



*Journal of
Religion & Society*
Supplement Series

The Kripke Center

Supplement 16 (2018)

Religion and Globalization

Edited by Ronald A. Simkins and Zachary B. Smith

8. Solidarity and Catholic Social Thought

Confronting the Globalization of Indifference

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Abstract

Pope Francis has introduced the idea of a “globalization of indifference” into Catholic social teaching. He imputes indifference to “people who close their hearts to the needs of others, who close their eyes to what is happening around them, who turn aside to avoid encountering other people’s problems.” The globalization of indifference has moved beyond personal indifference and has taken on broader dimensions, which is often manifested in structural sin that violates human dignity. This essay develops in three cumulative sections. First, it explains Pope Francis’s globalization of indifference and the threat this indifference poses to the call to discipleship and solidarity. Second, it defines the virtue of solidarity in its various dimensions. Finally, it explores the theological foundations of solidarity grounded in the biblical identification of God and God’s Christ with the poor and the Christian moral imperative to confront the globalization of indifference.

Keywords: common good, globalization of indifference, Pope Francis, solidarity, structural sin

Introduction

Pope Francis begins his message for the 2016 World Day of Peace (henceforth WDP) as follows: “*God is not indifferent! God cares about [hu]mankind! God does not abandon us!*” (2016b: 1). Unfortunately, humankind, both individually and communally, has often been indifferent to, and has abandoned the most vulnerable neighbor, the environment, and even the God who is not indifferent. The message for WDP calls for conversion to overcome indifference and to pursue justice through service that actualizes human dignity, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalized, those whom Joerg Rieger calls “the underside” (1-5) and whom Pope Francis asserts are no longer society’s underside or disenfranchised (2013a: 53). The Second Vatican Council opened its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World with the famous words, “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ” (Vatican II 1965: 1), and Pope Francis borrowed them to introduce WDP, entitled “Overcome Indifference and Win Peace.” The message allows for both a weak and a strong meaning. The weak meaning is that many of the world’s poor and afflicted are Christians, ostensibly followers of Christ. The strong meaning is that “the Church proposed to enter into dialogue with the entire human family about the problems of our world, as a sign of solidarity, respect and affection” (2016b: 2), and that real Christians are active believers who not only *say* “Lord, Lord” but also *do* the will of God “who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). Among the many things Christians are called to do is to overcome indifference and to minister to the poor and afflicted of every race, color, and religious persuasion, and to do so precisely because they are followers of the Christ who so ministered in his time and his place. Drawing from Catholic social thought (henceforth CST), Pope Francis articulates this moral imperative and explains how it is undermined through a lack of individual and communal commitment to solidarity.

This essay develops in three cumulative sections. First, it explains Pope Francis’ “globalization of indifference” and the threat this indifference poses to the call to discipleship and solidarity. Second, it defines the virtue of solidarity in its various dimensions. Finally, it explores the theological foundations of solidarity grounded in the biblical identification of God and God’s Christ with the poor and the Christian moral imperative to confront the globalization of indifference.

Globalization of Indifference

David Hollenbach describes globalization as the increase in complex networks of interdependence among individuals and institutions at multicontinental distances (213). These complex networks have both positive and negative impacts on the common good, which is “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily” (Vatican II 1965: 26). Some argue that globalization has had a positive impact on economic development in developing countries and has moved people onto the ladder of economic development (Sachs). It has also been critiqued because of its tendency towards economic exploitation, environmental degradation, and a fundamental and systemic assault, through social and political structures, on the common good and human dignity. Ironically, in the face of larger globalization, our personal worlds can become much smaller, when the biblical neighbor is reduced to our immediate relationships

and anyone beyond those relationships loses a human face and does not warrant our justice, compassion, care, and service. Pope Francis attributes these negative impacts of globalization to individual and communal indifference. There are various types and causes of indifference that call for solidarity and a renewed commitment to Christian discipleship and the common good. We consider these in turn.

Types of Indifference

Pope Francis has addressed the globalization of indifference on many occasions in his writings and homilies (2013b; 2015; 2016b). In general, he imputes indifference to “people who close their hearts to the needs of others, who close their eyes to what is happening around them, who turn aside to avoid encountering other people’s problems” (2016b: 3). He distinguishes between personal indifference and globalized indifference, which we see as structural indifference, a sinful social structure (see Finn) which shapes and perpetuates personal indifference through culture, institutions, and policies that place profit and power above human dignity, the common good, and the preservation of the environment.

Personal indifference stems from a “hardness of heart” (Francis 2014) and blindness when we become desensitized and indifferent to the suffering of others. Borrowing from Gregory Baum, we distinguish between voluntary and nonvoluntary indifference (115-16).¹ Voluntary indifference is a deliberate and conscious choice to be indifferent to the suffering of others and can include actions and attitudes that perpetuate and codify indifference in structures, laws, and policies that systemically perpetuate injustice through indifference. Such indifference can lead to “justifying deplorable economic policies which breed injustice, division and violence for the sake of ensuring the wellbeing of individuals or nations. Not infrequently, economic and political projects aim at securing or maintaining power and wealth, even at the cost of trampling on the basic rights and needs of others” (Francis 2016b: 4). Nonvoluntary indifference is an unconscious development where, if we are healthy and comfortable, “our hearts grow cold” to the suffering of those less well-off who struggle to survive daily in the face of oppressive situations. “Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own” (Francis: 2013a: 54; see 2016b: 3). Nonvoluntary indifference is often unconscious and, therefore, has no or limited moral culpability. It produces a blindness in people “that prevents them from recognizing the evil dimension of their social reality” (Baum: 113). Following his predecessor, Pope John Paul II, Pope Francis is concerned with both voluntary and nonvoluntary indifference. Whereas John Paul tends to focus on voluntary indifference and personal responsibility for structures of sin (1984: 16; 1987: n. 65; Baum: 115),² Francis makes greater concession for nonvoluntary indifference and the autonomy of

¹ Baum is using the terms in relation to responsibility for social sin. We consider indifference a type of social sin.

² John Paul II 1984: 16: “Whenever the Church speaks of situations of sin, or when she condemns as social sins certain situations or the collective behavior of certain social groups, big or small, or even of whole nations and blocs of nations, she knows and she proclaims that such cases of *social sin* are the result of the accumulation and concentration of many personal sins. It is a case of the very personal sins of those who cause or support evil or who exploit it; of those who are in a position to avoid, eliminate or at least limit certain social evils but who fail to do so out of laziness, fear or the conspiracy of silence, through secret complicity or indifference; of those who take

social structures that cause blindness that desensitizes people to injustice. He judges that “human beings are not completely autonomous. Our freedom fades when it is handed over to the blind forces of the unconscious” (2015: 105). The globalization of indifference as a structure of sin can be one of these blind forces.

