dualism and the Marginalization of the Soul

Descartes’ dualism regarding human nature, which distinguishes between the immaterial mind (or soul) and the physical body, is another essential facet of his philosophy. He maintained that the body is a part of matter and the mind is a part of the domain of thinking. Following the division of mind and body, philosophers began to emphasize the material parts of life more and more, gradually pushing the soul to the periphery of philosophical debate. Descartes’ dualism was rejected by materialist thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza, who maintained that only the material world exists. Hobbes, for example, asserted that

⁵⁰ Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (London: Yale University, 1987), 75.

physical principles alone control human behavior and that humans are just sophisticated machines.⁵¹ The idea that humans are only material beings immediately conflicts with the idea of an immaterial soul, which minimizes the significance of God in human life. This materialistic perspective, which gave little place for faith in a transcendent God or spiritual reality, would eventually serve as the basis for atheistic philosophy.⁵²

The Mechanistic View of Nature

In his discourse on the *Method* (1637), Descartes claimed that the universe—including the human body—operates much like a clock. This revolutionary mechanistic viewpoint proposed that physical processes could fully explain all natural events, negating the need for supernatural intervention. Pierre-Simon Laplace, later argued that the existence of God is not required to explain the workings of the cosmos.⁵³ There is little room for the active participation of a supernatural creator in Laplace's mechanistic worldview, which supported the idea that the cosmos is a self-sustaining system guided by natural rules. Consequently, the secularization of thought that resulted from Descartes' mechanical philosophy made atheism a respectable position in academia.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Edited by Richard Tuck. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Laplace, Pierre-Simon. *A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities*. Translated by Frederick Wilson. New York: Dover Publications, 1951.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Modern Atheism: Gradual Development

Atheism did not emerge overnight or suddenly; rather, it developed gradually over centuries. Throughout the sixteenth century, anyone who held unconventional beliefs or disagreed with Church teaching was frequently denigrated with the label "Atheist". In England and France, it was often used as a derogatory word directed to those who were thought to be heretics.⁵⁵ However, by the seventeenth century, the phrase came to mean something different—that is, the existence of God is to be denied. Denis Diderot exemplified this view.⁵⁶

The Church has always placed human reason within the context of divine revelation and acknowledged the significance of reason in knowing God. When reason was released from the restrictions of religion, it allowed for more critical assessments of conventional religious beliefs, which caused many people to doubt God's existence.⁵⁷

The Rise of Modern Atheists

Older theologians frequently believed that God was impervious to criticism, while contemporary philosophers recognized that human reason could probe and test the idea of God as presence and essence.

⁵⁵ Gavin Hyman, "Atheism in Modern History," in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, ed. Michael Martin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 29.

⁵⁶ Diderot, Denis. *Rameau's Nephew and Other Works*. Translated by Jacques Barzun and Ralph H. Bowen. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2001.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

When Friedrich Nietzsche famously declared the “God is dead” skepticism, rationalism reached a pinnacle. Nietzsche’s statement expressed the belief that the conventional Christian understanding of God was no longer applicable in contemporary reality. He believed the Church was an organization that stifled human potential. People should be allowed to follow their own creative paths without being constrained by religious doctrine.⁵⁸

Conclusion

René Descartes’ intellectual advancements unintentionally created the foundation for contemporary atheism despite his intention to reconcile reason and faith. By elevating logical inquiry above religious authority and emphasizing human reason, his methodical skepticism and attention encouraged subsequent intellectuals to question conventional ideas. Due to Descartes’ dualism and mechanical understanding of nature, which implied a self-sustaining cosmos that downplayed divine intervention, the notion of the soul was further rejected and materialist viewpoints gained favor. As the concepts of Enlightenment philosophy developed, they encouraged a greater distancing of reason from religion, which helped contemporary atheism gain traction as thinkers started to question God’s existence. Descartes left behind a legacy of skepticism and faith that interacted sophisticatedly to change the intellectual landscape and allow atheistic inquiry to flourish.

⁵⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, cited in Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 2nd ed. (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 81.

Bibliography

Broughton, Janet, and John Carriero. *A Companion to Descartes*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008.

Buckley, Michael J. *Atheism and the Philosophy of Religion: A Historical Perspective*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1996.

Descartes, René. *Discourse on the Method*. Translated by Ian Maclean. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Translated by John Cottingham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Descartes, René. *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*. Translated by Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911.

Hyman, Gavin. *Atheism in Modern History: Philosophy and its Contexts*. London: Bloomsbury, 2010.

