



RELIGION AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

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EDITOR'S COLUMN

Religious Engagement in the Covid-19 Pandemic

Anthony Le Duc, SVD

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented a particularly urgent need for religions to take an active role in addressing the crisis. Although the pandemic is a time in which religious institutions are as much victims of the crisis as they are agents of addressing the problem, the conditions of the pandemic oftentimes disrupt the ability of religious leaders to engage with their followers and to communicate with one another. When we speak of religious engagement, we are really speaking of three fronts: (1) within the tradition; (2) with secular institutions; and (3) with other religious traditions. Within each individual set of engagement, there are specific issues to focus on. Here, I would like to focus on three matters that religious engagement can help address when it comes the coronavirus pandemic or other similar dilemmas: (1) communicating an interreligious message to religious adherents within and across traditions; (2) communicating truthful, scientifically sound information to the public; and (3) communicating examples of proper behavior to the people.

(1) Communicating an interreligious message

For people of religion, many questions arise during times of personal, communal and global catastrophes and calamities. The specific questions will differ depending on one's religious background. However, the common questions may include: Is this happening because of my sins? Is God punishing the world for its wayward ways? How can God let this kind of suffering take place in the world? What is God telling us with these events happening?

Where is God in all of this? Is this a sign of the apocalypse? Are the gods angry about something? Is this the manifestation of personal and collective karma that humanity must pay for?

One of the primary tasks of religion is to present authoritative and orthodox theology and spiritual principles that can help the faithful make sense of the events taking place in their lives and in the world. This sense-making function is an ongoing responsibility of religion because human life is filled with constant happenings, big and small, one after the other, all of which can bring joy and hope, or fear, bewilderment, panic and despair. The need to understand or have a grasp of the meaning of phenomenal events in human life and to find a way out of despair and suffering is fundamental to the religious quest.

In the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a need for religious leaders to communicate theological and spiritual wisdom to their communities because there exists not only an “infodemic” regarding the scientific aspects of the pandemic, but also religiously inspired ideas that are not helpful towards understanding and solving the crisis. Ideas that the Covid-19 pandemic would bring to realization apocalyptic predictions in the Bible’s Book of Revelation can cause feelings of panic and despair among those who believe. Religiously inspired thinking that drives people to drink cow urine and lick a religious shrine to prevent infection can instigate disdain and mockery from those who look for opportunities to belittle religious people as ignorant and superstitious. Religious sentiments that the pandemic is God’s punishment on a particular society or culture can fan the flames of social and religious division. In the face of situations that present risk of extreme thinking and behavior, religious leaders can instill sensibility and hope in their constituents with sound theological and spiritual explanations to make sense of the events in order to maintain spiritual and emotional balance.

Religious leaders of various traditions in one way or another

has been addressing these issues for their adherents. In Pope Francis' livestreamed Masses, he related the scripture readings to the events in human life, and tried to keep the faithful grounded in the Christian virtues of faith, love and hope. In the *Angelus* prayer on 15 March 2020, Pope Francis also reminded all those people listening to him through communications media to remain steadfastly united to Christ. Pope Francis told the faithful, "In this situation of pandemic, in which we find ourselves living more or less isolated, we are invited to rediscover and deepen the value of communion that unites all the members of the Church. United to Christ we are never alone, but we form one sole Body, of which He is the Head."¹

Like Pope Francis, the Dalai Lama continues to send out tweets on a regular basis during this time. On 30 March 2020, His Holiness linked to his Twitter account a statement published on his website regarding the crisis. In it, the religious leader urged his followers, "If there is something to be done—do it, without any need to worry; if there's nothing to be done, worrying about it further will not help."² In another statement published on 14 April 2020, the Dalai Lama succinctly put the pandemic into a wider perspective, encouraging his followers to see beyond present hardships and obstacles. He wrote, "As a Buddhist, I believe in the principle of impermanence. Eventually, this virus will pass, as I have seen wars and other terrible threats pass in my lifetime, and we will have the opportunity to rebuild our global community as we have done many times before."

Besides speaking to adherents within one's tradition, global calamities like the pandemic also need interreligious messaging that is consistent and widely accessed. The present world is a diverse global

¹ Pope Francis, *Strong in the Face of Tribulation: A Sure Support in Time of Trial* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020), 99.

² Dalai Lama, "A special message from His Holiness the Dalai Lama," (30 March 2020), <https://www.dalailama.com/news/2020/a-special-message-from-his-holiness-the-dalai-lama>

community in which people tend to live among or near people of other faith traditions. Interreligious dialogue among religious leaders can help shape a more pluralistic message that transcends ethnic and sectarian boundaries. Interreligious messaging strategies can help to reduce the tendency to scapegoat people from other religions and ethnicities and promote social, cultural and religious harmony in times of crisis.

The Dalai Lama is an excellent example of someone who conscientiously engages in interreligious messaging that can appeal to a plurality of people. For example, on 10 August 2020, he tweeted:

As soon as I wake up in the morning, I remind myself that nothing exists as it appears. Then I think about sentient beings who want happiness, but experience suffering. I generate compassion for them, determined to help them as much as I can to eliminate their negative emotions.³

Indeed, the pandemic, in light of the long and broad history and future of humankind in particular, and sentient beings in general, represents an episode in which human beings are presented with opportunities to demonstrate compassion to others. In reality, these opportunities exist with or without the pandemic.

(2) *Communicating truthful, scientifically sound information to the public*

Despite increasing secularization around the world, religion still holds a position of authority, not only in religious and spiritual matters, but also other spheres of life. Because religion is viewed by their adherents as having the best interests of the people in mind, voices from leaders of religion are often heeded over those of political and social leaders, sometimes even scientists. Thus, religious leaders

³ Dalai Lama, <https://twitter.com/DalaiLama/status/1292755129410625538>.

have long been involved in areas beyond the religious domain such as social and economic development, peace and justice work, and environmental conservation.

In reality, wise and capable religious leaders realize that while they have the trust and the loyalty of their adherents, they need to collaborate with experts who have the necessary knowledge in order to present sound scientific information and to help shape effective community policies and actions. This was clearly demonstrated in the Catholic encyclical *Laudato Si* of Pope Francis, in which the first chapter of the document discussed the issue of ecological degradation solidly based on modern scientific consensus regarding the crisis.

Thus, in enlisting the cooperation of religious leaders in the Covid-19 pandemic, both the WHO and UN Secretary General demonstrated that they appreciated the degree of influence that religious leaders exert on their communities not only in matters of faith but also in areas pertaining to the secular sphere. Oftentimes, through the outreach work of the religious community, the larger community is also positively impacted. In its document addressing religious leaders, the WHO affirms that “religious leaders are a critical link in the safety net for vulnerable people within their faith community and wider communities.”⁴ Therefore, in the effort to present the public with accurate information,

Faith leaders also have a special responsibility to counter and address misinformation, misleading teachings, and rumors, which can spread rapidly and cause great damage. Sermons and messages can build on factual information provided by WHO and national or local public health

⁴ WHO, “Practical considerations and recommendations for religious leaders and faith-based communities in the context of COVID-19,” <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/practical-considerations-and-recommendations-for-religious-leaders-and-faith-based-communities-in-the-context-of-covid-19>

authorities and is in line with doctrine/teaching and practice of their respective faith traditions. Religious leaders can access guidance in formats and lay language that their members can understand.⁵

UN Secretary General António Guterres, in addition to asking religious leaders to help fight against misinformation and disinformation, also called on them to “encourage all communities to promote non-violence and reject xenophobia, racism and all forms of intolerance.”⁶

Thus, the need for religions to collaborate with local and international political, social and scientific institutions in order to communicate credible information to adherents is extremely important to addressing the issues surrounding any dilemma facing humanity. By doing so, religion not only helps to impart accurate information to the public, but also galvanize and encourage public participation in actions beneficial to self and the community. In an August 2020 YouTube post, Mufti Ismail Menk plainly spoke to his audience:

No one passes away except by the decree of Allah. That we know. At the same time, we’re taught to be very, very careful. We’re taught to take precautions. We’re taught to be responsible, and we should be....Take it seriously! Taking it seriously does not negate your faith in Allah... You take precautions then you rely on Allah. You can’t just say, ‘I rely on Allah’ and then do as you please. That’s foolish. That’s ignorant. It’s the height of ignorance even if bearded men are telling that to you. It’s the height of ignorance to say, ‘Don’t do anything about it.’⁷

The kind of exhortation such as that expressed by Mufti Ismail Menk

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ UN Secretary General Remarks, 13 May 2020.

⁷ Mufti Ismail Menk, “He infected me with the virus! A new crisis,” YouTube (12 August 2020), <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=9nqhEUwfiL0>

has been a staple in the messaging effort of sensible religious leaders worldwide. When the pandemic broke out in 2020, at the iconic Hindu Neasden Temple in Britain, the head monk Yogvivekdas Swami broadcasted religious rituals every evening. After the religious part of the broadcast was finished, the monk took an additional 10 minutes to brief the online audience (6,000-10,000 people) on news and public health information. Having been a practicing doctor before joining monastic life, the monk could move easily between technical medical science, public health guidance and Hindu teachings. In one of his briefings conducted in Gujarati, the religious leader reminded the people that “now is not the time to be overly philosophical or to falsely apply scriptural ideas; now is the time to follow the guidance of the government, as indeed that is wish of our guru and God.”⁸

(3) *Communicating examples of proper behavior to the people*

During Vietnam’s first wave which took place in the months of March to May 2020, Catholic churches were closed down nationwide as part of a concerted effort by the Vietnamese government to push back the coronavirus. Masses went online and were broadcasted mostly through social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook. One noticed that in some of the online Masses, the celebrant, either a bishop or a priest, wore a mask even though he was not standing in close proximity to the few other people who were also present to perform their roles in the liturgy either as readers or servers. In some ways, it seemed odd and unnecessary to see the celebrant of a solemn religious rite covering half of his face with a piece of fabric since the celebrant did not seem to be in a position to be in danger of being infected by another person or himself infecting someone else. A number of people viewing this action online were curious as to why the Mass celebrant seemed to be overly cautious and discussions

⁸ Rebecca Irons, “God’s daily briefings: Religious leadership in a global pandemic,” *Medical Anthropology at UCL* (19 May 2020), https://medanthucl.com/2020/05/19/gods-daily-briefings-religious-leadership-in-a-global-pandemic/#_edn2

ensued on social media.

Based on the discussion on social media, many Vietnamese Catholics perceived the reason for wearing a mask by the bishop or priest while celebrating Mass was not necessarily due to any immediate danger of infection. Many viewed the mask wearing as reflecting the religious leader's intentional attempt to communicate and model proper behavior for Catholics in their daily life, knowing that some people might be careless or averse to wearing face coverings, especially when going to church. By wearing the mask during the liturgy, the religious leaders intentionally used this time to set an example for how to prevent the spread of the virus within the community. Indeed, having faith in God during a global health crisis is one thing, but taking proper preventative actions to protect self and others is quite another. As the bishops and priests who wore masks during the liturgy did not participate in or comment on these social media discussions, it is not certain what their true intentions were. However, what is evident is that many viewers interpreted their action positively as communicating and modeling proper behavior to the faithful, when it came to wearing masks.

Not only in Vietnam, in Thailand, religious leaders such as Buddhist monks have also been appearing with masks both online and offline during the pandemic. Whether leading a prayer session, giving a sermon, performing a ritual, or making their morning rounds around towns and villages collecting alms from Buddhist faithful, monks regularly appear in masks and even face shields. Online, one could even see photos of statues of the Buddha being covered with a face mask as well as drawings of monks and Buddhists wearing face masks as they engage with each other. These images help communicate to the people the "normalcy" of the practice of wearing masks and the necessity in taking recommended actions to prevent the spread of the virus. Indeed, the ease which religious leaders in Vietnam and Thailand deal with the issue of wearing masks, reflected in how they appear in public and even online,

contrast greatly with certain world political leaders on the very same issue. Most notorious are the presidents of two of the largest countries in the world—Donald Trump of the United States and Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil—who eschewed mask wearing even when they were appearing in public close to other people.

These actions by religious leaders communicate effectively what needs to be done by the people so that they can imitate. When religious leaders ignore public health recommendations, they send a message of non-cooperation to the people who look to them for examples. Thus, part of the engagement among religions and with secular institutions is for religious leaders and organizations to agree on various practical measures to take in order to address a particular issue. Scientific recommendations are effectively reinforced when they are implemented by religious leaders and organizations across traditions.

Recommendations

In order for religious engagement in the various forms to be effective, the following points should be given due attention:

(1) Consistent communication strategy

Religious followers should know what to expect from their religious leaders in terms of content and messaging as to be able to rely on them as a regular source of information. For example, the head monk Yogvivekdas Swami at the Neasden Temple consistently gave his daily “briefing” following his religious rituals, helping his viewers to recognize the value of tuning in to his broadcasts, not only for spiritual nourishment, but also for useful knowledge that they might otherwise not have access to. This was especially true for the Hindu community in Britain, in which many older members did not have a strong grasp of English, and thus depended on the monk who could speak their native language for regular updates.

(2) Staying abreast on various dimensions of the issue with accurate information

Religious leaders and organizations who do not carefully study contemporary issues and stay updated on the latest developments can easily become the source of misinformation and disinformation. This is even more dangerous considering the status of religious leaders within their respective communities. Unfortunately, from North America to Africa, many religious leaders have been found to be purveyors of misinformation both online and offline. In September 2020, Church authorities in the Archdiocese of Denver, Colorado of the United States launched an investigation of a priest, Fr. Daniel Noland, who appeared in a video on YouTube telling Catholics: “I encourage everybody not to wear a mask. And I am telling you: disobey your bishop, disobey your governor. That’s what I’m telling you.”⁹ For Nolan, wearing mask was “contrary to your health, contrary to reason, and contrary to the common good.” This kind of ignorant religious leadership is extremely detrimental to the well-being of humanity.

(3) Being active on social media and other internet platforms

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a time in which the role of the internet in our lives is indispensable. If secular and religious leaders do not resort to the internet in order to communicate with one another and with the public, their messaging ability would virtually be crippled. Social media is especially important as a platform for communication. However, the world of social media is an extremely busy, ever changing and competitive environment full of distractions. Religious leaders who occasionally go on

⁹ JD Flynn, “Church officials evaluating priest who told Catholics to ‘disobey’ bishop on mask wearing,” (2 September 2020), <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/denver-archdiocese-fssp-evaluating-priest-who-told-catholics-to-disobey-bishop-on-mask-wearing-59756>

social media to post a message or a video clip cannot expect a large viewership, unless they have a wide distribution network that can help accelerate the content's reach. Inactivity or sporadic activity online ultimately reduces visibility, reach and influence. Thus, digital literacy, wisdom and active utilization of information and communication technology is essential to engagement among religions and with the global public.

(4) Closing the digital divide

Despite the fact that ICT has permeated a significant portion of the world, there is still nearly 40 percent of the global population that do not have access to the internet. The digital divide also exists between gender and age groups. This reality results in a situation where certain part of the population are left out of essential knowledge propagated by political, social and religious institutions via internet platforms. Religions can play an active part in engaging with each other and with government institutions to close the digital divide in order to promote better access to important information for social and spiritual well-being.

Whether it is before, during, or after the coronavirus pandemic, religious engagement both *ad intra* and *ad extra* is instrumental to helping resolve issues that impact the social and spiritual well-being of humanity. Religions are also essential in the promotion of human flourishing through providing sound spiritual principles and values that guide their adherents in their daily life, at the same time contribute to human progress through collaboration and dialogue with one another and with secular institutions established to serve the common good. Concrete manifestations of such dialogue and collaboration can take on countless forms, some of which have been discussed in a cursory manner in this essay. It is hoped that what has been briefly highlighted here affirms the fact that religious engagement must be ongoing, dialogical, interdisciplinary, and must be witnessed both in word and deed.

In Memoriam



Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD, PhD

11 May 1932 -13 January 2021

ARC Executive Director

This special section of *Religion and Social Communication* is lovingly dedicated to the memory of Prof. Dr. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD, long time Executive Director of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) from 1999 to 2021. His contribution to the field of communication—looking at the communicative dimensions and role of religion in societies especially in Asia, home of the world’s major religions—has been recognized around the world.

Franz-Josef Eilers was born on 11 May 1932 in Emsdetten, Germany. He entered the Society of the Divine Word at the age of 13 and was ordained to the priesthood on 8 December 1959. He

earned a licentiate in missiology and doctorate in communication with his research focusing on the communications among non-literate cultures in New Guinea. After his studies, he was called on to different roles within and outside of the Society. In 1968, he co-founded the quarterly journal *Communicatio Socialis* which centers on media ethics and Church communication. He also co-founded the Catholic Media Council (CAMECO) and became its director from 1971 to 1985. He was also involved with the World Council of Churches in Geneva and with the Vatican as consultor of the Pontifical Council for Social Communication.

In 1985, Fr. Eilers was assigned to the Philippines where, aside from exercising his priestly ministry, he taught missiology and social communication at the Divine Word School of Theology (Tagaytay City), University of the Philippines (Los Baños, Laguna), Don Bosco Center of Studies (Parañaque City), CICM-Maryhill School of Theology (Quezon City), Pontifical Gregorian University (Rome), Pontifical Salesian University (Rome) and Yarra Theological Union (Australia).

In 1995, Fr. Eilers was appointed as Executive Secretary of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences Office of Social Communication (FABC-OSC), a position he held until 2010. In 1999, together with Asian communication scholars during the FABC-OSC conference in Bangkok, he co-founded the ARC which up until now is under the auspices of Saint John's University in Bangkok.

Since its foundation, ARC has been working with scholars to carry out research in the field of religion and social communication and organizing roundtables to serve as venue for scholarly discussion. The ARC journal *Religion and Social Communication* codifies these researches.

In 2001, Fr. Eilers founded the Master of Arts in Theology

major in Social Pastoral Communication program at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila. From its foundation, the program has produced more graduates from all over Asia.

Fr. Eilers semi-retired from active teaching in 2018 but continued directing students as thesis adviser. His last membership in an advisory board was of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross' journal *Church, Communication, and Culture*.

Throughout his life, Fr. Eilers published numerous articles, books, and manuscripts on religion and social communication which have become necessary readings in the field.

In this section, friends and colleagues of Father Eilers pay their respects and honor to the man whose contributions to the study of communication is recognized all over the world. In a special way, they pay their respects to the man who became a friend, a part of their lives.

Father Eilers may have left us but his legacy lives on: to “give one’s self in love.”

--*--

I first met Fr. Eilers in 2012 at the University of Santo Tomas Graduate School in Manila. After obtaining my Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology, I immediately enrolled in the MA Theology program with a plan of joining the academe after graduation. During enrolment, it so happened that there were no subjects offered for MA Theology so I was advised to take courses in the MA Theology major in Social Pastoral Communication--the program which he founded--as the courses that I will take in this program will be credited later on to my original program.

As classes in the graduate school were conducted in the

evenings, I would often come late as I had a day job in the Central Business District. Fr. Eilers must have been annoyed by my frequent tardiness as his discussions would be interrupted by my arrival. One evening after class, he told me that the next time I came late, he would be constrained to drop me from the roll. I was taken aback: I needed a job to sustain my studies, but I also could not just sacrifice my studies which I already invested much time and effort. By the end of that semester, I told Fr. Eilers that I had already quit my job to focus on my studies. It was then that he offered me the opportunity to join ARC.

Joining ARC was a great blessing. I was able to meet and form friendships with communication experts across Asia, go to places I did not imagine I would set foot on, and more than anything else, to learn from the expert himself—Fr. Eilers. It was in ARC where I got to know him deeply, not as a professor, but as a spiritual father who I could confide with through the regular spiritual sharing that we had in his room. He saw the best and the potential of the people he accompanied. He was even very supportive of my decision to take on a teaching job, with a special request not to leave ARC. When my father was dying and I couldn't find a priest to administer the last rites, Father Eilers volunteered to give him the final sacrament.

Together, we would go to the Radio Veritas Asia site in Palauig, Zambales for retreat, accompany him in the German Ambassador's Residence for the annual German Community Christmas gathering, fly to Saint John's for the annual roundtables, attend various symposia and conferences where he was a speaker or panel member, and even stayed with him as a companion whenever he got admitted in the hospital.

On 11 January 2021, one of our collaborators, Mr. Jairus Gianan, called me up informing me that Fr. Eilers had no appetite and was not feeling well. With the help of my mother, we were

able to contact a physician to visit him in his room. Tests were done and when the results came in, we were advised to bring him immediately to the hospital. As usual, I was tasked to stay with him. I took a day off from work to be with him.

On 13 January 2021, around lunch time, he woke me up and asked for a piece of bread. I told him that he should only take a little as his blood sugar might spike. He sat on the edge of his bed, broke the bread and began to eat. His dental appliance fell on the ground. As I was picking it up, I can clearly see him as he passed out and slowly fell on his bed. There were only two of us in the hospital room. I immediately called for help. The doctors tried to revive him but he was declared dead at 2:41 PM local time. I can still recall the events of that fateful day as if it were yesterday.

Father Franz-Josef Eilers, svd taught that the Trinity is the perfect example of communion of persons, I hope and pray that he finally comes face-to-face with the Master Communicator to whom he dedicated his life's work.

Kenneth E. Rayco
ARC Secretary
Philippines

I first met Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD when he was still in Aachen opening up the German Churches to the evangelical importance of social communications. And then, in true cross-cultural mission mode, Franz came to Asia which became his home for the rest of his long life. Franz impressed me as an all-round professional in social communications - and equally important - as a confrere with a wide and deep apostolic vision. That combination of professionalism and apostolic far-sightedness was crucial to both his witness and his work.

On one level, if you ask me who was Franz Eilers, I could reply: Franz was simply the person who got done whatever he saw needed to be done, however difficult it might appear to the rest of us. That is true, for Franz had the ability to do whatever needed doing in communications, however perplexing. But, I also knew Franz as an authentic Divine Word Missionary (SVD). The SVD have social communications as one of their key characteristics, and Franz opened up the FABC and the Asian Churches at multiple levels to the evangelization outreach of social communication. With his dedicated secretary he edited the book series *For All the Peoples of Asia*, as well as documents from FABC-OSC which he directed for over two decades, and all this apart from seeing to radio and television programmes.

When he spoke at Plenary Assemblies I found Franz to be invariably clear and to the point. While he willingly took on a heavy workload himself, Franz continually encouraged others to take up social communication professionally, assisting in contacting institutes as necessary. While never pushing himself forward into the limelight, Franz' communication outreach made the FABC known and understood among all levels of the Asian Churches. This ongoing information has been a vital element in breaking down the isolation of the minority Churches on the continent, as it permitted the creative insights and mission strategies of each Church to impact the others.

I never found Franz' immense workload and outstanding professionalism intimidating but always inspiring. And Franz carried out this multi-task creative work for the Asian Churches for over two decades. Will we ever see his likes again? Hopefully!