Of the two types of personal indifference, nonvoluntary indifference is perhaps the most insidious and most difficult to combat. In the case of voluntary indifference, there are moral agents who espouse an active ideology that can be named and deconstructed through social analysis and social activism and transformed through concerted individual and communal action. Apathy and “destructive cynicism” (2016b: 2) are often at the root of nonvoluntary indifference, and these are much harder to deconstruct and transform. We agree with Gregory Baum when he notes that “Given the nonvoluntary dimension of social sin, ‘love and goodwill alone’ are insufficient to expose sinful structures. Rather . . . ‘it is through moments of interruption . . . that shatter our perceptions, that we discover the human damage done by our taken-for-granted world’” (203). What is required to confront the blindness of nonvoluntary indifference through moments of interruption is the creation of awareness through conscientization, which refers to the process whereby individuals within all sectors of society, especially privileged sectors, gain an in-depth awareness of both the presence of injustice and the requirements of justice (Heyer: 96, n. 14). Following Pope John Paul II’s emphasis on personal responsibility for structural sin, Pope Francis’s call for creating “awareness” (2015: *passim*) seeks to expose indifference, calling us to “conversion toward interdependence in solidarity” (Heyer: 87).

A second type of indifference is globalized or structural indifference. Francis notes that “in our day, indifference has ceased to be a purely personal matter and has taken on broader dimensions, producing a certain ‘globalization of indifference’” (2016b: 3). This globalization is often manifested in structural sin. Pope Benedict XVI notes that “the Church’s wisdom has always pointed to the presence of original sin in social conditions and in the structure of society” (2009: 34). Pope John Paul II judges that “social sins . . . cry to heaven because they generate violence, disrupt peace and harmony between communities within single nations, between nations, and between the different regions of the continent.” Examples of social sins are “the drug trade, the recycling of illicit funds, corruption at every level, the terror of violence, the arms race, racial discrimination, inequality between social groups, and the irrational destruction of nature” (1999: 56). Daniel Finn points out that, in the Catholic theological tradition, there is no clear and consistent definition of social sin and that the concept of sinful social structures is at best ambiguous. To remedy this ambiguity Finn proposes a definition: “social structures emerge from the activity of individuals, yet have independent causal impact on people through the way structures affect the (free but constrained) choices persons make” (138). Sin is attributable to structures causally, not morally, when they violate the requirements of human dignity (CDF 1986: 74) and “the common good and its exigencies in relation to the whole broad spectrum of the rights and

refuge in the supposed impossibility of changing the world, and also of those who sidestep the effort and sacrifice required, producing specious reasons of a higher order. The real responsibility, then, lies with individuals. A situation – or likewise an institution, a structure, society itself – is not in itself the subject of moral acts. Hence a situation cannot in itself be good or bad” (emphasis added).

duties of citizens,” and when they limit human freedom (John Paul II 1984: 16). The degree to which such structures constrain human freedom will impact the assessment of individual moral culpability and responsibility for structures of sin.

There are three dimensions of structures of sin that perpetuate the globalization of indifference. First, structures of sin evolve out of personal sin but take on a life of their own and perpetuate personal indifference. John Paul II notes this explicitly. Structures of sin “are rooted in personal sin, and thus [are] always linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove” (1987: 36). Racism, for example, is rooted in personal sin, but an individual does not create racism as a structure of sin. Racist acts and attitudes, however, can either perpetuate the communal impact of racism as a structure of sin or they can confront and challenge racism and limit its communal impact and prevalence as a structure of sin. Second, structures of sin perpetuate and facilitate the engagement of individuals and societies in sinful actions and attitudes. Social structures, to repeat, do not have moral agency and, therefore, cannot sin. The actions and attitudes of individuals, however, that have actively created such structures or have allowed them to exist and flourish are sinful. Third, structures of sin are often the result of sins of omission. Such omissions, and the voluntary indifference they reflect, bring to mind Edmund Burke’s words: “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good [people] to do nothing” (Bromwich: 176). Failing to act to confront structures of sin when it is within our capabilities to do so are sins of omission.

Causes of Indifference

The causes of indifference, voluntary and nonvoluntary, personal and communal, are multiple and complex. Pope Francis lists several causes, the most fundamental being indifference to God, the source and foundation for all authentic solidarity.³ He cites Pope Benedict: “without openness to the transcendent, human beings easily become prey to relativism and find it difficult to act justly and to work for peace” (2013). This lack of openness to God has devastating consequences. “On both the individual and communitarian levels, indifference to one’s neighbor, born of indifference to God, finds expression in disinterest and a lack of engagement, which only help to prolong situations of injustice and grave social imbalance” (Francis 2016b: 4). This indifference gives rise to neglecting one’s neighbor and the environment and is a result of false humanism and materialism grounded in relativism and nihilism (Francis 2016b: 3). Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI were greatly concerned with relativism, and it is an important concern, too, for Pope Francis. Relativism denies the existence of an objective order or universal truth. In his homily at the opening of the 2005 papal conclave, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger spoke of the “dictatorship of relativism,” which “does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate standard consists solely of one’s own ego and desires.” The ego-centricity of relativism refuses to hear and to respond to the cry of the poor and chooses, instead, to live in a ghetto of exclusive privilege. It justifies indifference to one’s neighbor by denying the universality of our fundamental interrelatedness

³ Although Pope Francis lists indifference to God as a “kind” of indifference, we prefer to classify it as a cause that leads to individual indifference and the globalization of indifference. Francis seems to support this indifference as a cause when he notes, “Indifference towards God transcends the purely private sphere of the individual and affects the public and social sphere” (2016b: 4).

as human beings and the normative responsibility that interrelatedness entails; we are indeed our brother's and sister's keeper. "Disregard and the denial of God, which lead man to acknowledge no norm above himself and himself alone, have produced untold cruelty and violence" (Francis 2016b: 4). Relativism and indifference to God impede acting justly and working for peace through solidarity.

A second cause of indifference, Francis asserts, is that humans have forgotten how to weep.⁴ "We are a society," he says, "that has forgotten the experience of weeping, of 'suffering with': the globalization of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep! . . . let us ask the Lord for the grace to weep over our indifference, to weep over the cruelty in the world, in ourselves and even in those who anonymously make socio-economic decisions" that directly or indirectly impact the poor (Vatican Radio). The failure to weep can be individual, communal, or codified in structures of indifference that both enable and sustain oppressive and dehumanizing conditions that seriously impact the poor, often for the sake of economic gain and political power. While we can work towards personal conversion through solidarity, conversion from structural indifference is much more difficult because the sources of that indifference are often hidden. Constant exposure to human suffering, either directly or through the media, causes us to construct barriers that protect us from the emotional, psychological, and spiritual vulnerability that comes with seeing suffering and feeling unable to do anything about it.

The third cause of indifference is theological. Pope Francis cites the iconic biblical story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4) to illustrate the theological root of indifference. Brothers, created in the image and likeness of God, born from the same womb, betray that brotherhood when Cain murders Abel out of envy. This betrayal of brotherhood, sisterhood, and personhood has been replicated throughout history when people "close their eyes to what is happening around them, who turn aside to avoid encountering other people's problems" (Francis 2016b: 3) or, worse yet, voluntarily aggravate and compound those problems.