Laplace, Pierre-Simon. *A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities*. Translated by Frederick Wilson Truscott and Frederick Lincoln Emory. New York: Dover Publications, 1951.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Cited in Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 2nd ed. New York: Meridian Books, 1956.

Spinoza, Baruch. *Ethics*. Translated by Edwin Curley. London: Penguin Books, 1996.

Voltaire. *Philosophical Letters*. Translated by Leonard Tancock. London: Penguin Books, 1980.

Sacrosanctum Concilium and the Liturgy

Duong Quoc Khoa SVD



Introduction

The Second Vatican Council, convened by Pope John XXIII and continued by Pope Paul VI, took place from 1962 to 1965. It marked a turning point in the history of the Catholic Church. One of the key documents discussed and approved with 2162 votes on November 22, 1963, was *Sacrosanctum Concilium*(SC)⁵⁹. According to John Baldovin, "*Sacrosanctum Concilium* marked a profound development in theology and had far-ranging implications

⁵⁹ Greg Brett. "*The Liturgy Is the Church: Theological Exploration*". Lecture, accessed 20 August 2024.

for liturgical reform and renewal"⁶⁰. This essay will discuss the theological principles in the document and its relevance to the contemporary Church.

The Theological Principles in SC

The first theological principle asserts that "Liturgy is the primary manifestation of the Church"⁶¹, reflecting the Council's intention to reform liturgy. The Constitution seeks to adapt the liturgy to

⁶⁰ Catherine E. Clifford and Massimo Faggioli, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II*, First edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 151.

⁶¹ Clifford and Faggioli, 2023.

the needs of the age, foster an ecumenical spirit, and support evangelization efforts. This theological principle underscores liturgy as a crucial means through which Christians express their beliefs and live out their faith. The liturgy is also described as the mystery of Christ and the true image of the Church in terms of its earthly and heavenly dimensions. This insight contrasts with that of Bellarmine who emphasized the Church's juridical structure. Instead of focusing on the hierarchy of the church, this new perspective highlights the sacramental nature of the Church. In other words, the Church is not merely an organization but a place where people gather to encounter God, for "the Church is the image of her divine-human Bridegroom: The duality of natures in Him is reflected in her"⁶². By emphasizing the liturgy in this way, Christians are better equipped to engage with the world actively. At the same time, this understanding avoids the misconception that liturgy is merely a tool for converting outsiders. Rather, the liturgy is the life of worship for those who belong to the Church, strengthening them in their ability to reach out to others.⁶³

The second theological principle states that: "Liturgy is first and foremost the action of Christ in the midst of his people"⁶⁴. Whenever the Eucharist is celebrated, "the work of our redemption is accomplished" (SC 2). The document also

⁶² Herbert Vorgrimler, 9.

⁶³ Herbert Vorgrimler, 9.

⁶⁴ Clifford and Faggioli, 151.

connects the Incarnation with the Paschal Mystery- the Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, as the apex of Christ's activity. The use of the term "Paschal" emphasizes the insight that the risen Lord is actively present in the liturgy. It is through making present the Paschal Mystery that Christ's priestly office is exercised (SC 7). The document further states that Christ is present in four distinct ways: In the person of the ordained minister, in the Eucharistic elements, in the proclamation of the Word, and when the Church prays. Pope Paul VI reiterated this in his encyclical on the Eucharist, *Mysterium Fidei*. He emphasized that Christ's presence in the minister and in the Word is as real as in the Eucharistic elements. The second paragraph of the SC's article 7 highlights the Church's role alongside Christ who is described as the primary liturgist, with the Church incorporated into the work of Christ, as a visible order of the Church's work and life expressing a 'union with her Bridegroom to glorify the Father alongside him.'⁶⁵ (SC 7).⁶⁵

The document defines two main purposes of Liturgy: the glorification of God and the sanctification of the people where the "Liturgy is the summit (glorification) toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount (sanctification) from which all her power flows"⁶⁶. As such, this is achieved by the "full, conscious, and active participation" of all faithful

⁶⁵ Herbert Vorgrimler, 152.

⁶⁶ Clifford and Faggioli, 152.

