

Critical Theology

engaging
church
culture
society

Fall 2023 issue edited by Christine Jamieson

Introduction

By Christine Jamieson

Concordia University, Montreal

The papers in this issue of *Critical Theology* all deal with the theme of ecumenism. Catherine Clifford's paper, "Pope Francis, Synodality, and Christian Unity: Leaning into the Distant Goal of Vatican II," explores this with reference to Pope Francis's call for synod. Explaining "what is at stake ecumenically in the synodal reform of the Catholic Church," Clifford seeks to show Pope Francis's aim: "not ... to create a new church, but to help us learn new ways of being church, ways that better reflect the nature of who we are as a community of disciples on a shared journey of faith."

Marie-France Dion's paper on the theme "Being a Blessing" resonates with ecumenism. God asks Abram to leave his family and his land in order that he may join with God's "project" aimed at restoring God's blessing to the world. Abram is to be a blessing to *all* the nations. Yet, not only Abram but all God's people are meant to be a blessing to each other. We are called to be attentive and responsible in our encounter with others.

Elisabeth J. Nicholson's paper, "Ecumenism as Theological Endeavour: Lonergan, Horizons, and Inquiry as Spirit," speaks to the call to be attentive and responsible. By exploring Bernard Lonergan's complex yet concrete method of understanding the operations that need to happen within us to bring about ecumenism, she goes to its roots. These operations move us toward discovering what is true and what is good. Using that as her foundation, Nicholson explores how Christian churches might come together in a good way.

Jakob Karl Rinderknecht titles his review of *Receptive Ecumenism as Transformative Ecclesial Learning: Walking the Way to a Church Re-formed* "Are We Willing to Receive Ecumenism?" His review wrestles with the tension between those in full support of Receptive Ecumenism (where traditions focus on what can be learned or received from other traditions, thus contributing to growth of communion) and those opposed to change. Rinderknecht points out that it is just as often *within* traditions that this tension is lived out as it is between different traditions. Through identifying and facing impasse, *metanoia* is possible and brings us back to what all four authors in this issue of *Critical Theology* address: how conversion might happen both individually and communally.

Contents

Introduction

By Christine Jamieson 1

Pope Francis, Synodality, and Christian Unity: Leaning into the Distant Goal of Vatican II

By Catherine E. Clifford 2

Ecumenism as Theological Endeavour: Lonergan, Horizons, and Inquiry as Spirit

By Elisabeth J. Nicholson..... 10

Be a Blessing!!!

By Marie-France Dion 14

Book Review 21

Pope Francis, Synodality, and Christian Unity

Leaning into the Distant Goal of Vatican II¹

By Catherine E. Clifford
Saint Paul University, Ottawa

To fully appreciate the significance of the ecclesial reforms being encouraged and introduced by Pope Francis, it is essential to place them within the broader context of the search for Christian unity and the evolution of world Christianity in the last century. This becomes apparent when we examine the present synodal process of the global Catholic Church (2021–2024), the aim of which is to move us toward being a more “synodal” church. I contend that Catholics would not be embarking on a global synodal process or rediscovering the experience of synodality as a “constitutive element of the church” today were it not for the experience of 60 years of sustained dialogue with other Christian communions.² Further, the extent to which Catholics embrace this process of “pastoral conversion” that has its roots in the Second Vatican Council will have profound consequences for the future visible unity of the Church. Francis and many others consider synodality as an apt description of the necessary path to full ecclesial unity.

Few authors have paid attention to this dimension of Pope Francis’s initiative for ecclesial reform. In his “programmatic” apostolic exhortation on *The Joy of the Gospel*, *Evangelii Gaudium*, where in 2013 he laid out his vision for the new evangelization, Francis made a single reference to “synodality,” suggesting that this practice or characteristic of ecclesial relations is something that, in a spirit of receptive ecumenism, Catholics might learn and receive from other Christian communions: “How many important things unite us! If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another. It is not just about being informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us.” He gives the example of dialogue with the Orthodox, from which Catholics might learn “about the meaning of episcopal collegiality and their experience of synodality” (EG 246).³ In this paper, I will explore some of the more important developments in the trajectory of the wider ecumenical movement to better contextualize Pope Francis’s initiative for a synodal reform of Catholicism and his unique perception of synodality as a requirement for

the future of Christian unity. Against this background, I will then consider some of his reflections on how this might determine the future shape of Catholicism as well as the future of full ecclesial communion as the churches come together in the full unity of diverse, yet fully reconciled, communions.

The Renewal of Conciliarity and Synodality: The Broader Ecumenical Context

Synodality or conciliarity has been the focus of ecumenical reflection and study for over half a century. The establishment of new ecumenical bodies, councils of churches, to foster the unity of the divided churches and provide spaces for joint reflection and action—including the World Council of Churches (WCC, founded in 1948) and other national, regional, and local bodies—raised a host of new ecclesiological questions.⁴ These new “councils of churches” carefully distinguished themselves from the authoritative and deliberative bodies that took important decisions on matters of Church doctrine and practice in the past—ecumenical and regional councils and synods. They have remained, by and large, consultative bodies and places of meeting for the separated churches. They are *conseils*, not *conciles*, in French; *Räte*, not *Konzilien*, in German—nuances that are lost in English translation. Still, a new ecclesial reality was being born, one that was not adequately covered by traditional categories, and that nonetheless evoked the memory of the “conciliarity” that characterized the communion of the diverse churches of early Christianity.

Catholic authorities were initially very cool to the growing interest in Christian unity among Protestant communities. Yet, in 1949, following the first Assembly of the WCC, things began to thaw. The Holy Office under Pope Pius XII recognized the working of the Holy Spirit in the modern ecumenical movement and authorized Catholics to participate in ecumenical gatherings.⁵ It was against the horizon of these developments and during the liturgical celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, on January 25, 1959, that Pope

John XXIII announced his intention to convoke a diocesan synod for the local church of Rome and a “general council” for the universal Church.⁶ The dual aim of the council was the “edification” and renewal “of the Christian people” and a “renewed invitation to the faithful of the separated churches to share with us in this banquet of grace and fraternity.”⁷ The updating and reform of the Catholic Church was to create the conditions for reconciliation and growth in unity with the separated churches. Other Christian churches had been invited to the general councils of the Western Church following the great schism of 1054, including the councils of Trent and Vatican I, though on condition of accepting papal claims to authority. In a remarkable move, Pope John now invited them to send delegates with no preconditions, essentially hitting the “reset” button on interchurch relations.

The upshot was that more than a hundred officially delegated observers from virtually every Christian communion would take part in each of the four sessions of the Second Vatican Council. While the ecumenical observers did not have a right to speak or vote *in aula*, they were not to remain passive spectators. Through weekly meetings with the staff and advisors of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and other informal encounters, they conveyed their views and concerns on the matters under debate to the bishops and theologians.⁸ Alberto Melloni sees in these moves by John XXIII an effort to consciously redefine the “ecumenicity” of the council. It was perhaps the most ecumenical of councils since the schism of 1054 or the 15th-century Council of Florence that had sought to heal the rift between East and West.

The appearance of new ecumenical councils of churches and the event of the Second Vatican Council gave rise to new studies on the importance of conciliarity, beginning in the 1960s.⁹ The 1968 Assembly of the WCC at Uppsala urged members to “work for the time when a genuinely universal council may once more speak for all Christians and lead the way into the future.” Beginning in 1971, the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC, established to explore church-dividing theological issues, and which now included Catholic participation, undertook a study on the meaning of conciliarity, defining it as “the coming together of Christians – locally, regionally, or globally – for common prayer, counsel and decision, in the belief that the Holy Spirit can use such meetings for his own purpose by reconciling, renewing and reforming the church by guiding it towards the fullness of truth and love.” These and other reflections led to a vision of unity as a “conciliar fellowship” understood essentially as a communion of local churches where each one possesses “the fullness of catholicity, witnesses to the same apostolic faith and therefore, recognizes the others as belonging to the same church of Christ

and guided by the same Spirit” (WCC Nairobi, 1975).¹⁰ By the 1990s, when the Faith and Order Commission turned its attention to a sustained study of ecclesiology, significant new studies began to emerge on the notion of synodality.¹¹

As far back as 1982, as we see in the Faith and Order agreed statement on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*, there was a growing recognition of the need for a substantial reform of the structures and practices of ministry in every church, especially as they relate to the exercise of authority and decision-making. The *BEM* text on Ministry distilled an important principle or pattern for the exercise of authority from the scriptures and the practice of the early church:

The ordained ministry should be exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way. It should be personal because the presence of Christ among his people can be most effectively pointed to by the person ordained to proclaim the Gospel and call the community to the Lord in unity of life and witness. It should be collegial, for there is need for a college of ordained ministers sharing the common task of representing the concerns of the community. Finally, the intimate relationship between the ordained ministry and the community should find expression in a communal dimension where the exercise of the ordained ministry is rooted in the life of the community and requires the community’s effective participation in the discovery of God’s will and the guidance of the Spirit.¹²

This principle for ecclesial reform would lead to a greater awareness of the need for a renewal in the practice of synodality in Church governance. It shows that the exercise of ministry cannot be divorced from the synergy of the whole Church and points to how all the baptized faithful must work together to discern the will of God, to understand the Gospel message more fully, and to proclaim it with greater effect. In the very next paragraph, *BEM* notes, “The collegial and communal dimensions will find expression in regular representative synodal gatherings.” A commentary observes that while these three dimensions—the personal, collegial, and communal—“need to be kept together,” in fact, “in various churches one or another has been overemphasized at the expense of the others.”¹³

The Renewal of Catholicism in Light of Vatican II

It is fair to say that in Catholic theology and practice, there has been an excessive focus on the personal dimension of ministry symbolized in the monarchical form of the papal and episcopal offices or in notions of an omnicompetent clergy at the expense of the colle-

gial and the communal. At the Second Vatican Council, Catholic theology began to recover an understanding of the collegial character of ordained ministry. This is expressed in its renewed understanding of the office of bishops who belong to a collegial body and who share with the Bishop of Rome in solicitude for the universal church (*Lumen Gentium* [LG] 27). It was further signified in the establishment of the International Synod (*Christus Dominus* [CD] 5) and national conferences of bishops (CD 37–39). At the local level as well, presbyters are understood as “cooperators” of the bishop in service of the local church (LG 28), a reality signified by their belonging to a council of presbyters or college of consultors (*Presbyterorum Ordinis* [PO] 7; Code of Canon Law [CIC] 495–502). These bodies all flow from the synodal character of church governance.

Vatican II’s recovery of an understanding of the equal dignity of all the baptized faithful and its recognition of the co-responsibility of the laity for the life and mission of the Church has placed us on the path to restoring a better balance where the communal dimension of authority and decision-making is taken seriously. While this principle might be taken for granted today, we ought not to underestimate what a significant change it represents. For almost a millennium, the Latin Church of the West laboured under an understanding of the Church as an “unequal society” inhabited by two classes or categories of persons: the omnicompetent pastors and the docile and obedient flock of the laity. Given the weight of this history, it should not surprise us to discover considerable resistance to the implementation of structures intended to foster a more meaningful participation of the laity. Vatican II had encouraged the revival of provincial and plenary councils and diocesan synods, which include provisions for lay participation (CD 36).¹⁴ In addition, it encouraged the establishment of diocesan and parish pastoral councils to foster lay participation in the discernment of pastoral and missional needs and priorities within the local church (CD 27; *Ad Gentes* [AG] 30). These various means of fostering lay participation in the discernment of the pastoral and missional priorities are to reflect the synodal nature of the Church at every level.

Following the Council of Trent in the 16th century, diocesan synods were to be convened annually, though they were often reduced to *pro forma* meetings of the local clergy. With the publication of the 1917 Code of Canon Law, the frequency of diocesan synods was reduced to every 10 years, though this law was not often followed. For all intents and purposes, they had fallen into disuse.¹⁵ The revised Code of Canon Law, published in 1983, and intended to reflect Vatican II’s teaching on the Church as people of God, retained provisions for diocesan synods and pastoral councils but left their implementation to the discretion of local bishops. While there have been some successful initia-

tives in this regard, recent studies show that in the 60 years since Vatican II, two thirds of Catholic dioceses have yet to hold a synod.¹⁶ In addition, there remain many dioceses and entire episcopal conferences today where no diocesan or parish pastoral councils exist.