A fourth cause of indifference is a failure both to recognize each human being as created in the image and likeness of God and to respond to the moral imperative to treat each person, our immediate or distant neighbor, with human dignity. To overcome indifference, both personal and global, Pope Francis calls for "authentic solidarity" (2016b: 5). Solidarity, and the conversion necessary to realize solidarity, is at the heart of the theological foundations of CST. Francis notes that "the suffering of others is a call to conversion, since their need reminds me of the uncertainty of my own life and my dependence on God and my brothers and sisters" (2014). To a consideration of solidarity and its theological foundations we now turn.

The Virtue of Solidarity

Pope Francis puts solidarity forward as a virtue that fundamentally challenges and transforms indifference and is at the heart of CST and the gospel. Pope John Paul II provides a concise definition of that virtue: "it is a firm and persevering determination to commit

⁴ Pope Francis lists the failure to weep as an effect of indifference, rather than its cause: "the globalization of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep!" (Vatican Radio). We believe there is more of a dialectical relationship between indifference and the failure to weep; indifference is both a *cause* and an *effect* of the failure to weep, as are the other failures discussed below.

oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all” (1987: 38). This general definition of the virtue of solidarity, however, does not specify it as a Christian virtue, and John Paul further explains:

Solidarity is undoubtedly a Christian virtue . . . it . . . [is] possible to identify many points of contact between solidarity and charity, which is the distinguishing mark of Christ's disciples (cf. John 13:35). In the light of faith, solidarity seeks to go beyond itself, to take on the specifically Christian dimension of total gratuity, forgiveness and reconciliation. One's neighbor is then not only a human being with his or her own rights and a fundamental equality with everyone else, but becomes the living image of God the Father, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and placed under the permanent action of the Holy Spirit. One's neighbor must therefore be loved, even if an enemy, with the same love with which the Lord loves him or her; and for that person's sake one must be ready for sacrifice, even the ultimate one: to lay down one's life for the brethren (1987: 40).

There are several dimensions to John Paul's understanding of solidarity as a virtue.⁵ First, it recognizes the “interdependence” of humanity. All humans exist in some economic, cultural, political, and religious systems that impact and shape human relationships for good and ill. Second, recognizing and naming this interdependence invites a “correlative response” in solidarity; indifference is not an option. Third, the virtue of solidarity transforms interpersonal relationships within a country or culture. Those in positions of power have a moral obligation to insure the dignity and well-being of all their people; those who are weak or poor must reject apathetic and destructive attitudes and behaviors; those in between the powerful and weak must respect the rights and dignity of all others (John Paul II 1987: 39). We agree with Donald Dorr that this account of layers and statuses of society “seems somewhat bland” (149). The situation demands a greater social analysis to illuminate the causes of class structure in society and how to address them. It also demands a greater theological analysis to illuminate and highlight God's “identification” with the poor (see below) and the weak.

Fourth, solidarity may be exercised by entire nations toward to one another, for systems make both individuals and nations complexly dependent on each other. Interdependence and collaboration should be a hallmark of cooperation between richer and poorer nations. Richer nations should avoid imperialism and hegemony, striving to ensure justice and equality for poorer nations and access to the goods necessary to ensure the common good and human dignity for all their citizens (John Paul II 1987: 39). Not only must richer nations help to facilitate, and not frustrate, integral human development for the citizens of poorer nations, but they must also avoid “cultural imperialism,” attempting to impose cultural beliefs, values, and systems on them. Both *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican II 1965: 53-62) and John Paul II's *Sollicitudo rei socialis* insist that solidarity “means taking seriously the different value systems of the various cultures, rather than the imposition of a Western model of development on other peoples” (Dorr: 150).

⁵ We are indebted to Donald Dorr's insights on solidarity as a virtue (143-54).

Fifth, the virtue of solidarity transforms the structures that shape nations and individuals. It empowers people to oppose structures of sin that place profit and power above human dignity and the common good. It helps to form more just and humane relationships between individuals and societies and to construct a “civilization of love” (John Paul II 1987: 33). Sixth, the impending doom for human civilization that climate change threatens demands what Pope Francis calls “social ecology.” In his encyclical *Laudato Si*, Francis emphasizes the interrelationship between human and *ecological solidarity*: “If everything is related,” and CST affirms this relatedness, “then the health of a society’s institutions has consequences for the environment and the quality of human life. ‘Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment’. In this sense, social ecology is necessarily institutional and gradually extends to the whole of society, from the primary social group, the family, to the wider local, national and international communities” (2015: 142). Now, more than ever, ecological solidarity is the *sine qua non* for human solidarity.

Finally, the issue arises of the consequences for individuals and nations if indifference supersedes solidarity. If rich nations and those who exert power in them choose to pursue policies and support structures that prioritize money and power over the common good and human dignity, that choice damages the potential for development in poorer nations and for the good of their citizens. It also damages the richer nations themselves, for it widens the gap between the haves and have nots within a nation and fosters both individual and global indifference. The basis for Christian solidarity and the selfless love that it requires is the theological truth that each person is “the living image of God” (John Paul II 1987: 42; Dorr: 152).

The Theological Roots of Solidarity: Transforming Indifference

The globalization of indifference is confronted by Francis’s pregnant theological phrase, “God is not indifferent.” God’s awareness of, attention to, and concern for humankind, especially for the poor and marginalized, provides a moral imperative for Christians to move beyond blindness and indifference to imitate God’s Christ in deed and word and to “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37). This imperative is grounded in the theological anthropology that accepts God’s and God’s Christ’s identification with the poor and the weak.

Theological Anthropology and Solidarity

The Second Vatican Council published its majestic new image of the Catholic Church, the people of God, all the baptized, laity and clergy, together (Vatican II 1964: 9–18). “It has pleased God to make men holy and save them not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges him in truth [that is, in actions as well as in words] and serves him in holiness” (9). That communal, perhaps familial, image of church is a vital root in Catholic social thought and its claim that “God intended the earth and all that it contains for the use of every human being and people.” We shall return to this claim as we proceed. In using the goods of the earth, therefore, “a man should regard his lawful possessions not merely as his own but also as common property in the sense that they should accrue to the benefit of not only himself but of others.” That is so true in the people of God that “if a person is in extreme necessity, he has the right to take from the riches of others what he himself needs” (Vatican II 1965: 69).

CST is grounded in a theological anthropology, a theological description of what God's revelation says of humans and their existence. First, "man was created to the image of God" (Genesis 1:26). Second, "God did not create man as a solitary figure; from the beginning 'male and female he created them' (Genesis 1:27). . . . By his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential" (Vatican II 1965: 12). God "has willed that all men should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood" (Vatican II 1965: 23), a revelation that is the ultimate root of the analysis of this essay. Third, Jesus, the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15), Christians believe, is the perfect human, and this perfect human "fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear" (Vatican II 1965: 22). God's incarnation in Jesus creates a solidarity between God and humans and between humans themselves. "Mindful of the Lord's saying: 'By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13:35), Christians cannot yearn for anything more ardently than to serve the [people] of the modern world ever more generously and effectively." That service offered "generously and effectively" is a key to understanding what is required, for "not everyone who cries 'Lord, Lord' will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the Father's will . . . [and] the Father wills that in all [humans] . . . we recognize Christ our brother and love Him effectively in word and deed" (Vatican II 1965: 93). Everything that follows in this essay is to be understood in the light of these teachings.