John Mansford Prior, svd
Indonesia

Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD touched Church leaders, seminarians, communication scholars, and communication practitioners around the world. He was a dogged scholar in all the best meanings of that term: he kept at the nagging questions; he kept encouraging his students to meet their potential; he kept asking other scholars to help; he kept a focus on the needs of the Church; and he kept demanding the best of himself. Without his leadership and energy, the communication work of the Church in Asia could well have tapered off as it has in so many other parts of the world. Like St. Augustine, he also knew the value of communication: it was not enough to preach a brilliant sermon or teach a great course if no one could hear it or read it. And so, much of the success of his work came through the success of his publications. His textbooks shaped clergy throughout Asia and in other parts of the world and his collections of church documents and other writings on communication proved handy and long-lasting guides, as my own bookshelves will testify. As a founder of two journals dedicated to religious communication research—*Communicatio Socialis* (in Europe) and *Religion and Social Communication* (in Asia), he kept ideas alive, promoted research, and mentored new generations of scholars.

Our paths first crossed over 35 years ago when we both participated in international seminars exploring the connections between theology and communication—an interest he continued to cultivate in his own books and in his later work with the Office of Social Communication of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences. If his scholarship were not enough to establish his reputation in communication circles, his service to the Church would in itself do that. He combined creative thinking with administrative skills and became a great organizer of workshops and meetings for the Bishops of Asia as well as their teacher in things communicative. In his role with the FABC he served as a bridge to the communication planning efforts and policy at the Pontifical Council for Social Communication and other offices in

Rome and in Catholic organizations like Unda, UCIP, OCIC, and later SIGNIS. One could only wonder how he managed to be in so many places, seemingly at the same time.

His attentions certainly made my own work better. Because we worked in different regions of the world, we did not have much face-to-face meeting times apart from conferences. But he kept in touch. I also well remember his writing (more than once!) something along the lines of, “it’s time for you to ...” whether than meant to write an article to follow up on my earlier work on communication and theology or to explore an issue new to the Church’s concern like the impact of social media or to plan a class. He also allowed me to put my ideas to the test in workshops for Bishops and scholars in Asia. In all of this he was an academic friend as well as a personal one.

The different workshops and conferences also allowed me to see Fr. Eilers at prayer and in liturgical celebrations. He was a man of the Gospels and of the Church and of his community. He was certainly a blessing in my own life.

May his memory be a blessing for all of us.

Paul A. Soukup, S.J.
United States

Three Catholic priests were in the vanguard of media and communication studies with particular focus on religious communication, beginning from the 1980s. Perhaps the best known of these pioneers was Dr Michael Traber, editor of *Media Development*, the quarterly journal of Christian Communication of the World Association of Christian Churches (WACC), published out of London. Dr Robert A White, edited *Communication Research Trends*, at the Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture (CSCC), also in London. On the continent of Europe,

Dr Franz-Josef Eilers, director of the Catholic Media Council (CAMECO), headquartered in the little German town of Aachen, edited *Communicatio Socialis*, a bilingual journal on religion and communication in German and English.

I was fortunate to have brushed shoulders with the three priest-scholars, first as a doctoral student at the University of Leicester during the mid-eighties, and later as a researcher and academician in India. They invited me on several occasions to contribute to the three journals they edited. We continued to meet regularly at international conferences organised by IAMCR, AMIC, and other associations around the world. By the mid-nineties, the trio had moved on to Asia and Africa: Dr Traber to Bangalore, India, Dr Eilers to Manila and Dr White to Gregorian University in Rome and later to Nigeria and Kenya, to continue their pastoral and scholarly work in the missions. (Dr. Traber breathed his last in 2006).

Under the aegis of the FABC's Office of Social Communication, Dr Eilers founded in 1999 the Asian Research Centre for Religion and Social Communication (ARC), at St. John's University, Bangkok, and its bi-annual journal *Religion and Social Communication* to bring together religious communication scholars from the sprawling continent of Asia. The annual seminar on religion and communication was a feature of ARC right from the start. He worked tirelessly to organise these annual seminars and to publish its journal regularly. But he was not a mere organiser and publisher/editor of journals and book-series; he was an invaluable contributor of scholarly articles and book reviews.

Besides, he was a prolific communication researcher. He published several books on Intercultural Communication, and edited compilations of the Catholic Church's official documents on social communication, updating them regularly. They will continue to serve as indispensable reference books for decades

to come. As the director of CAMECO, he edited *Communicatio Socialis* where some of my earliest work on Indian communication theory and Mahatma Gandhi as a Communicator were published.

On a personal level, Dr. Eilers was a guide and a friend, known for his graciousness, warmth and concern. My first meeting with him was in Bonn around the summer of 1986. I recall the warmth with which he received me, organised my stay at Sankt Augustin, and took me on a tour of the city, then the ‘provisional capital’ of Germany. For the next three decades we continued to meet at international conferences and at the annual meetings/seminars of UNDA-OCIC (now Signis) in India, and of ARC in Thailand. Our last meeting was at Centurion University in the city of Bhubaneswar where the February 2018 annual seminar of ARC was organised. He was his usual warm self as we bade goodbye at the end of the three-day conference. He was 11 years my senior, and it was clear to me that day that age was catching up on us.... And that that goodbye would be the last and final one.

It seems that it was only the other day that I wrote to Dr. Eilers wishing him for the Christmas season, and he reciprocated my wishes with his usual warmth. It is difficult to believe that he is no more; he was active writing and propagating the word of God till his last breath, in Asia and around the world.

Keval J. Kumar
Ahmedabad, India

My first encounter with Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers, svd was while serving on the Pontifical Council for Social Communications (Vatican) in the late 1980’s – 90’s. The PCSC was working on the publication of a new Catholic Communications document celebrating the 20th Anniversary of *Communio et Progressio*. The new document eventually would be known as “*Aetatis Novae*” (*The Dawning of a New Era*).

Fr. Eilers brought his vast intellectual knowledge and research on Social Communications to enable the Council to tweak the new document with a fresh perspective on the role of Pastoral Social Communications Planning within the Church. His prophetic emphasis on the term ‘Social Communications’ which emerged during the Second Vatican Council, resonated throughout his lifetime. We engaged with numerous conversations during and after each Council session. Each conversation inspired me with the breadth and depth of his wisdom and deep love for challenging Catholic Church Episcopal Leadership for positioning Catholic Social Communications in the heart of seminary and pastoral formation programs.

As the years unfolded, he invited me to participate in a number of FABC-BISCOM meetings in Hong Kong, Bali, Thailand, etc. Each opportunity I discovered the deep passion he brought to his Social Communications research and teaching. He was one who encouraged and nurtured research and publication within and among all of us who knew him.

He loved sharing his teaching experiences, seeking out new insights from colleagues from around the world to share with his students. Or, even to challenge each one of us to go deeper into where our particular interests, or, pastoral experiences lie related to the rapid digital evolution. Fr. Eilers was an encourager, enabler, supporter, and, prophetic figure for hundreds, if not thousands of us around the world. He simply never slowed down with continuing his research, writing and teaching. He was a passionate, loving and caring professor for each and every one of his students.

One year he invited me to the Philippines to give a lecture at University of Santo Tomas. During that time, I encountered many of his students and listened to their individual praise and enthusiasm for Fr. Franz-Josef. Simply observing him engage with rich and deep dialogue with his students was a testimony to the quality and

profundity of his teaching. He invited me to visit Radio Veritas, where a retreat center is/was located for a weekend of relaxation and dialogue by the sea. There were others who gathered each day for his liturgies that reflected his profound love of the Eucharist, deep faith, expressed through his enlightened homilies. His simplicity but brilliant presence was a testimony for each one of us.

In the evenings, as we sat watching the sunset over the sea, we would share experiences, insights, concerns and dreams for the future of the Catholic Church with an emphasis on Social Communications and the importance of research and formation of future Catholic Leaders (women and men). Yet, his research constantly focused on a deep spiritual grasp of the theological and spiritual grounding for appreciating, understanding and communicating the meaning and value of Catholic Social Communications.

What I supremely appreciate about Fr. Eilers, besides our deep friendship, was his visioning for the future of the Catholic Church. As the years passed along, changes occurred within the placement and structure of Catholic Communications in the region. The term ‘social’ communications seemed to be losing momentum. I sensed his sorrow, and grief, that what was so critically significant to him, may be dissolving with the attraction of the rapid advances of ‘technology itself’ for the sake of technology without a larger vision of its impact. New times, new people, new directions were displacing something of the dedicated passion he wrote and spoke about throughout his life.

One of my great joys was co-editing a book publication tribute to Fr. Eilers with Dr. Helmuth Rolfes (Germany) titled “Communicatio Socialis: *Challenge of Theology and Ministry in the Church*”. Kassel University Press. 2007.

In the past few years, Fr. Eilers and I would Zoom meet.

Praise God for Zooming opportunities! He never was one not to learn a new technology if he could help it. During those zoom chats, he constantly praised his students. He shared what they were studying, researching, writing and his hopes and dreams for each one of them. He simply did not want them to carry on his legacy but for each one to make a unique passionate commitment for advancing Social Communications in the Catholic Church.

I frequently have indicated in lectures I have given around the world that Fr. Eilers is the most expert Catholic Communicator who not only knew every Catholic Church document written concerning Catholic Social Communications, but could quote references without blinking an eye. Furthermore, he contributed to the depth of the concepts articulated within those documents, advancing them to a new, enlightening levels of understanding and application.

Our last Zoom conversation occurred prior to Christmas 2020. His vibrant energy for what was important to him radiated through the conversation. We were speaking about collaborating writing an article on the impact of the pandemic on the explosion of the use of virtual/digital technology in education. We were to reconnect after the New Year to expand our conversation. This never occurred.

Fr. Eilers is one of a kind. His passing is one of our great Catholic losses. Yet, as I think about it, I am reminded of his constant praise and love of his students. I realize that each one of them now carries Fr. Eilers torch into the future. They are to transmit forward the love, passion and faithful dedication for reimagining how to communicate faith in a rapidly shifting digital milieu. In this way, we each pay tribute to our dearest friend, Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers. He always remains one of our great friends, mentor and educator in the wide world of Catholic Social Communications. May his writings continue to inspire many into

the future of Catholic Social Communications.

Sr. Angela Ann Zukowski, MSHS, D.Min.
United States

I met Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers, svd almost two decades ago in the AMIC Conference which was held in Singapore. We had several hours of one-to-one discussion during the conference since we had a common interest in media and religion as individual research scholars. It was followed by a meeting (workshop or seminar) on the subject that was held in Bangkok supported by the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication. At that time not knowing much about Fr. Eilers or ARC, with reservation, I accepted the offer to write a paper on “Media and Hindu Religion” and attended the meeting in Bangkok. Since then I was interacting with Franz-Josef, though a few years ago, Franz-Josef indicated his inability to attend the meetings and had mentioned about old age and deteriorating health. He often did not personally attend the meetings though he was in full control of the program. Jointly, the program continued with financial support of missionary funds provided by Franz-Josef. Not knowing his church connection and Asian Research Center, for me Franz-Josef was an individual who took my advice for inviting scholars and supported them. At least one meeting that was held at MICA, Ahmedabad, he had provided some financial support. It has been a cordial relation and mutual support between us. I will miss him.

Binod Agrawal, PhD
India

A thousand words will never be enough to describe one’s relationship with Fr. Eilers. Nonetheless, I will attempt to briefly illustrate how I perceive him and are my impressions of him. I

first met Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD in 2011. He used to be a professor of Intercultural Communication at the CICM Maryhill School of Theology in Quezon City, Philippines, to second-year theology students. I never thought that more than a mere professor, Fr. Eilers, would later impact my life and become a mentor, a “spiritual companion,” and motivator. In these lines, I would like to bring out a few reflections about this fatherly figure to many, who posed valuable and vital contributions to the Church and impacted the lives of many tremendously.

At the CICM-Maryhill School of Theology, Fr. Eilers’ class was one of the most appreciated. Our class was composed of seminarians, religious men, and women hailing from various corners of the world. The subject he taught was very instigating and thought-provoking because he spoke eloquently about his missionary experiences coupled with sound theology shaped in advanced thinking. I am not afraid to say that his classes brought together high theologizing and vivid human experiences among cultures. He impressed many with his communication style to the extent that his simple presence among students was “the power and the point” in whatever he would convey. Deeply touched by his subject and his heart-warming methodology, I would later enroll in the Social and Pastoral Communication Program at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila, Philippines.

More than a professor, Fr. Eilers became a mentor of a considerable number of lay, religious, and clergy people. As a mentor, he would never be satisfied with mediocrity. Instead, he would encourage each of his students “to go beyond the book” and be creative in thinking. He always saw his students’ capabilities and did his very best to help them “develop proper dispositions for ministry.” One could not negate that he would appear as an intimidating “German Shepherd at first glance;” however, such an impression would not last long, as each could see how kind and humane he used to be.

I remember vividly how he guided me in the process of writing my thesis. Each advice, uplifting word, plausible correction, pushing forward are marked throughout the pages of my research and treasured in the intimacy of my heart and mind. As he would say, “I am here to kick you,” he indeed kicked me forward to do research that bridges pastoral theology and people’s “conscientization.” In the beginning, I should confess, I was not convinced about my paper; he was. From sources to revisions, he guided me to the conclusion and beyond the chapters written down to sharing experiences. As a mentor, it is still worth mentioning that he has been a prolific professor in the field of communications, always striving to bring out from his students new insights, ideas, and innovation in the ministry of communication within and beyond the Church.

Besides being a mentor, Fr. Eilers became my “spiritual companion,” as he was for many. Interestingly, he was a kind of “allergic” to the expression “spiritual direction,” as for him, one is responsible for his own growth process. As a “spiritual companion,” he stressed much on the importance and significance of one’s prayer life, which goes beyond structured and formal prayer periods or methods. For him, prayer was the core of his life. He witnessed that up to the last moments of his journey among us, as he would say, “God has his own ways.”

Being a young missionary priest led me to seek out Fr. Eilers’ meaningful advice. Yet, more than being a “speaker,” he was a listener. He was never judgmental. He never looked down on people. Each encounter with him elicited from me a renewed look into life and ministry. Each opportunity to see him nurtured my missionary vocation and made me grow as a person, as a Christian, and as a priest. Each meeting has recharged my energies and boosted my desire to serve the Lord through communicating life and hope. I see him as an inspiring missionary who always promoted the “sharing of faith.”

From a mentor to a “spiritual companion,” Fr. Eilers has become a motivator to many. He always saw the best in people, and he enthusiastically led them to see the best in themselves and nurture it. His interest was not focused on himself but others’ growth and development, above all his students, his mentees, his “spiritual companions.” As a motivator, he would see beyond one’s academic limitations and exert effort for one’s blossoming by tickling their mind towards research. I guess he was born to motivate others.

Needless to say, he has been a prolific writer, especially in the field of Social Communication. He wrote extensively on his praxis on the field. He wrote with mastery and authority. He wrote as one who has a heart for the ministry of communications, which pervades social means. Communication for him was at the heart of an encounter. Communication for him is what happens in circumstances of life. Communication for him is what makes us who we are. Hence, his “face was not on the book,” as he would say whenever asked what his Facebook account was, and whether there were likes, hearts, emoticons, fostering communion was at the core of communication for him

I had the privilege to meet him a few days before his demise. After meeting him for the last time on January 6, I would never imagine that; indeed, that was the last time to encounter him physically on earth. I am thankful for having found on him the loving face of the Lord as a mentor, a “spiritual companion,” a motivator, and beyond. His legacy will continue to thrive on each person he has touched, on each mind he has advised, on each person he has formed, and on each communicator he has pushed forward.

*William F. da Silva, CICM
Philippines*

Setting:

There were two things that changed the face of the modern era: modern communication media in the world scenario and the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church held fifty years ago. It was all during this time that Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers, svd emerged as an energetic, ever dynamic, pastorally encouraging, and spiritually a gracious missionary communicator from Germany, via Vatican to Asia through the SVD congregation in the Philippines.

Authenticity:

He had a unique and authentic experience in the world of Social Communication. He was a voracious reader, well read and an accomplished writer, publisher, communication professor in various parts of the world. It was at this time around 1996, he became the Executive Secretary of Social Communication for the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference. In one word, he “changed” the entire perception of communication in the Asian Christian context. I was closely associated with him in most of the conferences.

Goal is Social Communication:

His one and only goal was Social communication for Evangelization, Mission, and Pastoral Ministry. He viewed and presented his whole gamut of ideas, experiences, thinking and interactions all in this field of Social Communication and therefore it is global.

Soul is Pastoral:

All the communication dimensions must be geared towards the perfect message, language, and delivery of Pastoral Communication; he insisted on and lived up to that ideal. In fact, Eilers used

the power of media to become a voice of the voiceless, promote morals and pastoral values, empower churches and reform the communication thinking. He was always so relevant when questions were being raised on the objectivity, practicality and credibility of social communication today.

Heart is Intercultural and Interreligious:

He might be the first Catholic communicator to write and introduce more about intercultural communication than anyone else. There were so many Asian level conferences for Bishops, communication specialists, practitioners, strategists, pastors, catechists and teachers. He sought to it that we look, think, and execute everything in terms of dialogue and interactions.

Mind is Asian and Ecumenical:

Leave alone his breadth, width, length of travel in Asia and the globe; he had his mind as an Asian, he thought and wrote like an Asian, always keeping in touch with the Ecumenical Churches and with an ecumenical spirit.

A celebrated Religious and a Missionary:

As a Catholic religious belonging to the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), an international missionary congregation, he taught, and lived for a long time at the Divine Word Seminary in Tagaytay, Philippines. As an exemplary religious priest, he gave importance to religious and priestly formation a communication dimension. His day never ended without spending quality time before the Blessed Sacrament in silence with the help of the ever present Holy Spirit. Whether we stay in a hotel or communication centres he will see to it that we celebrate the Mass everyday without fail. This kept him going ever stronger in the love of God and love of neighbour through religious communication.

Passion for Communication:

Fr. Eilers is known for being gracious and generous with his recognition of others' hard work, initiative and endeavours in communication. With his passion, he moved the entire FABC toward a significant social and pastoral change through the power of his ideas and the way he shared them through his writings, teaching and research. As a master communicator, Fr. Eilers did many things to promote positive disposition, direction and dialogue. As a man of prayer, he did even more to model the power of persuasive, educative, and advocacy communication. He had a bold and constant articulation on communication theology and Missiology as well. He was a person endowed with rare insights, with a broad vision of communication and social media. He cared for his non-Christian friends, communicated the meaning of symbolism to his students, and committed himself as a pastor to all.

*Fr. Sebastian Periannan, PhD
India*

I am probably the most inappropriate person to pay tribute to Fr. Franz-Josef, since I have never met him. However, I would like to mention a few words about what he left for us and what ARC has inherited from him.

I was fortunate enough to be invited to present my research at ARC conference in Bangkok in March 2020. At the time of my presentation, I was still a Ph.D. candidate and it was my first conference presentation outside of my university. After the arrival at the hotel, I was on my way to meet Fr. Anthony Le Duc and other ARC members at St. Louis College, but I lost the way. Fortunately, Fr. Anthony contacted me while I was in the middle of a small maze of alleyways, and the motorbike driver near me talked to him directly in Thai language and drove me to the meeting place for free. Yes, for free for some reason! Fr.

Anthony and Dr. Chainarong Monthienvichienchai as well as other members present welcomed me with nice smiles despite my late arrival. The sisters from the college offered me a cup of tea, fruits, then dinner. I was overwhelmed by the hospitality and warm atmosphere around the dinner table at the college.

During the dinner, it was mentioned that Fr. Franz-Josef was unfortunately unable to attend the conference this time, the first conference without his physical presence. However, he would make an appearance at the opening ceremony online. I could only imagine how difficult it was and at the same time how rewarding it was for him to establish this organization thus far and stayed in Asia for such a long period of time. Patience, tolerance, love, compassion, and love were pouring from him through Christ to the members of ARC, I sensed it immediately.

I strongly believe that ARC is a legacy of Fr. Franz-Josef, and ARC is a living testimony to him in playing a significant role in both ecumenical and interreligious dialogues as well as establishing and maintaining a peaceful co-existence among different religions. No matter how small the impact may have been in the beginning, he had initiated the project and he had developed the organization. If we add the populations of both East Asian countries, i.e., China, Japan and Korea and South Asian countries, i.e., India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and etc. to South East Asian countries, we have about a half of the entire human population in these regions. Therefore, without dialogue and communication among people from different religious and cultural backgrounds, it is unlikely to achieve the goal of loving and peaceful society in these regions. Speaking positively, if we pursue the vision of Fr. Franz-Josef, it is very possible through both academic and non-academic dialogue and communication to achieve and maintain a peaceful Asian continent, which can possibly send positive ripple effects to other parts of the world, including Fr. Eilers' home continent of Europe.

I truly wish I could have met him, but through the members and staffs of ARC and its journals, I am convinced the inheritance

of Fr. Franz-Josef remains now and onwards.

Fumihiko Matsumoto, PhD
Japan

When I first made my acquaintance with Fr. Eilers in 2015 at a conference organized by the Society of the Divine Word, Australia Province, I was not yet familiar with the field of social communication – at least not in an academic and systematic way. My field was religious studies, and I had and still have a keen interest in religious environmentalism. However, upon encountering Fr. Eilers, he suggested that I could research and write on a relatively new topic called “cybertheology” and to present it at an upcoming International Roundtable of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication in Bangkok, Thailand. One of his complaints about the submissions that he had received thus far was that too many of the abstracts were case studies rather than research that involved more theoretical thinking and approaches.

Despite being rather uncertain about this new topic, I decided to carry out the research, eventually writing an article on the topic for the ARC journal. Although this activity did not take me deeply into the field of digital theology itself, since I have never been a professionally trained theologian, accepting Fr. Eilers’ invitation did take me down the path of thinking, researching, and doing quite a bit of writing on topics that represent intersections between religion/society and digital communication technology. Needless to say, this journey has been extremely eye-opening academically, enriching professionally, and rewarding spiritually.

Not long after my first participation in the ARC Roundtable, I was invited by Fr. Eilers and the ARC Board to collaborate as ARC Deputy Director and to serve as the journal’s assistant editor, both under the tutelage and guidance of Fr. Eilers. Working under Fr.

Eilers for five years, I learned that on the one hand, Fr. Eilers was extremely staunch in certain matters that he saw as essential to the mission and vision of ARC. On the other hand, he was also very open to new voices and contributions from others. He was never so protective of his “child” that he could not listen to others’ ideas or be receptive to new ways of doing things.

Despite me being in Thailand and Fr. Eilers working from the Philippines, Fr. Eilers proved to be a true communicator not only in his theorizing and teaching, but also in practice. No email to him ever went unanswered. No LINE message was ever read without a response. And no request for input was ever left unattended. It was always something of a wonder for me to see how an octogenarian managed to teach, mentor numerous students, keep in touch with former students and colleagues, accompany others spiritually and professionally, read and write new research, and still had time to answer every email in details and every LINE message in a timely manner. Fr. Eilers was able to do all of this because he was truly rooted in God from Whom he drew the needed inspiration, grace, and strength to live out his vocation as a Catholic Social Communicator – in his work, in his personal life, and in his relationship with others.

In many ways, I owe my present and future work to Fr. Eilers. Indeed, when I met him at the event organized by the SVD, of which we are both members, I certainly did not expect that this encounter would change my professional life in so many ways. But by the grace of God, the encounter took place and I have been all the better for it.