Christians in the liturgy. SC 14, cites 1 Peter 2:9 to affirm that the active participation of believers is an inherent "right" of all people that they have, based on their baptism. Such participation is rooted in a renewed understanding of the Church's nature, reflecting a deeper appreciation of the dignity of all baptized faithful as members of the priestly people of God.⁶⁷ Moreover, the document highlights the importance of various ministerial roles in the liturgy, beyond that of the priest (SC 26-31). The Council aimed not only to encourage a more active engagement in the outward rituals of the liturgy but also to foster a deeper participation in the Paschal mystery of Christ, celebrated in the Eucharistic memorial (SC 48).⁶⁸ Participation of all baptized persons is to be "conscious"-meaning knowing, responsible, and fully understanding the significance of the rites and gestures of each celebration. SC appreciates the necessity of liturgical formation. Along with merely understanding the words and actions, the baptized faithful should be guided to understand the depth of the mysteries being celebrated and to adapt their lives to them. The Second Vatican Council calls for a commitment to liturgical formation not only for seminarians, diocesan liturgical commissions, and members of parish liturgy committees or those entrusted with various liturgical ministries but also for the

⁶⁷ Richard R. Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2012), 25.

⁶⁸ Gaillardetz and Clifford, 25.

instruction of all the faithful (SC 19). Therefore, liturgical formation is considered an integral part of all catechesis and Christian formation.⁶⁹ Another significant theological aspect is the importance of faith and conversion in relation to worship (SC 9).⁷⁰

The ongoing relevance of SC to the Contemporary Church

Although the document was promulgated in 1963 and faced some resistance in the ensuing decades, it remains highly relevant in the contemporary Church. Its theological principles continue to shape the Church's liturgical life today, evident in some aspects including the use of the vernacular, popular sacred music and inculturating local practices and symbols in the liturgy.

One of the most significant and practical liturgical reforms to emerge from the Council was the decision to allow the use of the vernacular in the liturgy.⁷¹ The Church recognizes the official authorization to translate certain parts of the sacramental rites, the Mass or other parts of the liturgy into the language of the people has brought great benefit to the people. (SC 36:2). In continuing to encourage this change, Pope Francis issued *Magnum Principium (MP)* on September 3, 2011. A part of the content in the *MP* granted local bishops' conferences greater authority in translating liturgical

⁶⁹ Gaillardetz and Clifford, 25.

⁷⁰ Clifford and Faggioli, 153.

⁷¹ Clifford and Faggioli, 153.

texts into vernacular languages, underscoring the need for the liturgy to be accessible and understandable to the faithful. It acknowledges the foundational role of SC in promoting the use of vernacular languages and emphasizes the importance of translations that are both accurate and pastorally effective, demonstrating the ongoing relevance of SC's principles concerning the use of the vernacular to ensure that the liturgy remains relevant and meaningful in different cultural contexts.

Secondly, music is among the most influential factors in the practice of worship. The chapter on music in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* begins by emphasizing the importance of what it calls "sacred music" and preserving the "treasury of sacred music" handed down from the past (SC 112-144).⁷² Accordingly, it appreciates Gregorian chant and polyphonic music. However, other kinds of music may also be included (SC 115). *Musicam Sacram*, an instruction on music in the liturgy issued by the Sacred Congregation of Rites in 1967, provided practical guidelines for implementing the principles regarding sacred music outlined in SC. Additionally, *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (RS), an important instruction issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in 2004, demonstrates the continued relevance of SC to the Church today. Accordingly, the RS states:

⁷² Clifford and Faggioli, 160.

The Church has always recognized and encouraged the ministerial functions of the faithful in the celebration of the sacred Liturgy, but she has also emphasized the importance of music and chant in the liturgy, in particular Gregorian chant, as being especially suited to the Roman Liturgy. (RS 57)

Thirdly, the practice of the priest facing the people during Mass is one of the most visible signs of the changes initiated by Vatican II that remains relevant today. Before Vatican II, the altar was typically placed against the wall, and the priest would face away from the congregation throughout the Mass. However, in the light of the principle of emphasizing the importance of active participation by the faithful in the liturgy, the reform reconsidered the orientation of both the altar and the celebrant. As a result, a year after SC, the instruction named *Inter Oecumenici* (IO), was issued by the Sacred Congregation of Rites on September 26, 1964, providing specific guidelines for implementing the liturgical reforms including more explicit instructions regarding the arrangement of the altar and the orientation of the priest. Accordingly, the main altar was to be freestanding to allow for movement around it and have the priest celebrating the Eucharist facing the people. The altar was to become the center toward which the attention of the entire community of people naturally turns (IO). This change

has fostered a stronger connection between the celebrant and the congregation, with both focusing on the centrality of the Eucharist. The practice remains a legitimate and widely accepted norm in the Church today.