"The dignity of the human person and the common good," Pope Francis writes in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, "rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privilege" (218). It is a firm statement of CST: the dignity of all human persons, the priority demands of the common good, and the preferential option for the poor.⁶ It has become easy to assume that since the theological principles, the body of thought, and the call to action subsumed in the phrase "Catholic social thought" came to prominence in the twentieth century, the reality itself came into existence only in that era. Kenneth Himes's definition of CST as "the explicitly formulated theories of economic, political, and social life that are expressed in papal, conciliar, and other episcopal documents," coupled with his listing of those documents as beginning with Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* and ending with Pope John Paul II's celebration of its hundredth anniversary in *Centesimus Annus*, lent some support to this assumption (Himes: 7-8). Several influential works under the general rubric of "One hundred years of Catholic social thought" had earlier lent further credence to the assumption that CST came into existence only with *Rerum Novarum*. We are in full agreement, however, with John Coleman when he acknowledges the reality that "Catholic social thought is much older than one hundred years. Its roots go back to the life and words of Jesus" (2). Though a

⁶ The phrase, "preferential option for the poor," which has been common currency in discussions of Catholic social thought for the past twenty years, gained its preeminence as a result of two conferences of Latin American bishops, the first at Medellin in Colombia in 1968, the second at Puebla in Mexico in 1979. Medellin adumbrated the phrase, "preferential option for the poor;" Puebla adopted it explicitly. Among the signs of authentic Christian evangelization are "preferential love and concern for the poor and needy" (Latin American Episcopate: 382). Latin American bishops pledged themselves "to make clear through our lives and attitudes that our preference is to evangelize and serve the poor" (Latin American Episcopate: 707). "A preferential option for the poor represents the most noticeable tendency of religious life in Latin America" (Latin American Episcopate: 733). The Puebla Conference is analyzed in its contextual depth in Eagleson and Scharper.

legitimate theological argument can be offered that CST as defined by Himes concretizes the CST that historically preceded it, this essay is not about CST in that restricted sense. The assumption that the past hundred or so years are all there is to CST is seriously, and ultimately disastrously, mistaken.

This section is about CST in a more radically historical sense, rooted in documents that long antedate the last one hundred years and the papal theology written in them. Catholicism is essentially a religion of the book, a “textualized religion” (Lindbeck: 361), that assigns theological priority to its holy Bible, which it takes to be the very word of God. This essay argues that the root of CST goes all the way back to that word of God and could not be clearer. The biblical God, and the Christ whom God sent to reveal Godself, is a God of love and justice and in real historical time stands preferentially on the side of the poor and oppressed to whom God and Christ are never indifferent. All who would be truly Christian and “perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48) have no option but preferentially to do the same in the face of a massive global indifference. This “ethical imperative” of Christian discipleship is central to the gospel and beyond debate (Francis 2015: 158).

The church, then, or the people of God in *Lumen Gentium*'s preferred term, is almost by definition a church of the poor. More so, Francis – both the saint and the pope – insist, it is a poor church. Since his election, Francis has consistently pointed out in both word and illuminating deed the scandal of indifference and debilitating poverty in a world of plenty and the obligation of those who have riches to share with, and create structures that insure access for, those who have not. “The right to have a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one’s family,” *Gaudium et Spes* teaches, “belongs to everyone,” and “all are obliged to come to the relief of the poor, and to do so not merely out of their superfluous goods” (Vatican II 1965: 69). Pope Francis echoes that declaration: “In the present condition of global society,” he writes, “where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters” (2015: 158). This statement is clearly rooted in the sacred scripture, the word of God.

Solidarity as Identification of God and Christ with the Poor: The Demands of Love and Justice

The central principles of CST – common good, solidarity, and a preferential option for the poor – are manifested and affirmed in the Bible as the identification between God, God’s Christ, and God’s least. This identification serves as a theological foundation for CST and for confronting the globalization of indifference. The God of Jews and Christians is a God of actions, a God who speaks and acts efficaciously, a God whose word is also happening, a God who is not indifferent. Every confession of belief in God is rooted in historical happenings. The most radical of these events for Jews was the great Exodus from Egypt, comprising their experience of slavery in Egypt, their liberation from Egypt under Moses, their wandering in the desert, and their settlement in the land where “milk and honey flow” (Deuteronomy 26:9). The response of biblical faith to God’s saving action is the observance in real time of God’s commandments. When we ask in what actions is belief in God concretized, the Old Testament leaves us in no doubt.

Yahweh, the God of Israel, intervenes in history in signs and wonders to reveal not only God's power, but also that God's power is in defense of the defenseless poor and oppressed. Yahweh is "father of the fatherless and protector of widows . . . God gives the desolate a home to dwell in; God leads out the prisoners to prosperity; but the rebellious dwell in a parched land" (Psalms 68:5-6). To know this God is not, as in Greece, to know *that* God is and *what* God is; it is to love God and act like God. In Gustavo Gutierrez's accurate judgment, "to know God as liberator is to liberate, is to do justice" (8), always remembering how Yahweh intervened in Egypt to achieve liberation for Israelite slaves. That memory and the actions in history it demands return again and again. Deuteronomy prescribes:

You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this. When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, the widow; that the LORD your God may bless you in all the works of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterwards; it shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore, I command you to do this (Deuteronomy 24:18-22).

God's paradigmatic action in the New Testament was raising Jesus from the dead and revealing his righteousness, which would later advance as a relationship of identification between God and "the least of these my brethren" (Matthew 25:40). This relationship was embedded in Jesus's Jewish tradition as an identification between God and the poor. The prophets consistently linked these two and proclaimed that to truly know and love God demands action against the injustice and oppression perpetrated against God's poor. Jeremiah, for instance, proclaimed this prophetic message.

Hear the word of the LORD all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the LORD. Thus says the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel. Amend your ways and your doings and I will let you dwell in this place. . . . For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless, the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever (Jeremiah 7:2-7).

Knowledge and love of God is proved in practice by action on behalf of justice for the underside, Francis's "excluded," the poor and the oppressed. The book of Proverbs offers an axiomatic statement about this identification: "He who mocks the poor insults his creator" (Proverbs 17:5). Francis insists that, with respect to this identification,

We incarnate the duty of hearing the cry of the poor when we are deeply moved by the suffering of others. Let us listen to what God's word teaches us about mercy, and allow that word to resound in the life of the Church. . . . The apostle James teaches that our mercy to others will vindicate us on the day of God's judgment: "So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the

law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy, yet mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:12-13) (2013a: 193).