Anthony Le Duc, svd
Thailand

Catholic Liturgical Teleparticipation Before and During the Pandemic, and Questions for the New Normal

*Leo-Martin Angelo R. Ocampo*¹

ABSTRACT

During the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the ways by which the Catholic Church sought to provide the faithful with continual spiritual nourishment, without breaking quarantine or transgressing social distancing protocols, was to harness the potential of online liturgies. This article traces the historical evolution of remote participation in liturgy in the Catholic Church from radio to the Internet parallel with the development of the Church's official stance. It then gathers the experience of online liturgies during the pandemic in both its positive and negative aspects. Finally, it attempts to articulate and begin to unfold some questions for liturgical teleparticipation in view of the new normal.

Keywords: *online religion, Eucharist, religious broadcast, Covid-19, POPC*

According to tradition, Clare of Assisi (1194-1253) was too

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ill one Christmas Eve to attend the midnight Mass as she ardently desired – an experience shared by many a Catholic whenever alienated from the liturgy, whether by sickness or other causes like the recent pandemic. In an unexpected way, the Holy Spirit projected the celebration in a nearby church on the wall of her room, such that she was able to see it, hear it, and participate in it from her bed “as if she was present in person.”² Because of this event, which is perhaps the earliest recorded, albeit supernaturally initiated telecast in history, Pius XII designated her as the patroness of television in 1957. However, it was not until recently that such an immersive although remote liturgical experience would become possible for most people, this time by human effort, thanks to the ongoing development in modern means of communication.

From a Catholic perspective, this essay traces the development of the use of these technologies in liturgy from radio to the Internet, highlighting emerging developments especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. It will then reflect on some key questions for the post-pandemic period, also known as the “new normal,” not only for Catholic liturgical teleparticipation but also for religious social communication in general.

From Radio to Internet

The 19th and 20th centuries witnessed the development of modern technologies that would revolutionize human experience in an unprecedented way. Whereas before, one had to be physically present in order to see the Tower of London or hear the Queen, these visual, audio, and eventually audiovisual technologies such

² “comme si elle était présente en personne” See Pius XII, *Lettre Apostolique Proclamant Ste. Claire Patronne Céleste de la Télévision*, 14 February 1957, Vatican Archive, https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/fr/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-xii_apl_21081958_st-claire.html (accessed 4 May 2020).

as the camera (1816), telephone (1876), radio (1895), motion picture (1895) and television (1927) would make remote, non-vicarious experience possible. Aside from bypassing the necessity of being physically onsite, remote broadcasts would also gradually widen access to indirect and mediated but increasingly vivid experiences.

In terms of its use in Catholic liturgy, it was 90 years ago after the first blessing was imparted *Urbi et Orbi* “to the city and to the world, and to all who live there” over the radio by Pius XI at the conclusion of his speech during the opening of Vatican Radio on 12 February 1931. This monumental event marks the first time that the Pope gave such a blessing using modern communications technology. Also, it is important to note that as early as then, the remotely transmitted blessing has already been deemed efficacious. In fact, reflecting an acute awareness of the reach of the new technology, Pius XI addressed himself on that occasion not only to all people but also to all creation who would be able to hear him through the radio waves. Moreover, he also addressed himself to God, tacitly implying that the divinity could also be reached through the transmission.³

Thanks to this kind of technology, those who could not be physically present during such occasions are still able to participate in some capacity. Not only are they able to hear the Pope’s message and profit from its substance, they are also able to receive the spiritual benefits attached to his blessing. Similarly, radio broadcasts of the Mass would enable those who are unable to partake of the Eucharist, especially on Sundays and holy days of obligation, for various reasons such as sickness or old age, to literally “hear Mass” on air.

³ “all’Urbe e all’Orbe e a tutti quelli che vi abitano” See Pius XI, *Il Primo Radiomessaggio di Papa Pio XI a Tutti Le Genti e Ad Ogni Creaturae*, 12 February 1931, Vatican Archive, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/it/speeches/documents/hf_p-xi_spe_19310212_radiomessage.html (accessed 5 June 2020).

In addition, radio is able to penetrate even remote areas, where it can be enjoyed by several people gathered in the same place at the same time. This is expedient particularly in far-flung communities that cannot be reached regularly by the priest. It is also accessible to the poor because it is not too expensive and to the sick and the elderly, who sometimes have a more limited use of vision but are still able to understand what they hear. This would make radio more powerful compared to film, although film has a visual dimension that is lacking in radio. Still, there were also some liturgies that were filmed, although not on a regular basis, but only for very special occasions, enabling those who were absent to experience these events for as long as they can see and hear the footage. Prior to these technologies, remote experience was only possible in a very limited way through illustrations, manuscripts, books or printed materials that were rare and accessible only to the literate. However, especially with the advent of *telecast* or television broadcast, what Cairncross would call “the Death of Distance”⁴ in 1997 had already begun.

The advent of television in 1927 would radically change the playing field by combining the audiovisual dynamism of film with the broadcast capacity of radio; hence, when it comes to liturgy, it would allow its audiences not only to hear the Mass but to see it as well, initially in black and white, and later on in color. This makes the experience closer to that of Saint Clare, which was not only auditory but also visual. Nevertheless, televised liturgies would continue to be a one-way communication just like radio, although there were already some efforts to engage the active participation of the faithful. For instance, Franz-Josef Eilers mentions how the Second German Television Network (ZDF) would indicate the song numbers from a common songbook in the frame to invite the viewers to sing along during the liturgy.

⁴ Frances Cairncross, *The Death of Distance: How the Communications Revolution Will Change Our Lives* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1997).

The same network would also develop a system of televising the Mass from the same church and with the same priests in order to give their viewers a feeling of being in a kind of parish.⁵

In light of this, I propose to apply and use the term *teleparticipation*, not only as a neologism but also as a real paradigm, when referring to and understanding Catholic remote (*tele*) participation in liturgy. As a term that entails more than mere broadcasts, teleparticipation allows believers to partake of a sacred reality that entails not only consumption but also participation, as Vatican II said, to “take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects.”⁶ In the same vein, Eilers avers, ‘the presentation of liturgical celebrations on radio and television is not a ‘show’ like many other programs but a worship which needs a certain disposition in producers as well as in viewers and listeners.’⁷ In this way, remote liturgies can be understood as unprecedented bridges that can effectively straddle the distance not only between the liturgy and the faithful, but even between the faithful and God.

Thus, the Catholic Church would discover and recognize the importance and potential of an emerging media. In its Decree *Inter Mirifica*, the Second Vatican Council would describe them as “wonderful technological discoveries which men of talent, especially in the present era, have made with God’s help.”⁸ The same Decree would also claim

⁵ Franz-Josef Eilers, *Communicating in Ministry and Mission* (Manila: Logos Publications, 2018), 121.

⁶ Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC), 4 December 1963, Vatican Archive, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html (accessed 1 May 2020), 11.

⁷ Eilers, *Communicating in Ministry and Mission*, 123.

⁸ Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Media of Social Communication *Inter Mirifica*, 4 December 1963, Vatican Archive, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/

as the Church's birthright (*nativum ius*) "to have at its disposal and to employ any of these media insofar as they are necessary or useful for the instruction of Christians and all its efforts for the welfare of souls."⁹ In relation to this, the Code of Canon Law enjoins that pastors, "availing themselves of a right which belongs to the Church, are to make an ample use of the means of social communication" as an important tool in their pastoral outreach.¹⁰ Aside from the liturgy, the Church would also use these technologies for other aspects of the apostolate such as catechesis; however, these are beyond the scope of this particular study.

Meanwhile, with regard to liturgical broadcasts in particular, the Constitution on the Liturgy would direct that "Radio and television broadcasts of sacred rites must be marked by discretion and dignity... This is especially important when the service to be broadcasted is the Mass."¹¹ This particular concern of the Council that such liturgies, especially Masses, "should be marked with such care and dignity" was reiterated in the 1967 Instructions *Eucharisticum mysterium* and *Musicam Sacram*.¹² In the same spirit, those studying for the priesthood were explicitly mandated to learn how to use media and to develop their communication skills as a matter "of high importance in the reformed liturgy."¹³ Such constant emphasis on the careful preparation and dignified execution of broadcasts is an implicit acknowledgement of their peculiar importance. Nonetheless, there were already some questions not only regarding their appropriateness but also concerning their reality even then, as Eilers reports:

In the early days of popular television, there was quite a

documents/vat-ii_decree_19631204_inter-mirifica_en.html (accessed 5 June 2020), 1.

⁹ *Inter Mirifica*, 3.

¹⁰ Can. 822 § 1-3.

¹¹ SC 20.

¹² See Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction on worship of the Eucharist *Eucharisticum mysterium*, AAS 59 (1967) 539-573, no. 22 and Instruction on music in the liturgy *Musicam Sacram*, AAS 60 (1967) 300-320, no. 8.

¹³ Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, Basic Plan for Priestly Formation *In Synodo Episcopali*, AAS 62 (1970), 321-384.

lively discussion between leading theologians including Karl Rahner, questioning if the Eucharistic celebration is *really* a public happening which can be transmitted by modern communication means at all. It was argued that in the days of the early Church, only those initiated through baptism were admitted to the full celebration of the liturgy and all others excluded. The celebration of the Eucharist should not be a public happening which it becomes when transmitted through mass media, especially through television. The old ‘arcane discipline’ of the early Church should also be respected today.¹⁴

Contrary to this opinion, the 1971 Pastoral Instruction, *Communio et Progressio*, would once again underline the value of religious broadcasts, including transmissions of liturgical celebrations, and the idea of outsiders gaining access to the church remotely. Among the benefits of these religious programmes it lists: 1) their educative and transformative value, 2) their relational and pastoral value in their capacity to sustain the Church’s connection, especially with members who cannot go to church, like the sick and infirm, and 3) their missionary import in their potential to forge new relationships with the so-called “unchurched” seekers who engage and can be engaged through these modern technologies, and their ability to reach people even in places where the Church cannot be physically present. It says:

Religious programmes that utilize all the resources of radio and television enrich people’s religious life and create new bonds between the faithful. They help in religious education and in the Church’s active commitment in the world. They are bonds of union for those who cannot share physically in the life of the Church because of their sickness or old age. In addition, they create new relationships between the faithful and those people - and today they are legion - who

¹⁴ Eilers, *Communicating in Ministry and Mission*, 121. Emphasis added.

have no affiliation with any Church and yet subconsciously seek spiritual nourishment. They carry the message of the Gospel to countries where the Church is not. The Church cannot afford to ignore such opportunities. On the contrary, she will make the fullest use of any fresh opportunities that the improvement of those instruments may disclose.¹⁵

These very same effects are the ones that would be heightened by the coming of the Internet, which made its debut just a little over fifty years ago in 1969. From having a similar capacity for one-way transmission in its initial stages (Web 1.0), the Internet has taken mediated communication further with the interactive and dynamic features of “social networks” (Web 2.0) that enable people to engage in online virtual communities. Gradually, the Internet would continue to evolve into an intuitive, user-sensitive web (Web 3.0). At present, new modalities of a so-called integrative web (Web 4.0) that blurs the divide between offline and online are becoming increasingly commonplace.¹⁶

Lamentably, the Catholic Church’s use of the Internet for liturgy has been largely confined to streaming videos of liturgical

¹⁵ See Pontifical Council for Social Communication, Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio*, 23 May 1971, Vatican Archive, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_23051971_communio_en.html (accessed 21 May 2020), 150.

¹⁶ See my previous articles for a discussion of these stages in the development of the Internet with illustrative examples of religious use of the Internet for each of the stages: “How to Communicate in the Age of Web 4.0?: Challenges and Possibilities for Religions in Asia,” *Religion and Social Communication* 14:2 (2016): 106-121. “Digital Expressions, Experiences and Challenges of and for Religions in Asia” *Religion and Social Communication* 16:2 (2018): 105-123. “Internet and Social Media: Bridge or Barrier for a Culture of Communion?” *Landas* 32:2 (2018) 33–59. See also Eilers, *Communicating in Ministry and Mission*, 210-212.

celebrations with little to no interactivity, which is very Web 1.0 or primitive Web 2.0 at the most. In the Philippines, for instance, online streaming of liturgies in real time were in fact a rarity before the pandemic and limited to just a handful of very large shrines in Metro Manila like Quiapo Church, Baclaran Church and the National Shrine of Saint Jude Thaddeus. Meanwhile, most liturgical transmissions still come in the form of radio and TV broadcasts, which are sometimes not even done live¹⁷ despite the kind of technology available, even as analog radio and television itself are gradually becoming obsolete in many parts of the world. At the same time, these broadcasts especially those transmitted through mainstream channels have been rather inconvenient, being allocated odd timeslots in the very early morning or late hours of the night for commercial reasons. Meanwhile, Catholic radio and TV, which allocate the best time of the day for the Mass, have a very limited reach.

More importantly, the Catholic Church has been absolute in its official stance regarding the status of online liturgical celebrations, especially those involving the celebration of the sacraments. On the issue of online liturgies, for instance, it has been clear and unequivocal in stating that “There are no

¹⁷ While recorded or so-called “canned” Masses are not explicitly prohibited, the Church is very clear in its preference for live transmissions of Masses. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops explains: “Ideally, the Mass is telecast “live,” in real time, as it is celebrated. Here, the viewer is able to join in the prayer of a worshiping community as the liturgy is celebrated. The liturgical days and seasons are respected and the worship setting as well as an actual praying community help the viewer to participate with an attitude of prayerful attention and internal participation.” See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Guidelines for Televising the Liturgy*, <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/frequently-asked-questions/guidelines-for-televising-the-liturgy> (accessed 5 February 2021).

sacraments on the Internet; and even the religious experiences possible there by the grace of God are insufficient apart from *real-world interaction* with other persons of faith.”¹⁸ Despite the expanding capabilities of the Internet to enable greater and richer interpersonal communication, the phrase “real-world interaction” used here to describe offline contact effectively disparages online connections as inauthentic. Also, by the same statement, it maintains that whatever semblance of sacramental participation remotely done through the Internet, no matter how immersive it may become with the continually evolving technology, is in reality non-sacramental in nature.

Based on this official teaching and contrary to the impression of many Catholics during the pandemic, watching a Eucharist through the Internet, as well as doing so through television or radio, even in real time or through a replay, does not actually count as liturgical participation in the strict sense.¹⁹ Technically speaking, hearing a Mass on radio or watching a Mass on TV or through the Internet is not attending Mass and it does not satisfy the obligation to do so, whether in the case of the pandemic or the case of the sick and other similar cases. In the case of the pandemic in particular, there is actually no more obligation to fulfill, not only where a dispensation from the precept of obligation has been issued, but since the pandemic itself and the quarantine

¹⁸ Pontifical Council for Social Communication, *The Church and Internet*, 22 February 2002, Vatican Archive, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20020228_church-internet_en.html (accessed 4 May 2020), no. 9. Emphasis added.

¹⁹ You may want to see another recent article where I tackle the question of the validity and efficacy of online liturgies from a theological perspective. It is titled “Cybergrace in Cyberspace?: An Argument for Online Liturgies in the Light of COVID-19” and will soon come out in Vol. 33 no. 2 of *Landas*, the journal of Loyola School of Theology in Ateneo de Manila, Quezon City, Philippines.

that was imposed have made attendance impossible, as foreseen in Canon 1248 §2. With regard to the sick, the very same Canon applies. They are deemed “*excused* for a serious reason” on account of their condition, as affirmed twice by the Catechism of the Catholic Church.²⁰ As Pope simply puts it, “It doesn’t have to ‘count’ since you don’t have an obligation to meet in the first place.”²¹ Nonetheless, some argue that watching online Masses, even replays, can have certain spiritual benefits. Diwa says:

This is a great help to grow in prayer and desire for the Holy Eucharist. It’s not a question of ‘blessing’ but of participating in the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ vs. watching a recording of it some other time. Both are genuine sources of spiritual nourishments in this difficult time.²²

Even the Pope, who presided in what is perhaps the most iconic online liturgy of the entire pandemic in his Extraordinary *Urbi et Orbi* Blessing last 27 March 2020, warned afterwards of a fundamental deficiency in such online liturgies. He elaborates:

I say this because someone made me reflect on the danger brought about by this moment that we are experiencing, this pandemic that has made all of us communicate, through the media, through the means of communication, even in matters of religion. Even in this Mass, we are all communicating, but we are not together, spiritually together. The people present here are very few. But there are many people attending: we are together, but not together. Even when it

²⁰ See CCC 2181 and CCC 2183.

²¹ Charles Pope, “Does TV Mass ‘count’?” in *Our Sunday Visitor*, 4 January 2017, <https://osvnews.com/2017/01/04/does-tv-mass-count/> (accessed 4 May 2020).

²² As quoted in Paterno Esmaguel II, “Replays of Masses not ‘invalid’ amid pandemic, says Bishop David,” *Rappler*, 24 May 2020, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/261833-replays-masses-not-invalid-pandemic-bishop-david> (accessed 25 May 2020).

comes to the Sacrament that you are receiving today, the Eucharist; the people who are connected with us only have Spiritual Communion. And this isn't the Church: this is the Church in a difficult situation, which the Lord permits, but the ideal of the Church is always with the people and with the Sacraments — always.²³

Here we see how the current Pontiff himself remains very much in line with the ambivalent, if not, negative stance of the Church towards online liturgies in particular and broadcast liturgies by extension. As his former spokesman recalls from the beginning of his papacy, the Pope consistently declined requests to stream his daily Masses at the Vatican online. Fearing the intrusions of cameras, he intended to preserve the simplicity and spontaneity of the liturgical celebration. It was not until the lockdown during the pandemic that he finally agreed to have them livestreamed.²⁴ Thus, we may say that on the official level the Catholic Church tends to view these liturgical transmissions as mere broadcasts rather than as *teleparticipation*.

²³ “Dico questo perché qualcuno mi ha fatto riflettere sul pericolo che questo momento che stiamo vivendo, questa pandemia che ha fatto che tutti ci comunicassimo anche religiosamente attraverso i media, attraverso i mezzi di comunicazione, anche questa Messa, siamo tutti comunicanti, ma non insieme, spiritualmente insieme. Il popolo è piccolo. C'è un grande popolo: stiamo insieme, ma non insieme. Anche il Sacramento: oggi ce l'avete, l'Eucaristia, ma la gente che è collegata con noi, soltanto la comunione spirituale. E questa non è la Chiesa: questa è la Chiesa di una situazione difficile, che il Signore permette, ma l'ideale della Chiesa è sempre con il popolo e con i sacramenti. Sempre.” Pope Francis, *Homily*, 17 April 2020, Vatican Archive, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/cotidie/2020/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20200417_lafamiliarita-conil-signore.html (accessed 4 May 2020).

²⁴ Federico Lombardi, “Piazza Piena e Piazza vuota” in *Vatican News* 15 April 2020: <https://www.vaticannews.va/it/vaticano/news/2020-04/diario-crisi-piazza-piena-vuota-coronavirus-padre-lombardi-covid.html> (accessed 4 May 2020).

Liturgical Teleparticipation during the Pandemic

As quarantine restrictions created obstacles to recording the usual “canned” television Masses one to two weeks in advance, most broadcast liturgies using radio and television had to stop or shift suddenly to online during the pandemic. Otherwise, some resorted to replays from past years that felt ridiculously irrelevant and out-of-touch with reality as they made no reference at all to the glaring social situation, aside from seeming like illegal gatherings oblivious of mandated quarantine protocols like social distancing and the wearing of face masks. Moreover, as televised liturgies were usually available for Sundays and special occasions such as Christmas and Easter, a lacuna soon became apparent for those with the habit of going to daily Mass.

This compelled dioceses and large churches, and eventually even small parishes and communities, to initiate daily Masses that were streamed online using free and accessible platforms like Facebook or YouTube. As Sanchez reports, “Physical distancing however has not prevented the Philippine Catholic Church in its apostolate. As the country braced for the pandemic, the Church fully turned to social media, and ‘liturgical televisuality,’ to respond to the faithful’s much needed spiritual nourishment.”²⁵ Providentially, basic to intermediate skills in using video cameras and sound equipment as well as in editing and livestreaming through the Internet are not so uncommon anymore, especially among younger generations who were quick to form a new ministry where it was previously non-existent.

Meanwhile, the Vatican, through the Congregation for

²⁵ Louie Jon A. Sánchez, “Catholic Liturgical Televisuality in the Time of Pandemic,” Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, 4 June 2020, <https://ari.nus.edu.sg/20331-11/?fbclid=IwAR3ZP6QpPB0x7STbYdM2rtCoJmv7g851KI7uHwrC-HyJ98W7AyS1PYvMItQ> (accessed 7 June 2020).

Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, would issue two successive Decrees acknowledging the value of such liturgies and at the same time expressing its clear preference for liturgies that are transmitted in real time. The first Decree, “In time of Covid-19,” affirms that “in this occasion, the means of *live (not recorded)* televisual or internet broadcasts are helpful.”²⁶ This is repeated once again in a follow-up Decree issued six days later where it instructs:

The faithful should be informed of the beginning times of the celebrations so that they can prayerfully unite themselves in their homes. Means of *live (not recorded)* telematic broadcasts can be of help.²⁷

Nevertheless, the “digital divide” became apparent between dioceses and parishes that can afford the infrastructure and have the necessary skills and those who lacked the resources.—This discrepancy was evident in various aspects such as the quality and the stability of transmission, which are dependent not only on the equipment used but also on the Internet connectivity available or affordable to them. Thus, while there were online Masses that looked very polished and professional – as some in fact involved the work of professionals, whether on a paid or volunteer basis – there were also those that looked like “home videos” with very poor image and sound.

Even the liturgical setting became a concern as most church

²⁶ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Decree *In time of Covid-19*, 19 March 2020, Vatican Archive, <http://www.cultodivino.va/content/cultodivino/it/documenti/decreti-general/decreti-general/2020/decreto-triduo-pasquale-2020.html> (accessed 2 May 2020).

²⁷ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Decree *In time of Covid-19 (II)*, 25 March 2020, Vatican Archive, http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2020/03/25/01_81/00409.html#en (accessed 2 May 2020).

buildings proved to be very challenging for more limited or amateur teams especially in terms of acoustics. As such, most of these online liturgies were celebrated not in the main church building but in smaller chapels or even makeshift altars. These, however, do not always reflect the beauty and dignity mandated by the Church in her liturgical celebrations, especially in telecast ones, as we saw above. There were even some priests who would celebrate the Eucharist in their rooms where the sound is better contained but with their bed visible in the background.

As such, it was not uncommon for viewers to prefer broadcasts from dioceses or parishes other than their own, or to follow the papal liturgies instead, even as a replay. This practice eliminates the advantage of a liturgy transmitted live by one's local church as a more immediate if not more intimate experience, and at the same time one that keeps them connected to their local community. This kind of "shopping around" for online Masses and choosing which ones are better or have more convenient timeslots also gives the impression of commodifying the liturgical celebration and treating the Eucharist just like YouTube clips or Netflix movies, especially in the case of settling for mere replays over live transmissions when these are available. At the same time, church communities may need to realize that such is the dynamics of most netizens and choose to shape up rather than gripe about the reality.