Pope John Paul II was cognizant of both the ecumenical import of these reforms and the slow and halting pace of receiving the vision of Vatican II. In his 1995 encyclical letter on Catholic commitment to ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint*, he famously opened a new chapter in the ecumenical dialogue concerning the exercise of papal primacy within the communion of churches, a topic that had been the subject of several important studies. There he asked that church leaders and theologians help him in “heeding the request made of me to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation.”¹⁷ A more collegial and synodal form for the exercise of primacy is indispensable to the future recognition of this ministry and to the restoration of full communion between the separated churches. Similarly, on the eve of the new millennium, Pope John Paul II could not help but observe that the many structures for the participation of the people of God at the local level envisioned by the council’s teaching and the revised Code of Canon Law had yet to be implemented in a consequential way.¹⁸

Emerging Ecumenical Consensus on Synodality

The question of synodality has been explored in some depth in recent bilateral dialogues. One of the first to do so was the 1999 agreed statement of the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II), *The Gift of Authority*, which defines synodality as the “common way,” “the manner in which believers and churches are held together in communion,” in their following of Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life (cf. Jn 14:6; Mk 10:52).¹⁹ It points to the indispensable role of the *sensus fidelium*, or sense of the faithful, that Spirit-guided capacity for discerning the Gospel that belongs to all the baptized. In its discussion of synodality, which is practised in the exercise of *episcopé*, ARCIC II is clear that “consulting the faithful” is integral to this ministry: “When bishops take counsel together, they seek to both discern and to articulate the *sensus fidelium* as it is present in their local church and in the wider communion of churches.”²⁰

Considering this theoretical agreement on the synodal nature of church governance, ARCIC II identified important questions to be faced by the Catholic Communion concerning the lived experience of synodality (as it does for the Anglican Communion). It asks whether there is “at all levels, effective participation

of clergy as well as laity in emerging synodal bodies”; whether Vatican II’s teaching “regarding the collegiality of bishops [has] been implemented sufficiently”; whether there are adequate provisions for the “consultation between the Bishop of Rome and the local churches prior to making important decisions”; whether “the procedures of the Roman Curia adequately respect the exercise of *episcopate* at other levels”; and what answer, if any, might be given to the question of the universal primacy of the Bishop of Rome in response to the “patient and fraternal dialogue” initiated by Pope John Paul II.²¹

In 2013, the year of Pope Francis’s election as Bishop of Rome, the Faith and Order Commission published a substantial consensus document, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, the fruit of 20 years of study and dialogue. It describes the quality of synodality or conciliarity as signifying that “each member of the Body of Christ, by virtue of baptism, has his or her place and proper responsibility in the communion of the church.” It maintains, further, that “the whole church is synodal, at all levels of ecclesial life: local, regional, and universal” as church structures are intended “to express this quality and actualize the community’s life as a communion.”²² All this and more was said and done before the election of Jorge Mario Bergoglio as Bishop of Rome. This all-too-brief survey illustrates Catholicism’s debt to the wider ecumenical movement for reawakening the awareness of this essential dimension of ecclesial life and helps us to understand what is at stake ecumenically in the synodal reform of the Catholic Church.

Pope Francis on the Renewal of Synodality in Catholic Ecclesial Practice

Against this broader ecumenical context, we now turn to Pope Francis’s effort to revive the practice of synodality. By exhorting the bishops of the Catholic Church to embark upon a synodal process with the whole community of the baptized and to listen to the voices of the marginalized, he is inviting the whole Church to relearn some ancient yet forgotten habits. His aim is not, as he has clearly stated, to create a new church,²³ but to help us learn new ways of being church, ways that better reflect the nature of who we are as a community of disciples on a shared journey of faith.

In “The Joy of the Gospel” (*Evangelii Gaudium*), published in 2013, Francis called the whole Church to begin a process of self-examination and reform, to undergo a “pastoral and missionary conversion” (EG 25) by re-examining structures and practices at every level and asking whether they continue to serve the mission of the Church with effect. That mission, put simply, is to create spaces where those who seek the face of God might encounter God’s loving mercy, where they

might encounter Christ. This renewal begins by deepening our own personal encounter with Christ through the Word. It bears fruit in the creation of a “culture of dialogue and encounter” (EG 220) both within the Church and in the way we go out to meet and serve others, especially those on the peripheries of society. The practice of synodality would become a key to this reform of ecclesial life and help to achieve two objectives: first, to better express the nature of the Church as the baptized people of God; and second, to better equip it for discerning the call to participate in God’s mission to the world.

Reflecting on his own ministry as Bishop of Rome and on the need for the “conversion of the papacy,” Francis notes that “little progress” has been made regarding Pope John Paul II’s acknowledgement of the need to exercise the primacy in a way that better serves the unity of the churches. Seeking to reverse the centralizing dynamic that has characterized the recent history of the papacy, he remarks: “Nor do I believe that the papal magisterium should be expected to offer a definitive word on every question which affects the Church and the world. It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of the local bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory” (EG 16). In this regard, he pointed to the need for a more robust role of the episcopal conferences and to overcome an “excessive centralization” in church governance, which stifles the responsiveness of the local churches in their missionary outreach (EG 32).

Francis took note of the failure to create spaces for the meaningful participation of the laity in the practice of discernment of the Church’s missional needs and priorities.

Lay people are, put simply, the majority of the people of God. The minority – ordained ministers – are at their service. There has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the church. ... At the same time, a clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places. In some cases, lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities. In others, it is because in their local churches room has not been given for them to speak and to act, due to an excessive clericalism that keeps them away from decision-making. (EG 102)

He pointed to the importance of Vatican II’s teaching on the *sensus fidelium* (LG 12), thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit in the lives of baptized believers as they encounter Christ and discern “what is truly of God.” “The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which

enables them to grasp those realities intuitively, even when they lack the wherewithal to give them expression" (EG 119). He would later urge, in a letter to Cardinal Marc Ouellet, "Let us trust in our people, in their memory and in their 'sense of smell'; let us trust that the Holy Spirit acts in and with our people and that this Spirit is not merely the 'property' of the ecclesial hierarchy."²⁴ In short, they have a "nose" for the truth of the Gospel.

From the beginning of his pontificate, Francis has sought to make the international synod of bishops a more vital instrument of encounter and dialogue, of teaching and learning. Since its establishment in 1965, it has remained a consultative body and largely an instrument of the papacy. Pope Francis is working to make it a forum for listening to the voices of the local churches. In his opening speech to the 2014 synod on the family and marriage, he reminded the bishops that synodality brought "a great responsibility": namely, to give voice to "the realities and problems of the churches." The basic condition for that to happen was that they speak honestly, candidly, frankly, with *parrhesia*.²⁵

Pope Francis's most important reflection on the meaning of a synodal Church is found in a speech he gave on October 17, 2015, on the 50th anniversary of the institution of the international synod by Pope Paul VI.²⁶ Here he describes a synodal church as "a church which listens, which realizes that the listening 'is more than simply hearing.' It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening together, all listening to the Holy Spirit, the 'Spirit of truth' (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he is saying to the churches (Rev 2:7)." The international synod, he said, is to be the culmination of a listening process that begins in the local churches.

The synod of bishops is the point of convergence of this listening process conducted at every level of church life. The synod process begins by listening to the people of God, which also shares in Christ's prophetic office, according to a principle dear to the church of the first millennium: *Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractare debet* [Whatever concerns all should be considered by all]. The synod process then continues by listening to the pastors.

Here he characterizes the practice of synodality as "a constitutive element of the church."

In a 2018 Constitution on the Bishops' Synod, *Episcopalis Communio*, this process of extensive consultation became a mandatory procedure. This legislative document acknowledges that the synod "is essentially structured as an episcopal body," a gather-

ing of bishops. Nonetheless, it insists, "this does not mean that the synod exists separately from the rest of the faithful. "On the contrary," it exists "to give voice to the entire people of God."²⁷

The recent synthesis document prepared as part of the global synodal process, entitled "Enlarge the Space of Your Tent,"²⁸ seems to confirm Pope Francis's perception of the essential role of the baptized faithful in a synodal church. Participants describe a renewal of hope born from the simple experience of being invited to share their wisdom, to be heard, listened to. Some describe it as an experience of long-awaited "liberation," or of the "return from exile of the people of God."

Synodality and the Path to Christian Unity

In the first extensive interview granted in September 2013, Francis linked synodality to ecumenism, with no little awareness of the significance of the internal reform of the Catholic Church for the future of Christian unity. His remarks anticipate the text of *Evangelii Gaudium*:

We must walk together: the people, the bishops, and the pope. Synodality should be lived at various levels. Maybe it is time to change the methods of the Synod of Bishops because it seems to me that the current method is not dynamic. This will also have ecumenical value, especially with our Orthodox brethren. From them we can learn more about the meaning of episcopal collegiality and the tradition of synodality. The joint effort of reflection, looking at how the church was governed in the early centuries, before the breakup between East and West, will bear fruit in due time. In ecumenical relations it is important not only to know each other better, but also to recognize what the Spirit has sown in the other as a gift for us.²⁹

In *The Joy of the Gospel*, he alludes to ecumenism as a shared journey of faith, playing on the word "synod" (which means, literally, together on the way): "We must walk united with our differences: there is no other way to become one. This is the way of Jesus." In *The Joy of the Gospel*, he identifies ecumenical partners as fellow travellers on the path of salvation, saying: "We must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another. That means that we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicions or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking: the radiant peace of God's face" (EG 244).

In a homily during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2015, he warned against the danger of reducing ecumenical relations to "subtle theoretical discussions."³⁰ True dialogue and encounter, he argued, must lead us to interior conversion and to

“grasp[ing] more fully what unites us.” He is not naive about the need for careful theological work to overcome doctrinal divisions. But he insists that it must be accompanied by an ecumenism of the heart and an ecumenism of life. He drew a parallel between the encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well and the ecumenical gift exchange. “[Jesus’] example encourages us to seek a serene encounter with others. To understand one another and to grow in charity and truth, we need to pause, to accept and listen to one another. In this way we already begin to experience unity. Unity grows along the way; it never stands still. Unity happens when we walk together.” The suggestion here is that we must learn to lean in, or to live into unity, deepening an understanding of the character of our differences—not all of which are necessarily church dividing, when seen in the light of all that we hold in common.

In 2018, Pope Francis travelled to the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, as it marked the 70th anniversary of its founding. The theme of that anniversary celebration was “Walking, Praying, and Working Together.” “The journey of ecumenism,” he said, “must take ‘the path of forgiveness,’ humbly acknowledging both historic and more recent failures that have contributed to ‘mutual distrust and estrangement.’”³¹ It also involves committing ourselves to be sent out together on mission: “I am convinced that an increasing missionary impulse will lead us to greater unity. Just as in the early days, preaching marked the springtime of the church, so evangelization will mark the flowering of a new ecumenical spring.” Francis describes our “walking together” as having “a twofold movement: the first, moving inward toward Christ,” who is the centre; and the second, outward movement “towards the many existential peripheries of today’s world.” Speaking elsewhere of the priority of common witness, he remarked: “I don’t believe in a definitive ecumenism, much less do I believe in the ecumenism that as its first step gets us to agree on the theological level. I think that we must progress in unity, participating together in prayer and in the works of charity.”³²

These remarks provide an interpretive lens for Pope Francis’s prophetic ecumenism of encounter and common witness. As Cardinal-Archbishop of Buenos Aires, he developed bonds of friendship with local Pentecostals through a movement known as the “Renewed Communion of Evangelicals and Catholics in the Spirit.” This, in a period where the Catholic Church in Latin America was witnessing an exodus of 8,000 to 10,000 members each day, as they joined charismatic Protestant communities. The Episcopal Conference of Latin America had identified, in the Report of its 1992 assembly in Santo Domingo, the activities of “fundamentalist sects”³³ as a major chal-

lenge. But at that meeting, which included frank exchanges with Evangelical leaders, the bishops of Latin America were forced to acknowledge that many of those leaving the Catholic Church were doing so not only because of unwelcome proselytism but due to the lack of vitality in their own communities. When his friend the Italian Evangelical pastor Giovanni Traettino organized a meeting with Pentecostal representatives in the city of Caserta in July 2014, Francis paid them a “private” visit. In his unscripted remarks, he made a historic apology in his capacity as “Pastor of Catholics.” “I ask your forgiveness,” he said, “for the times when the Christian community has been tempted to say, ‘I am a church, you are a sect,’” and he committed himself to an approach that would emphasize instead all that is held in common.³⁴

Pope Francis has sought to model the practice of common witness on many occasions. He travelled to Jerusalem in 2014 to meet with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I on the 50th anniversary of Paul VI’s historic meeting with his predecessor Athenagoras to begin the thaw in Orthodox–Catholic relations. In their joint declaration, they committed themselves to work together for the safeguarding of creation.³⁵ Francis did not hesitate to quote from Bartholomew’s encyclical letter on the care of creation in his own teaching, *Laudato Si’*.³⁶ And in 2015, he travelled together with Patriarch Bartholomew to the Island of Lesbos to draw the world’s attention to the plight of migrants on the Mediterranean Sea. In 2017, he accepted an invitation to participate, together with the leaders of the Lutheran World Federation, Bishop Munib Younan and Rev. Dr Martin Junge, for the ceremonies of the Joint Commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. In a joint statement signed during the liturgy, they committed themselves to a renewed common witness and service.³⁷ More recently, he travelled on an ecumenical pilgrimage of peace to South Sudan, together with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, Iain Greenshields.