Isaiah’s messianic formulation of the intimate connection between God and justice for the underside or excluded leads us into the New Testament, for Jesus chooses it for commentary in his home synagogue of Nazareth.

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Sion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit, that they may be called oaks of righteousness . . . for I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrong. I will faithfully give them their recompense and I will make an everlasting covenant with them (Isaiah 61:1-8).

This predilection for the poor and the oppressed, Isaiah prophetically proclaims, will be characteristic of the coming Messiah, the ultimately righteous one of Israel. That the Messiah has come in Jesus is proclaimed in Jesus’s commentary on the text: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21).

The confession of the followers of Jesus was and is that he is the promised Messiah, in Greek the Christ (Mark 1:1; Matthew 1:1), the one anointed by God “to bring good tidings to the afflicted.” The gospels symbolize his messianic anointing in the passage that narrates his baptism by John the Baptizer, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him, and his designation as “beloved son” (Mark 1:9-11; Matthew 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-22). Immediately following his anointing Jesus proclaims the advent of the kingdom or reign of God (Mark 1:15), the nature of which is the full import of Luke’s use of the Isaiah text cited above: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”: the reign of God is a reign of justice in favor of the poor, the underside, the excluded. Jesus’s proclamation of this reign, not only in words but more importantly in actions, is precisely what led him, first, to his death on the cross and, then, to his resurrection by God (1 Corinthians 15:4; Romans 6:4 and 8:4; Colossians 2:12; Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15). For the entire body of his disciples, dispirited by his death, and not just for the two on the road to Emmaus, “their eyes were opened” (Luke 24:31) by his resurrection, in which God verified that both the words and actions of Jesus were right with God and he was, indeed, the “holy and righteous one” (Acts 2:14).

The eyes of Jesus’s followers were so well and truly opened by his resurrection that, ultimately, they confessed not only that he was the Christ, the anointed and righteous one sent by God, but also that he was God in human form, God pitching his tent among God’s people (John 1:14). The universal biblical identification between God and the poor reaches an unsurpassable personification and high point in Jesus who, in Gutierrez’ powerful phrase, is “God become poor” (13). It is in his life on behalf of his poor, excluded sisters and brothers that Jesus is finally recognized as God’s beloved Son. Jesus’s life penetrates and transforms indifference. It is in their lives on behalf of his poor, excluded sisters and brothers that Christians too will be recognized as God’s daughters and sons, for Jesus “clearly taught the

sons of God to treat one another as brothers” and sisters (Vatican II 1965: 32). “God’s word teaches that our brothers and sisters are the prolongation of the incarnation for each of us: ‘As you did it to one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it to me’” (Francis 2013a: 179; quotation from Matthew 25:40).

Like any good Jew of his time Jesus continued to uphold the identification between God and the poor and to insist that to know and love God is to act against injustice perpetrated against the poor. Matthew makes his position clearest in his Sermon on the Mount: “Not everyone who *says* to me ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven but the one who *does* the will of my Father who is in heaven” (7:21, emphasis added). The disciples who responded to Jesus’s invitation to “follow me” (Mark 1:17; Matthew 4:18), which includes every person today who claims to be a Christian, upheld the same identification and insisted that it is to be lived not in words but in action. Again, Matthew makes it clearest in his powerful last judgment scene.

Then he will say to those at his left hand “depart from me you cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” Then they also will answer, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not minister to you?” Then he will answer them, “Truly I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me” (Matthew 25:41-45).

Matthew’s final comment is a chilling woe for those who, both then and now, do not recognize the identification between God and the underside and excluded, and a blessing for those who do: “they will go into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (25:46). The righteousness God and God’s Christ demand of their followers is not easy, for “although he was made by God in a state of holiness, from the very dawn of history man abused his liberty at the urging of personified evil. . . . Therefore, man is split within himself. As a result, all of human life, whether individual or collective, shows itself to be a dramatic struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness” (Vatican II 1965: 13). It is the great mystery of sin; sin that leads to indifference both communally and individually. Christians, however, share in the promise of their Christ who is “the true light that enlightens every man coming into the world” and gives them “power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:9-12).

James, as radical as Jesus and Matthew, has his own formulation of the identification between God and the poor.

What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them “Go in peace, be warmed and filled” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead (James 2:14-17).

Gaudium et Spes also has its own formulation of this sentiment: “Feed the man dying of hunger, because if you have not fed him you have killed him” (Vatican II 1965: 69). Pope Francis

draws from these passages and from the Wisdom literature, which “sees almsgiving as a concrete exercise of mercy towards those in need: ‘Almsgiving delivers from death, and it will purge away every sin’ (Tobit 12:9)” (2013a: 193). Martin Luther sparked a long and false debate between Lutherans and Catholics about the respective values of faith and good works, as if Lutherans valued *only* faith and Catholics valued *only* good works. That debate has now been formally laid to rest by the agreement between Lutherans and Catholics in their *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. The theological reality is that Luther and the theologians who followed him never doubted that faith is proved in action, in other words that faith must work; and the Catholic Church never doubted that faith concretized in works is necessary for salvation. Francis summarizes the tradition eloquently: the biblical exhortations “summon us so forcefully to brotherly [and sisterly] love, to humble and generous service, to justice and mercy towards the poor” (2013a: 194).

Christ, Service, and Communion

There is another Christian pattern highlighted throughout the New Testament, which is intimately related to the universal identification between God, God’s Christ, and God’s least. That pattern is service to others, especially to the poor and the excluded, which Jesus exemplifies in his life and unceasingly strives to inculcate in his disciples. The synoptic Christ articulates the perspective unequivocally: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45; Matthew 20:28). Service is Christ’s way of relating to others; service of others is what he strives to inculcate in his disciples of every generation. He instructs them patiently that those who have authority over the Gentiles lord it over them. “But it shall not be so among you. Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be the slave of all” (Mark 10:42-44; Matthew 20:25-7). *Evangelii Gaudium*’s interpretation is that, moved by Jesus’s example, “we want to enter fully into the fabric of society, sharing the lives of all, listening to their concerns, helping them materially and spiritually in their needs, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep; arm in arm with others, we are committed to building a new world” (Francis 2013a: 269). How far modern Christians are from being this kind of Christian is summed up in a statement from *Gaudium et Spes*, as relevant today as it was in 1965: “If the demands of justice and equity are to be satisfied, vigorous efforts must be made . . . to remove as quickly as possible the immense inequalities which now exist” (Vatican II 1965: 66). Those immense inequalities are starkly highlighted by the fact that “while an enormous mass of people still lack the absolute necessities of life, some, even in less advanced countries, live sumptuously or squander wealth. Luxury and misery rub shoulders” (Vatican II 1965: 63). It would appear that contemporary Christians have not understood or, perhaps, have chosen to ignore Jesus’s clear teaching.