On the other hand, some new technologies, such as live videoconferencing apps like Zoom and GoogleMeet, that suddenly became popular in their secular use for business or education during the pandemic also seemed to enrich liturgical telecasts and bring them to a whole new level. As of the time of writing, a Zoom conference can accommodate as many as 100 participants or up to 500 with the Large Meeting add-on. These participants will then be able to see, hear and interact with each other in real-time as they pray and sing together, in what is

perhaps more approximate to or even already beyond what was miraculously experienced by Saint Clare.²⁸

Such new affordances somehow compensate for the lack of sense of community that Pope Francis, as quoted in the Homily above, finds to be lacking in online liturgies. Moreover, they also open the possibility for the sharing of ministries among the participants such as the reading of Scripture, the proclamation of the intercessions, or even concelebration where there are several ordained ministers present—something which was not previsible prior to these emergent technologies. In fact, even while using Facebook or YouTube live, which are essentially still one-way transmissions, the actual number of live viewers is flashed in real time, giving people some sense of companionship and belonging to a believing and worshipping community. In this way, they elevate what would have otherwise been a very Web 1.0 experience, not just to Web 2.0 but even to Web 4.0! Still, although this setup potentially enables greater participation, there are those who insist that the celebration be confined to one physical space where the liturgy really happens and the others are reduced to mere spectators. In the “RCAM Liturgical Instructions” sent to the Manila clergy by Apostolic Administrator, Bishop Broderick Pabillo said that

For those using Zoom or any other similar applications that simultaneously live stream participants from

²⁸ Last May 17, 2020, for instance, we had an online Mass via Zoom with some contemporaries from the College Department of San Jose Seminary. The presider led us from Pampanga, the first reading was proclaimed from Makati, the psalm from Quezon City, the second reading from Muntinlupa, the Gospel from Manila, and a priest gave the homily from Makati. Afterwards, a new deacon, ordained only during the pandemic, led the intercessions from Florida, USA. And although our microphones had to be turned off to decrease bandwidth consumption and avoid lagging, there was still much more participation as compared to just “watching” an ordinary online Mass.

different venues, the norm regarding the integrity of the liturgical celebration must be respected. Ministerial participation in the celebration requires physical presence in the place of worship. In the absence of a lector in the place of worship, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) provides that the priest himself proclaim the readings (GIRM, 59). Please avoid the practice being done by some where the readers, and even the celebrants, are from different locations and they meet only in the online platform.²⁹

As quarantine regulations gradually relaxed, online liturgies began to be complemented by the possibility of receiving communion offline in the flesh, thereby enabling fuller participation. Practices in this regard would vary from parish to parish. Some designated communion stations within parish vicinity that parishioners went to after watching the online Masses. Some would offer “drive-through” communion in the church yard for parishioners who have vehicles or go all the way to bringing the Eucharist to the homes of the faithful. It is good to note that while these practices may seem novel or unorthodox at first sight, Charles Borromeo (1538-1584), during another pandemic in 1576, ordered Masses to be said in elevated platforms strategically located throughout the city so the quarantined faithful could assist in those Masses from the windows of their homes. Afterwards, he caused communion to be brought to the faithful on Sundays at their doorsteps, thus allowing them to receive the sacrament even while on lockdown.³⁰ In fact, this

²⁹ Roman Catholic Archbishop of Manila, *RCAM Liturgical Instructions*, 20 August 2020.

³⁰ See Dominic Galatolo, *How Saint Charles Borromeo Fought the Deadly Virus in Milan*. <https://www.isfcc.org/post/how-saint-charles-borromeo-fought-the-deadly-virus-in-milan> (accessed 8 September 2020). See also Carol Glatz, “Apart but together: Church shows creativity ministering during pandemics” in *Crux*, 25 May 2020, <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2020/05/apart-but-together-church-shows-creativity-ministering-during-pandemics/> (accessed 8 June

would figure prominently in the saint's iconography and many popular depictions would show him distributing communion to victims of the Plague outside the confines of a church building. This practice was considerably widespread, as evidenced by the interesting communion implements that are extant from that period like *forcipes* or elongated pincers and *hostienloffel* or hostspoons that help maintain social distancing.³¹

With the kind of technology that we have in the Internet today, along with its wider reach, the benefits of religious broadcasts listed in *Communio and Progressio* were exponentially magnified in these pandemic online liturgies. Such was the experience during the pandemic, as reported by Alessandro Gisotti, the vice-editorial director of Vatican media, who shared that the papal liturgies that were broadcast online during the quarantine effectively reached out not only to believers but “even agnostics and non-believers,” as gleaned from the feedback that the viewers themselves sent. Based on the same article, almost 5.5 million users registered more than 14.5 million views of these papal liturgies on the Vatican News website between April 5 and 13 alone. According to Gisotti, “Many people, not just the Catholic faithful, were able to follow and ‘*encounter*’ the Holy Father and, through him, the Word of God thanks to this technology and especially to streaming services and social media.”³² Note that Gisotti here uses the word “encounter,” implying a connection or contact much deeper than just watching. Bullivant, a theologian

2020).

³¹ See Lucas Viar, “Eucharistic utensils” in *Liturgical Arts Journal*, 6 April 2020, <https://www.liturgicalartsjournal.com/2020/04/eucharistic-utensils.html> (accessed 8 June 2020).

³² As quoted by Carol Glatz, “Vatican registers huge growth, engagement online for Holy Week, Easter,” *Crux*, 14 April 2020, <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2020/04/vatican-registers-huge-growth-engagement-online-for-holy-week-easter/> (accessed 21 May 2020). Emphasis added.

and sociologist, also asserts, “Do not underestimate the power of those words, and of that witness, broadcast to a frightened audience that included many non-Catholics. One of my best friends, an Anglican priest, said, ‘That visual of the Pope in the rain in an empty square with the ‘plague crucifix’ commending the world to God was *incredibly powerful*.’”³³

On May 20, 2020, Vatican News shared a short video on its Facebook page that showed people from all over the world following the Pope’s daily Mass online during the pandemic. The caption said, “Messages and videos have poured in from around the world to thank Pope Francis for *accompanying* the faithful with his live-streamed daily Masses during these difficult months of COVID-19 lockdown.”³⁴ Again, we notice the use of the word “accompaniment,” which suggests that the faithful experienced the closeness and presence of the Holy Father, despite the physical distance.

Based on another report, the Pope’s daily Mass is able to attract a live online audience of as much as 6,000 people.³⁵ According to the same report, this figure easily rises to about half a million for Italy alone, if one were to include television broadcast. Providing perspective, the article also notes that “the 500,000 figure is high, given the capacity for those attending an open-air Mass in the perimeter of St. Peter’s Square is around 60,000 people. Exceptional events, such as the canonization of

³³ Stephen Bullivant, *Catholicism in the Time of Coronavirus*, Downloadable online at <https://www.wordonfire.org/covid/> (accessed 8 June 2020), 38. Emphasis added.

³⁴ See <https://web.facebook.com/vaticannews/videos/1158725847656219/>

³⁵ See Elise Ann Allen, “As Coronavirus spreads, so does Pope’s ‘virtual parish’” in *Crux*, 17 March 2020, <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2020/03/as-coronavirus-spreads-so-does-popes-virtual-parish/> (accessed 2 May 2020).

John Paul II and John XXIII, attracted 500,000.”³⁶ The kind of feedback and corresponding figures give us a sense of the ordinary people’s “reception” or what is formally termed in theology as the *sensus fidelium* regarding these online liturgies. As one Catholic from England says about her experience of online Masses during the pandemic, “‘Participating’ is the remarkable word here, for this is precisely how it felt, despite the real spiritual and sensory deprivation of not being physically present.”³⁷

Conversely, a young American shares her first experience of online Mass: “watching the Mass on my laptop, feet stretched out on my bed, I scarcely felt any sense of participation in the Body of Christ. In fact, I scarcely felt I had participated in anything. There is a vast gulf, I discovered that day, between going to Mass and simply watching Mass the way one watches Netflix. One is a foretaste of heaven; the other is, well, not.” Nonetheless, with the help of some friends, she was later able to find ways to make the experience more spiritually nourishing. One of her friends said, “I think it does have something to do with the fact that we don’t know how to watch anything in a holy way.” Thus they introduced some variations in bodily posture and even decorated the physical space in order to make it more conducive to prayer and to promote a corresponding inner disposition. The following Sunday, she joined a Mass that used Zoom with more than fifty participants, with sharing of ministries and active participation, and she now had this to say: “I stood, too, in my tiny Bronx apartment, and said, ‘Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ,’ in chorus with dozens of people hundreds of miles away, and I felt the connection I’d been longing for that first week: a union of word, gesture, prayer and time.”³⁸

³⁶ See Christopher Lamb, “Half a million tune into Pope’s daily Mass” in *The Tablet*, 19 March 2020, <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/12608/half-a-million-tune-into-pope-s-daily-mass> (accessed 2 May 2020).

³⁷ Hilary Davies, “Masses in Mind,” *The Tablet*, 6 June 2020, p. 6.

³⁸ Coleen Dulle, “Coronavirus has cancelled public

Nonetheless, not all reported experiences of online liturgies have been positive. Beattie for instance shares how “the livestreamed official liturgies expose more starkly than ever how male-centered the Eucharist is. Women have been rendered almost redundant by the shift to virtual Masses. Several women say they simply switch off the livestream after the liturgy of the Word because, in the words of one, “it seems to be just a man doing something of which I have no part.”³⁹ Parvis echoes the same sentiment, saying, “I felt not only terrible desolation but also naked jealousy. It looked liked some kind of clericalist fantasy: no lay people, and above all no women.”⁴⁰ Thus, rather than feeling a sense of community, she tells how it felt like “we watched other people feast on the risen Christ together while we fasted separately from behind an impregnable online wall. It was meant to comfort, but it felt like being shut out of Paradise.”⁴¹

This kind of sentiment however may not be inherent to the online liturgy itself. For one, online liturgies, as with any liturgical celebration, need not be “male-centered” or clericalist and should not be so. In fact, as we saw, the kind of technology that we now have can already enable the participation of women and lay persons in various liturgical ministries even from different venues. On a deeper level, however, the issue has to do with the current official teaching concerning online and transmitted liturgies. People who are aware of their non-liturgical and non-sacramental status will naturally feel like they are shut out and

Masses. How can we participate in our own homes?,” *America*, 31 March 2020, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/03/31/coronavirus-has-cancelled-public-masses-how-can-we-participate-our-own-homes> (accessed 5 May 2020).

³⁹ Tina Beattie, “Women and the post-Covid Church,” *The Tablet*, 6 June 2020, p. 4.

⁴⁰ Sara Parvis, “Why we must mourn,” *The Tablet*, 2 May 2020, p. 6.

⁴¹ Parvis, “Why we must mourn,” p. 6.

“fasting” while those who are physically present in the venue of the transmission are feasting on the real Eucharist. In stark contrast, those who do not know this actually find the celebration spiritually enriching and nourishing. The online wall may not really be impregnable after all.

Questions for the New Normal

On May 12, 2020, the Pope’s spokesperson announced the eventual cessation of the online transmission of the Pope’s daily Masses on May 19 as quarantine restrictions were eased, allowing for the resumption of in-person worship. He said, “As he has been able to affirm in recent days, the pope hopes that the People of God will thus be able to return to communal familiarity with the Lord in the sacraments, participating in the Sunday liturgy and resuming, also in churches, the daily attendance of the Lord and his word.” Again, we can sense here an implicit disparagement of online liturgies as non-sacramental and non-liturgical, thereby necessitating a “return” to real sacrament and liturgy.⁴² In a similar vein, on August 15, the Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Cardinal Robert Sarah, with a mandate from Pope Francis, addressed a letter to the presidents of episcopal conferences titled, “Let us return to the Eucharist with joy!”⁴³ From the title itself, there is

⁴² Elise Ann Allen, “Pope to stop livestreaming daily Mass amid Italy’s coronavirus recovery,” *Crux*, May 12, 2020, https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2020/05/pope-to-stop-livestreaming-daily-mass-amid-italys-coronavirus-recovery/?fbclid=IwAR1shhFlaW5AAP0reSVnJmCie_C5sJXGsPSoYakfIRVDe-P8jdVsDbeCR7M (accessed 20 May 2020).

⁴³ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Letter on the celebration of the liturgy during and after the COVID 19 pandemic to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences of the Catholic Church, *Let Us Return to the Eucharist With Joy*, 15 August 2020, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/>

likewise an implication that despite their participation in online Masses, the faithful have been away from the Eucharist, and thus the invitation to “return” to it as soon as possible. Should we then stop online Masses as early as we can, and altogether?

Soon enough, there were people around the world who expressed how they missed the Pope’s livestreamed Masses and called for its resumption. As one priest from Rome comments, “We also have many, many people participating in these Masses from the U.S. and other countries where public Masses are not yet available. And, also from many people who are homebound for many other reasons. It has opened up a new ministry that we never thought we needed to do.”⁴⁴

The same sentiment appears to be true not only about the continuation of the Holy Father’s livestreamed Masses but also about online Masses in general, which appear to respond to a need that may outlast the quarantine that initially made it necessary. Parvis observes, “Many who expect to carry on shielding at home for a year or more await with sadness the day when the recordings of daily Masses will stop, which have become so central to their lives. Perhaps we could find a way of keeping those unable to return to Mass quickly, or perhaps indeed ever, closer to the centre of the Church’s life in years to come.”⁴⁵ O’Hanlon inquires, “Are we missing something? Surely the fact that more people are online than in Church on a Sunday cannot be ignored? When the virus is defeated, we cannot go back to where

full-text-cardinal-robert-sarah---let-us-return-to-the-eucharist-with-joy-58368 (accessed 20 September 2020).

⁴⁴ Courtney Mares, “Around the globe, Catholics hope papal Mass online will continue,” *Catholic News Agency*, 21 May 2020, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/around-the-globe-catholics-hope-papal-mass-online-will-continue-57642> (accessed 22 May 2020).

⁴⁵ Sara Parvis, “Without the Mass,” *The Tablet*, 30 May 2020, 17.

we were.”⁴⁶ In the Philippines, for instance, a recent survey conducted by a communications consulting company identified Quiapo Church as the top two social media influencer in the country. Its Facebook page, where it regularly streams Masses and other church activities has reached 1.6 million likes and has more than three million followers.⁴⁷ This attests to the enduring relevance of online Masses even after in-person Church activities have been allowed to resume on a limited scale.

Firstly, it is important to note that the online shift is far from being a Catholic-specific shift. In reality, other faith communities also experienced the need for a sudden shift online.⁴⁸ It is only that we were now thrust all of a sudden and forced to cope up with an ineluctable transition that has been happening in the world. So much Catholic and religious life has been happening online these days because so much of *life as a whole* has been happening online these days - and even prior! - such that it no longer makes sense, now more than ever, to distinguish sharply between “online” and “real” (i.e., offline) life⁴⁹ in an emerging Web 4.0 world. In the Philippines, for instance, Internet use has been on the rise and has reached an average of ten hours and two

⁴⁶ Joseph O’Hanlon, “A Chapel of the Mind and Spirit,” *The Tablet*, 6 June 2020, p. 16.

⁴⁷ Christina Hermoso, “Cardinal Tagle cites Quiapo Church’s ranking as top 2 social media influencer,” *Manila Bulletin*, 26 February 2021, <https://mb.com.ph/2021/02/26/cardinal-tagle-cites-quiapo-churchs-ranking-as-top-2-social-media-influencer/> (accessed 1 March 2021).

⁴⁸ For instance, the YouTube Channel of Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple’s last post prior to the pandemic was nine years ago. During the pandemic, the same YouTube Channel once again became active with prayer services, Dharma lectures and other sangha activities posted and even livestreamed online. See <https://www.youtube.com/user/fgsphilippines>. Curiously, their prayer services are only made available as live events but not retained as recordings.

⁴⁹ Bullivant, *Catholicism in the Time of Coronavirus*, 45.

minutes a day in 2019.⁵⁰ This means that the average Filipino spends most of one's waking hours online rather than offline. Nor can this be dismissed as a temporary phenomenon that would eventually pass when the pandemic ends. As early as 2015, Gould had pointed out a growing fusion of online and offline in the religious sphere.⁵¹ Thus, there is a need for us to become more and more aware of how virtual reality is actually more real than we think, rather than maintain a dismissive attitude towards it.

Secondly, we must admit how many Catholic communities have been quite slow in recognizing and responding to this ongoing online shift, until the pandemic struck. In effect, the pandemic served as a providential jolt to harness the power of these emerging means of communication that has largely stayed untapped. As Bullivant envisions, "One might reasonably prophesy that, finally, our churches will realize how important the internet and digital technology now are. (...) Perhaps for the first time, those in charge of parish communications have had to think seriously about how best to use them to connect with people, whether existing parishioners or anyone else."⁵² This is also true for other faith communities who are beginning to discover or rediscover the potential of this emerging technology only now. There is still so much that needs to be done to improve, particularly in technical aspects, to better promote liturgical participation. Also, for those who do not yet have online communication mechanisms in place, Bullivant suggests that faith communities should have a broader online communication plan that includes social media, email, text

⁵⁰ The latest comparative report on global digital use is available online in <https://p.widencdn.net/kqy7ii/Digital2019-Report-en> (accessed 4 May 2020).

⁵¹ Meredith Gould, *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing the Good News in New Ways*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 30.

⁵² Bullivant, *Catholicism in the Time of Coronavirus*, 41-42.

messaging, and online giving.⁵³

Nonetheless, the most crucial question here is whether the current disposition of the Catholic hierarchy with regard to online liturgies in particular and remote mediated liturgies in general would be able to shift from one of treating them as mere broadcasts without much real worth to seeing them as valid, legitimate and efficacious forms of liturgical teleparticipation and thus harnessing their potential. Otherwise, any progress in technology would only be disparaged by a dismissive and at best condescending stance towards all forms of mediated participation in liturgy, no matter how dynamic, engaging and effective these may be, as experienced by the faithful themselves.

The crux of the matter seems to lie on understanding cyberspace as *real space*.⁵⁴ Murray calls this the “spatial affordance”⁵⁵ of the Internet, which Horsfield describes by noting how “mediated communication has taken on the characteristics of an enveloping technological and symbolic environment *within which life is lived*.”⁵⁶ As virtual reality becomes the new reality, cyberspace also becomes the new space where people are. Campbell and Garner advice that “the digital environment is not

⁵³ Bullivant, *Catholicism in the Time of Coronavirus*, 42.

⁵⁴ I have tackled this from a theological viewpoint in my article “Cybergrace in Cyberspace?: An Argument for Online Liturgies in the Light of COVID-19” especially in the sections “The importance of the body in liturgy” and “The importance of the cosmos in liturgy” where I try to weigh in on the different sides. Thus, I will focus here instead on the phenomenological and communication dimension.

⁵⁵ See J. Murray, *Inventing the Medium: Principles of Interaction Design as a Cultural Practice* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 51–87.

⁵⁶ Peter Horsfield, *From Jesus to the Internet: A History of Christianity and Media* (West Sussex: John Wiley and Sons, 2015), 264-265. Emphasis added.

going away in the foreseeable future. Rather, with the proliferation of augmented reality, mobile media, and internet, it promises to grow and become interconnected with our physical environment and to give rise to *distinct digital places or neighborhoods for people*.⁵⁷

In contrast, there are those who find it difficult to imagine virtual space as sacred or even real for that matter. Silience, for instance, avers that “the making of a sacrifice requires an altar, from which the sacred species can then be distributed to the faithful. The space on Dr. Jenkins’ desk in front of her computer monitor is not an altar.”⁵⁸ The problem here appears to be an inability, if not a refusal, to perceive a space other than physical space. Cyberspace is not a physical space within a device or in front of it. It is a virtual point of convergence where real people are able to gather in a real way to do real things. Even laws now already recognize how actual crimes are being committed in these virtual spaces. If evil then is able to operate in cyberspace, could not grace as well?

Surprisingly, the Church appears to be able to recognize this spatial affordance of the Internet in other areas, but not in liturgy. The Pope, for instance, declared in 2014, “The media can help us greatly in this, especially nowadays, when the networks of human communication have made unprecedented advances. The internet, in particular, offers immense possibilities for encounter and solidarity. This is something truly good, a gift from God.”⁵⁹ Even prior to this, John Paul II called it the “New Areopagus”⁶⁰ or

⁵⁷ Heidi Campbell and Stephen Garner, *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 93.

⁵⁸ David Silience, “Real presence,” *The Tablet*, 16 May 2020, 18.

⁵⁹ Message for the 2014 World Communications Day (24 January 2014): AAS 106 (2014), 113.

⁶⁰ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* 37.

new marketplace where people today converge and the best and worst of the world can be found. Benedict XVI also described it as the “digital continent”⁶¹ way back in 2010. Just a decade later, it is now the largest continent in the world with four billion citizens. Thus, the words of Paul VI to the members and *periti* of the Consilium for the execution of the Constitution on the Liturgy in 1970 now appear to be prophetic: “The instruments of social communication are everywhere in today’s society and their even wider use is foreseen in the coming years.”⁶² However, in this era of Web 4.0, not only is the Internet “everywhere in today’s society,” the people of today’s society are also everywhere on the Internet. Thus, if we will not build churches and hold worship “there,” where will they go to find God and worship? This is a challenge not only for Catholics but also for all faith communities.

Beneath the difficulty of accepting cyberspace as worship space seems to lie a concern that online liturgies, if continued, would come to replace physical participation in liturgical celebrations, which is part of a wider concern that the rise of online religion would be detrimental to offline religion. (Note, again, that unhelpful distinction!) Bullivant, for instance, warns of a potential decline in Mass-goers after the pandemic. One of the reasons that he identifies is the breaking of habit, which once broken, usually turns out difficult to revive. According to him, “this will be especially true if, as seems likely, we will have a long period when people can go to church again, but when being part of a large gathering is still widely viewed, and possibly officially cautioned against, as an ‘unnecessary risk’”⁶³

⁶¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *44th World Communications Day Message*, 24 January 2010. See also his *43rd World Communications Day Message*, 24 January 2010.

⁶² Paul VI, *Address to the members and periti of the Consilium on the occasion of its final plenary meeting*, 10 April 1970, AAS 62 (1970), 272-274.

⁶³ Stephen Bullivant, “After the Storm,” *The Tablet*, 16 May 2020, 4.

Curiously, this is a concern that did not seem to be raised in the case of radio and television broadcasts that were never seen as a threat to onsite Mass attendance. Also, it has to be asked whether what is important is participation itself or the fact that it has to be physical, especially in cases where physical participation is not an actual possibility. Also, given many cases where physical attendance was not even there to begin with, for instance among young Catholics, is online participation not a good entry point for revitalizing the faith in the post-pandemic, as it was during the pandemic?

Hence, there may be a need here to reassess the validity as well as productivity of our anxieties and apprehensions. After all, virtual worship space may not necessary be in competition or contradiction with physical worship space, and they need not be mutually exclusive. As O’Hanlon argues, “The many who go online to hear a word of God must not be switched off or redirected to the church up the road... They are in a new place of prayer, certainly new to those of us who dwell in pews.”⁶⁴ He even goes on to say: “the presence of God-in-Jesus is as real in these new online chapels as in any sacrament, as in any church, as in any tabernacle.”⁶⁵

However, without necessarily going as far as to equate in-person and online worship, we should consider a possibility of accommodating and harnessing both worship modalities in the post-pandemic or new normal setting. Even prior to the pandemic, some faith communities have actually been initiating this process as “a natural evolution of ways to respond to Jesus’ command to proclaim the gospel to all nations,” extending it to the digital frontier.⁶⁶ While there may be a clear preference and superior

⁶⁴ O’Hanlon, “A Chapel of the Mind and Spirit,” p. 16.