In all these prophetic initiatives, Pope Francis can be seen to put in practice the “Lund principle,” which asks the churches to do all that they can in conscience do *together*, even if full visible unity has yet to be achieved. In doing so, he is leaning into fuller unity and challenges us to do the same.

Conclusion

I began by suggesting that the experience of the Second Vatican Council, which had as its distant goal the restoration of unity with other Christian communions and was marked by the presence and influence of official ecumenical observers, redefined the “ecu-

menicity” of a council of the global church—albeit in a provisional way, one that reflects the present state of ecclesial separation. Surely, we have grown together in communion since then. The practice continues in our day of inviting ecumenical representatives to attend and at times address the international synod of bishops, conferences of bishops, and other synodal gatherings. In return, Catholics are regularly invited as ecumenical guests and delegates at synods and assemblies of other Christian communions. In the synodal process on synodality, we have made efforts to listen to the voices of ecumenical partners, convinced that they are essential to discerning the *sense of faith*, or the consensus of the whole Church, a sign and confirmation of the Spirit’s guidance. Do we continue to see these encounters as a mere form of diplomacy or “politesse”? Have we taken the full measure of these encounters? Pope Francis invites us to consider the gifts of the Spirit in the life of other communities as something we are meant to receive, as a source of wisdom, healing, and conversion as we grow into the community of disciples we are called to be.

The way of synodality is a marathon, not a sprint. We cannot see the finish line. But we can find a pace to move forward together into a future of the Spirit’s making. Christians together on the synodal path are rediscovering themselves as people of the Way, pilgrims on a journey, God’s people sent forth as one.

Catherine E. Clifford is Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology at Saint Paul University, Ottawa. She holds a PhD in Theology from the University of St. Michael’s College, Toronto, and a Licentiate in Theology from the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. Her teaching and research are focused on the fields of ecclesiology, ecumenism, and the study of the Second Vatican Council. She has contributed to several ecumenical dialogues and is presently a member of the Methodist–Roman Catholic International Commission. Catherine has written and edited 10 books that have appeared in several languages, including the Oxford Handbook on Vatican II (2023), co-edited with Massimo Faggioli, and Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II (2012), co-written with Richard R. Gaillardetz. She is currently working on a book concerning the question of ecclesial recognition, tentatively entitled Communities of Grace.

1 Originally a paper presented at the “Pope Francis and the Future of the Church: Prospects and Challenges for Renewal” conference, St. Mark’s College, Vancouver, BC, March 6, 2023.

2 Francis characterizes synodality in this way in his 2015 speech on the 50th anniversary of the International Synod of Bishops, instituted by Pope Paul VI in October of 1965. “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis. Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops” (17 October 2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html. The term “elements of the church,” introduced into official Catholic

teaching at the Second Vatican Council (LG 8; *Unitatis Redintegratio* [UR] 3), has an important theological and ecclesiological significance.

3 Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on the Joy of the Gospel, *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#Star_of_the_new_evangelization. Hereafter abbreviated as EG.

4 Thomas F. Best, “Councils of Churches: Local, National, Regional,” in N. Lossky, et al., eds., *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd ed. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), 255–63.

5 Holy Office, “Instruction *De Motione oecumenica*” (20 December 1949), *Acta Apostolica Sedis* 42 (1950), 142–47.

6 Alberto Melloni, “Concili, ecumenicità e storia: Note di discussioni,” *Cristianesimo nella storia* 28 (2007), 509–42. Melloni draws here from the manuscript of Pope John XXIII’s oral remarks, which would be revised to say “ecumenical council” before they appeared in published form, six weeks later, in the *Acta Apostolica Sedis* 51 (1959), 65–69. Cf. *Tablet* 213 (1959), 308; *ICI* 93 (April 1, 1959), 27–28. Pope John was acutely aware that the separation of the churches following the Great Schism of 1054 prevented them from gathering in a truly “ecumenical” council; those of the second millennium are more properly considered “general councils of the Western Church.”

7 Joseph A. Komonchak notes the difference between Pope John’s original text and the published version, which has “separated communities” in the place of “separated churches” and to “follow us in this search for unity and grace” in the place of “share with us in this banquet of grace and fraternity.” See “Initial Reactions to Pope John XXIII’s Announcement of an Ecumenical Council” (2011), <https://isidore.co/misc/Res%20pro%20Deo/Councils/Vatican%20II%20documents/Komonchak/initial-reactions-to-announcement.pdf>.

8 Mauro Velati, *Separati ma fratelli. Gli osservatori non cattolici al Vaticano II (1962-1965)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2014); Peter de Mey, “Non-Catholic Observers at Vatican II,” in Catherine E. Clifford and Massimo Faggioli, eds., *The Oxford Handbook on Vatican II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 475–92; Thomas Stransky, “The Observers at Vatican Two: An Experience of Dialogue,” *Bulletin Centro Pro Unione* 63 (Spring 2002), 8–14; Idem., “Paul VI and the Delegated Observers to Vatican II,” in *Paolo VI e l’Ecumenismo. Colloquio Internazionale di Studio. Brescia, 25-27 settembre 1998* (Brescia/Roma: Istituto Paolo VI, 2001), 118–58.

9 Emmanuel Lanne, “Conciliarity,” *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd ed., 235–36. Discussion in this paragraph draws from Lanne’s overview. From this period, see also Hervé Legrand, “Synodes et conseils de l’après-concile. Quelques enjeux ecclésiologiques,” *Nouvelle revue théologique* 86 (1976), 193–216.

10 Aram Keshishian, *Conciliar Fellowship: A Common Goal* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992).

11 See, for example, *La synodalité. La participation au gouvernement de l’église. Actes du VIIème congrès international de droit canonique. L’année canonique*, Paris, UNESCO, 21-28 septembre 1990; Alberto Melloni and Sylvia Scatena, eds., *Synod and Synodality: Theology, History, Canon Law and Ecumenism in New Contact*. International Colloquium, Bruges, 2003. *Christianity and History*, Vol. 1 (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2005).

12 Faith and Order Commission, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1982), Ministry, no. 26, https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/FO1982_111_en.pdf. To my knowledge, the earliest identification of this principle can be traced to the Groupe des Dombes, “The Episcopal Ministry (1976),” in Catherine E. Clifford, ed., *For the Communion of the Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 37–58.

13 Faith and Order, *BEM*, Ministry, no. 27.

14 Francis Sullivan, “Why Does the Earnest Desire of Vatican II that Provincial Councils Flourish with Renewed Strength, Remain Unsatisfied?” *Loneragan Workshop* 27 (2017), 271–81; idem. “Provincial Councils and the Choosing of Priests for Appointment of Bishops,” *Theological Studies* 74:4 (2013), 872–83. Sullivan argues that provincial councils might provide a means for lay persons to contribute to the nomination of suitable candidates for the episcopal office, a function held by provincial councils until recent revisions of

canon law, and a role played by the laity in early church practice. At present, the Apostolic nuncio may consult members of the laity “who are outstanding for their wisdom” concerning the suitability of candidates for episcopal ministry (CIC 377.3).

15 Pope John XXIII was surely aware of this. At the same time that he announced his intention to convene the Second Vatican Council, he issued a pastoral letter to convene a synod of the local diocese of Rome. John XXIII, “La Lettera di Sua Santità al Popolo Romano,” *L'Osservatore Romano* (21 February 1959), 1.

16 Arnaud Joint-Lambert has compiled a comprehensive list of diocesan synods and para-synodal assemblies: <https://www.pastoralis.org/document-n-3-les-synodes-diocesains-parasynodes-et-conciles-particuliers-dans-leglise-catholique-depuis-le-concile-vatican-ii-liste-bibliographie-ressources-ed-join-lambert>.

17 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on Commitment to Ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), no. 95. Citing “Homily in the Vatican Basilica in the Presence of Dimitrios I, Archbishop of Constantinople and Ecumenical Patriarch (6 December 1987), 3; AAS 80 (1988), 714, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html#%244A.

18 John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, On Preparation for the Jubilee Year 2000 (10 November 1994), https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19941110_tertio-millennio-adveniente.html.

19 Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II), *The Gift of Authority [Authority in the Church III]* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre / London: Catholic Truth Society, 1999), p. 26, no. 34. Also at <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/comunione-anglicana/dialogo/arcic-ii/fr.html>. This basic understanding of synodality is echoed in the more recent statement of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, “Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service of the Unity of the Church (Chieti, 2016),” <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese1.html>. “Since the bishop is the head of his local church, he represents his church to other local churches and in the communion of all the churches. Likewise, he makes that communion present to his own church. This is the fundamental principle of synodality (no. 10).” See also Orthodox–Roman Catholic International Dialogue, “Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority,” where synodality is taken as synonymous with conciliarity (no. 5).

20 ARCIC II, *The Gift of Authority*, p. 28, no. 38.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41, no. 57. More recently, ARCIC III, applying the method of receptive ecumenism, has explored the actual functioning of Anglican and Catholic instruments of communion, acknowledging that there is lively debate today within each communion as to how these might better serve the mission of the Church. *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to be Church – Local, Regional, Universal* (2018), <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/comunione-anglicana/dialogo/arcic-iii/arcic-iii---documents/2018-walking-together-on-the-way.html>. Also of note: Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, “Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity, Authority (2007) [Ravenna Document]”; “Synodality and Primacy in the First Millennium (2016) [Chieti Document]”; “Synodality and Primacy on the Second Millennium (2023) [Alexandria Document]”: <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo.html>.

22 Faith and Order Commission, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), p. 30, no. 53.

23 Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Opening of the Synod, 9 October, 2021,” <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/october/documents/20211009-apertura-camminosinodale.html>;

“There is no need to create *another* church, but to create a *different* church.” A citation of Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. Paul Philibert (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 2010). [Original edition: *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'église*. Paris: Cerf, 1952; revised 1968.]

24 Francis, “Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to Cardinal Ouellet, President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America” (19 March 2016), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160319_pont-comm-america-latina.html.

25 Francis, “Greeting of Pope Francis to the Synod Fathers during the First General Congregation of the Third Extraordinary Synod of Bishops” (October 6, 2014), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141006_padri-sinodali.html.

26 Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis. Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops” (17 October 2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html.

27 Francis, “Apostolic Constitution on the Synod of Bishops, *Episcopalis Communio*” (15 September 2018), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/papa-francesco_costituzione-ap_20180915_episcopalis-communio.html.

28 “Enlarge the Space of Your Tent (Is 54:2): Working Document of the Continental Stage” (2023), <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/continental-stage/dcs/20221025-ENG-DTC-FINAL-OK.pdf>.

29 Antonio Spadaro, “A Big Heart Open to God,” *America* (30 September 2013), 1–15, at 10. Francis refers explicitly to the importance of the Ravenna document of the Orthodox–Catholic dialogue (see note 21, above) and his desire to reform the exercise of the Roman primacy.

30 Francis, “Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis, Celebration of Vespers on the Solemnity of the Conversion of Saint Paul the Apostle” (25 January 2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150125_vespri-conversione-san-paolo.html.

31 Francis, “Address of His Holiness, Ecumenical Meeting, WCC Ecumenical Centre” (21 June 2018), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/june/documents/papa-francesco_20180621_pellegrinaggio-ginevra.html.

32 Alessandra Nucci, “Francis, Ecumenism and Common Witness to Christ,” *Catholic World Report* (5 September 2014). The remarks are drawn from a monograph entitled *Il Cardinale Bergoglio al Rinnovamento*, published by the Italian Renewal in the Spirit.

33 CELAM, Documento de Santo Domingo: Nueva Evangelización, Promoción Human, Cultura Cristiana Jesucristo Ayer, Hoy y Siempre, especially section 1.4.5.