John’s paschal supper narrative highlights the Christian emphasis on service, an emphasis that has been somewhat obscured liturgically by the Catholic emphasis on the transformation of bread and wine in the eucharistic supper. The narrative describes Jesus’s washing his disciples’ feet, a prophetic action that reveals Jesus’s will to be remembered as servant and challenges those who remember him at the supper to be and do the same. Lest this point be missed (as it has been regularly missed in Christian history), John’s Jesus underlines the challenge in his final testament. “I have given you an example that you also should do as I

have done to you” (John 13:15). Jesus, he of right action and righteousness, who lived a life of neighbor-love (Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:31) in service to others, challenged his disciples, then and now, to do the same. Xavier Léon-Dufour interprets his foot washing as symbolically integral to Jesus’s paschal meal, to the Christian Eucharist that derives from it, and to the character of both as memorial meals (82-95). We are arguing here that it is integral, too, to the way Christians, committed to the identification between God and the poor underside, are to live their lives in real time after celebrating Eucharist together in memory of the Christ. Included in that memory are Jesus’s death and his transformation in resurrection. “Christ has risen, destroying death by His death. He has lavished life upon us, so that, as sons in the Son, we can cry out in the Spirit: Abba, Father” (Vatican II 1965: 22; see Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). Christians are called, in preparation for their final resurrection-transformation, to transform the lives of their sisters and brothers of the poor underside through acts of justice and charity.

Pope John Paul II, in his important letter on the lay faithful, teaches that “communion is the very mystery of the Church” (1988: 18). The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s commentary on that text further teaches that “the concept of communion lies ‘at the heart of the Church’s self-understanding’” (1992: 3). These opinions echo the judgment of the 1985 Roman Synod and of the secretary of Vatican II’s Central Theological Commission that its vision of Catholic Church as communion was the council’s most important teaching. The Catholic Church *is* a communion; communion describes its very essence.

One of the salient features of the modern world is the growing interdependence of men one on the other, a development very largely promoted by modern technical advances. Nevertheless, brotherly dialogue among men does not reach its perfection on the level of technical progress, but on the deeper level of interpersonal relationships. These demand a mutual respect for the full spiritual dignity of the person. Christian revelation contributes greatly to the promotion of this communion between persons (Vatican II 1965: 23).

That communion is intended to be among all men and women but, certainly especially, among all Christians in the Catholic Church.

Communion is a common word in the Catholic tradition but, in the recent tradition, it has not been used to describe the Catholic Church. Rather, it has been used as an expression for receiving the body of Christ in Eucharist. The two uses of the term, however, are connected, and Paul was the first to enunciate their connection. “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). The Second Vatican Council echoed this teaching. “Truly partaking of the Body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with Him and with one another” (Vatican II 1964: 7). That statement is important for the identification-communion between God and the excluded underside and between all Christians in the Catholic Church, as well as for the argument of this essay.

Participation in Eucharist leads to communion not only with God in Christ but also with the body of believers, the Church. That relationship is already evident in the earliest Jerusalem church, which devoted itself to “the apostles’ teaching and *koinonia* [communion]” (Acts 2:42)

and “had everything in common [*panta koina*]” (Acts 4:32). Paul makes clear that communion is not just between the members of a local altar community but reaches out to embrace all the churches, telling us in his original Greek that the poor churches in Macedonia and Achaia “have been pleased to make *koinonian*” for the church at Jerusalem (Romans 15:26; see 2 Corinthians 8:4) and praising “the generosity of your *koinonias*” (2 Corinthians 9:13). Such genuine communion among disciples sharing the eucharistic meal, Paul argues, is a necessary precondition for genuinely celebrating the Lord’s Supper. When there is no such communion between believers, as there was not at Corinth, neither is there communion with the Christ whom they *say* they confess as Lord. In such circumstance, Paul judges, “it is not the Lord’s Supper that you eat” (1 Corinthians 11:20). That judgment ought not to come as a surprise given the final Judge’s declaration that “as you did it not to one of the least of these you did it not to me” (Matthew 25:45). When there is no communion with the least in the body of believers, neither is there communion with Christ and Christ’s God. Leaning on this notion of communion, *Gaudium et Spes* teaches that in our contemporary world “it grows increasingly true that the obligations of justice and love are fulfilled only if each person,” contributes to the common good, “according to his own abilities and the needs of others” (Vatican II 1965: 30). Liberation theologians have articulated the most detailed connection between ritual Eucharist, Catholic Church communion, and communion Christian life. What came to be known as liberation theology was spawned in the barrios of South America on behalf of the multitudinous poor in its various countries. Liberation theologians correctly interpreted the biblical data we have considered as a preferential option for the poor, and enunciated this option first as a theological doctrine which later was verified as a doctrine of the South American Catholic Churches. It is not a surprise that an Argentinian Pope Francis would manifest this doctrine in his papal actions and words. As noted above, the doctrine of the preferential option for the poor came to preeminence as a result of two conferences of Latin American bishops, the first at Medellín in Colombia in 1968, the second at Puebla in Mexico in 1979. Medellín adumbrated the phrase “preferential option for the poor”; Puebla explicitly adopted it. Among the signs of authentic Christianity, the bishops taught, are “preferential love and concern for the poor”; they pledged themselves “to make clear through our lives and attitudes that our preference is to evangelize and serve the poor”; they also taught that a “preferential option for the poor represents the most noticeable tendency of religious life in Latin America” (Latin American Episcopate: 382, 707, 733; see Eagleson and Scharper). Medellín and Puebla, we should note, came shortly after the Second Vatican Council and *Gaudium et Spes* was an acknowledged influence on them. Questions are being asked today about the words and novel actions of Pope Francis with respect to a Catholic Church of the poor and a poor Catholic Church. The answers lie openly for those with eyes to see in the Old Testament prophets, in the New Testament prophet, Jesus, in *Gaudium et Spes*, in Medellín, and Puebla.

An Asian liberation theologian, Tissa Balasuriya, writes of Eucharist that it is “spiritual food in so far as it leads to love, unity, and communion among persons and groups. Today this requires love among persons and *effective* action for justice. The Eucharist must also lead us to a response to the suffering of the masses, *often caused by people who take a prominent part in the Eucharist*. Unless there is this twofold dimension of personal love and societal action, the eucharist can be a sacrilege” (22; emphasis added). The phrase we have underscored, and

which is demonstrable throughout the Christian world beyond debate, illustrated the Second Vatican Council's confession that the Church is a Church of sinners in her membership and is, therefore, "at the same time holy and always in need of being purified" and renewed in its commitment to the Christ and to the God he reveals (Vatican II 1964: 8). It is a sad commentary on the Church that several liberation theologians so dedicated to the poor and excluded were condemned for teachings contrary to Church doctrine, though their condemnations were later lifted thanks to the influence of Pope John Paul II. Pope Francis speaks out of the biblical tradition, the best of the Catholic Church tradition, and *Gaudium et Spes* when he teaches that "alleviating the grave evil of poverty must be at the very heart of the Church's mission. It is neither optional nor secondary" (McElroy: 13).