⁶⁵ O’Hanlon, “A Chapel of the Mind and Spirit,” p. 16.

⁶⁶ Julie Anne Lytle, *Faith Formation 4.0: Introducing an Ecology of Faith in a Digital Age* (New York: Morehouse Publishing,

regard for in-person worship, there may still be room for online worship to meet specific needs and situation in ways that in-person worship cannot.

For instance, we have a relatively more balanced text from the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines titled “Recommendations and Guidelines for the Liturgical Celebration in ‘New Normal’ Condition,” which affirms how “social media has brought us together in spite of the social distancing we imposed on ourselves” while also calling for a clear distinction “between virtual participation and the full participation of the people in our liturgical celebrations.”⁶⁷ Thus, while it asserts that virtual participation is not full, it still calls and recognizes worshipping in a virtual space as a legitimate form of participation, without any hint of advocating liturgical teleparticipation as the new status quo or as a substitute for “full participation” in the new normal.

In fact, the two can be complementary in a very beautiful way, such that those who could not be present for valid reasons could continue to be connected to the community’s liturgical celebration and the physically gathered community would be aware of the reality of a faith community that is much wider than their worship space. As Parvis puts it, “The Catholic Church has never been made up solely of those who are able to be physically at Mass.”⁶⁸ Catholics in fact have long believed in the doctrine of the “communion of saints,” and this may yet be another doctrinal underpinning that can support how the Mass bridges both physical and virtual worlds. As Colleen Dulle says, “Without the physical

2013), 76.

⁶⁷ Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, *Recommendations and Guidelines for the Liturgical Celebration in “New Normal” Condition*, 16 May 2020, <https://cbcnews.net/cbcnews/liturgical-guidelines-in-new-normal-condition/> (accessed 8 June 2020).

⁶⁸ Parvis, “Without the Mass,” p. 17.

communion of the Eucharist or an immediate community, the holy communion that remains to us is the communion of saints: our spiritual bond with not only the saints in heaven, but the profound spiritual connection we share when we pray at the same time as others across great distances, or for the same intentions across time, or even the profound bond we share with others who pray to the same God.”⁶⁹

Conclusion

What was once a miracle for Clare of Assisi has gradually become a reality, beginning with radio in 1931 and moreso with the present technologies in this time of Web 4.0 that have made liturgical teleparticipation not only more vivid and vibrant, but also more dynamic, engaging, inclusive, participatory and intimate. Thus, although the pandemic drastically precipitated a drastic shift to online, which was not always smooth nor pleasant, this transition may actually be opportune, if not long overdue, as part of the organic development of liturgical teleparticipation from radio to the present, bringing us closer and perhaps even further than the original experience of Clare.

The leaders of the Catholic Church and of other faith communities would thus do well to reflect on the experience of the pandemic and the positive outcome they can retain and learn from it in the context of the new normal. For instance, the practice of so-called “Zoom Masses,” especially with communion made available afterwards, can perhaps be continued for the sick and elderly, including the significant number of faithful who cannot attend the Sunday Eucharist for valid reasons. This kind of set-up has many obvious advantages as compared to the pre-pandemic staple of canned radio and television liturgies. To return to the previous status quo and abandon in its favor whatever has been achieved so far with online Masses is to go backward. If indeed the

⁶⁹ Dulle, “Coronavirus has cancelled public Masses.”

Holy Spirit, no less, pioneered liturgical teleparticipation as early as the 13th century for a saintly nun in an obscure monastery, could we not also trust that the same Spirit is guiding its development today?

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Shaping Future Pastoral Leaders with Desirable Pastoral Skills in the Vietnam Church

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to shape future pastoral leaders with desirable pastoral skills in Vietnam Church. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were applied during the study which included document study and content analysis, interviews and questionnaires to find the desirable pastoral and leadership characteristics and to determine the gap between the current and desired characteristics of the parish priests. The participants of the study included 2,308 seminarians and parishioners from six seminaries in Vietnam. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The findings from the study revealed the following eight characteristics to be relevant to pastoral care: Protection, Wisdom, Sanctity, Humility, Creativity, Courage, Confidence, and Care. The statistical findings indicated that there was a difference in the expectations of parishioners and seminarians in the pastoral care they were receiving and the expected and current leadership characteristics of their parish priests. This supports the need for a model to be implemented during the training of seminarians in order to more effectively carry

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out their future responsibilities as a parish priest. A subsequent model was developed incorporating the eight characteristics of pastoral care and leadership and sent to religious experts for approval and validation.

Keywords: *Pastoral and Leadership Characteristics, Seminarians, Parishioners, Parish Priests*

Introduction

As it has always been throughout the ages and around the world, pastoral care is a basic responsibility of Catholic priests. Nonetheless, with the rapid pace of the changing world, the elements of pastoral care need to be re-examined to meet the dynamic context of today's parishioners. Religion and religious leaders still have the ability to significantly influence and motivate others towards sacrificial service to humanity. Throughout history until the present, religion has been a powerful influencing force in the world (Küng, 2002). For more than a thousand years, culture has been shaped by religious systems which are older than many empires and dynasties. People around the world are taught to live in ways advocated by particular religions and follow religious teachings faithfully. One of the world's major religions is Christianity, which teaches people to follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ and to be as perfect as possible. All Catholic Christians are obliged to attend Church services, especially the Holy Masses on Sundays and during significant feast days, such as Christmas, Epiphany, Assumption of Mary, and All Saints' Day. Attending the Holy Mass on weekdays, while not compulsory, is much encouraged.

Results of the Religious Landscape Study conducted by Pew Research Center (2019) indicated that as of 2019, the United States has about 51 million Catholic adults or about 20 percent of the total US adult population, and about 141 million adult Protestants or about 43 percent of the total US adult population. Saad

(2018) reported that attendance in Holy Masses during the past decades in the United States has been decreasing. Specifically, from 2005 to 2008, about 45 percent of Catholics have been attending the Holy Masses in the Church. However, from 2014 to 2017, only 39 percent on the average had been attending Holy Masses. Meanwhile, during 2005 - 2008, 46 percent of Protestants (i.e. Protestants plus Christians) have been participating in Protestant Church services, and during 2014-2017 this has slightly decreased to 45 percent. Moreover, while attendance by older Catholics in the Holy Masses has decreased, the young Catholics who seem to be less devout could contribute to the continued decline in Catholic Mass attendance in the future. Saad (2018) continued that the attendance of Protestants in their Church services may be stable but it is the proportion of adults identifying as Protestants that had decreased during the last decades (Pew Research Center, 2019), and while this trend appears to be continuing, the older Protestants would be replaced by less younger generations who are less Protestant-identifying persons.

As a religion in Vietnam, Catholicism has been confronted with many challenges, including political pressure from the communist government, strong authoritarian repression, and other local problems. Nonetheless, Catholicism in Vietnam has been growing despite these challenges. In the past, attendance in Holy Masses in Vietnam had been very high, reaching up to 80-90% attendance rates. However, several factors such as changes in the social landscape globally and locally, thoughts and perspectives of the younger generations (Tien, 2017), and changes in family and traditional structure have presented new pastoral challenges for Catholicism in Vietnam (Catholic Vietnam, 2016). It is therefore necessary that pastoral care should respond to the challenges of modern-day demands. This means that it is not just enough to repeat traditional formulas and rites, but pastoral care needs to renew the faith of the Christian community and contribute to the solidarity of the Catholic faith.

As such, there are notable questions that confront contemporary leaders of the Catholic faith. These could include: (1) Are contemporary Catholics still interested in attending Church services including the Holy Masses, most especially on Sundays? (2) Is regular attendance of the Holy Masses obligatory to being a good Catholic? (3) Is attending Holy Masses becoming a burden to today's Catholics? (4) Is attending the Holy Masses becoming an obsolete practice for people who are occupied with their daily life routines?

As mentioned, there have been reports about the decreasing number of people attending Church services including the Holy Masses. Why is this happening? Perhaps, one of the causes could be secularization, which is defined as the disassociation or separation from religious or spiritual concerns (Dobbelaere, 2011). Moreover, there could be other causes such as those pointed out by the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) in 2010 that include incompetency of leaders, poor management or lack of skills in pastoral care on the part of responsible leaders, and other issues related to the concern on “the challenge to the priestly role of a priest as seen in his diminishing awareness of the Sacred Scriptures (Snell, 2020) resulting from secularism and due to the fast-changing cultural factors; and the challenge to the kingly role of a priest as seen in his refusal to listen and dialogue, and in his failure to empower participatory leadership among the people.” As pastoral care is one of the primary aspects of caring for parishioners and a major responsibility of the Catholic priest, a research was carried out for the development of a leadership model for pastoral care, which could be introduced in the seminaries, where the formation of future priests takes place.

The Importance of Pastoral Leadership in the Church

Leadership in pastoral care is one of the missions that Jesus gave to the Community of Apostles (Hyos, 1999). He also entrusted leadership skills in pastoral care to his chosen

disciples—“The Twelve”—who lived their lives following Jesus closely. He offered to his disciples the power of their pastoral care skills so that they could lead and serve the people as He himself appeared to the world to protect human beings, cure diseases, eliminate the devil, heal the sick, and to direct communities to join the brightness of God... (Matthew 15: 22-28; Matthew 9: 1-8; Mark 8: 22-25; Mark 9: 30-37).

It is important for Church leaders, especially the priests and future priests to possess leadership skills in pastoral care concerning the teachings of Jesus. The Church teaches us that the representatives of Jesus Christ on Earth are the priests, and as associates to the bishops, priests are responsible for guiding the spiritual well-being of the Christian community. Charged with the duty to lead people away from sin, the priests become the fountain of life and the spirit for the whole Church and their own parish. Together, the bishops and priests direct the community endowed to them (Hyos, 1999; John Paul II, 1992). Pope John Paul II affirmed that priests are very important for the Church and they exist in order to accomplish Jesus Christ’s missions entrusted to them (Hyos, 1999).

A priest, particularly a parish priest, is a public figure who performs many roles. He leads and serves his own parish apart from his ecclesial ministry. Therefore, to encourage the parishioners to go to Church and attend the Holy Masses, the parish priest must possess pastoral skills and the characteristics necessary to perform his role in the parish. He must be a mature person with integrity, able to communicate well, listen empathetically, and be always available to his parishioners for counseling and guidance, especially concerning their personal and spiritual problems.

To effectively lead and serve their parishioners, parish priests must be equipped with adequate characteristics in pastoral care as well as in leadership (FABC, 2010). It has therefore,

become imperative that an assessment of seminaries where priests are formed and trained should be made. Academic courses and training programs do not only require in-depth study, but also evaluation of their suitability and appropriateness for the present context. So, are the formators doing their role well, or are they inefficient in their mission? Are the seminarians inadequately prepared? Are the seminarians motivated, able, and determined to be formed truly? Are they able to respond to the requirements of the modern time?

To become a good leader, one needs to have these elements: care, confidence, courage, initiative, and empathy. Specifically, a good leader needs to possess five traits: “confidence, open-mindedness, direction, empathy, and honesty” (Morris, 2013). These are the same attributes required for seminarians undergoing training to become future priests. When they become ordained priests, they stand as the leaders of their own parish communities. Thus, they should get the opportunity to develop these attributes when they undergo practical experience in community management formation and training in the seminary (Pascoe, 2018). Pope Paul VI (1965) in his “Decree on Priestly Training” advised that bishops as well as the formators should provide seminarians the chance to strengthen their skills in practical leadership through training.

How can educators, who are responsible to train the seminarians, identify and gauge the potential of each seminarian to lead and become a priest? Is it necessary to evaluate the character traits and the mental outlook of each seminarian in the course of their formation? These questions require a well-researched and in-depth study to come up with possible answers. As such, the research study focused on designing a leadership model for seminarians in Vietnamese seminaries. It is the desire of the researcher that through the designed model for the development of pastoral care, the seminarians would be able to identify their

inclinations and potentials, while the formators or educators would also be able to assist them to become fine leaders to serve and lead their parishioners.

Forming Future Pastoral Leaders with Desirable Pastoral Skills in the Modern Church

As with the other churches around the world, the Church in Vietnam has similar problems. The parishioners and churchgoers have decreased in numbers, especially in the big cities. Some dioceses and parishes lack prudent priests to take care of the parishes and parishioners (Thien, 2017). Thus, it is imperative to find the causes of the problems so that possible solutions could be proposed.

An organization with good leaders can develop quickly and become stable. The same is true with the parish which needs a dedicated priest with good leadership, pastoral care, and management skills to run it. Then, the parish will develop stably and draw in more parishioners to attend the Holy Masses. If the parish priest is friendly, he would be able to motivate the parishioners to make friends with one another, especially treating one another as brothers and sisters. Nonetheless, when the leadership skills of some priests are inadequate, such priests would not be able to lead and guide the parishioners (Tai, 2003). What then could be the possible causes? Is it because the parish priest has insufficient knowledge in leading and managing his parish? It should be noted that parish priests also encounter various pressures, especially the challenge of fulfilling the hopes of their parishioners to help them spiritually in the conventional and contemporary ways (FABC, 2010), such as attending to the essential life questions that would impact the multiple age groups. Parishioners expect much from their priests, especially for them to dedicate their time to leading and serving the parish as they devote their life to God and humanity. In turn, there are certain negative perceptions by

parishioners about their parish priests. An investigation conducted by Hardy *et al.* (2014) on parishioners and their experiences with the parish priests showed that parishioners have negative descriptions of their interactions with their parish priests. They used words, such as “far-off,” “decisive,” and “lacking empathy” to describe such interactions. When asked about their “bad experience” with their parish priests, thirty-three percent (33%) of the parishioners felt that their parish priests are not approachable or welcoming. Moreover, when asked specifically if unfriendly priests were the reason why they stopped attending Holy Masses or left the Catholic Church, twenty-seven percent (27%) gave affirmative response. Furthermore, in the research conducted by Gortner (2014) about the aspects of seminarians’ experience that were critical in preparing them for spiritual leadership, the newly ordained priests indicated that 52% of their preparation was about pastoral care, 38% was about Christian education and formation, and 10% was on communications.

Modern technology such as the mass media is a double-edged sword. It can bring together optimistic and pessimistic outcomes depending on how we make use of it. Technology has an impact on every individual, no matter who you are, where you are, and when you make use of it. Vietnamese priests are no exceptions; they have to cope with the rapid social changes once they leave the seminary which might not have prepared them well for the new social environment (Lam, 2017). With modern technology such as the internet, smartphones, and other devices, the outside world is at their fingertips. Priests may become attracted to these gadgets and spend most of their time on mass media which could affect their performance as parish priests (Spadaro & Way, 2014).

Secularization is another reason which discourages the priests from maintaining a spiritual life, including the inability to keep their vow of chastity; while still having to cope with many pitfalls like financial problems, religious animosity issues,

and use of power to assert authority in the Church, all of which could destroy the priests' religious faith (Huy, 2014). Materialism is another very influential concern which could also affect their attitude resulting in neglect of their duties as priests.

The Catholic Church and Catholic priests in Vietnam are facing similar problems as with the other Catholic priests around the world. These problems could include decreases in the number of churchgoers, falling off in faith, change of religion, Church leaders are rejected or not well appreciated, and religious syncretism, among others. Vietcatholic (2018) reported that attendance of participants in the Holy Masses in Vietnam has fallen from 80% in 2002 to 72% in 2015. It is therefore important that parish priests understand the changing needs and wants regarding the pastoral care of their parishioners and develop the skills necessary to lead their parish effectively.

When we look at the academic guidance of the seminaries in recent academic years (Xuân Bích, 2015; Đại chủng viện Hà Nội, 2018; Đại Chủng Viện Thánh Giuse Sài Gòn, 2017), we can see that all seminaries in Vietnam concentrate on educating seminarians in theology and philosophy subjects. Some seminaries may have subjects in administration of a parish, but most of them lack the kind of subjects that deal with pastoral leadership for future priests. Seminarians therefore, especially when they become young priests, are not experienced in handling the affairs of the parish, and specifically in understanding the psychology or behavior of their parishioners, especially in dealing with their assistants in the parish. To assist Vietnamese seminarians to become good leaders in the future, it is necessary for parish priests to serve as model leader for seminarians, to promote good behavior, have adequate knowledge of psychological factors, recognize the seminarians' struggles, and have good skills in using crisis management when necessary.

In order to address such concerns, a model has been developed through this research that outlines the crucial pastoral care skills for parish priests to implement in their mentorship of young seminarians who would become future leaders of the parishes. It is therefore highly recommended that integration of this model in the curriculum for the formation program in the seminaries should be considered.

Leadership in the Context of Catholic Seminaries

The Church has received from the Lord Jesus Christ three tasks to be continued in the Church and leadership is one of them (Hyos, 1999; John Paul II, 1992; Paul VI, 1965a). Those tasks that are received from Jesus Christ are as: 1) Preacher of the Gospel, 2) Vicar of the Sacraments, and 3) Principal of the community (Hyos, 1999). Only by following Jesus Christ can Catholic Church leaders complete the three tasks which are entrusted to them (Hyos, 1999).

1. Leadership in the Bible

As leaders of the local Church, the Parish Priests should possess leadership skills to be able to effectively proclaim the teachings of Jesus Christ. As representatives of Jesus Christ on earth, priests are given the responsibility to look after the Christian community as they are charged with the power of saving people from sin. Parish Priests should therefore understand the changing needs and wants regarding the pastoral care of their parishioners, and develop the skills and abilities necessary to lead their parish effectively.

Although not concretely mentioned, examples of leadership styles could be derived from the leadership models in the Bible. Moses, as mentioned in the Old Testament, led Israel out from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land that God gave to Israel who was His people. During the exodus, Moses demonstrated good leadership principles that helped the Israelites to their freedom.

Having been called by God, Moses walked closely with God. He was a man of integrity and character, a man of faith, a man of prayer, and a visionary. He was bold, made disciples, and was humble before God. Being a great man of God, he led God's people in a way that was righteous. The transformational leadership followed by Moses had pleased God.

Another great leader mentioned in the Bible is Israel's King David. Because he was a man after God's own heart, the Israelites were willing to follow David even before he was king, and even when he was on the run. David always believed that God was in control of his life, and when he was named King, he recognized that to be God's leader, one should be humble, courageous, faithful to God, and should have the grace to accept misdeeds, quick to seek forgiveness, and then be transformed to proceed with the right path again.

Jesus Christ is *the paragon of a practical leader*. Nearly 2000 years ago, after a period of thirty years of private life in the village of Nazareth, Jesus started his public ministry by preaching and teaching in and around His place. Jesus Christ is the Son of God who loved the world so much. As mentioned in the Gospel of Saint John, "Jesus came to the world to release human beings from the bondage of sins and lead them to perceive salvation (1 Timothy 1:15). The mission entrusted to Jesus by God the Father, is the redemption of the world (Hyos, 2002). The Evangelists Saint Matthew and Saint Mark wrote in their Gospel accounts about Jesus that His leadership style is servant leadership with the following characteristics: maintaining relationship with love, spending time for others, sharing passion and vision, empowering His disciples, providing needed resources, and observing and correcting His disciples.

In the epistles in the New Testament, the great leadership style of Saint Paul the Apostle could be observed. Saint Paul's leadership

is based on personal expertise such as spiritual experience and knowledge, hard work, patience, sacrifice for the Gospel, self-deprivations of all kinds, anguish on behalf of the congregation, perseverance and determination.

Thus, through the examples of the prominent men in the Bible, very important characteristics that are essential for religious leaders could be noted. Like for example in servant leadership, transformational leadership, and instructional leadership which adopt the virtues of honesty and integrity; work with purpose, kindness and compassion, and humility; facilitate healing and good communication; promote team development; and maintain courage, fairness and justice.

2. Essential Characteristics of Religious Leaders

Based on the foregoing, the essential characteristics of religious leaders could include the following:

(a) *Caring and feeding.* Religious leaders (shepherds) always take care of the parishioners (flock) under their care both worldly and spiritually, as Jesus said to His disciples: “feed my sheep” (John 21: 15-18). The Book of the Prophet Isaiah also indicated “like a shepherd, He feeds his flock; in His arms He gathers the lambs, carrying them in His bosom and leading the ewes with care” (Isaiah 40:11). In the second book of Exodus, God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. When the Lord saw Moses from the middle of the bush, He said, “Now I am sending you to the king of Egypt so that you can lead my people out of his country” (Exodus 3:10). Thus, Moses led the Israelites to the Promised Land through the desert, following God’s command.

There are many books in the Bible that reveal the leadership examples of Jesus. In the Gospels accounts of Saints Luke and John, there are examples which show that Jesus was a good

leader as He carried out feeding and caring for His people. The Gospel of Mathew also presents Jesus Christ as one who came into the world to serve the people, to heal the world from any disease, to keep the people away from the snares of the devil, and to cure the sick. Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) explained the reason why “Jesus came into the world not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” When the disciples of Jesus requested Him to send away the crowd who followed Him to listen to his teaching, Jesus replied that they do not have to go away and that they should be given something to eat. In his first letter, Saint Peter also instructed his followers to “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve” (1 Peter 5:2). In the Acts of Apostles, the author Saint Luke wrote, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the Church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). Saint Paul is considered as the founder of many churches. His pastoral letters are good examples of his care and concern for the churches or communities that he founded. He was a Jew, but he proclaimed in the Acts of the Apostles that “I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as you all are this day” (Acts 20:3).

(b) Leading. One of the most important characteristics of a shepherd-leader is his ability to lead the community. By following Jesus’ example as the Good Shepherd, Catholic leaders represent the good shepherd to the people and must lead them by helping them with their spiritual life like providing them the ways and means in receiving the sacraments. *“The LORD is my shepherd I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters and he restores my soul. He guides*

me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:1-3). Jesus Christ came to the world and led the sheep, as He said in the Gospel of John, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). Jesus confirmed the purpose of His incarnation by saying that "the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Without any doubt one can say that Jesus came to the world to serve humanity. He did that not only by preaching, but also by performing miracles so that the people may believe that He is the Son of God. He gave bread to the hungry, healed the sick, and so on for the sake of spreading the kingdom of God.

(c) *Being courageous.* The Bible is filled with brave men and chiefs who show many sorts of courage: physical, political, and moral. One such man is David, a shepherd boy who told King Saul that he will go and fight Goliath, a heavily armored and battle-hardened giant. The prophet Jeremiah was willing to take danger for death by cautioning the leaders of his nation of their future death if they did not transform their idolatrous modes. Although he was not put to death, he was questioned and underwent various sentences and torments instead. In the Book of Isaiah, the Lord encourages the prophet Isaiah with these words: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10). Courage, maintained by inner confidence, is the source of their strength and it is courage that sustained them through difficult trials. Jesus was very courageous to accept death on a cross to give salvation to the world. Christ's courage was in perception of what was correct and incorrect. As mentioned in the Gospel of Mathew, "Despite the mockery of the multitude; despite the resistance of the authorities; despite the cross that set before Him; despite the criticism of the religious leaders; despite

the pain of His own conscience – He chose His Father’s will! This is true courage!” (Mathew 26: 36-46).