34 Francis, “Private Visit of the Holy Father to Caserta for a Meeting with the Evangelical Pastor Giovanni Traettino, Address of Pope Francis,” (28 July 2014), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/july/documents/papa-francesco_20140728_caserta-pastore-traettino.html.

35 “Common Declaration of Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I” (25 May 2014), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/may/documents/papa-francesco_20140525_terra-santa-dichiarazione-congiunta.html.

36 Francis, Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home, *Laudato Si'* (24 May 2015), nos. 8–9, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

37 “Joint Statement by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity on the Conclusion of the Year of the Common Commemoration of the Reformation” (31 October 2017), <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/10/31/171031a.html>.

Ecumenism as Theological Endeavour

Lonergan, Horizons, and Inquiry as Spirit

By Elisabeth J. Nicholson
Saint Paul University, Ottawa

Introduction

To date, there have been several scholarly contributions correlating the study of ecumenism with the contributions of 20th-century theologian Bernard Lonergan. These include (i) the transposition of Lonergan's theological method into tasks for ecumenism, especially with respect to synthesizing dialectical viewpoints and retrieving and reimagining traditional interpretations in accordance with new questions and new data; (ii) understanding and appreciating the lived experience of traditions *outside* one's own as guiding self-reflection and self-correction *inside* one's own; and (iii) incorporating some unique methodological formulations, based on Lonergan's work, into ecumenical dialogue and praxis.¹

This essay offers an additional reflection on the relationship between Lonergan's theology and ecumenical endeavour by discussing Lonergan's steadfast insistence that presence to and awareness of inherent dynamisms in our subjective "selves" (both individual and corporate) enable horizon-expanding transformation precisely "*in light of*" that same self-aware, self-reflective presence. Further, with Lonergan, this essay suggests that awareness and presence to our subjective selves will distinguish an openness to *inquiry* as the operative condition for the elasticity of horizons and the orientation toward an interpretation of proportionate participation in the life and work of God.

Lonergan's Horizon-Analysis, Inquiry, and Subjectivity

In virtue of its very nature and aims, ecumenical endeavour attends to familiar notions of "horizons" and "world-views" with respect to individuals, corporate bodies, and communities. Generally speaking, "horizons" and "world-views" indicate a sort of acceptance of boundedness, delimiting what and how people know about "things" and "ethics." Science tells us that what is actually "known" is a proportional subset of the theoretical possibility of all that can be known (and is, then, at least provisionally "bounded"); that what is culturally understood, believed, and handed down in traditions and stories is cultur-

ally and historically defined (and is also, then, at least provisionally "bounded"); and that practical wisdom regarding structures for ethical distribution of goods, while oriented toward continuous evolution in meeting unanticipated events and emergences, is constrained by what can be known about past and present patterns of interacting and cooperative systems (and is, similarly, at least provisionally "bounded"). Certainly, the history of ecumenical endeavours of the 20th and 21st centuries indicate a keen awareness and integration of "boundedness" with respect to what people understand and believe and the ways in which the contours of that boundedness may be loosened or redrawn.

Lonergan's analysis of horizons, however, intentionally and specifically defines "boundedness" in terms of *inquiry*—the dynamism of questioning and all its related operations—and emphasizes the primordial role of a consciousness present to the self that conditions the possibility for recognizing these operations as they occur.

In several works, Lonergan describes three fields or "horizons" and identifies them in terms of the activities related to questioning or inquiry.² In Lonergan's terms, first there is the field of the *known*, which comprises answers to questions that the conscious self, present to itself, knows that it knows. While, potentially, an infinite number of questions might be posited here, this horizon conditions both the questions and the answers as "known," or predictable. When one "knows" the equation for measuring the force of impact of a falling object, one may predict answers to questions about the body's weight, speed, acceleration, and impact.

After that is the horizon of the *known unknown*, comprising all that about which one knows enough to posit further questions. Questions here can be raised and considered, weighed and postulated, articulated, and brought to bear on data—even in the absence of answers. Even if we doubt that we ourselves will ever be able to answer the questions, we recognize the possibility that someone will answer them. Thus, we know at least some things about what we do not know.

Finally, there is the horizon of the *unknown unknown*, comprising an unknown quantity of possibilities, potentialities, and actualities that lie outside the range of questioning or meaning. By nature, the *unknown unknown* is nebulous and ebbs away into its own vanishing point. As Lonergan expresses it, “What one does not attend to, at all, ever, one knows nothing about, and that settles one’s horizon.”³

Further, in his analysis of horizons, Lonergan couples two distinct and necessary poles. There is the *objective* pole, which is the horizon itself—the heuristic notion of those boundaries and where they might lie—and there is the *subjective* pole—the “who,” “where,” and “what” of the subjective consciousness that perceives, intends, and inquires.

As Lonergan himself asserts, “moving beyond”⁴ one’s horizons may not be as straightforward as we might like; whether this sense of horizons—especially the *unknown unknown*—is horribly threatening or magnificently thrilling begins with the question of how one might traverse or “move beyond” them.

In some of Lonergan’s most sombre treatments, he describes operations of *bias* as precisely shutting down the occurrence of inquiry, thus avoiding any possibility of traversing horizons,⁵ and in other places the confrontation of broaching horizons represents a person’s “deepest dread ... the collapse” of the person’s “world,” leading to an active, “organized resistance.”⁶ As Lonergan remarks: “Within one’s horizon, one’s ready-made world, one is organized, one has determinate modes of living, feeling, thinking, judging, desiring, fearing, willing, deliberating, choosing. But to move beyond one’s horizon in any but the most casual and insignificant fashion calls for a reorganization of the subject.”⁷ Against such, “there come into play all the conservative forces that give our lives their continuity and their coherence.”⁸

In his more optimistic approaches, however, Lonergan emphasizes and relies on the “desire to know” as the key dynamism for the authentic expansion of horizons. In Lonergan’s view, this innate, primordial, and unquenchable desire—for a variety of reasons—endures as the operative dynamism capable of traversing horizons. As Lonergan remarks:

Name it what you please—alertness of mind, intellectual curiosity, the spirit of inquiry, active intelligence, the drive to know. Under any name, it remains the same, and is, I trust, very familiar to you. This primordial drive, then, is the pure question. It is prior to any insights, any concepts, any words; for insights, concepts, words have to do with answers, and before we look for answers we want them; such wanting is the pure question.⁹

Horizons expand when the spirit of inquiry drives the related operations of questioning, understanding, and learning. Once traversed, the self-aware and self-possessed observer is able to distinguish the “narrower” and the “expanded” horizons and is able to recognize that what was previously delimited as “outside” the boundary is now “inside.”

Further, the self-aware and self-possessed observer is able to recognize that nothing, really, about any *actual* boundedness—that *objective* pole—has changed. Rather, the transformation originates entirely *in* the subjective, experiential self. Hindsight reveals no changed field but rather a changed understanding of the self-possessed, self-aware, existentially attendant subject. And while the objective contours of the horizon may have, in a sense, been loosened or expanded, reimagined or redrawn, it is only “*in light of*” inquiry and meaning-making of the subjective self.

Thus, the first formulation of the relevance of Lonergan’s horizon-analysis to ecumenism consists in noting that while there exists an openness for engaging in the operations of inquiry, the very activity of ecumenical endeavour provides opportunities for the existentially transformative shift in horizons. A key recognition here is that the expanding horizons of the self—whether that is an individual, corporate, or communal “self”—have less to do with the boundedness of any sort of real field and everything to do with the self’s transformed perspective.

Understanding “Things” “in Light of” Inquiry

After decades of dedicated study of Aquinas’s works on operative grace, human intellection, and the analogical / proportional relationship between self-reflective acts of understanding and God’s Trinitarian being, Lonergan wrote a series of articles that have come to be known, collectively, as *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*.¹⁰

In these works, Lonergan describes Aquinas’s account of the intellectual operations that proceed from experience and the desire to know, through questioning, hypothesizing, sorting and distinguishing, assenting, articulating and, in a sense, conceptualizing, and ultimately emerging as “something understood,” which, generally speaking, is the form or pattern that constitutes “*things*” as the particular “*things*” they are.

As well, rather uniquely, Lonergan highlights and insists on a particularly significant, albeit often overlooked, feature of this procession of operations: namely, the condition of self-awareness that allows intellection to pivot from the procession of operations culminating in an understanding of particular “*things*” to the intellect’s ability to generalize “*thingyness*,”

i.e., that generalized principle that would apply to any instance of “things” of this sort, irrespective of their particular presence.¹¹

Lonergan insists on recognizing that the self-reflective awareness in which the entire process has occurred—and always occurs—does so “in light of” the proceeding of intelligence itself. This recognition is equally significant to, if not more significant than, the correctness of understanding “things” as “things” or even the general notion of “thingyness.” For Lonergan, the truly momentous element is self-awareness and ultimate self-appropriation of the understanding that in one’s self, inquiry and discovery are “because of” or “in light of” operations and conditions for any and all understanding, possessed “in” and “by” one’s self.¹²

Aiming for Flourishing in Interacting Systems and Patterns of Cooperation

As well as understanding concatenations of matter (“things”) or even the generalized forms or patterns that may be abstracted (“thingyness”), systematic patterns of action, interaction, and cooperation—especially with respect to those that occur and recur in cooperative human living—can also be inquired about; they, too, may be “objects” toward which aim intellectual operations such as questioning, hypothesizing, analyzing, and learning.

Significantly, as Lonergan formulates briefly in *Verbum* and more robustly in *Insight and Method in Theology*,¹³ the same “in light of” that conditions the possibility of understanding “things” and generalized “thingyness” applies equally to those operations that proceed when considering, deliberating, choosing, and deciding how to act. When the aim of understanding and deliberation is to bring about the best good in interacting systems and cooperative patterns, the “best” understanding may affect the “best” choice.

This is because self-aware, self-reflective, and self-appropriated observers notice that while some systems and patterns of interaction and cooperation result in decline and sometimes, ultimately, self-demise, others result in flourishing and continued viability. While it is necessarily impossible for human intellection to predict every outcome of interacting systems (because that would entail knowledge of future emergences), it remains reasonable that the “best” deliberations, decisions, choices, and acts depend on the best possible understanding. Thus, the related operations of inquiry extend toward consideration of factors and interventions that may effectively aim toward flourishing and away from decline. This, in turn, may present an exigence to “move beyond” one’s present horizons and discover that when self-reflective and present-to-self subjects recognize that those decisions and choices

are made “in light of” inquiry and its affiliated operations, those subjective selves may be better able to welcome and harness existential and horizon-shifting transformations.

“In Light of”: Proportionate Analogy and Participation

Just as subjective selves understand themselves as capable of expanding their horizons “in light of” inquiry and its affiliated operations from the *known* to the *known unknown* to the *unknown unknown* with respect to “things,” so, too, might these subjective selves understand themselves as capable of traversing horizons of *knowns* and *unknowns* when aiming toward flourishing systems of cooperation “in light of” that same family of operations—namely, inquiry.

Self-reflection, self-awareness, and self-appropriation of the “in light of” as the condition for understanding itself enables continuous engagement in the processes understanding anything and everything at all, and understanding it better, whether that is of “things,” “thingyness,” or choosing the best course of action. This is because subjective selves, present to their own operations, understand that “understanding” is not a collection of things stored permanently and fixedly as nuggets of immutable truth or fact but are, rather, hallmarks of the processes of continuous, transformative expansion.

To authentically “understand” something about any “thing” at all indicates the operative ability to understand, potentially, **every** “thing,” given the right series of questions and the proper orientation toward life-altering transformations in horizon. Thus, the “in light of” enables a heuristic of proportion, where what is “understood” in the human intellect might be interpreted as existing analogically, or in a proportionate ratio, to all-that-there-is-to-be-understood, where what is “understood” is the variable that comprises, as its principle of change, the continuously operative dynamism of inquiry.

As Lonergan endeavours to demonstrate in *Verbum*, the thing understood—or “verbum”—proceeds from the act of understanding and emanates “in light of” the possibility of understanding itself.

In *Insight* and more fully in *Method in Theology*, Lonergan demonstrates that deliberation, decision, choice, and act proceed from authentic, self-appropriated understanding. In both cases, the primordial origin is the spirit of inquiry, and that spirit necessarily engages both an awareness of the role of subjectivity itself—and all that such subjectivity entails—as well as an openness to life-altering transformation.

Conclusion

It is reasonable to expect that authentic ecumenical endeavour seeks ceaselessly to grow, evolve, and expand into the love, life, and goodness of God. Thus, in all ecumenical endeavour there ought to be an extraordinary exigence for attending to the key operations that enable the transformation of horizons, as well as an openness to the painstaking demand for reflective presence to the subjective self.