The inseparable connection between participation in Christian sacrament and Christian life in real time is a firm and ancient theological position in the Church. Already in the third century, Cyprian of Carthage argued that putting on Christ in baptism is meaningless unless it is followed by a Christ-like life: "To put on the name of Christ and not continue along the way of Christ, what is that but a lie?" (*De Zelo et Livore* 12, PL 4, 646). If we have put him on, "we ought to go forward according to the example of Christ" (*De Bono Patientiae* 9, PL 4, 628). In the twentieth century John Paul II agreed: initiation into communion in the Catholic Church is initiation into the mission of the Catholic Church. "Communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion" (1988: 32). The communion that is the mission of the Catholic Church, we have already argued, is twofold: it is the communion of believers with one another and the communion of believers with Christ and Christ's God. Those two communions are dependent on one another, and they are celebrated, proclaimed, and made real in Eucharist and are intended to be lived outside Eucharist in real-time Christian lives. It is not difficult to see how this sharing in the Catholic Church, the body of Christ, shares also in the ancient identification between God and God's least, the easily ignored poor and excluded.

Jesus and Family

There is another gospel tradition related to the question of Catholic social thought, a recurring, disturbing, and, therefore, usually ignored tradition about Jesus's attitude to the family life of his day. Mark reports that Jesus was preaching and healing and that his family, concerned about his conduct which impinged on their honor, came "to restrain him." When told "your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you," Jesus responded with a question: "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" The contemporary American answer is clear: his biological mother and brothers, waiting outside, seeking to restrain activity for the sake of family honor, are his mother and his brothers. That, however, is not the answer Jesus gives. His answer is more expansive and other-embracing than the biological answer. Looking around at those in the circle around him, he declared: "Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of God is my brother, my sister, and my mother" (Mark 3:31-33).

"As the first-born of many brethren and through the gift of His Spirit, [Jesus] founded after his death and resurrection a new brotherly community composed of all those who receive Him in faith and in love. This He did through His Body, which is the Church. Thus everyone, as members one of the other, would render mutual service according to the different gifts bestowed on each" (Vatican II 1965: 32). The followers of Jesus are like one big family, but

there is a caveat to be heeded. The extended biological or blood family was the source of honor and status in first-century Mediterranean society. It was also “the primary economic, religious, educational, and social network” (Malina and Rohrbaugh: 202). To sever connection to that family was to lose connection to everything that was social and, in that corporate culture, personal. Yet Jesus suggests a move away from that family to another, surrogate family in which kin is created not by blood but by belief in and loyalty to the God preached by Jesus. The true holy family, he suggests, is not his biological family but the surrogate, fictive-kin family composed of believers loyal to God. This is made clearer in a Lucan parallel in which, in response to a woman who proclaims his mother blessed Jesus declares “blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:27-28). The “blessed” language here is honor language. The woman proclaims the traditional honor due to the mother of an honorable son; Jesus responds that for him and his followers true honor derives not from fidelity to one’s blood kin but from fidelity to God and God’s word.

Earlier in his gospel, Luke highlighted the issue of breaking with one’s biological kin group (Luke 9:57-62). He taught that the followers of Jesus would lead a deviant lifestyle to the extent that they might live away from their family home (57-58). He recorded that Jesus rejected a family obligation of the highest order, “leave the dead to bury their dead” (62). “There can be no doubt about the radical quality of the break that following Jesus requires nor about Luke’s understanding of its cost” (Malina and Rohrbaugh: 202). A fictive-kin family of brothers and sisters in Christ is not to eliminate the blood-kin family but to transcend it and embrace a larger, more universal family. The cost of such a move is high and is underscored later in the gospel. “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and his mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, even his own life, he cannot be a disciple of mine” (Luke 14:26).

Jesus does not demand such a socially suicidal sacrifice without offering some reassurance. Peter asks about the reward to be expected from such countercultural behavior. “We here have left our belongings to become your followers.” The implication is clear. Look what we have done for you; what will you do for us? Jesus replies that they will receive “manifold more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life” (Luke 18:28-30). There is little good news here for the blood family. A forlorn mother in Gerd Theissen’s fictional-scholarly account of Jesus’s life puts the attitude of parents bluntly. “He corrupts the young people. It all sounds fine; blessed are you who weep for you will laugh. But what does he actually do? He makes parents weep over lost sons. He promises everything will change. But what actually changes? Families are destroyed because children run away from their parents” (71). The bad news here for blood families is balanced by the good news or gospel that blood families are to be transcended to create a larger fictive-kin family that embraces all not included in the biological family: the poor, the “lepers” of whatever color or sexual orientation, the sinners who dishonor the family, many of whom, to repeat, “take a prominent part in the Eucharist,” indeed all who “hear the word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:28). That word of God, remember, in that society in which Jesus lived and preached, included the identification between God and the poor underside. Nothing has changed for Christians today.

Jesus appears to be teaching clearly in these passages that God and grace are embedded not in a particular family structure, whether it be ancient Israelite or contemporary American, but in the following of Jesus. “Follow me,” he invites (Mark 1:17), join my fictive-kin family

and be blessed not by belonging to this or that honorable family but by hearing the word of God and keeping it. Many today, called baptized nonbelievers, appear to equate being a disciple of Christ simply with being ritually born into this church-family in baptism, with little attention being paid either to the word of God or the following of Jesus. That equation, *Gaudium et Spes* teaches, is seriously misconstrued.

This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age. Long since, the prophets of the Old Testament fought vehemently against this scandal [see Isaiah 58:1-12] and even more so did Jesus Christ Himself in the New Testament threaten it with grave punishments [see Mark 7:10-13; Matthew 23:3-23] (Vatican II: 1965: 43).

The Catholic Church that is the people of God and the body of Christ can heal this scandal and the disunity among Christ's followers, "for the promotion of unity belongs to the innermost nature of the Church, since she is, 'by her relationship with Christ, both a sacramental sign and an instrument of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind'" (Vatican II 1964: 1; 1965: 42). This is one more place where *Gaudium et Spes* assumes the new ecclesiology advanced by *Lumen Gentium*.

The Family of God

Israelite self-understanding was rooted in their covenant with God. To covenant is to consent and promise that both parties, equal or unequal in other respects, are equally committed to one another solemnly and radically. It is thus that God and Israel commit themselves to one another in covenant. When the Egyptian slaves reached Sinai, God instructed Moses what to say to the people: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself. Now, therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples." All the people answered together and said: "All that the LORD has spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:4-8). This foundational covenant, which solemnly ratifies the identification between God and the poor slaves from Egypt and establishes them as "a people [a family] holy to the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2), is neither forgotten nor abandoned by the followers of Jesus. It is, rather, transformed to be rooted in Jesus. *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican II 1965) invites all Christians to commit to that same covenant, people, and extended family.