Courage is frequently cited as the significant interest in the “steward leadership.” The leaders in the Bible were confronted with arduous yet inspiring tasks and they recognized that courage is comparative to the range and significance of their missions. Therefore, courage is repeatedly underscored in the Bible. The Book of Joshua mentions: “Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people who inherit the land I swore to their forefathers” (Joshua 1:6). The Book of Deuteronomy also mentions, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you” (Deuteronomy 31:6). The Book of Chronicles indicates: “Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged” (1 Chronicles 28:20).

Like Jesus, the religious and priests must have the courage to protect the parishioners from predators and wolves. They must sacrifice for the parishioners. Saint Matthew repeats the words of Jesus Christ “the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Jesus has the authority, but he did not need to flaunt his authority and was cautious that a man with authority tends to abuse his authority by oppressing others. As seen in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus lived as a servant among the people. The Evangelist Mark mentioned in the Gospel that Jesus has come to serve and to give His life. Saint Paul wrote about the authority of Jesus in his letter to the congregation in Philippi saying that, “Jesus Christ is God. Rather He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness and found human in appearance” (Philippians 2: 6-7).

(d) Healing. God has always been merciful and compassionate to His people. He heals them from diseases and infirmities. In

the Book of Exodus, it is written that “if you listen carefully to the LORD your God and do what is right in His eyes, if you pay attention to His commands and keep all His decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you” (Exodus 15:26). Jesus is the embodiment of God. He came to the world to heal people. The Gospel of Luke presents the words of Jesus, “The Spirit of the Lord [is] upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted (Luke 4:18). Jesus Christ always had a particular place in his heart those who were besieged by illness and those affected by death. Jesus cured the sick and raised people from the dead, like the daughter of Jairus and the son of the widow of Naim. His healing and loving touch reminded the people of their inherent worth.

Jesus brought back into the society those who were infected with leprosy by His healing mission through words and deeds. Jesus criticized the belief that illness is the result of sin. It was the belief that the diseased are unclean and are punished by God; hence they are separated from the people of God. However, Jesus touched the outcasts and welcomed them back to the society. Jesus taught the importance and need of spiritual healing. Those who were cured by Jesus were advised to turn away from their sins so that something worse might not overtake them. Jesus commiserated with the poor, the sick, and disabled. He was not only compassionate, but also inspirational.

Church leaders should have a close relationship with God, have the heart of a servant, act responsibly, have the heart of repentance, and obey His commandments. In the Old Testament, the Book of Proverbs lists the characteristics a good leader should possess: wisdom, integrity, love, resourcefulness, self-control, awareness of his influence, compassion, humility, moderation, and submission to God. In his letters, Saint Paul also mentions that a good leader should have these characteristics: confidence, humility,

enthusiasm, fortitude, forgiveness, attentiveness, and adaptability.

Seminarian Formation

1. Principles and Basis of Seminarian Formation

Seminarians are supposed to follow Jesus Christ, who is their master and Lord. The training that seminarians receive during formation is aimed at making them essential leaders. They are members of the Church, and they receive the authority and power as the bishop rests his hand on their heads during their priestly ordination. The Catechism of Catholic Church, no. 771, mentions that “the Church is essentially human and divine, visible but endowed with invisible realities.” It explains that “the Church is the visible society and the spiritual community” (John Paul II, 1997). Just as every organization here on earth needs leaders, the Catholic Church is also in need of leaders. The distinctive feature of the Catholic Church’s leadership is servant leadership which is bestowed by Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew’s Gospel clearly explains that Jesus Christ is the founder of the Church and He gave the power of leadership over the Church to his apostles. The apostles of Jesus Christ selected their followers from among their disciples and called them “bishops, priests and deacons” so that they may fulfill the mission of Jesus Christ (John Paul II, 1992). While giving the authority and power to his disciples, Jesus told them that “as the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). The followers of Jesus are known as the Apostle (cf. Luke 6:12-16).

To lead the Christian community of the future and to evangelize the world, the Lord Jesus Christ had given the Apostles special powers and authority (John Paul II, 1992). In chapter ten of the Gospels of Mathew and Luke, Jesus Christ stated that “he who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects who sent me and he who receives you

receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me” (Matthew 10:40). Jesus appointed Saint Peter as the head and father of the Christian community, also known as the Church. The Gospel of Mathew mentions that Jesus even changed the former name of Simon to Peter which means “rock.”

The seminarians are the future priests, the future leaders of the Christian community that will be entrusted to their care. They are supposed to follow the example of Christ, who had great concern for the people during His public life here on earth. Jesus, the great leader, whom the seminarians are supposed to follow, gave up even his life for the people, as part of His mission. While following the example of Jesus in their life, the seminarians should follow certain lifestyles, such as the life of obedience, life of celibacy, life of poverty, etc. As part of this mission, seminarians should give up their personal belongings including their homes and parents. This is to make them fully available for the community of faithful who will be taken care of by them (John Paul II, 1992). As the future leaders of the Church, the seminarians should completely devote their entire life for the sake of following Christ.

As mentioned earlier, seminarians are supposed to follow the example of Jesus Christ in their mission to spread the Gospel and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. In doing this, they should be very careful. Their subordinates and the faithful should be treated out of love for the Lord Jesus Christ (Paul VI, 1964). Faith should be increased among the faithful by the care and concern of the seminarians, who are doing their work in collaboration with the parish priests (Hyos, 2002). Those seminarians who are now undergoing the formation given by the Church or the parishioners, are moving towards their big dream to becoming priests. They will be appointed in due course of time in the parishes, where they would help the faithful grow as a community under the guidance of the parish priest.

2. Formation of Seminarians based on the Church's Leadership Doctrine

Mission of the Seminary and the Six Seminaries in Vietnam. The Seminary is the place where seminarians get trained in the Gospel values. Established by a board of directors, the training is carried by the priests in charge of the formation. The seminarians are trained in the solid foundation of Catholic doctrine, and are also given formation in the basics of human sciences so that they may approach human issues in the light of faith.

The Catholic Church is very much concerned about those youths who strongly wish to become priests. The Church wants them to become true leaders to be trained after the great leader, Jesus Christ. According to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (1983), “the bishops should erect the seminary and set the programs for the formation of the seminarians.”

Objectives of the Seminaries. Seminary formation in the Asian context, especially in the context of Vietnam, is aimed at preparing the young generation who are interested in becoming priests to proclaim the Good News. Moreover, seminarians should also understand the particular socio-cultural context of Vietnam and the broader context of the Asian continent. Therefore, seminarians should not only know the doctrine of the Church but also the environment of their mission. Studying at the seminary prepares priest candidates for a fundamental understanding of the truth of revelation and the treasury of human wisdom, so that they can serve the Church and people, especially in the ethical aspect. For this, seminarians are expected to know the traditions of the region, major religions, different political affiliations, Asian theology, philosophy, and religious and cultural studies. The seminary for Church service, especially for the Church in Vietnam, contributes to evangelization in the context of culture, etc. The purpose of training in the seminary could be summarized

in seven categories: holy, liberal, independent, mature in human and emotional aspects, proficient in the spiritual values, intimate, and devoted (John Paul II, 1992).

Living in the world nowadays, everybody wants to be rich, famous, and powerful. Instead of serving others, everybody wants to be served. It should not be forgotten that the primary mission of seminarians is service to humanity. So, the formation period is a very important time for each candidate. This period helps them understand their vocation clearly and learn how to serve the humanity.

The Pope, as the head and father of the Church, also gives exact guidelines regarding the formation of the seminarians through pastoral letters and encyclicals. The following are some of the examples: *Pastores dabo vobis* (no. 8,9,16,17,18, 43-60) and *Optatam Totius* (no. 3). Formation of the seminarians should be in accordance with the directions of the Church. Being trained as the future leaders of the Church, seminarians should show eagerness and passion in the following five areas:

- 1) During the seminary formation, seminarians must undergo formation to live as Jesus Christ who is their master, and they should be totally attached to God the Father. They should be given training to become the “Imago Dei” or the image of God here on earth. They should be trained in ways so that they may be able to give the crucified Christ to the people (Chapter IV).
- 2) Seminarians should be given the appropriate training which enables them to give up everything: worldly possessions and family among others – for the sake of God and His kingdom. They should heed the three evangelical counsels, namely: obedience, chastity, and poverty. They should be willing to go and preach about God anywhere they are sent for the mission by the church

- (Proposition 21).
- 3) The Papal encyclicals and pastoral letters, such as *Optatam Totius*, no. 11; *Presbyterorum Ordinis* no. 3; *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, no. 51 etc. mention that seminarians should be given training in order to do the missionary work with the spirit and the mind of Lord Jesus, who is the Good Shepherd.
 - 4) The Second Vatican Council states that seminarians must be given formation in a way that helps them obtain intellectual depth of knowledge and the broader understanding of God's mysteries. They should be able to grasp the human problems that are faced by the contemporary society (*Gaudium et Spes*, 15).
 - 5) Love for the Church should permeate the activities of seminarians. By practicing their love for the Holy Father, the seminarians can develop closer connections with the congregation or the diocese. They can foster obedience and respect of superiors, and inspire priests to collaborate upon the needs of the universal Church (*Optatam Totius*, 4).

The training of young leaders in the seminaries is conducted in accordance with the leadership prescribed in the Church's doctrines and with the whole authority of the Church's hierarchy, that is, the pope, bishops, priests, and deacons. So, it must be noted that Jesus Christ instated the structure of the church, and thus compels the leaders to follow in Christ's example.

As Jesus has shown the concern for his followers, the priests and leaders of the Church should imitate Jesus in their mission. The love of a priest towards his parishioners should be aimed at forming the faith of the people. Seminarians and priests should have fraternal care and love towards the people who are receiving their service. Jesus himself commanded his followers to "Love one another as I loved you" (John 15: 12).

Sources of Formation or Education in the Seminaries. The major sources of seminary formation or training are the Sacred Scriptures, liturgy, the teachings of the *Magisterium*, teachings of the Church Fathers, Doctors of the Church, and pastoral ministry. All these doctrines should be treated in the spirit of “thinking along with the Church.” The seminaries should be very faithful towards the traditions of the Church in transmitting the truth.

Summary of the Survey Process

The research study utilized an exploratory sequential mixed-methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods. In order to arrive at the ultimate goal of developing the leadership model, steps were undertaken to achieve the objectives of the research study. These steps were: (1) determining the desirable pastoral and leadership characteristics of parish priests according to the Bible and Catholic theology, Catholic experts and parishioners; (2) identifying the expected and current pastoral characteristics of the parish priests in the six seminaries in Vietnam; (3) determining the expected and current leadership characteristics of the Parish Priests in the six seminaries in Vietnam. Through these steps, the objectives of the research study were achieved through: content analysis of the documents related to the Church doctrines, interviews of the administrators of the six seminaries in Vietnam, development of a survey instrument which was distributed to the parishioners of the dioceses of the six seminaries.

Instrument Development

A content analysis of 105 documents comprising 73 books of the Holy Bible and 32 Church documents including books on Catholic theology, articles, and journals was carried out to find the ideal characteristics of parish priests in terms of pastoral care. Additionally, literatures related to transformational and servant

leadership, were reviewed to identify the good leadership traits along with literatures on pastoral counseling frameworks. In order to confirm the findings from the content analysis, six administrators from seminaries in Vietnam were interviewed. Their responses were analyzed using quantitative content analysis, from which the main ideas and themes were extracted to provide the elements related to pastoral care and leadership that should be included in the draft questionnaire. After the questionnaire was finalized, validated and pilot tested according to the standard research methodology, this was distributed to the target respondents.

Population and Sample

From a total population of 2,246,402 parishioners in the dioceses of Vietnam and 1,082 seminarians from the six seminaries in Vietnam, a sample size of 2,450 was determined based on the standardized table (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The respondents were randomly selected, and the questionnaires were personally distributed. A total of 2,309 respondents returned the questionnaires, indicating a return rate of 94.2 %, as shown in Table 1. Of the 2,309 confirmed respondents, 925 were seminarians (40 %) and 1,384 (60 %) comprised the other parishioners in the dioceses.

Table 1: Total population in six seminaries in Vietnam, number of samples, and respondents who returned the questionnaires

Seminaries in Vietnam	Population (parishioners/ seminarians)		Questionnaires distributed	Returned questionnaires	%
St. Joseph Seminary, Hanoi Archdiocese	315,764	186	420	395	94.1
Hue Seminary, Hue Diocese	72,210	143	300	277	92.3

Vinh Thanh Seminary, Vinh Diocese	558,256	206	430	401	93.3
Sao Bien Seminary, Nha Trang Diocese	220,000	175	370	347	93.8
St. Joseph Seminary, Saigon Archdiocese	688,710	207	530	506	95.5
St. Quy Seminary, Can Tho Diocese	191,462	165	400	383	96.0
Total (six dioceses)	2,246,402	1,082	2,450	2,309	94.2

Development of the Leadership Model

For the development of the leadership model, the researcher identified the most appropriate pastoral care skills. Then, referring to the three previously mentioned leadership theories and the Sacred Scriptures, the researcher came up with eight pillars for the model: protection, care, wisdom, creativity, sanctity, confidence, humility, and courage. From these eight pillars, the researcher then developed the corresponding elements which the respondents considered as very essential (the researcher chose two highest score items of each pillar) for pastoral care skills. These elements were derived from the results of the content analysis, specifically leading to the necessary elements of the pastoral and leadership characteristics of parish priests. Finally, these elements were set appropriately into the model, corresponding to the eight pillars. The key word ‘pastoral care’ is purposely placed as the center of the model, because this is the main output of the research study. The following are the elements in the established Leadership Model.

1. **Protection.** Refers to the ability of parish priests to protect the parishioners. The pastor of the parish is like the father of the house, he has the duty to always protect every member of the household. The parish priest should protect the parishioners that are entrusted to him by his bishop, shielding them from false teachings and taking home the lost sheep. The capability of the parish priest to protect the parishioners could be achieved through his efforts in:
 - a) *Providing the ways to fulfill the sacraments.* The most important role of the parish priest is to take care of the parishioners especially in their spiritual life. The pastor (parish priest) provides the holy sacraments for parishioners such as celebrating the Holy Mass every day, giving holy anointment when people get sick, giving the sacrament of reconciliation when parishioners request.
 - b) *Providing parishioners with green pastures for them to be safe and sound.* This means that the pastor should always protect parishioners, especially during their difficult times in order to attain peace. Parish priests help the parishioners overcome their difficulties, provide comfort, and support them.

2. **Care.** Refers to the ability to take care of the needs of the parishioners. It is the way of showing kindness and concern for others by the parish priest when he:
 - a) *Takes care of his people with a shepherd's concern.* This means that the pastor treats his parishioners with respect, tolerance, compassion, integrity, empathy, modesty, and gentleness. With the help of the Holy Spirit, the pastor discharges without fail his duties as prescribed in the office of the priesthood, and as a worthy fellow worker with the Order of Bishops in caring for the Lord's flock (in accordance with the rite of priest's ordination).
 - b) *Become a good shepherd and supporter of his subordinates.*

This means that to become a good shepherd is a purpose of becoming a priest as God's will and expectation of the people. The parish priest is like a father in the family. He stands behind the stage to provide support for parishioners to do good things like charity or contribute to building the society.

- 3. Wisdom.** Refers to the ability of the pastor to give or to provide the Word of God, sound doctrine, celebration of the sacraments, and pastoral care in the parish, hospital, and home, when he:

 - a) Runs his church based on the Bible and Church's Doctrine.* This includes exercising the ministry of the Word worthily and wisely, preaching the Gospel and teaching the Catholic faith (in accordance with the rite of priest's ordination).
 - b) Thinks before taking action and is open-minded.* This implies acting as an ordinary parishioner and think as one when doing anything, for being a pastor, one needs to think twice before doing, because what the pastor does will have an effect to the parishioners, especially with respect to spiritual guidance.
- 4. Creativity.** Refers to the ability of the pastor to run or lead the parish and the parishioners, through his efforts as he:

 - a) Sees things positively and flexible to changes.* Identifying positive things about others is necessary for being a pastor.
 - b) Searches for new information to enhance not the existing ones.* Parishioners often do not have high education, so that by searching for new things and information, the parish priest could have some new information to share with the parishioners, which is also necessary.
- 5. Sanctity (Holiness).** This characteristic shapes the pastor. He is human but striving to be holy in the manner that Jesus

Christ exemplified for his disciples. The pastor practices holiness when he:

- a) *Obeys his superiors and practices three vows of the Gospel.* A priest is obliged to obey his superiors because the superior represents God on earth. This is reflected in Jesus' obedience to His Father to live as man and die for the salvation of the world. The pastor vows to the bishop when he is ordained the "promise of respect and obedience to the diocesan Bishop, who is his legitimate superior (the rite of priestly ordination)."
- b) *Prays and encourages others to pray and trust in God and people.* To gain more awareness of his dignity, the priest needs to pray for God's providence. He prays for himself to grow in holiness and to be a good example for others. He also encourages people to pray for themselves and for the world. The pastor prays for God's mercy upon the people entrusted to his care by observing the commandment to pray without ceasing (based on the rite of priestly ordination).

6. Confidence. This refers to the characteristic of parish priest to run or lead the parish. The pastor leads the people to God and walks with His people on their journey of faith. He runs the parish with confidence and will not be afraid of anybody or anything, as he:

- a) *Proclaims what he believes and is responsible for his actions:* "Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you have become. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach." (based on the rite of priestly ordination).
- b) *Makes his own decisions, and lives and dies with what he proclaims.* The pastor who is the representative of the bishop runs or leads the parish, so he must make his own decisions. He must bear the burden of leadership and must act decisively, and like a wise man he does not blindly agree with other people's opinions.

- 7. Humility.** Refers to the characteristics that a pastor as a human being, who should be humble. The priest needs to be aware of his sinfulness, although he is called by God to be a representative for Jesus Christ in the world. God works through the priest and underscores that the priest is the pen in His hand. Everything from him belongs to God, for God and for God's victory. These could be achieved when the parish priest is:
- a) *Not shy to ask for help from others and is humble as Jesus Christ and the saints.* The pastor needs to be humble in words and actions. He needs to live sincerely with others. He needs to know his limitations, so that he would need the help of others.
 - b) *Grateful for what he has and what he doesn't have.* "For every high priest taken from among men, is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God, that he may offer up gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion on them that are ignorant and that err: because he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And therefore he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins" (Hebrews 5:1-3).
- 8. Courage.** Refers to ability for the pastor to run or lead the parish. As Pope Benedictine XVI said to the seminarians of Almo Capranica Seminary of the Diocese of Rome on 20/1/2006, "This world is in need of courageous, loving priests, who are not afraid to bring God's love to all, especially those who are miserable in poverty or struggle with difficulties." These aspirations are attained when the parish priest:
- a) *Proclaims the Gospel at his convenience and inconvenience.* This is the important mission of the pastor, as Saint Paul reminded his disciple Timothy to proclaim the word: "be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through

all patience and teaching (2 Timothy 4:2).”

- b) *Expresses opinions, ideas, and recommendations when appropriate.* To advise and to express ideas to others is difficult especially when they are doing wrong, but the pastor needs to be brave to lead others to go the right way that coincides with the Church’s teaching and God’s will, but he needs to choose the appropriate time.

Conclusion

The findings from this research show that there is still room for enhancing the formation of seminarians in the seminaries in Vietnam. The recently developed leadership model could be useful as an additional instrument that could be employed to enhance the pastoral care skills of seminarians during their formation program as this would adequately equip them with the tools and skills when they become parish priests. Additional results of this study also point to leadership as being a driver of the expected pastoral characteristics that the parishioners in Vietnam desire that their parish priests would possess. Nonetheless, improving the leadership skills of seminarians may not be something that can be accomplished in simply one course or semester. It should be a life-long process of training for priests, accumulated through years of hard work and faithfulness to the tenets of the Catholic Church (Beck, 2018).

Although different styles of leadership with varying characteristics are available and could be introduced in the formation program for seminarians, those leadership styles are either transformational, transactional, instructional, or stewardship in nature, which could be inadequate to equip the seminarians with the appropriate tools to make them effective and efficient Church leaders with improved pastoral care skills based on the concepts of leadership in the Bible. Some of the previous studies did not take into consideration the Sacred Scriptures in establishing the

characteristics of the leadership styles to be incorporated in the formation program in the seminaries, especially with respect to servant leadership (Krejcir, 2008) which requires obedience to the teachings of Jesus Christ “who come to serve and not to be served” (Matthew 10:28).

The recently developed leadership model strives to be complete in the sense that it incorporates not only transformational leadership styles, but also servant leadership styles, as well as counseling theory guided by the teachings in the Sacred Scriptures and inculcating the eight pillars of pastoral care and leadership that were established through a content analysis of the doctrines of the Catholic Church. Once introduced in the training program of the seminaries, this leadership model is, therefore, expected to be more sufficient and adequate than those developed by the previous studies. This new model draws attention to the enhancement of the spiritual and secular formation of the seminarians in terms of their pastoral care skills, thus making them ready after ordination to become good pastors or parish priests.

The overall result of this research study hopes to fill a gap in the literature related to leadership training of seminarians and pastoral care. When this model is implemented in the six seminaries in Vietnam for the training of candidates for the priesthood, the most tangible output would be priests with desirable pastoral care and leadership characteristics. This leadership model which was developed as research-based also hopes to encourage seminarians to consider their current role towards effective administration and management with the necessary leadership skills. The four determinants essential to successful pastoral care (i.e., protection, care, wisdom, and creativity) and the four educational leadership characteristics (i.e. sanctity, confidence, humility, and courage) are recommended to be adopted in the seminaries in Vietnam. Therefore, parish priests with high qualification in pastoral administration can play their roles to reach the desired common

goals. The implication of this developed model for parish priests' professional growth is best achieved by the integration of theory and practice, and could be accomplished through the conduct of short-term programs designed for becoming an effective pastoral care and academic program directors. Nevertheless, to gain better understanding of the complex skill sets of effective pastoral care and academic leadership based on the recently developed model, a long-term program could be organized that focuses on pastoral care and management of the parish by the pastor, and on the effectiveness of academic leadership. It is hoped that this model will help the parish priests to understand and acquire good leadership qualities, and run the parish under a good management.

A leader must shoulder many responsibilities; to be a parish priest demands even much more, for he is responsible in not only leading the parish to develop and manage the Church well, but also taking care of the souls and the spiritual life of the parishioners. The seminaries and all the parishes are the place where the leadership for the future generations and for the Catholic youth is being formed. The findings from the research study which examined the current and desirable practices in the area of pastoral care and leadership reveal that the pastoral care in the seminaries has to be improved by the collaboration of all concerned, such as the bishops, priests, and parishioners. Through the careful implementation of the leadership model, some improvements could take place in the areas of pastoral care skills and leadership characteristics, especially in the six seminaries in Vietnam. In the process of enhancing pastoral care, the directors and lecturers of the seminaries have a great role to lead the pastoral ministry. This would also benefit the administrators/educators in the seminaries as they could acquire good leadership in pastoral care skills for fulfilling their mission of training future priests.