If ecumenical endeavour is to be considered not only “reasonable” but also “theological,” it might be helpful to recognize, with Lonergan and Aquinas, that with respect to both “things” and “choosing the best course of action,” it may be through the grace of God that subjective selves possess, in themselves, that very dynamism—that “in light of”—that enables traversal of all *knowns* and *known unknowns* into and through the limitless *unknown unknowns*, constituting its journey as both theological and ecumenical.

Elisabeth Nicholson is a systematic theologian specializing in the theology, philosophy, and theological ethics of Bernard Lonergan. Dr. Nicholson attained her PhD and MA in theology from Saint Paul University, Ottawa, and works in the related fields of theological hermeneutics, epistemology, and ecumenism. She is currently the Director of the Lonergan Centre at Saint Paul University and teaches part-time at Saint Paul University in Ottawa and at Concordia University in Montreal.

1 For an application of Lonergan’s methodology to the praxis of ecumenism, see Catherine Clifford, “Lonergan’s Contribution to Ecumenism,” *Theological Studies* 63 (September 2002), 521–38, and Karen Finch, “Bernard Lonergan, Decision, and Ecumenical Discernment,” in Vicky Balabanski and Geraldine Hawkes, eds., *Receptive Ecumenism: Listening, Learning, and Loving in the Way of Christ* (Adelaide, So. Australia: ATF Theology, 2018), 37–47 and

43–44. For an example of considerations of Lonergan’s approach for receiving charisms of traditions outside one’s own, and the use of learning to bolster and heal weaknesses within one’s own traditions, see Catherine E. Clifford, “Kenosis and the Church: Putting on the Mind of Christ,” *One in Christ* 43:2 (2009), 2–5, and Antonia Pizze, “On the Maturation of Receptive Ecumenism: The Connection between Receptive Ecumenism and Spiritual Ecumenism,” *Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies* 28 (June 2015), 114. For applications of Lonergan toward methodology in ecumenical dialogue, see Elisabeth J. Nicholson, “Ecumenical Dialogue and the ‘Insight Approach’ to Conflict: Mediation: A Suggestion Based on Lonergan for a Minor Methodological Innovation,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 56:2 (Spring 2021), 224–28.

2 See Bernard Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, vol. 10, *The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 88–91; Lonergan, “Subject and Horizon,” in *Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston College Lectures on Mathematical Logic and Existentialism*, vol. 3, *The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Philip McShane (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 280–94; Lonergan, “Metaphysics as Horizon,” in *A Second Collection*, 2nd ed., vol. 13, *The Collected Works of Lonergan*, eds. Robert M. Doran and John D. Dadosky (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 188–205. See also David Tracy, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 1–21.

3 Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, 90.

4 Ibid.

5 See Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 5th ed., vol. 3, *The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 214–15 and 244–69.

6 Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, 90.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Lonergan, *Insight*, 34.

10 Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, vol. 2, *The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

11 See Lonergan, *Verbum*, 177, and *passim*.

12 Lonergan, *Verbum*, 46–47.

13 Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 2nd ed., vol. 14, *The Collected Works of Lonergan*, ed. Robert M. Doran and John D. Dadosky (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017).

Subscribe to **Critical Theology: Engaging church, culture, and society**

A quarterly journal from Novalis

Price: Canada: \$16 • International: \$33 (postage and taxes included).

CT website: **criticaltheology.net**

For further information or to submit articles, contact: **Don Schweitzer**

McDougald Professor of Theology • St. Andrew’s College • 1121 College Drive • Saskatoon, SK S7N 0W3 • **don.schweitzer@saskatoontheologicalunion.ca** • **306-966-8964 (W)**



Be a Blessing!!!

By Marie-France Dion

Concordia University, Montreal

Introduction: Being a Blessing from Abram to a Pluralistic and Multicultural Society

Since the studies of Emile Durkheim (1898), Wilhelm M. Wundt (1916), and G.H. Meads (1934), research into the influence of society on a person has continued to validate the assumption that a person's identity is powerfully influenced by culture: "Societal forces create collective belief ... racial unconsciousness"; values, norms, customs, and/or traditions are internalized and influence behaviour.¹ Who we are, and the kind of person we are, is "socially constituted."² As noted by Esther Osborne and Roxane De La Sablonnière, "Across social scientific disciplines culture is acknowledged to be a critical element in the construction of an individual's identity."³ The pericope of Genesis 12:1-4 is an opportunity to reflect on the elements on which our identity is based and on how we define ourselves as a community of believers. Rethinking and re-evaluating the foundations that constitute us, that inform our decisions and actions, may prove to be challenging, even daunting, but could also provide insights into living with others and responding to God's imperative to be a blessing. The need for this becomes more pressing when considering issues of the 21st century. As explained by the above-mentioned authors:

Culture is argued to provide insight into how to be a person in the world, what makes for a good life, how to interact with others, and which aspects of situations require attention and processing capacity However, in today's increasingly multicultural and globalized world, the boundaries between cultures have become more permeable. Often individuals have to negotiate multiple, possible competing or unclear values, norms, and behaviors that stem from groups to which they belong⁴

While I do not hold the answers to many pressing issues in our society, I believe that our commitment to the project that God proposes to Abram is a solid beginning. It is, rather, a "new beginning," since actualizing the word of God means to (re)understand in our specific situations and to act responsibly. This is how "the call of Abram" becomes the *living* word of God, a *word* to be continually actualized from generation to generation.

I begin this article by situating the pericope of Genesis 12:1-4 in the context of Genesis chapters 1 to 11. These chapters provide crucial elements to the understanding of the call of Abram. I will then discuss some preliminary and technical issues pertaining to the manuscript and provide a translation based on a grammatical and syntactical analysis.⁵ This section is especially enlightening for the interpretation of Genesis 12:1-4. The analysis highlights the difference between announcing that an action will take place and the elaboration of a project that God intends to achieve.⁶ The next section deals with elements of style and literary devices and draws attention to the author's emphasis and important nuances. I end the article with a section focusing on the first imperative given to Abram—"Go!"—and its implication to notions of identity and inclusiveness in propagating the blessing of God to the world.

The Canonical Context: A Recurring Problem and the Broken Pattern

The text of Genesis 12:1-4 is commonly referred to as "The Call of Abraham." In the canonical context, it presents itself as a possible solution to a recurring problem with humanity. The terms "possible" and "recurring" in no way suggest a limit to God's sovereignty or omnipotence. Rather, the problem is expounded and the cause clearly identified. God's continuous redeeming action is repeatedly impeded by human decisions and actions. The "solution" is a divine bi-lateral project, involving human responsibility and God's blessing, communicated to Abram in a divine speech (Gen. 12:1-3). The purpose is restoring the blessing to all nations. It is God limiting himself to allow the implementation of human will. The latter is a characteristic that is neither good nor bad. It is the way in which it is exercised that determines its quality. Situated at the beginning of the Abraham cycle, the call of Abram follows upon a series of little stories connected by genealogies. Although these genealogies serve different purposes, the focus in this article is on their function as a narrative device in the overarching narrative of Genesis chapters 1 to 12. The first chapter, the creation of the heavens and the earth, is presented as the genealogies (*toldoth*) of the heavens and the earth (Gen. 2:4a).⁷ For everything that God created, "he saw ... that it was good" (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12-18, 21, 25) and even "that all that he made ... was indeed,⁸ very good"

(Gen. 1:31). And all his creatures are recipients or experiencers of his blessing (Gen. 1:22, 28). Following the genealogies of the heavens and the earth is the story of Adam and Eve scheming with the cunning serpent, which results in God's "blessed" and "very good" creation being seriously impaired, with lasting consequences. Responsibility for the grievous act is on the culprits, and all three are punished.⁹ Nonetheless, God performs a redemptive act and protects Adam and Eve.¹⁰ By means of a short genealogy (Gen. 4:1-2), this story fast-forwards to the next, in which the same cycle is repeated: Cain murders his brother Abel (4:2b-8), and again the text emphasizes responsibility and culpability (vv.7, 10). Cain is punished (vv.11-12), yet God, once more, performs a redemptive act (v.15). Following this short story are two genealogies: Cain's genealogy (vv.7-22) and a note mentioning that a third son, Seth, is born to Adam and Eve (v.25). Chapter 5 consists of a long genealogy that fast-forwards the narrative from Seth's birth to Noah and his sons. The next story recounts that by then, in contrast to what God

saw when creating the heavens and earth, Yahweh now sees (Gen. 6:5) that "the wickedness of humans was great on earth and all forms of thought from his heart are only evil all the time" (6:5; also vv.11-12). He regrets having made humans (6:6) and wants¹¹ to wipe them and all other creatures off the face of the earth (6:7). But Noah finds grace in the eyes of Yahweh. So, although humanity is punished, a divine redeeming act saves humanity as well as all species (Gen. 6-9). God blesses Noah and makes an everlasting covenant with Noah and his sons, as well as with every living creature (9:1-17). Once again, a genealogy is used to fast-track to the narrative of the tower of Babel. By now, the reader knows the pattern: sin, responsibility, punishment, redemption, genealogy. But with this last story, the pattern is broken: the people sin,¹² a divine council¹³ renders them responsible, and the people are scattered (11:8-9), but the story ends there. There is no redemptive act. Instead, a genealogy follows, with a note commemorating this event.¹⁴

..... *The Recurring Pattern Broken*

The last genealogy presented before the call of Abram records the lineage of Shem, Ham, and Shapheth, the three sons of Noah (Gen. 10:1-31), so essentially it is still a universal genealogy. The next genealogy following the tower of Babel and the broken pattern, however, is selective and reports only the lineage from Shem to Terach and then from Terach to Abram. This selective genealogy inaugurates what will later develop into the concept of divine election. Noteworthy is the mention that by the time of Terach's death, Abram has no descendants except for Lot his nephew, son of his brother Harran (11:26-32). Thus, the selective genealogy, which should be headed by Abram, is already in jeopardy. But God's call to Abram will open new avenues of possibility that are contingent on Abram's commitment to the divine project. It is this project that becomes the redemptive element that is missing in the story of the tower of Babel.

Genealogy of heaven and earth	Narrative: Disobedience in Eden (3:1-4)
	Man and woman eat from the forbidden Tree
	God punishes: Exile
	God redeems: Covers them
Genealogy birth of Cain and Abel	Narrative: Cain murders Abel (4:1-16)
	Cain murders his brother
	God punishes: Exile
	God redeems: Protects Cain
Genealogy of Adam to Noah's sons (5:1-32)	Narrative: Sin multiplies on earth (6:1-9:17)
	Sin invades the earth
	God punishes: Return to chaos
	God redeems humanity: Through Noah's family
Genealogy of Sem (10:1-31)	Narrative: The Tower of Babel (11:1-9)
	Humanity wants to conquer heaven
	God punishes: Division
	Redemptive element: Missing
Genealogy from Shem to Abraham (11:10-32)	Narrative: The Call of Abraham (12:1ff)

The Manuscript and Translation for Genesis 12:1-4

To demonstrate clearly how the call of Abram becomes a possible solution to the missing redemptive element in Genesis chapter 10, the text is here translated with its different nuances emphasized. The Leningrad codex reproduced in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*

is the manuscript used for the translation. Variants to this manuscript are indicated in footnotes along with justification for the choice of reading. The translation is a "working translation" resulting from a macro-syntactic analysis. The focus is on highlighting important elements in the text rather than rendering a refined translation.

Introduction: And he said, YHWH, to Abram: (v.1a)

Imperative: Go ‘for’ you (v.1aβ) from your land, and from your clan, and from the house of your father to the land that I want to show you.

Project

I want to make of you a great nation (v.2a)

I want to bless you (v.2b)

I want to make your name great (v.2c)

Imperative: So, be a blessing (v.2d)

Project cont’d

I want to bless those who bless you (v.3a)

But the one who despises you, I will curse (v.3b)

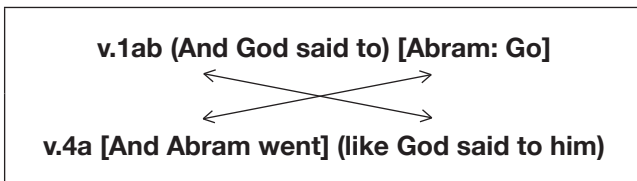
Purpose:

And thus, with you, they will be blessed, all the clans of the world (v.3c).

Conclusion: And he went Abram, like he had spoken to him, Yahweh (v.4a).