Fourthly, *SC* marked a significant turning point in the cultural adaptation of the Church in terms of the liturgy. Before the *SC*, liturgical adaptation was generally forbidden, for instance in China and India in the 17th century.⁷³ However, the *SC* emphasized the need to avoid a "rigid uniformity of rites" and allowed for "legitimate variations"⁷⁴. In some cases, even more radical adaptations were permitted if necessary (*SC* 40). This change was well-received, especially in diverse societies. For example, in the United States, the liturgical reform greatly contributed to ecumenical efforts. The interaction of liturgical reform with

contemporary culture is indeed an ongoing process.⁷⁵

Finally, *Evangelii Gaudium (EG)*, issued by Pope Francis in 2013, also shows the continuing relevance of the *SC* to the modern Church by emphasizing the importance of inculturation within the Church including the liturgy. (*EG* 115).

Conclusion

SC highlights key theological principles related to the liturgy, including it being the primary manifestation of the Church and, most importantly, the action of Christ in the midst of His people. The purpose of the liturgy is to glorify God and sanctify the people, serving as both the culmination of the Church's activities and the source of its spiritual power. From this foundation, the Church calls for the full, conscious, and active participation of the faithful and emphasizes the importance of faith and

[T]he whole Church plays the role of priest and victim along with Christ, offering the Sacrifice of the Mass and itself completely offered in it. The Fathers of the Church taught this wondrous doctrine.

—*Pope Paul VI*

Eucharistic Virtue



⁷³ Clifford and Faggioli, 155.

⁷⁴ Clifford and Faggioli, 155.

⁷⁵ Massimo Faggioli, ed., *The Legacy of Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), 123-124.

conversion. The principles of the SC remain highly relevant to the contemporary Church. This is shown through the changes in the liturgy, including the use of the vernacular, the

practice of *versus populum*, the openness to diverse forms of music, and the incorporation of inculturation into the liturgy.

Bibliography

Brett, Greg. *The Liturgy Is the Church: Theological Exploration*. Lecture. Yarra Theological Union, Box Hill, Australia.

Clifford, Catherine E., and Massimo Faggioli, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II*. First edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023.

Faggioli, Massimo, ed. *The Legacy of Vatican II*. New York: Paulist Press, 2015.

Gaillardetz, Richard R., and Catherine E. Clifford. *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II*. Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2012.

Herbert Vorgrimler. *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*. Vol. Vol 1, 1967.

Haiku

The haiku is a Japanese poetic form that consists of three lines, with five syllables in the first line, seven in the second, and five in the third. They are a form of mindfulness meditation. Here are some for you to enjoy.



Springtime in Melbourne
The flowers are blooming now
My heart is joyful
(Class effort)

The birds are shouting
They're in empathy with me
My soul is fulfilled
(Thuc)

Winter's dead dried leaves
Are picked over by the wind
A footprint lingers
(Class effort)

Garden in summer
Coming back from the winter
A circle of life
(Khoa)

In the whispered wind
The creator is breathing
To shape the cosmos
(Luong)

The sun is warming
The infinite source of life
For all creation
(Khanh)

Roses are blooming
As hope is waiting to shine
See I'll rise again
(Christopher)

The sun warms nature
Flowers burst into bright colors
Breeze whispering life
(Jacob)

The sun is shining
For students and teachers -all
Hunger is coming!
(Khanh)

Walk into forests
See the life flourishing here
I am empowered
(Menjie)

A cold spring morning
Birds are singing cheerfully
Yet hearts feel empty
(Gusti)

The fairytale comes
Ants eat greedily with passion
Echoing my hope
(Krisna)

DIVINE WORD
MISSIONARIES

CELEBRATING

150t

SVD
1875-2025



witnessing
to the

LIGHT

from everywhere
for every one





THE DIVINE WORD MISSIONARIES CORDIALLY INVITE YOU TO THE
SVD ANNUAL
MISSION DAY 2024



WITNESSING TO THE LIGHT

FROM EVERYWHERE FOR EVERYONE

Saturday, 12th October 2024

TIMES

3:00 PM - MISSION DAY SEMINAR
 6:00 PM - MISSION DAY EUCHARIST
 7:00 PM - MULTI-CULTURAL MEAL

WHERE?

YARRA THEOLOGICAL UNION
 98 ALBION ROAD,
 BOX HILL, VIC. 3128



ASAELI RASS SVD
 Chair



SR MONICA CAVANAGH RSJ
 Principal Speaker



CECILIA FRANCISCO-TAN
 Respondent



Also featuring
PRISCILLA STANLEY
 Live music performance



DIVINEWORD.ORG.AU

SCAN
 FOR
 JOURNAL





The Divine Word Missionaries in Australia

100 Albion Road, Box Hill, VIC 3128