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The Concept of Pluralistic Society in Qur'anic Perspectives

Sulaiman Rifal¹

ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this paper is to examine the concept of pluralism in Islam in accordance with the Qur'anic perspective. What does the Qur'an say about the pluralistic society? Does the Qur'an accept the concept of pluralism? Is there any room for non-Muslims and atheists in Muslim society? How does the Qur'an treat any non-Muslim community? What does the Qur'an say about religious freedom? It is generally believed that Islam promotes an exclusive society of its own. Yet, the prophet Muhammad lived in a pluralistic society. He accepted the concept of pluralism in his lifetime. The covenant of Medina is a historical document that justifies the concept of pluralism in Islam. This paper examines all these questions.

Keywords: *Pluralistic society, pluralism, Qur'an, Islam, Muslim community*

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Introduction

As a prelude to our study of the subject of pluralism, we should understand the conceptual foundation of pluralism according to the Qur'an. The fundamental message and mission of all the prophets is one and the same. All the prophets of God called the people to *Tawhid*, that is to believe in the oneness of God. The last prophet Muhammad did not bring entirely a new message. Rather he was sent down to perfect all previous divine messages. Many verses of the Qur'an emphasize the unity and integrity of divine messages. The divine messages are connected to the last message of the Prophet Muhammad.

Say (Prophet), No, (ours is) the religion of Abraham, the upright, who did not worship any god besides God. So, you (believers), say, 'We believe in God and in what was sent down to us and what was sent down to Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the Tribes and what was sent down to Moses and Jesus and all the prophets by their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them.'²

The final divine message of God was not a new divine message; rather it was a completion of all the previous divine messages. Moreover, God commanded Prophet Muhammad to follow all previous divine guidance. "Those are they whom God guided them, so follow their guidance."³ Furthermore, the duty and responsibility of Prophet Muhammed was to explain what was revealed to him from previous revelations. "O people of the scripture! Now our messenger has come to you, expounding unto you much of that which you used to hide in the scripture."⁴ All these verses tell us that the divine messages are interrelated, and all divine messages are sent by one God. The logical conclusion

² Qur'an 2:136

³ *Ibid.* 6: 90

⁴ *Ibid.* 5:15

of these verses is that God is one and all revelations were sent down by one and only God. It means that the prime source of all revealed religions, namely, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is one.

Islam's Attitude Towards Other Religions

People differ from one another on the matter of religion with the passage of time. It does not make any sense to believe that this universe has more than one God. Almost all the prophets said, "We submit our wills to one and only God."⁵ For instance, in the case of Abraham, when his Lord said to him: "Surrender!" He said, "I have surrendered to the Lord of the Worlds." In the case of Jacob, upon near death, when Jacob said to his sons, "What will you worship after me?" They replied, "We shall worship your God, the God of your fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac, and one God and to him we have surrendered."⁶ Therefore, when we say that the "only acceptable religion for God is Islam,"⁷ it should naturally mean that this term incorporates all the divine messages of previous revealed religions. Otherwise, there would not be a unity of divine messages.

Although, the Qur'an declares the oneness of divine messages, it never compels people to believe in Islam. The Qur'an clearly acknowledges that unifying all human beings around the one faith is an impossible task. It is not what God intended. The Qur'an asserts, "If it has been your God's will, He verily would have made mankind one nation, yet they continue to be differing except him whom your Lord has mercy and for that He did create them."⁸ It again reminds us in another verse, "People will have different religions and ways. Had God willed, He would have

⁵ *Ibid.* 2:131

⁶ *Ibid.* 2:133

⁷ *Ibid.* 3:19

⁸ *Ibid.* 11:118-119

made you one community.”⁹ Moreover, in the Qur’an, the Prophet is told that most people will not believe “even if you are eager that they should.”¹⁰ Thus, people will differ from one another until the Day of Judgment in the matter of religion. Therefore, Islam in dealing with other religious people emphasizes the importance of mutual understanding and tolerance and compassion. Moreover, the duty of the Prophet is not to force the people into religion; rather it is his duty to teach them and warn them. It is God who judges the people in the Day of Judgment with regards to their belief. A few quotes from the Qur’an will further clarify this point. “Remind them for you are but a reminder and you do not have authority over them.”¹¹ Moreover, the Qur’an reminds that the role of the Prophet as “the messenger is only to convey the message plainly.”¹² In the end, if they do not believe, what one can do is to be sympathetic to them. “(Prophet) are you going to worry yourself to death because they will not believe?”¹³ Displaying sympathy is what Muslims can do. They cannot do anything but sympathize with non-Muslims as guidance is in the hands of Almighty God alone. “Say that God judges them in the Day of Judgment.”¹⁴ Religious freedom is one of the fundamental teachings of Islam. The Qur’an, in fact, inspires people to know the truth in life. It is like a kind mother telling her children not to go near a pit of fire or touch fire out of affection and love; and yet, stubborn children do not care about their mother’s warning but intentionally fall into the pit of fire. Likewise, God has given man warning through his messengers, and yet, if still people choose a wrong path in life, they are entirely responsible for their choices. After all, people are bestowed with a sound human intellect to choose between right and wrong.

⁹ *Ibid.* 5:48

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 12:103

¹¹ *Ibid.* 88:21

¹² *Ibid.* 29:18

¹³ *Ibid.* 26:3

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 2:113

Islam's Stance on Religious Conversion and Violence

The Qur'an never declares war for changing one's religion. The Prophet of Islam fought some battles in his lifetime, but all the battles of the Prophet were waged in self-defense or to preempt an imminent attack. Muslims were persecuted and tortured in Makkah for ten years. Yet, the permission for fighting was not given at an earlier time. Instead, they were asked to endure with patience. "Pardon and forgive until God gives his command."¹⁵ Only after they were forced out of their houses and their town and those left behind were subjected to abuse, God gave his permission to fight in defense. "Permission is given those who fight because they have been wronged.... Those who have been driven from their homes unjustly only because they said, 'our Lord is God'. For had it not been for God's repelling some men by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of God is much mentioned, would certainly have been destroyed."¹⁶ Jihad becomes an obligation for defending religious freedom, for self-defense¹⁷ and defending those who are oppressed.¹⁸ Yet, some non-Muslims quote various verses of the Qur'an to argue that Islam incites violence and war against non-Muslims. The following verses and traditions are often presented in support of this argument:

1. *Ayat al-Saif*: (the Sword Verse): "When the (four) forbidden months are over, whenever you encounter the idolators, kill them, seize them, besiege them, wait for them at every lookout post."¹⁹
2. The verse which begins with the sentence: "Kill them wherever you encounter them and drive them out where

¹⁵ Qur'an 2:109

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 22:39-41

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 2:190

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 4:75

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 9:5

they drove you out.”²⁰

3. “Believers, those who ascribe partners to God are truly unclean: do not let them come near to the Sacred mosque after this year.”²¹

Likewise, some prophetic traditions are taken out of context. The following traditions are reported to have been said on some social contexts. Yet, some literalists have made a generalization on these traditions. These following traditions denounce and disapprove polytheism and disbelief. Yet, we should read them in their social contexts.

“I have been ordered to fight with people until they pronounce the *Tawhid* and pray five times...”²²

“I’m free (in the Day of Judgment) from every Muslims who lives among the non-Muslims...”²³

On an occasion when Umar was reading a copy of Jewish scripture, He was warned by the Prophet saying: “Had Moses been among us He would have been following me.”²⁴

All these Qur’anic verses and prophetic traditions must be read, interpreted, and understood in the historical, social, and political contexts of the Arabian Peninsula during the time of the Prophet. It would be utterly wrong to do a cherry-pick reading of these Qur’anic verses and prophetic traditions out of their social and cultural contexts. Some classical scholars declared war on non-Muslims merely based on religion, but their statement should

²⁰ *Ibid.* 2:191

²¹ *Ibid.* 9:28

²² Hadith 385. This hadith has been narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

²³ Hadith 2645, This hadith has been narrated by Abu Davood.

²⁴ Hadith 14736, This Hadith has been narrated by Ahmad.

be understood in the historical context. Some classical scholars of Islam promoted the theory of exclusiveness of Muslim society. For instance, let us consider Imam al-Shafi's statements in dealing with non-Muslim nations. He instructed Muslim rulers to engage in war with non-Muslims at least once a year, if not more often, and not to accept a truce for more than 10 years. This instruction was made by an analogy to the practice of the Prophet that he engaged in battles with non-believers at least once a year and did not accept a truce for more than ten years. This was a legal speculation of this great scholar of the medieval time. This analogical conclusion might have been suitable for the time of Imām al-Shāfi'. The generality of such a ruling is questionable in the context of our time. Abū Sulayman notes that no statesman could possibly accept this kind of analogy and understanding in our contemporary world. This kind of analogy is an individual juristic opinion, which has no support from the Qur'an. The tendency toward literalism, a word-for-word and issue-for-tissue analogical comparison led many jurists like al-Shāfi' to such a general conclusion that does not sustain the test of time.²⁵

Islam's Contemporary Worldview

The classical Islamic legal scholars made a distinction between Islamic and non-Islamic worlds. They called the Muslim world *Darul Islam*: an abode of Islam, and the non-Muslim world *Darul of Harb*, or an abode of war. This classification was done by some classical Muslim scholars more than a thousand years ago, in their social, political, and geographical contexts. No sane person would agree with such a demarcation in the modern age of globalization. Today, the entire world is envisioned as a global village and the whole humanity virtually interacts with one another without any social or communication barriers. So, it would be inappropriate to divide the world by this sort of

²⁵ Abū Sulayman, *Theories of Islamic international relations*, 1993, pp. 80-83.

classical classification. One of the biggest social changes that humanity experiences today is that it lives in an interconnected world. The digital communication networks, transport facilities and technologies have made the world virtually one. People of different faiths, ethnicities, and cultures live side by side, work together and interact with one another. Cities like London, New York, Paris, and Melbourne are some classic examples of pluralism and multiculturalism and community cohesion. Human collaboration is very much closer today than ever before in the business and service sectors. To divide the modern global world into *Darul Islam* and *Darul Harb* in line with classical Islamic classification would be irrelevant and inappropriate.

Does the Qur'an fundamentally accommodate pluralism in its teaching? If so, how do we reconcile between the Qur'anic verses that denounce disbelief and deplore the acts of disbelievers and the Qur'anic verses that give religious freedom? Polytheism is one of the greatest sins in Islam and yet, God has given freedom to man either to believe or not believe. It is entirely up to man to choose his path. After all man is blessed with free will and freedom. God tests man for his free will and freedom on the Day of Judgment according to Islamic teaching. *Iman* or faith in Islam is all about freedom of choice. If one does not believe with free will and freedom, there would not be any meaning to belief due to force. The verse that gives a full religious freedom, "There no compulsion in religion"²⁶ was revealed after victory of Makkah. This verse was revealed after the Arabian Peninsula was cleared from shirk and the people returned to the original religion of their forefather Abraham. Therefore, all the verses related to *kital* such as "O prophet; Strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites"²⁷ are abrogated by this verse, including the above Ahadith, which must be understood in its contexts. Also, some verses related to fighting have been particularized by universal

²⁶ Qur'an 2:286.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 9:36

and general verses such as Ayat Saif²⁸ and by many other verses.

Many verses of the Qur'an encourage Muslims to build a strong and harmonious relationship between Muslim and non-Muslims. The following verse is regarded as a fundamental verse that constitutes the foundation of Muslim and non-Muslim relationship: "God forbids you not, with regards to those who fight you not for your faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them. For God loves those who are just. God only forbids you, with regards to those who fight you for your faith and drive you out of your homes."²⁹ Faith does not become a barrier in Islam to interact and communicate with people. Muslims are always advised to be good with non-Muslims in their interactions and dealings. Faith is a personal choice of everyone. So, Islam does not force any one to accept the religion. There is no place in Islam for any kind of coerced indoctrination.

When Qutailla (a non-Muslim mother of Asma) visited the Medina Asma and refused to see her non-Muslim mother, the Prophet asked her to see her mother and treat her well. Moreover, the relationship between Muslims and the people of the Book is more special. Muslims can eat their food and even marry their women. Non-Muslims comprised of two groups. The first group are non-Muslims who get on well with Muslims and do not harm Muslims; and Muslims are advised by the Qur'an to do justice towards them and treat them equally. The second group are those who do not get on well with Muslims. They disdain Islam and Muslims for no reason. An example of such group are the pagans of Makkans who tortured the Muslims. It is with this second group of people that Islam does not want Muslims to build friendships. Islam tells Muslims not to make any loyal friends from this group of people. "The Believers should not make the disbelievers their

²⁸ *Ibid.* 9:6.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 60:8-9

allies rather than believers.”³⁰ Similarly, the Qur’an says, “O, you who believe do not take disbelievers your allies and protectors instead of believers.”³¹ This group of non-Muslims always want to wipe out Islam and Muslims. That is why the Qur’an instructs Muslims to take precautionary steps in dealing with these people.

Islam does not forbid friendship with every non-Muslims; rather the forbidden friendship is with those who attack the Muslims and challenge God and His prophet. “You will not find people who truly believe in God and the last Day loving those who oppose God and His messenger, even though they be their fathers or their sons or their brethren.”³²

The Qur’an states, “God does not forbid you from doing justice and showing kindness from those who do not fight you on account of your religion and those who did not drive you out from your home.”³³ Therefore, this is the fundamental Islamic teaching on Muslim and non-Muslim relations. Islam tells Muslims to treat non-Muslims well. Islam always seeks to avoid a confrontation even if the Muslims are strong as in the case of Hudaibiyah by accepting all the conditions of the treaty. Islam demands Muslims to respect the treaties: “Except those of the idolaters with whom you Muslims have a treaty, and who have since abated nothing of your right nor have supported anyone against to you. For these fulfill their treaty till their full term.”³⁴ Muslims are required to honor any pact with non-Muslims, even when they might not do the same, as in the case of the Jews in Medina who claimed, “We are under no obligation towards gentiles.”³⁵ Moreover, fulfilling a pact is considered a humanitarian duty in Islam, and Muslims are

³⁰ *Ibid.* 3: 28

³¹ *Ibid.* 4:144

³² *Ibid.* 58: 22

³³ *Ibid.* 60: 8, 9

³⁴ *Ibid.* 9: 4

³⁵ *Ibid.* 3: 75

commanded to honor agreements and treaties. Even during time of war and conflict, Muslims are asked to follow certain rules, which impose some strict conditions for fighting. “Fight as they fight. No transgression.”³⁶ Islam does not allow soldiers to kill women, children, priests, and elderly in war, in other words, no innocent killing. Even on the eve of victory Islam encourages forgiveness of enemies. During the victory over Makkah, the Prophet forgave all his enemies.

It is wrongly perceived by some non-Muslims that Muslims are trying to overtake the countries. Some believe that Muslims want to create a different world order with Islamic ideologies. These are mere assumptions. Islam in fact encourages diversity in culture and religions. Indeed, Islam calls on people to think freely and believe in Islam without any coercion.

The Qur’an affirms, “The Truth is from your Lord. Let him who will believe and let him who will reject it.”³⁷ The Qur’an also tells people that there is no coercion in Islam: “Let there be no compulsion in religion.”³⁸ It is a firm conviction of Muslims that God has His one plan. He guides people as He would like, and the guidance is from God alone. “If it had been your Lord’s Will, all who are in the earth should have believed together. Would you Muhammad compel men until they are believers?”³⁹ We also read that the Prophet gave religious freedom for the followers of other religions. He made the treaties with people of Najran and the Jewish tribes in Medina. The Treaty of Medina which he made with the Jews was a classic example for his tolerance of all different religions. Islam always encourages Muslims to avoid any sort of confrontation to prevent bloodshed. For instance, in the treaty of *Hudaibiyah*, the Prophet agreed to all the conditions

³⁶ *Ibid.* 2:190.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 3:60

³⁸ *Ibid.* 2: 256.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 10: 99.

that his opponents suggested. This was done to maintain peace and good relationship. The prophet knew well that the pagans of Makkah presented some strict conditions that were in their own favor. Yet the Prophet told his companions to strictly adhere to the conditions of this treaty in order to maintain peace.

Islam and Religious Tolerance

Muslims have always been tolerant of different faiths throughout Islamic history. Jews, Christian, Hindus, Buddhists, and many other religious groups have been living in Muslim countries for centuries. In the past, no Muslim ruler wanted to wipe out other religions in Islamic history. Today, we see a lot of minority communities who have been in Muslim countries for centuries. It is against Islamic teaching to chase people out of their homes and native places. Yet, when Christians conquered the Muslims in Spain, the Christian armies and rulers gave three choices for the Spanish Muslims. Either to be converted to Christianity or to be chased out of the country or to be killed. More recently, when UN peace keeping forces were working in the Balkan war, some Dutch regimens were entrusted to protect Bosnian Muslims. When some Muslim men sought protection from Dutch battalions, they did not protect them; rather they let them out to be killed by Serbian forces. Court rulings in Hague found out that Dutch forces did not act with responsibility on this matter. In a subsequent trial, the appeals court in The Hague ruled, “Dutch soldiers acting as UN peacekeepers were partly liable for the deaths of about 300 Muslim men massacred near Srebrenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Yugoslavian civil war.”⁴⁰ Islamic teaching does not allow Muslim rulers or armies to behave like this. Protecting innocent people is an integral part of Islamic rule in war.

In fact, the Qur’an instructs Muslims to give protection and shelter when people seek protection. So, Islamic rule does not

⁴⁰The Guardian UK. 28/jun.2017.

give any favoritism to treat people differently based on their faith in time of war. Muslims have been accused by many orientalist of spreading Islam by swords. In fact, they claim the concept of Jihad was instituted for this very purpose. This claim does not have any academic credibility. First, people cannot be forced to believe in any faith. Secondly, the Qur'an gives religious freedom to all religious groups. If the Qur'an gives religious freedom to believe or not, it does not make sense to say that the religion of Islam forces people to believe in Islam. Moreover, the Qur'an demands people to use their own human intellect and reasoning faculties to know the truth.⁴¹ The Qur'an instructs people to ponder over the world around them. It tells the faithful to ponder over the divine creation in this world, to explore and examine the wonders of this universe. It tells them how the world around them was created with its all-natural wonders and marvels. It does not make sense to claim that this universe was created by accident or by any coincident as some atheists have claimed. This universe with its so many milky ways, galaxies and planets has been designed beautifully and perfectly. No sound person would say that this universe created itself without any Creator. We, Muslims strongly believe that it is one and only God Almighty Allah who has created this universe and yet, people call this one and only God with different names. But we Muslims call him Almighty Allah in accordance with what the Holy Qur'an reveals. We believe in Him and in His qualities as it has been described in the Qur'an. The Qur'an also encourages us to believe in God through our scientific investigation and intellectual inquiries. It does not ask people to believe in God blindly. So, no Muslim believes in Allah blindly.

Conclusion

In conclusion, if it is the divine plan to have different religions, the claim that Muslims force people to accept Islam does not hold. Indeed, forcing people to believe in Islam by any

⁴¹ Ustaz Mansoor, pp. 50-95.

means will go against the basic teaching of the Qur'an. Hence, it can be concluded that the Qur'an promotes a pluralistic humanity. We often find various kinds of flowers in a flower garden. The diversity in a flower garden with different fragrances enriches the aromatic atmosphere of the garden. Likewise, all different religions should enrich the world with their unique fragrance. Yet, people are fighting for the sake of religion and faith, an act contrary to good sense in this modern world. Indeed, freedom of expression is one of the fundamental principles of the modern democratic world.

Moreover, we could say that the actions of all-radical Muslim groups are wrong according to the Islamic teaching that has been highlighted in this paper. I have highlighted some wrong actions of some Muslim radical groups to illustrate that they have been wrong in their barbaric attacks on innocent non-Muslim brothers and sisters across the world. There is no justification in Islamic law to wage war on innocent non-Muslim people at all. Islamic teachings do not permit them to commit such barbaric crime in the name of Islam and Muslims.

Muslim radical groups	Some of their wrongful actions/ activities
Taliban	Destruction of two tallest Buddha statues in Afghanistan, if it was by them
Al- Qaeda	9/11, if it was done by them
ISIS	Killing Non-Muslims of Iraq, Syria, and other Muslim countries. It was committed by them.
Al- Qaeda and ISIS	7/7 London attacks, if was done by them.
Zahran cult in Sri Lanka	Eastern Sunday attack, if it was done by them.

By many other groups, such as Buka Haram	Killing of non-Muslims in the name of Islam.
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Finally, Muslims cannot be judgmental about the faith and belief system of any one or any non-Muslim community. It is God alone who will judge people and their faith on the Day of Judgment. It is God alone who has the authority and the power to judge people. God has already made all the necessary arrangements to judge people in their eschatological life. According to Muslim faith, it is our firm conviction that God brings each soul into judgment on the Day of Judgment. So, these radical groups have no authority to pass judgment on the faith and belief system of people.

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The Communicative Role of Camillian Chaplains in their Pastoral Ministry during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Vince Henry M. Salles¹

ABSTRACT

This case study sought to describe four Camillian chaplains' communicative role in their hospital ministry during the COVID-19 pandemic based on in-depth interviews. Data from the interviews were coded and analyzed thematically. Findings revealed that the chaplains ministered communicatively to patients, families, and hospital workers as listeners, liturgists, counselors, comforters, and accompanists. Due to the pandemic, the chaplains had to perform majority of their ministries from a distance, i.e., away from their patients using high and low technology tools. The chaplains conducted online counseling using video conferencing platforms (high technology) to reach hospital stakeholders who are physically distant. Two of the interviewed chaplains have had the opportunity to minister in-person in a COVID-19 facility by celebrating the Holy Eucharist in the hospital's lobby. The celebration was amplified through a sound system (low technology) so that patients and hospital personnel in wards may participate. The two chaplains communicated to the persons inside the wards by delivering inspiring homilies and asking them to clap or

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shout as a form of feedback. In terms of being a liturgist, three chaplains ministered the Sacraments of Anointing of the Sick and Holy Eucharist in-person. They were also able to organize a procession of the Blessed Sacrament inside the wards. Another ministry technique they used is a Mental Health Awareness Program intended to debrief healthcare workers from their stress and tensions. All four chaplains noted the importance of courage and creativity in ministry during a pandemic by drawing inspiration from the founder of the Ministers of the Infirm, Saint Camillus. This study's results may be used as a basis for considering the essential role of hospital chaplains in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Willing and healthy priest chaplains who followed strict health protocols must be allowed inside COVID-19 wards to minister to the patients and healthcare workers. However, if an in-person ministry is impossible, government authorities could provide ways and means for hospital chaplains to reach out to the sick even virtually. This study may also serve as a basis for establishing a national association of chaplains to share the best practices and the formation and training of new pastoral workers. This research may also serve as a model for other hospital chaplains ministering to COVID-19 patients, their family members, and healthcare workers. A similar study could be implemented involving other religious congregations or the diocesan clergy directly engaged in pastoral care in health.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Hospital Chaplaincy, Camillus de Lellis, Spiritual Care for the Sick, Pastoral Ministry, Pastoral Communication*

Introduction

There have already been more than 111 million COVID-19 cases worldwide at the time of writing, which resulted in more than 2.45M casualties. In the Philippines, there are already more

than 555,000 cases and 11,000+ deaths. Despite having the “world’s longest lockdown,” as reported by media outlets, the Philippines still sees new cases and deaths due to COVID-19 daily. Observing health protocols, maintaining safe physical distances, wearing face masks and shields are still enforced. In-person classes in schools are still suspended, and many people have lost their livelihood due to the downturn in economic activity. Although vaccines have been developed, the majority of the Filipino population has not yet received vaccinations.