Some Elements of Style, Literary Devices, and Their Function

The pericope is clearly delimited by a framework that emphasizes Abram’s consent to embark on this project with God:



Within this framework is the enumeration of what God wants to do (v.1d, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a), followed by a second imperative compelling Abram to be a blessing (v.2d).

This second imperative is also followed by a statement of God’s intent (v.3a). Also stated is what he will do should the plan be obstructed again (v.3b). Finally, Yahweh’s speech ends by enunciating his overall purpose (v.3d). These volitional clauses in Yahweh’s speech create an anaphora¹⁵ type of style which emphasizes all that Yahweh *wants* to do *with* Abram to achieve his purpose provided in v.3c.

- I want to show you (v.1d)
- I want to make you a great nation (v.2a)
- I want to bless you (v.2b)
- I want to make your name great (v.2c)
- I want to bless those who bless you (v.3a)

The anaphora style is abruptly interrupted twice: once by an imperative (v.2d) and a second time by a reversal in the word order in v.3b. The verb in the clause of v.3b appears after a nominal element signalling that here, the verb is not volitional but a simple indicative future that announces what will happen: “the despiser of you, I will curse.”¹⁶ The idea of responsibility is once again communicated. The decision to despise belongs to the culprit, who becomes responsible for the consequence of his action. God’s intent is to bless. The curse is consequential to the culprit’s action. The break in style produces another literary device whereby both parties are mentioned together and are framed by the active verbs “to bless” and “to curse”:

I will bless
 The blessers of you
 The one who disrespects you
I will curse

The blessing and the curse are contingent upon human action. Furthermore, if we compare v.3ab with Genesis 27:29c and Numbers 24:9, we immediately recognize a type of saying about blessings and curses:

Reference	Grammatical construction	Translation
Gen. 12:3	Verb (brk) – participle (brk) Participle (qll) – verb ('rr)	I want to bless those who bless you. the one who disdains you, I will curse.
Gen. 27:29c	Participle ('rr) – participle ('rr) Participle (brk) – participle (brk)	Cursed are those who curse you. Blessed are those who bless you.
Num. 24:9	Participle (brk) – participle (brk) Participle ('rr) – participle ('rr)	Blessed are those who bless you. Cursed are those who curse you.

A first difference noted between these texts is the use in the “call of Abram” of conjugated verbs of the first person rather than the more “impersonal passive use of the participles.”¹⁷ While it does accentuate the closeness of the relationship between Yahweh and

Abram,¹⁸ it also stresses action as opposed to a more passive or static state. This feature comes through also by means of the imperatives followed by the non-promissory type of clauses. Abram, like others (the blessers of Abram), needs to actively partake of the

divine project for it to be achieved. A second difference between Genesis 12:3 and the blessing and curses formula is the use of two different roots in the clause pertaining to the curse. Rather than use the same root *'rr* (to curse) in both parts of the clause, Genesis 12:3b uses two roots: *'rr* (to curse) and *qll* (to despise, disdain, scorn, disgrace, belittle, disrespect, or shame). Based on the (misguided) assumption that the *piel*¹⁹ form of the verb *qll* means the same thing as the verb “to curse,” many scholars translate both parts of the verse by the same verb.²⁰ The use of two different roots, however, begs the question as to why the writer deviates from the normal curse formula. In my view, this is intended for theological purposes.

In a study pertaining to various terms related to the verb “curse” in Hebrew, Josef Scharbert and Herbert C. Brichto concluded that the root *'rr* “predominantly designates curses which an authority pronounces,” such as gods, kings, or fathers.²¹ In Genesis 12:3, YHWH is appropriately the subject of the verb *arāru*, “to curse.” But the root to designate Abram’s opposers is the *Piel* verb *qll*. Keeping in mind the underlying sense of the *Piel* verb, that is, “to busy oneself eagerly with the action indicated by the stem,”²² it connotes the idea of a repetitive action. So, any meaning associated to the *Qal* root *qll*²³ would work here in the *Piel* paradigm in its intensive or repetitious behaviour,²⁴ and the text should reflect the different verb used. The participle used as a substantive also reinforces this idea of a recurring action or attitude.²⁵ The person has become what he/she does—in this case, a “despiser.” It is this repetitive offender, determined to destroy Abram—God’s instrument—for the blessing of the world, that God curses. This again comes through with the pronominal singular suffix that breaks yet another pattern. In parallel texts (Gen. 27:29c and Num. 24:9), both parts of the clause remain in the plural: “Cursed are those who curse you/ Blessed are those who bless you.” In Genesis 12:3, this balance is disrupted; a plural is paired with a singular “those who bless/the one who despises.”²⁶ The use of the singular in Genesis 12:3b implies that the repeat offender becomes a serious obstacle to the progression of the blessing to reach the “clans of the world” and needs to be nipped in the bud.²⁷ The break of the anaphora style, along with the parallelism reconfigured in Genesis 12:3, serves to highlight the two parties—the blessers and the despiser; noteworthy also is that both are made responsible for the consequences of their actions. Humanity is thus now participating in the redemptive element through the exercise of their will and actions.²⁸

The concluding clauses of v.3 (v.3c-d) summarize the process for the spreading of the blessing. As noted by many, the root *brk* (to bless) appears five times in this small pericope (vv.2b, 2d, 3a^{2x}, 3c) and is key to

its interpretation. A major difficulty for scholars is the *Niphal* verb form in v.3c.²⁹ Some translate it as a passive “they will be blessed”³⁰ and others as a reflexive “they will bless themselves.”³¹ More recently, there seems to be a common agreement that the *Niphal* does not express the reflexive voice.³² Waltke and O’Connor³³ provide four different senses in which the *Niphal* verb stem is used, while van Wolde identifies six.³⁴ Nonetheless, all agree that the verb is focused on the subject and, even if not reflexive, it is not in all cases that the subject is completely non-participatory, as the simple passive voice would convey.³⁵ Affinities of the *Niphal* perfect verb with ancient ergative languages³⁶ suggests that the subject of the *Niphal* verb would be “the blessers of Abram.”³⁷ Yet, they are not the performer of the action.³⁸ With the *Niphal* verb, the performer is not always named, but in our case verses 2b and 3a clearly identify him as YHWH. Nonetheless, the blessers of Abram are not completely inactive, in that they are also participants in their role of experiencers of the blessing. So, in a very true sense, they are also the clans of the world, beneficiaries of the blessing.³⁹ Significant as well is the proposition with pronoun that follows the verb. Wolde’s research on the *Niphal* verb convincingly demonstrates that if followed by a preposition with pronoun, such as is the case in 12:3d, its grammatical function is comitative, indicating accompaniment.⁴⁰ Thus, it should translate not as “in you” but as “with you” will all the clans of the earth find blessing. The emphasis is not so much on Abram as it is on the purpose for which God blesses Abram—so that the clans of the world also find blessing. Finally, another meaningful element to this *Niphal* verb is that it appears in a *weQatal* verb form. This means that besides continuing the indicative future of the previous clause (v.3b), it also indicates its syntactical function, which here has a causative value and conveys the intended overall purpose to the proposed project: the blessing of “all the clans of the world.” As an indicative future it announces—and, we could even surmise, it promises—the propagation of the divine blessing to the clans of the world.⁴¹

Remarkably, with just one clause (v.3c), the writer manages to summarize the whole process for the divine blessing elaborated in vv.1-3. This process involves:

- 1) YHWH the performer
 - v.2b YHWH to Abram: “I want to bless you”
 - v.3a YHWH: “I want to bless...”
 - v.3c They will find blessing
(agent of *Niphal* verb – Yahweh’s blessing)
- 2) Abram the instrument
 - v.2d YHWH orders Abram: “Be a blessing.”
 - v.3c *with* you they will be blessed

3) The blessers of Abram

- v.3b and 3c “those who bless you”

The redemptive element is thus a project involving YHWH, Abram, and others for the purpose of spreading God’s blessing.

An Informed Decision: Reconfiguring Identity

From the above, we can conclude that God’s project for humanity is contingent upon a few considerations. Responsibility is one key factor in bringing the divine project to its realization. As discussed above, both the overarching literary context (chapters 1–12) and the call to Abram (12:1–4), as well as the non-promissory speech of Yahweh to Abram in 12:2–3, emphasize this point. Interestingly, Yahweh is not asking for “blind obedience.” Rather, Yahweh’s speech to Abram explains the reasons why Abram must leave and why he and others are necessary to God’s plan. If they (humanity) are the object of God’s blessing, then they must also be participants both as experiencers of the blessing (be blessed: v.2b and 3a) and as agents for the dissemination (be a blessing: v.2d and 3a) of the blessing to the clans of the world (v.3c). Abram’s consent to the divine project implies much more than what is initially understood, mainly because the focus is too often on the need for obedience to God’s word and on the rewards that Abram will consequently reap. These rewards have even been understood as being the blessing that God intends to give Abram. While it may seem gratifying to become a great nation, to be blessed, and to have a great name, there is much more involved in what is required of Abram for God’s blessing to spread.

He is called to transcend human boundaries so that God may establish new ones that are inclusive and for the greater good. Abram is plainly told to leave all that is familiar and fundamental to his self- and social identity. In committing to God’s project, he will be redefining who he is and the kind of person he is. Yahweh’s speech to Abram begins with an imperative to which is attached a pronominal suffix and forms, what scholars have termed a “colloquial” expression: *lekh-lekha*. There is no easy translation to convey all that is signified by the imperative to go/to leave. The idiom is said to be a *dativus commodi* or, more specifically, a *dativus ethicus*.⁴² Gesenius explains, “In this construction the person of the pronoun, must always agree with that of the verbal form,” as is the case in Genesis 12:1a.⁴³ But Takamitsu Muraoka clarifies that in the dative ethical case, “the person other than the subject or object, has an interest in the fact stated.”⁴⁴ In re-examining biblical texts that use the *lamed*⁴⁵ preposition after verbs of motion, as is the case in Genesis 12:1, and following

his analysis of other Hebrew texts with this grammatical construction, Muraoka concludes:

The preposition *lamed* followed by the matching pronominal suffix seems to have the effect of creating a self-contained little cosmos, around the subject, *detached from the surrounding world*, an effect of focusing on the subject Basically, it serves to convey the impression on the part of the speaker or author that *the subject establishes his own identity*, recovering or finding his own place by *determinedly dissociating himself from his familiar surrounding*.⁴⁶

The familiar elements are mentioned in the genealogy that precedes “the call of Abram” (Gen. 11:27) and that essentially repeats the elements of 11:26.⁴⁷ This second mention, however, is followed by a short narrative that provides significant details to the community in which Abram was “embedded” and which “anchored and sponsored his identity.”⁴⁸ This literary context first identifies Abram by linking him to a clan or tribe⁴⁹ that first dwelled in the land of Ur.⁵⁰ This is where his brother Harran dies, and it is described as the “land of his nativity [*’erets mōledeth*]” (11:28b). Ur is also the point of departure of Terach, Lot,⁵¹ and Abram and his wife. Thus, Ur is where the larger clan/tribe dwells and would be Abram’s homeland as well as that of Harran, who died there. Terach, Lot, Abram, and his wife, however, travel to a place called Haran⁵² and settle there. Interestingly, Ur and Harran were cities in which the Lunar cult was practised. Several names in Terach’s genealogy seem to be associated with this cult of the God Sîn⁵³ and would thus indicate a link between this cult and the house of Terach. Whatever the case may be, after Terach’s death, Abram is told to leave “your land,” which by then is Harran. He is also instructed to leave “your clan”; this would imply that he is not to travel back to Ur, where dwells his clan of origin. And finally, he is ordered to leave “your father’s house.” In other words, he is to separate all ties that anchored and defined his identity⁵⁴: *your* land (where he is presently dwelling), *your* clan (not go back to his homeland), and the house of *your* father (his familial lineage).⁵⁵ Thus, Abram’s call is not one of blind obedience to be rewarded. It is a call to transcend; it is an informed and responsible commitment. Becoming a nation and having a great name is part of God’s plan in rebuilding an identity for Abram (Abraham) that will enable the divine project to grow.