There are no covenants as there are no contracts without stipulations, and the Jewish and Christian covenants with God are no different. There are endless stipulations, but they all spring from the same root, the two commandments on which "depend all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40). These commandments are clear in Jewish Torah. The first embraces relationship with the covenant God: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:4). The second embraces relationship with the covenanted people of God, brothers and sisters in God's family: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). When tested about the greatest commandment, Jesus, righteous Jew that he was, has no hesitation in citing these Torah commandments (Mark 12:28-34; Matthew 22:34-40; Luke 10:25-28) and making them stipulations also for those who would covenant in his family-communion. His statement in Luke tells all: "Do this and you shall live" (25:28). *Gaudium et Spes* stands firmly in this ancient

biblical tradition. “Love for God and neighbor is the first and greatest commandment. Sacred Scripture, however, teaches us that the love of God cannot be separated from love of neighbor” (Vatican II 1965: 24). Good news, indeed, for the poor underside.

There is a caveat to be heeded here. In its contemporary American usage love almost always means romantic love, a strong, passionate *feeling* for another person. That is not what New Testament *agape*-love, neighbor-love means, at least not exclusively. *Agape* is more radical than feeling-love which is frequently about oneself; *agape* is love that *wills* and *does* the good of another for the other’s sake. That is the love the Bible commands for Christians: willing and active love, compassionate and forgiving love, persevering and steadfast love. The Bible may not have much to tell us about contemporary family structures, but it has a great deal to tell us about relational *processes* that make it possible for two or four or one thousand people to live together in extended family, peace, and communion. The recipe it offers sounds a lot like the famous Beatles song, “All You Need is Love.” The caveat is that biblical, Christian love evinces a preferential option for the poor and voiceless excluded. John Wesley puts the point beyond debate. Since the love of God is universal and unrestricted, so also is Christian neighbor love universal and unrestricted (184). Christians are to love, not only their spouses, not only their families, not only their neighbors, but all people, especially those who are not always easy to love: the least, the poor, enemies, the excluded underside. It may not be possible to feel love for them, but Christians, like Christ, can will good and do good to them.

Pope John Paul II put this same argument in his usual personalist terms, stressing *interdependence* among the hierarchy of values and teaching that, when interdependence is appreciated, the “correlative as a moral and social . . . ‘virtue’ is *solidarity*.” This solidarity “is not a vague feeling of compassion or shallow distress at the misfortune of so many people . . . [but] a *firm and persevering determination* to commit oneself to the common good – to the good of all and of each individual because we are *all* really responsible for *all*” (1987: 38; emphases in original). Following a well-marked magisterial trail of recent decades, he later underscored this solidarity as “a love of preference for the poor” (1987: 42) and proposed as a motto for our time *opus solidaritatis pax*, “peace as the fruit of solidarity” (1987: 39). It is not without relevance to the present discussion that peace and communion are regularly linked and even used synonymously.

The Catholic Church, the fictive-kin family of sisters and brothers in Christ, Pope Paul VI taught, “has an authentic secular dimension, inherent in her inner nature and mission, which is deeply rooted in the mystery of the Word incarnate and realized in different forms in her members” (208). The Christian doctrine of the incarnation of God in Jesus constructs a bridge over the gulf between God and humans. The Christian church, founded and rooted in Jesus, enlivened by his Spirit, and charged to continue his mission, ministers to maintain that bridge. It, therefore, must also be incarnate everywhere in human life. That theological doctrine explains why Pope John Paul II teaches that the lay faithful are possessed of a “secular character,” and why he insists that character is to be understood in a theological and not just a sociological sense. The world, John Paul means, is both the place and the means in and with which lay Christians fulfill their Christian vocation. God, he explains explicitly, “has handed the world over to women and men so that they participate in the work of creation, free creation from the influence of sin, and sanctify themselves” in the various activities of society (1988: 15). Christians are to sanctify themselves by immersion in their community. They are to

“imbue and perfect . . . [it] with the spirit of the gospel” (Coriden, et al.: 225, 2), a fundamental part of which is the identification it proclaims between God and the least poor underside. Pope Francis provides two metaphors for the intimacy of the connection between the Church’s ministers, lay and clerical, and the world. Ministers must be so embodied in the world that they get their shoes “soiled by the mud of the street” (2016a: 308) and start to give off “the smell of the sheep” (2013a: 24).

Christians are called, we have argued, to fashion their lives in the world after the life of Jesus. They are called to be his faithful followers, to incarnate him in their everyday places, and thereby bring the gospel of neighbor-love, reconciliation, compassion, forgiveness, justice, and salvation in Christ directly to the world. It is precisely because that is their calling as Christians that four great fourth-century bishops and fathers of the church, two in the East and two in the West, could argue as they argued. Basil, the fourth-century bishop of Caesarea, wrote to the rich of his day:

Who is avaricious? One who is not content with those things which are sufficient. Who is a robber? One who takes the goods of another. Are you not avaricious? Are you not a robber? You who make your own the things you have received to distribute . . . that bread which you keep belongs to the hungry; that coat which you preserve in your wardrobe to the naked; those shoes which are rotting in your possession to the shoeless; that gold which you have hidden in the ground to the needy. Wherefore, as often as you were able to help others and refused, so often did you do them wrong (*Hom in Illud Lucae*, 1, PG 31, 275-78).

John Chrysostom, fourth-century patriarch of Constantinople, offers a similar argument (*De Virginitate*, 68, PG 48, 584-85). In the West, Ambrose of Milan argues in the same vein. “Not from your own do you bestow upon the poor man, but you make return from what is his. What has been given in common for the use of all you appropriate to yourself alone. The earth belongs to all, not to the rich. . . . You are, therefore, paying a debt, not bestowing what is not due” (*De Nabuthe Jezraelita*, 1, 53, PL 14, 747). The great Augustine of Hippo offers an almost identical argument (*Sermo L*, 1, PL 38, 326). Though all these ancient bishops were consummate rhetoricians, these texts cannot be interpreted as mere rhetoric. Their consonance with the words of Jesus the Christ, already considered, make them authentic Christian interpretation.

Conclusion

Pope Francis notes, “Indifference and lack of commitment constitute a grave dereliction of the duty whereby each of us must work in accordance with our abilities and our role in society for the promotion of the common good, and in particular for peace, which is one of [hu]mankind’s most precious goods” (2016b: 4). Pope John Paul II draws attention to a temptation that Christians “have not always known how to avoid,” the temptation to separate “the gospel’s acceptance from the actual living of the gospel in various situations in the world” (1988: 2). What the pope implies is that, to be responsive and faithful to their vocation to follow Jesus, Christians need to reach out in active love to all the women and men around them, always and preferentially the poor and excluded. This essay underscores that the demand to do so does not come from fourth-century Basil and Ambrose, nor from thirteenth-century

Aquinas, nor from nineteenth-century Leo XIII, nor from twentieth-century John Paul II, all of whom do no more than interpret ancient demands for the situations of their time and place. No, the demand comes from the founding Jewish and Christian tradition that establishes an identification between God and God's least, the underside poor and excluded. Pope Francis emphasizes the point. "How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion [and indifference]. . . . those excluded are no longer society's underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised – they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the 'exploited' but the outcast, the 'leftovers'" (2013a: 53). God is not indifferent and we find the moral imperative in scripture, CST, and the virtue of solidarity, to make God's and Jesus's identification with the least our example and to confront the globalization of indifference.

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