Conclusion

Anyone tackling the text of Genesis 12:1–4 would agree with Wenham when he states: “By placing the promises to Abram right at the beginning of the patriarchal narratives the redactor is asserting their fundamental importance for the history of Israel and

the world and indicating how the stories that follow ought to be understood.”⁵⁶

It must be emphasized, however, that the text is not a *promise* but a *project* initiated by Yahweh in view of restoring his blessing in the world. The call of Abram, the election of Israel, and the mission of the Church are to willfully commit to God’s project, which may require that we transcend some of our human-made boundaries if we are to answer God’s call. “Be a blessing” (v.2d) and be a “blesser of Abram” (v.3a) so that the “families of the earth will find blessing *with you*” (v.3c).⁵⁷

Marie-France Dion is Associate Professor at Concordia University in Montreal. She holds a PhD from the Université de Montréal. Her area of expertise is the Hebrew Bible; she teaches the Pentateuch, biblical Hebrew and text linguistics, biblical methodologies, and other courses related to the Hebrew Bible. She also works with an international French team of scholars on the publication of *La Bibliothèque de Qumrân with les Éditions du Cerf*. She is presently on a research sabbatical working on a publication about *New Beginnings (Macros-syntactical analysis and theological ramifications of texts related to Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Saul, and King David)*.

1 For a history on the development of social psychology and social identity and other connected fields of research, see Michael A. Hogg and Kipling D. Williams, “From I to We: Social Identity and the Collective Self,” *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice* 4:1 (2000), 81–97; Marilyn B. Brewer, “The Many Faces of Social Identity: Implications for Political Psychology,” *Political Psychology* 22:1 (2001), 115–25.

2 Hogg and Williams, “From I to We,” 83.

3 Esther Osborne and Roxane De La Sablonnière, “Understanding My Culture Means Understanding Myself: The Function of Cultural Identity Clarity for Personal Identity Clarity and Personal Well-Being,” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 44:4 (2014), 437.

4 Ibid.

5 The emergence and development of text linguistics has greatly contributed to the understanding of ancient Hebrew syntax and the function of grammatical constructions in larger units than the sentence. It has also helped elucidate problems with tense, mood, etc. For a short explanation on the main problems of biblical Hebrew syntax and the necessity of an approach dealing with larger units of texts, see Alviero Niccacci, *Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose*, trans. W.G.E. Watson (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 17–18, and Matthew H. Patton and Frederic Clarke Putnam, *Basics of Hebrew Discourse: A Guide to Working with Biblical Hebrew Prose and Poetry*, ed. Miles V. Van Pelt (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 35–41. Scholars recognize the necessity of a “macro-syntactic analysis” (also called “discourse analysis” or “text linguistics”) more and more. Already in 1980, Robert Longacre remarked: “In earlier work, discourse analysis was regarded as an option Discourse analysis emerges not as an option or as a luxury for the serious student of a language but as a necessity.” Quoted from Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 53 § 3.3.4.

6 Imperfect verb forms can indicate an indicative future but can also be nuanced with a volitional mood. The macro-syntactic analysis provides the rules that determine when the verb is a simple indicative and when it is volitional. The difference needs to be clearly indicated. See Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, ed. and enlarged by E. Kautzsch (New York: Dover, 2006), 319 § 108.

7 I will not be discussing the composite nature of the texts in Genesis; rather, for the purpose of this article, I will focus on the text as we now have it (the received text) and in its canonical context. I will, however, discuss textual critical issues when needed.

8 Often translated as “behold,” one of the functions of the term *hinneh* is to change the value of the information. “Without *hinneh* ... the same event would be introduced as information of no significance for the actual moment of communication.” Here it is used as a “wow!” factor.

9 God’s question to the man, then to the woman, and the punishment being handed to all three clearly emphasizes that each is responsible for his or her actions but also for their impact on others.

10 There are many symbolic elements in this text, one of which is God covering Adam and Eve with an animal skin. God is entering or renewing a covenant with them and protecting them.

11 The grammatical construction, *Yiqtol* in first position, indicates a volitional nuance. Niccacci, *Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose*, 75–78 § 55. Interestingly, this contrasting of “want” and “but” seems to exemplify the exercise of the freedom of will and how it should be exercised. Here, seeing what “he sees” (Gen. 6:5, 11), Yahweh regrets (6:6) having created humans and wants to wipe out everything, but he doesn’t.

12 They want to make a name for themselves. This suggests they want to become great and conquer the heavens.

13 Indicated by the plural verb forms “let us go down and confound.” Cf. Gen. 1:26.

14 The city is called *babel*. A wordplay with the verb *babal* (confuse, confound).

15 The repetition of a word at the beginning of a clause. Here it is mainly the repetitive use of the volitional mode.

16 Niccacci provides many examples to show that the *Yiqtol* that appears first in a clause differs from the *YIQTOL* that is preceded by an element (X-YIQTOL). The X-YIQTOL grammatical construction conveys an indicative future. Niccacci, *Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose*, 77 § 55 and 94 § 64.1.

17 Gordon J. Wenham, *World Biblical Commentary, Vol. 1: Genesis 1–15* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 276.

18 Ibid.

19 See note 28 below.

20 This is because most scholars give the *piel* a sense of intensification, which they express as “to curse,” as does the Brown-Driver-Briggs *Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 886.

21 Josef Scharbert, “rr,” in G. Johannes Botterbeck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Vol. 1*, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 405.

22 Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, 141 § 52f.

23 To despise, disdain, scorn, disgrace, belittle, disrespect, or shame.

24 Jouon and Muraoka term the *piel* conjugation as the “most elusive of the Hebrew Conjugations.” One can, however, affirm that it is the active pattern corresponding to the passive *pual* and reflexive *hithpael*. See Paul Jouon and Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 2nd ed. (Rome: E.P.I.B., 2008), 140.

25 A participle used as a verb usually suggests a continuous occurrence of an activity. Choon L. Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 81.

26 Despite the variant reading of a plural participle in other ancient manuscripts, the Masoretic text is to be preferred. The Samaritan Pentateuch (SP), the Septuagint (LXX), and the Targum tend to harmonize a text to parallel passages: in this case, to Gen. 27:27b and Num. 24:9b. The Vulgate uses the Greek text for its translation. The Syriac, although close to the Masoretic text, bears many affinities with the LXX and the SP. See Dominic Barthelemy, *Compte rendu préliminaire et provisoire sur le travail d’analyse textuelle de l’Ancien Testament* (Corpus Biblicus et Orientalis 50/1) (Fribourg: Vandenhoeck & Rubrecht, 1982), 19; Emmanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 125.

27 “Repeat a lie often enough and it becomes the truth” is a law of propaganda often attributed to the Nazi Joseph Goebbels. Among psychologists, something like this is known as the “illusion of truth.” See Aumyo Hassan and Sarah J. Barber, “The Effects of Repetition Frequency on the Illusory Truth Effect,” *Cognitive Research: Principles and Implications* 6:38 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41235-021-00301-5>.

28 I realize there is a need for a discussion pertaining to the grace of God and how this grace is exercised. In light of this recurring pattern and Abram’s call representing or foreshadowing Israel and Christians’ call to contribute, how does grace figure into this? Could grace be the very fact of having the potential to participate with God in restoring the blessing? Also, the meaning of the verbs “to bless” and “to curse” could be revisited in light of their contribution to the fate of humanity.

29 Biblical Hebrew knows the active voice (*Qal*, *Piel*, and *Hiphil*), the passive voice (*Pual*, *Hophal*), and the non-active middle voice (*Niphal* and *Hithpael*).

30 Two similar passages also employ the *Niphal*: 18:18 and 28:14.

31 Mainly because of other similar passages that have the *Hithpael* verb form: Gen. 22:18, 26:4; Jer. 4:2; Ps. 72:17.

32 Ellen van Wolde, “The *Niphal* as Middle Voice and Its Consequence for Meaning,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 43:3 (2019), 463, 467.

33 Waltke and O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 378–95.

34 Ellen van Wolde identifies six types of middle voice that the *Niphal* in the Hebrew Bible expresses: (1) body action middles, (2) mental middles, (3) reciprocal middles, (4) collective motion middles, (5) anti-causative middles, and (6) medio-passive middles.

35 For explanations and examples, see Waltke and O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 355 § 21.2.2d.f.g.

36 Hans-Peter Müller, “Ergative Constructions in Early Semitic Languages,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 54:4 (October 1995), 261–71, at 261. Italics added.

37 In fact, as an ergative intransitive verb, the object of the corresponding transitive verb becomes the subject of the *Niphal* verb. This is provided in v.3a, where the *Qal* transitive verb “to bless” is used and its object clearly indicated: “the blessers of Abram.” So, they become the subject of the *Niphal* verb in v.3d. It then makes sense that the *Niphal* verb is a third-person plural without it being “the clans of the World.”

38 As Waltke and O’Connor explain: “In the *Niphal* construction the subject is not the performer of the action but only a participator in it In this construction the agent may or may not be expressed. The *Niphal* is used ... because the subject is not the performer of the action.” Waltke and O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 356 & 21.2.2f.

39 For a discussion on the relationship between the participants and the verb, see Wolde, “The *Niphal* as Middle Voice and Its Consequence for Meaning,” 455. Admittedly, the text of Gen. 12:3 needs to be further analyzed within the categories proposed by Wolde.

40 Ibid., 470.

41 It can only become a promise once Abram commits to the project, which he does. It becomes a promise in v.7 when Yahweh appears to Abram. For characteristics of a divine promise and those of a divine project, see M.F. Dion, “Du projet à la promesse,” 110–15.

42 Expresses an advantage (or disadvantage) to the imperative (Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, § 119s; the section is indicated as 119s).

43 Ibid.

44 Takamitsu Muraoka, “The So-Called Daticus Ethicus in Hebrew,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 29:2 (1978), 495.

45 Left untranslated because this preposition has diverse meanings and functions, as stated by Waltke and O’Connor: “... used in a great many ways A variety of its senses are often rendered by English ‘to’ in its diverse meanings ... the basic sense of / is spatial. ... the Temporal use of / include[s] the simple locational (in, at, or during a period of time Another set of relations ... based on connections ... includes possession ..., authorship ..., manner ... class and type ..., comparison ... goal of an action.” For detailed explanations on the complexities of meanings and use of the lamed preposition, see Waltke and O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 205–12 § 11.2.10.

46 Muraoka, “The So-Called Daticus Ethicus in Hebrew,” 497. Italics added.

47 A fact that was previously noted by scholars who proposed diverse reasons for the repetition. See Wenham, *World Biblical Commentary, Vol. I*, 267–69.

48 For the role of culture on individuals, see Carol H. Hoare, “Psychosocial Identity Development and Cultural Others,” *Journal of Counseling & Development* 70 (1991), 45.

49 The term used is *môledeth* (with pronominal suffix 2nd-person singular), which derives from the *yalad* to give birth.

50 As noted earlier, I am discussing the text in its final form and will not be discussing the anachronistic mention of the Chaldeans or the dating or nature of the composition.

51 Son of Harran.

52 Not to be confused with the brother Harran.

53 See Roland DeVaux, *Histoire Ancienne d’Israël. Des Origines à l’installation en Canaan* (Paris: Lecoffre J. Gabalda et Cie, 1986), 186. Although the dating of the text and the viability of an ancient pre-Israelite Abraham tradition remain a subject of debate, there is strong evidence that several names in the Abraham lineage presented in Genesis are related to the Lunar cult that was practised in Ur and Harran at diverse periods of their history.

54 For an understanding of identity formation of the self, of the social and collective identity, and its implications, see Brewer, “The Many Faces of Social Identity,” 115–23.

55 Direct descendants of a particular ancestor, thus Lot and whoever else was born in the house of Terach during his stay at Harran.

56 Wenham, *World Biblical Commentary, Vol. I*, 271.

57 There is so much more to be said about this text that pertains to the concept of divine election, its purpose, who are the elect, and what “being a blessing” implies. The text also raises multiple questions: for example, of destiny, human responsibility, and many more.

Book Review

Are We Willing to Receive Ecumenism?

By Jakob Karl Rinderknecht

University of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio, Texas

Paul D. Murray, Gregory, A. Ryan, and Paul Lakeland, editors. *Receptive Ecumenism as Transformative Ecclesial Learning: Walking the Way to a Church Re-formed*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. xxxv + 539 pp.

The Receptive Ecumenism (RE) movement has been influential in interchurch engagement since the first RE conference in 2006. The first volume, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (Oxford, 2008), has been important in both academic and ecclesial ecumenical circles, as have the five international conferences sponsored by the movement. The appearance, therefore, of a second book of essays is an important moment to consider not only the collected essays but also the outlines and future for an important set of commitments in contemporary ecumenism.

The volume is structured in four sections. The first, “Receiving Receptive Ecumenism Across Traditions,” gathers nine essays considering how traditions from a variety of Christian traditions, from Pentecostalism to Orthodoxy, might stand to grow by listening to and learning from others. One particularly interesting chapter by Sarah Rowland Jones considers the work of the Global Christian Forum as a locus of RE methodologies.

The second section, “Receiving in Relation to Our Difficulties,” pushes this notion somewhat further, directly considering areas of perceived difficulty within traditions and proposing remedies or balances from elsewhere. One question that arises here will preview some of my discussion below: In an RE methodology, what is the interplay between theologians, groups of Christians within communions, and the structures of authority within those traditions? Especially in a situation where some ecclesial authorities may not recognize other Christian communions as fully Christian, or fully Church, what role can an RE methodology play? What about when those authorities don’t recognize the problems that members of their communions raise?

The third section, “Receptive Ecclesial Learning in International Perspective,” consists of eight essays that include both regional perspectives and a pair of interesting chapters that consider how RE might relate

to interfaith engagement. The first of these, written by Francis X. Clooney, considers the similarities and differences between RE and practices of interfaith dialogue. It is an intriguing parallel, partly because RE, unlike traditional ecumenical methods, does not centre the question of how to come into fuller unity but instead asks each communion to consider how it might become more fully what it ought to be. In the second, John O’Brien provides an example of what such learning might look like, considering how the writings of Sufi thinker Ibn al-’Arabi illuminate RE practices.

The fourth section is by far the longest and is further divided into three sub-sections. Five chapters consider the dynamics of RE and what prevents its learning from being received. Four consider specific scriptural voices and their contributions to the RE project. Finally, four chapters consider the present and future of RE as mode of an ongoing and Spirit-elicited ecclesial conversion. This final section has some of the richest contributions to the volume, with authors wrestling with how ecclesial change might come about and what stands in the way of hearing and responding to the call of the Spirit.

The idea at the heart of RE is simple: “each tradition should focus first on the self-critical question: ‘What can *we* learn, or *receive*, with integrity, from *our* various others in order to facilitate our own growth together into deepened communion in Christ and the Spirit?’”¹ This simple commitment signals, nevertheless, a sea change in much of actual ecumenical practice. Instead of trying to change others to someday reunify with them, or seeking to understand differences and ask whether they require division, RE asks what other Christians could teach us about becoming more fully the Church. And here, the simple becomes immediately both deeply complex and quite difficult.

On the one hand, RE understood in this way can sometimes seem incredibly broad, almost as if it could be a synonym for “living the Gospel.” More narrowly, RE is variously described as a method or a vision, a process or a mentality. Each of these is important,

and they certainly interlock with each other, providing a complex of commitments and patterns of recognizable behaviour that make RE a distinct approach to ecumenical engagement. But it is not one that is easily defined beyond its basics outlined above. It stands as a commitment to an eschatological reality toward which each Christian community ought to strive and a willingness to ask for the Spirit's unsettling guidance toward nearing that eschatological future. This vision is at its clearest in this book in the chapters detailing how various groups, often drawing from a wide variety of Christian traditions, have gone about RE, such as that on the Global Christian Forum mentioned above, or the chapter on Australian experiences by Geraldine Hawkes.

Two chapters from the final section in particular help frame the question I bring to this book and to the RE movement in general. Antonia Pizzey contributes a carefully wrought chapter that considers the virtues necessary for RE to take hold. The list will be familiar: love, humility, faith, courage, justice, hope, and prudence (449–50). All of these are necessary for RE, and the essay is both thoughtful and worthy of close attention. But it also points to an open question: What is the relationship between individual participation in ecumenical spaces and the actual reform of communities that this book so clearly longs for?

The European philosophical tradition has generally considered virtues as individual characteristics, as descriptors of the morally developed person able to live well in the complexities of the world. While Pizzey's description of these virtues is helpful, it remains unclear how the virtues are to be practised *communally*, particularly in the typical situation where some members of the community—too often those in positions of authority—do not see a need for growth in their churches.

An account of community virtue analogous to individual virtue might bridge this gap, but it remains underdeveloped. In Paul Murray's chapter, for example, when considering the calling forward of the various communions toward the reign of God, he writes:

Receptive Ecumenism is shaped by an Ignatian-inspired understanding of conversion as always *out of that which frustrates us and into that which is of real life for us*. Within Ignatian formulation, the call to personal conversion is most fundamentally understood not, primarily, as an act of mortification and dispossession but as a positive call to greater life, interior freedom, and flourishing Accordingly, Receptive Ecumenism views ecumenical ecclesial conversion not, primarily, as a relinquishing and diminishment of respective ecclesial identities, but as a freeing of them to be-

come more fully what they most truly are through expansion rather than diminishment. (475)

But the jump from the Ignatian retreatant to the whole Church conceals myriad difficulties. Each community of faith, like each Christian, should understand itself as *already* and *not yet*. But what belongs to the *not yet* is often exactly what is contested. And as communities of faith remain political entities, the decision-making processes of the churches are often one of the things about which people disagree.

Susan Ross's chapter argues that "women's lay and ordained ministerial *practices* can become a nexus of conversation that will enhance communities and provide for a greater sense of engagement on the part of Christian communities" (141). The chapter investigates what is to be learned by considering these practices and contributes much to understanding the practices of clericalism, the discernment of callings, the question of good preaching, and the richness of lay ministries. This is valuable. But it is unlikely to change much about the interior conversation within the Catholic Church about women in either lay or ordained ministry, precisely because nearly all of those who are able to make new decisions are not part of this conversation. The distance between academic theology, or pastoral work, and the political life of the Church is often vast. Lay ministers or lay theologians often work within an entirely different realm than that in which decision-making about their ministries happens. One of the ironies of RE is that the primary work of relationship building and conversion may need to happen *within* communions (between such ministers and their bishops), even if the work of cracking open the door to such rapprochement may often be initially mediated by ecumenical encounter.

This leads to a second difficulty of engaging with RE. Since the goal of RE is measured against the future Church, and because the current ecclesial reality is both quite diverse and quite divided, descriptions of RE and its goal can sometimes become indistinguishable from other general descriptors of the Christian eschatological hope, such as the "reign of God." As such, it sometimes seems to be almost a rhetorical flourish rather than a substantive addition to descriptions of the Christian life.

Karl Rahner describes the basic problem of division as arising from a failure to love. He calls this failure *mala fides*, and it is a deceptively simple reality. While Christians have from time to time come to believe of each other that the other has abandoned the faith, even heresy does not of itself produce schism. Schism is the decision not to be in communion with the other—the act of giving up on unity. And we maintain schism either actively or passively until we choose not to.

The division of the church is a *surd*: a product of sin that is, because it is a turning away from meaning and being, not capable of receiving a rational account. Certainly, we can describe the history and decisions that led to our divisions, including the conviction that uniformity is required for unity. But the division (not diversity) of the churches remains a sinful, and therefore irrational, thing. And overcoming it requires, as many authors in this volume note, a change in heart, *metanoia*, turning toward the other with real repentance. It requires a willingness, as Paul Murray notes, to give up aspects of who we think we are to become more fully ourselves.

But the “myself” here is corporate, and corporate meaning is expressed in communal actions governed by politically constituted structures—often, structures that are much more complex in fact than they are in theory. The reception of Pope Francis’s reforms of the last decade are a good example of this: certainly, the pope has the juridical right within Catholicism to rewrite canon law and to clarify teaching. But the number of Catholics who are not willing to be taught by *this* pope, especially when they see his teaching as being any kind of change, leads to real questions about how the Catholic Church might go about the kind of corporate *metanoia* required by pilgrimage toward either the kingdom or RE.

The task of ecumenism has shifted, often toward convincing those with influence that the “irrevocable commitment” of the Church must require self-sacrifice and change if it is to be an actual commitment.² Catherine Clifford’s chapter notes similar concerns, pointing to the necessity for “a certain asceticism” for the Church to learn (435). Receptive Ecumenism then becomes a practice, one that “far from being a mere strategy to carry us through a winter of the ecumenical movement ... is an essential step in attaining the unitive purpose of Vatican II” (438). But real asceticism will never be an easy sell when self-aggrandizement posing as holiness is so much easier, as spiritual writers from John Cassian to Martin Luther to the present have noted. And if the best work in this regard is done

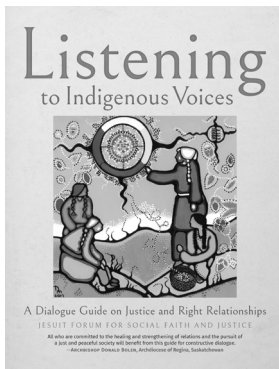
in practice within and across local communities, RE is left with the question of what academics and an academic volume can contribute to the various ecclesial communions’ self-understanding and growth.

This book wrestles with these questions, sometimes quite aware that academic chapters are less than likely to be read by those who are not already committed to the ecumenical task. It may be that this is primarily a gathering for mutual encouragement, so that the slow work of growth might happen out in the churches. This has always been the task of the Christian life, as St. Benedict noted in his *Rule*: “Let [us] prefer absolutely nothing to Christ, and may he bring us all together to everlasting life” (RB 72:11–12). Given the energy and commitment to the process that we see in Murray and his collaborators, I’m hopeful that the movement will rise to face this challenge—and to help the rest of the Church do likewise.

Jakob Karl Rinderknecht is the Director of the Honors Program and an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of the Incarnate Word (San Antonio, Texas). He studies how embodiment and culture shape the Catholic Church in its internal and external relationships. Recent works include *Mapping the Differentiated Consensus of the Joint Declaration* (Palgrave, 2016, winner of the Harding Meyer Prize in Ecumenism) and a critical translation of Karl Rahner’s *An Ecumenical Priesthood: The Spirit of God and the Structure of the Church* (Fortress, 2022). His current work argues that the field of ecumenism must attend to the intra-ecclesial wounds that Christians have inflicted on each other by participating in colonialism, enslavement, and the structures of abuse and exclusion.

1 Paul D. Murray, “Preface,” in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), ix–x.

2 Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint* (May 25, 1995), §3, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html#3; Pope Francis, *Letter to Cardinal Koch for the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Ut Unum Sin*, (May 24, 2020), ¶1, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200524_lettera-card-koch.html.



Listening to Indigenous Voices A Dialogue Guide on Justice and Right Relationships

BY JESUIT FORUM FOR SOCIAL FAITH AND JUSTICE

As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reminds us, “reconciliation is not about ‘closing a sad chapter of Canada’s past,’ but about opening new healing pathways of reconciliation that are forged in truth and justice.” This process entails “awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour.”

To engage in this process, we need to *listen* deeply to what Indigenous Peoples are saying, open ourselves to be transformed by their words, and act based on what they are telling us so that we can begin to address injustices, heal relationships, and bring about a post-colonial Canada.

Listening to Indigenous Voices explores Indigenous worldviews, examines the history of colonization, and concludes with sessions on righting relationships, decolonization, and indigenization.

The guide features writings from authors such as Arthur Manuel, Beverly Jacobs, Lee Maracle, Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, Sylvia McAdam Saysewahum, John Borrows, and Robin Wall Kimmerer, along with works from a variety of Indigenous artists including Christi Belcourt and Kent Monkman. Each session includes questions to guide sharing circles as well as curriculum ideas for use in secondary and post-secondary educational settings.

“As we gather to contemplate next steps towards genuine reconciliation, we need to move beyond knowing and feeling. Tears and regret are not enough. Tangible change is urgent. This rich resource can help. Deep gratitude to the many collaborative hearts and minds who prepared it.”—Marie Wilson, TRC Commissioner

The **Jesuit Forum for Social Faith and Justice** promotes small-group sharing circles to foster transformative learning and engagement on themes related to ecology, justice, spirituality, and right relationships.

114pp, spiral-bound PB, ISBN: 978-2-89688-676-0 \$19.95



Available at your local bookstore, online at en.novalis.ca or call 1-800-387-7164 to order.

Critical Theology: Engaging Church, Culture, and Society is published quarterly by Novalis © Novalis 2023.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical or otherwise, without prior permission of and proper acknowledgement of *Critical Theology: Engaging Church, Culture, and Society*.

Founding editor: Gregory Baum – **Editorial team:** Rosemary P. Carbine, Christine Jamieson, Scott Kline, Don Schweitzer

Contributing editors: M. Shawn Copeland, Lee Cormie, Charles Curran, Marilyn Legge, Harold Wells

Design: Gilles Lépine and Audrey Wells – **Layout:** Audrey Wells

Subscriptions: Canada: \$16 • International: \$33 (postage and taxes included).

To order: Periodicals Dept., Novalis, 1 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 800, Toronto, ON M4P 3A1

Tel: 1-800-387-7164 Fax: 1-800-204-4140

ISSN: 2562-0347

Please send submissions and correspondence to don.schweitzer@saskatoontheologicalunion.ca.

Printed in Canada