Apart from suffering the illness, patients infected with the virus also deal with loneliness and anxiety due to their isolation in hospitals and quarantine facilities, which affects their overall mental health. Sickness disrupts a person’s equilibrium, reminds him of humanity’s fragile nature, and raises questions such as the meaning of suffering, our existence in this world, and our destiny. Thus, the challenge of being *unwell* is not merely a physical, psychological, or social one but includes the spiritual dimension.² Lartey³ defines spirituality as “the human capacity for relationship with self, others, world, God, and that which transcends sensory experience.” According to him, spirituality is essential in an individual’s meaning and identity, and the loss of this will impact immediately and substantially his wellbeing. Fostering the patient’s spiritual well-being should be considered side-by-side treatment and interventions necessary to address their health problems.⁴ It is the role of hospital chaplains to meet the spiritual needs of the patients and healthcare workers.

² Mark Cobb, *The Hospital Chaplain’s Handbook: A Guide for Good Practice* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2005), 21.

³ Emmanuel Lartey. *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 2nd ed (London: Jessica Kingsley Press, 2003), 140.

⁴ Cobb, *The Hospital Chaplain’s Handbook: A Guide for Good Practice*, 22.

Hospital Chaplaincy in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The landscape for hospital chaplaincy has changed much due to the health risks brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. It has impacted how hospital chaplains communicate and provide pastoral care to the patients, their families, and the medical staff. Drummond and Carey⁵ acknowledged that spiritual care practitioners are now “forced to stand far off, observing but not near enough to engage” the sick. For this reason, the authors suggested that spiritual care practitioners must adapt their practice to fit the parameters of the present reality since spiritual care is essential for the patient’s well-being.

Ferrel⁶ described the absence of spiritual care and faith communities in hospitals during this time as “excruciating.” She added that spiritual care is part of the whole-person approach to health care and is not a luxury but a necessity. The question of Nuzum⁷ may also be the question of many hospital chaplains struggling to provide spiritual comfort to COVID-19 patients: “How do we remain pastorally close while physically distant from patients?” Giffen and Macdonald⁸ observed that chaplaincy

⁵ David A. Drummond and Lindsay B. Carey, “Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care Response to COVID-19: An Australian Case Study – The McKellar Centre,” *Health and Social Care Chaplaincy* 8, no. 2 (September 2020): 10, <https://doi.org/10.1558/hssc.41243>

⁶ Betty Ferrel, “The Urgency of Spiritual Care: COVID-19 and the Critical Need for Whole-Person Palliation,” *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* 60, no. 3 (September 2020): e8, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2020.06.034>

⁷ Daniel Nuzum, “The COVID-19 dilemma: How to maintain physical distance without sacrificing pastoral closeness,” *SEARCH* 43, no. 2, (2020): 104–107.

⁸ Sarah Giffen and Gordon Macdonald, “Report for the Association of Chaplaincy in General Practice on Spiritual Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Health and Social Care Chaplaincy* 8, no. 2 (September 2020): 3-4, <https://doi.org/10.1558/hssc.41767>

services in the United Kingdom shifted to being done virtually through phone or video calls. They have also noted that patients often bring up their anxieties and struggles with various losses in normality, livelihood, purpose, socialization, and loved ones. The authors also noticed an increase in conversations about the spiritual: the meaning of life, sources of hope, and wondering “where God is” in this pandemic; requests for prayer and reading of the Scriptures were also common.

This paper describes the communicative role of hospital chaplains belonging to the Order of the Ministers of the Infirm (the Camillians) before the pandemic struck and the adaptation of the regular ministries they do to care for patients infected by the Coronavirus Disease-2019, their family members, and healthcare workers. By communicative role, I mean the primary task or purpose that is a combination of external (which is imposed) and internal (self) expectations in the area of communication. A hospital chaplain’s communicative role is determined by his religious tradition, training, context, skills, and the needs of those who receive his care. This study explains how the pandemic altered the communication strategies that these chaplains employ in dealing with the hospital stakeholders and how they incorporate their identity as followers of Camillus de Lellis in their ministry.

The general outline of this paper is as follows: first, the presentation of the training undergone by the hospital chaplains; second, the enumeration of their regular hospital duties, which are very personable and directed to the spiritual health of the patients, families, and healthcare practitioners; part of their chaplaincy work is also dealing with death and dying; third, the presentation of narratives how the pandemic altered the ways and means hospital chaplains do their ministry; and fourth, based on the stories of the chaplains, presentation of conclusions and recommendations to affirm the essential roles of chaplains in hospital ministry in times of crises.

The findings of this study show the essential role of hospital chaplains in the well-being of COVID-19 patients. Being infected with the COVID-19 is more than just a physical ailment since the social isolation required in treatment significantly impacts the individual's emotional, mental, and spiritual health. Together with doctors, nurses, and hospital staff, the chaplain can also provide valuable care for the COVID-19 patient. I chose the Order of Saint Camillus for this study because of their ministry's particular focus on the sick. In writing this research paper, I aim to bring to light the best practices of the Camillians as a model for other religious congregations or the diocesan clergy in no-contact care for the sick in these extraordinary times of the pandemic when the "way things were" are challenged to the core.

Who the Ministers of the Infirm are

The thought of forming a congregation to minister to the sick occurred to Saint Camillus de Lellis after observing the poor condition of hospitals in Rome and the poor treatment of sick people. In the year 1584, Camillus founded a congregation to relieve "the ever-present merciful love of Christ for the sick and bearing witness to it to the world."⁹ This congregation was approved and confirmed by Pope Sixtus V in 1586 allowing Camillus and his companions to live together in poverty, chastity, and obedience, and the service of the sick and plague-stricken.¹⁰ Saint Camillus asked the same Pope for permission to wear a cross of red cloth on their cassocks to distinguish them from other groups. Sixtus V consented to this request through an apostolic brief titled *Cum nos nuper* allowing Camillus and his companions

⁹Ministers of the Infirm, *Constitution and General Statutes* (India: St. Camillus Province, 2017), 1.

¹⁰Frederick William Faber, *Saint Camillus de Lellis: Founder of the Clerks Regular Servants of the Sick*, trans. Mueller, M. (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Servants of the Sick, 1926), 64.

to adorn their habits with the red cross.¹¹ In 1591, Pope Gregory XIV established the Ministers of the Infirm into a Religious Order and Camillus was elected as its first superior general.¹²

Aside from the usual threefold vows that religious men and women profess, the Ministers of the Infirm take a “fourth vow” where they consecrate themselves to the service of the ill “even at the risk of life.”¹³ As regards to their particular ministries, the General Statutes of the Camillians specifies the following: serve all sick people and their families, persons with disabilities, and the elderly; promote health and prevention of sickness; cultivate healthcare workers ethically and professionally using Christian ideals; humanize healthcare institutions and services; exercise pastoral care in health; help developing countries; and promote the life and dignity of the person.¹⁴

The presence of the Camillians in the Philippines began in 1974 and was formally established in 2003. They live out their charism through hospital chaplaincy, administration of healthcare institutions, parish ministry, community-based health care, public health services, and seminary formation.¹⁵ During this COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministers of the Infirm have been active in their work for the sick. Although there were modifications to their usual ministry, they adapted and thought of creative ways to still pastorally serve the sick. Camillian priests assigned as hospital chaplains still continued their apostolates despite the risks posed by the pandemic.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 66

¹² *Ibid*, 99, 101.

¹³ *Constitution and General Statutes*. 28.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 13.

¹⁵ Dick Korzinek, *The Giant of a Man* (Philippines: St. Camillus Provincialate, 2006), 62.

Methodology

In-depth interviews were conducted with four Camillian priests serving as chaplains of hospitals and healthcare institutions taking care of COVID-19 patients. The interview provided information regarding how the pandemic has changed their pastoral ministry in the hospital and what communicative techniques they use to deal with those infected by the virus, their families, and healthcare workers.

This case study involved inquiry conducted virtually through Zoom. My initial plan for data collection was complete enumeration: hence I asked for the list of all Camillian hospital chaplains in the Philippines ministering to COVID-19 patients. However, out of the six hospital chaplains identified, only four agreed to be interviewed. Although this study's sample size is small, the information gathered was adequate to provide rich narratives of chaplain work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The four chaplains were contacted and sent a message through Facebook messenger explaining the rationale of the study and the interview questions. The research participants were informed that their identities would be protected with aliases. I transcribed the recordings of the interviews and translated them into English. The transcriptions of the four interviews were presented in narrative form, which is descriptive and detailed.

Training as a Chaplain

All the four priests, Fr. Matthew, Fr. Mark, Fr. Luke, and Fr. John were exposed to the pastoral care of the sick since they were seminarians. They were asked to visit the sick at hospitals and do volunteer work in charitable institutions as part of their formation. The life of Saint Camillus de Lellis and his spirituality in taking care of the sick was also included in their academic curriculum. The four chaplains also mentioned about the Clinical Pastoral Education

(CPE) they took up for ten weeks to equip them with necessary clinical and pastoral skills in being a chaplain.

Fr. Matthew specified that they had daily visitation to the sick, counseling, and self-processing during the CPE. According to him, the CPE helped them manage their personal issues not to be triggered while being with the hospital patients.

For Cobb, a chaplain's knowledge, skills, beliefs, and faith tradition will shape his practice of ministry and training is essential because of the multidimensional nature of the chaplain's role.¹⁶ I suppose that the trainings the chaplains were subjected to aided them to face preparedly the unprecedented large-scale effect of the current pandemic to everyone, including the Church.

Regular Communicative Duties and Responsibilities of a Hospital Chaplain

Fr. Matthew summed up the chaplain's duty into two tasks: "ministry of healing and ministry of hope." According to him, the ministry of healing refers to "listening to the voices of the suffering patients." He acknowledged that listening is not easy since the chaplain has to sit with the patient for hours. Fr. Matthew defined ministry of hope as "giving not a false hope but bringing them to see Christ's presence in their lives. It is also helping the patients appreciate God's hand at work so that they will have hope even though their sickness is irreversible. It is making the patients hope for God's forgiveness of their sins." He also clarified that the chaplain's duties and responsibilities are not only limited for the patients but also hospital employees as well. The chaplain takes care of their psycho-spiritual needs.

Meanwhile, for Fr. Mark, the chaplain is a "representative

¹⁶ Cobb, *The Hospital Chaplain's Handbook: A Guide for Good Practice*, 22.

of the Church, a spiritual minister to safeguard the faith, and give the Sacraments of the Church to the people.” He also mentioned about his role in providing spiritual formation for hospital employees.

For Fr. Luke, “the primary task of a hospital chaplain is spiritual accompaniment for the sick and those who are taking care of the sick. I also look after the psycho-emotional needs of the (hospital) employees.”

Fr. John shared that one of a hospital chaplain’s regular duties is administering the Sacraments of the Holy Eucharist, Anointing of the Sick, and Reconciliation. He also mentioned visiting the sick daily, acting as a pastoral counselor, and animating the Pastoral Care Committee of the hospital.

Frs. Matthew, Mark, and John all affirm that the hospital chaplain engages in a ministry of presence. When asked about the usual topics of conversation they have with the patients, all the four said it depends on what patients want to talk about. Fr. Matthew’s patients brought up topics about their financial woes because “hospital bills can shoot up to millions.” Some patients that Fr. Matthew encountered asked difficult existential questions: “Why me, Lord?” “Will I ever be forgiven of my sins?” “Will I be saved if I die during the operation?” Other patients voiced out their anger at God through Fr. Matthew, and some shared their deepest secrets to him that even their family members do not know. He shares that “being able to listen to the patients is a liberating experience for me. My role is to listen, to facilitate the conversation so that the patient will be able to answer his or her own question.”

Most of Fr. Mark’s patients cannot talk because of the nature of their disease, so when he goes to the bedside of the patients, he will just pray with the family for the sick. “I minister to the family; I talk with the family members. They bring up moral and ethical

issues and bare their guilt, especially here in the hospital – their usual question is, ‘Is it OK to remove the ventilator?’ ‘Will we just let him die?’” Fr. Mark and the doctors hold conferences to clarify ethical issues in ways understandable to the family members. Some of the patients that Fr. Mark ministered to also asked difficult questions on the meaning of suffering: “Why did this happen to me?” “Why am I being afflicted?” “Why is God making me suffer?” “Is this a punishment from God?” One nun even asked Fr. Mark why she is suffering, arguing that she is good and obeys God’s commandments. The chaplain confessed that he does not know how to address these questions.

Your presence is important. At least you’re there listening to them. You will remind them that although they are suffering, there are people who care for them and love them and do not forsake them. The presence of family members is proof that God’s love is at work. Even though we are suffering, God will send people to become instruments of his love and comfort. I consider myself as a divine instrument to assure the patients and their families that God never abandons them, that God is always with them.

Fr. Luke begins his conversation with patients by asking how they are and how they are feeling. The main concern of the patients, according to him, is about healing. The patients talk about their family members and their life of faith.

The topics of conversation at the bedside of Fr. John’s patients are mostly existential in nature. “Father, will I still get better?” “Will I die already?” “If I die, what will happen to my family?” “Is God punishing me?” “Is there a God?” He related one of his most unforgettable experiences as a chaplain when a child died while being operated. The parents approached him and asked, “Why my child, who is so young? What did we do wrong to deserve this?” Fr. John insists that a chaplain is not with the patient and his family

to answer all their questions. His presence at the bedside assures the patient that he is not alone, that God is with him, and that the patient can articulate his emotions, anger, pain, or even happiness in the chaplain's presence. "They mention their grief and sorrows, especially if they are already terminally ill." Aside from these, some patients also share their hopes, realizations, and gratitude to the Lord for giving them a new life.

There are also others who express their acceptance of the situation, letting go and letting God take control. There are times when the chaplain feels the need to say something to the patient, especially if the question is too deep. He needs to answer so that the patient may come to his senses. The chaplain should also include the element of faith in the conversation.

According to John Paul II, hospitals and treatment centers "are like shrines, where people participate in Christ's paschal mystery." He emphasized that within these structures, people confront the meaning of life, suffering, and death; thus, believers' skilled and significant presence should never be lacking here. He also wrote that the world of health should be evangelized so that it may become a "valuable laboratory for the civilization of love."¹⁷

As John Paul II compared hospitals to shrines, I daresay that the hospital chaplains are Christ. To synthesize what the four chaplains related regarding their regular communicative duties and responsibilities, just like Jesus Christ the Divine Physician, they engage in the ministry of healing by their active listening, assuring presence, and consoling words (and even their silence when they really do not know how to respond to the patient). Because the

¹⁷ John Paul II, "Message of the Holy Father for the World Day of the Sick for the Year 2001," 22 August 2000, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/sick/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_20000822_world-day-of-the-sick-2001.html

hospital chaplains are ordained ministers of the Church, they can administer the two essential sacraments of healing – Anointing of the Sick and Penance – that targets not only bodily healing but especially spiritual well-being. Of course, I cannot fail to mention the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, the heavenly Bread that gives eternal life. The hospital chaplains share in Christ’s ministry of healing sickness and restoring life.

Communicating to the Dying and the Bereaved

One of the salient themes that the interviewed hospital chaplains shared is on death and dying. Hospital chaplains, aside from *being with* the patients in their sickness, also engage in end-of-life care. As Morris put it, “chaplains dwell in the midst of death and dying. Chaplains walk with the wounded.”¹⁸ This is perhaps one of the hardest things to do in the life of a hospital chaplain.

Fr. Matthew admitted that confronting the topic of death and dying is difficult. He narrated one incident of a paralyzed patient nearing death, being taken care of by his wife. When the patient died, the wife got furious and was not able to accept the situation. She even told the chaplain blamingly, “Father, it seems that you did not pray for my husband! He died already.” Fr. Matthew had to wait for two hours to bless the dead body because the wife kept saying that her husband was still alive. The chaplain told the wife, “Death is a reality of life. All of us will die sooner or later. For us Christians, death is not the end of everything. Death is a door to the life promised to us by God, and there is the Kingdom of our Lord.” Fr. Matthew shared that in difficult situations, timing is necessary. The chaplain must wait for emotions to subside, especially when it comes to emotions of anger. The agitated family members will calm down eventually. Fr. Matthew

¹⁸ Marla Morris. “Currere at the Cross-roads: The Deeply Theological in the Age of COVID-19,” *Journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies* 14, no. 1 (2020): 7, <https://doi.org/10.14288/jaaacs.v14i1.192025>

always assures the family that God is forgiving and loving. “God will forgive you even if you repent in your last breath. God is with us in the darkest and most painful situations of our life.” On the part of the dying person, the chaplain acts as a guide on their way to eternal life. Fr Matthew said that he facilitates their way to eternal life. He helps them realize two truths: there is a God, and that life will eventually come to an end.

Fr. Mark disclosed that he struggles to lift the spirits of the mourning. In his ministry with the bereaved family, he said that he accompanies them in their grief and assures them of his prayers.

In dealing with dying patients, Fr. Luke said that he does the routine procedures of anointing the patients and giving them last rites. He proceeded to tell the procedures he does when visiting patients. First, he introduces himself as the chaplain and asks the patient if he can pray. He also asks patients if they want to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Fr. Luke said that patients communicate by gestures. If the patient is dying, he proceeds with the rite of commendation. Fr. Luke said that he feels a tinge of sadness when ministering to the dying, but he is at the same time inspired by the patients’ faith.

Fr. John shared that he usually lets the bereaved family members speak their minds to unload their burdens. “When they are calmer, I insert the connectedness of faith in their experience: that they can hold on to their faith in God amid difficulties.”

To summarize what the chaplains had mentioned on their role in relation to the dying and the bereaved, they stand as accompaniers. The chaplains confront not only death per se but persons who cannot accept the reality of death squarely. This confrontation was also the experience of Christ when Lazarus died, and the sisters Martha and Mary sulked in sadness. Mary stayed at home and did not meet Jesus when he arrived in Bethany

(cf Jn 11:20), and Martha said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (Jn 11:21). Chaplains can learn from Christ to weep (Jn 11:35) with the grieving family and assure them that God will take care of the situation.

Holst¹⁹ described the two general types of a hospital chaplain’s pastoral functions as overt and covert. Overtly pastoral functions are performed specifically, distinctly, and exclusively by an ordained pastor. These include leading worship, preaching, administration of the sacraments, prayer, Scripture reading, confession, and absolution. For Holst, these functions explicitly manifest the presence and love of God through word and ritual. He calls the overt functions as *kerygma* (verbal proclamation). On the other hand, covertly pastoral functions do not require the pastoral office and may require having skill sets derived from non-theological disciplines; Holst calls this *diakonia* (loving acts) because the communication of God’s presence will be likely nonverbal through actions and relationships.

The overt and covert pastoral functions are evident from the interviews of the chaplains. Their overtly pastoral and communicative duties are being the liturgist and counselor of the hospital; while their covertly pastoral and communicative roles are being a listener, accompanier, and comforter. They fulfill these roles in relation to the sick, their family members, and hospital personnel.

The Pandemic’s Impact on Hospital Chaplaincy

Ferrel predicted that at the intersection of COVID-19, spiritual injury, spiritual distress, and suffering are likely to be exacerbated.²⁰ In the ongoing onslaught of the pandemic, the work

¹⁹ Lawrence E. Holst, *Hospital Ministry* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 47.

²⁰ Ferrel, “The Urgency of Spiritual Care,” e9.

of hospital chaplains has increased in difficulty. As enumerated earlier, a chaplain's duties and responsibilities are very personable acts involving an encounter between peoples in which the patient's spiritual and emotional needs are met.²¹ Face-to-face presence and communication are essential in the pastoral care of the sick and it engages both the chaplain and the patient in a meaningful and deeply human level. However, due to the restrictions necessarily imposed by government authorities to contain the virus, pastoral ministry seemingly became depersonalized.

According to Fr. Matthew, the pandemic has dramatically affected his role as a hospital chaplain. He narrated that in the hospital's COVID areas, they totally do not have contact with the patients. Visits to wards of Persons under Monitoring (PUM) and Persons Under Investigation (PUI) are allowed but limited. During the first months of the lockdown, Fr. Matthew's ministry was limited only through prayers for COVID patients in his daily Mass. In the hospital where Fr. Matthew serves as chaplain, administrators do not allow him near COVID-19 patients' bedsides to avoid the risk of infection. Two doctors in the hospital where Fr. Matthew is ministering died due to the virus. Fr. Matthew recounted one experience of his virtually dealing with a COVID-19 patient, a medical doctor. The doctor expressed his desire to avail the Sacrament of Confession, but the chaplain was not allowed inside his ward because of health restrictions. To reach a compromise, the priest gave his contact number to the doctor, who then confessed his sins through the phone. The doctor was admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU), who soon died. Fr. Matthew said that he was aware of the disallowance of confessions done through digital means or by telephone through the directive of Manila Apostolic Administrator Bishop Broderick

²¹ Michael J. Byrne and Daniel R. Nuzum, "Pastoral Closeness in Physical Distancing: The Use of Technology in Pastoral Ministry during COVID-19," *Health and Social Care Chaplaincy* 8, no. 2 (September 2020): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1558/hssc.41625>

Pabillo. Nevertheless, the chaplain just listened to the patient's sins due to grave pastoral reasons. Fr. Matthew conveyed his frustration toward government authorities, saying that those in power were not able to take into consideration the role of chaplains for COVID-19 patients.

Meanwhile, Fr. Mark thought that his role as a hospital chaplain was only slightly altered. For one, he was already used to wearing masks and dealing with patients who have respiratory ailments. With the pandemic, he was only limited to visit two non-COVID-19 wards. The hospital administrators did not oblige him anymore to visit wards for COVID-19 patients since they do not want the chaplain to be exposed to the virus. However, he was given a chance to minister to COVID-19 patients five times to anoint the sick at their families' request. He recounted the procedure he followed in administering the Sacrament of Anointing; he prepared the holy oils in advance and transferred them in sachet packs because if one enters a COVID-19 ward, whatever is brought inside should be left there. Before going inside the COVID-19 ward, Fr. Mark wore a PPE (personal protective equipment), two layers of gloves, and goggles. He approached the patients who were already intubated and recited the invocations from memory. The patients were conscious and were aware of his presence. He said that one patient even opened his eyes. The oil inside the sachet was dropped on the patient's forehead and hands. After anointing, he threw away the sachet in a bin inside the ward since it was already contaminated. All the five who were anointed died afterward since they were already severely infected. Fr. Mark added that he praised the dedication of nurses who stay in COVID-19 wards for long hours, exposing themselves to the risk of being sick and wearing PPEs which are inconvenient. He said that his stay in COVID-19 wards for half an hour was nothing compared to the healthcare workers' length of stay there. Fr. Mark could not contain the joy he felt after ministering to COVID-19-positive patients.

I can't help but feel proud of myself and grateful at the same time to God for allowing me the opportunity to serve. 'Wow, God! I was able to administer your Sacrament to those COVID patients!' It's so uplifting, so fulfilling that I experienced this firsthand! Only a few priests experienced this, and I was one of those given the privilege to enter those wards. I am really fulfilled! I am happy to be a chaplain of a COVID center. It was an overwhelming experience for me.

Fr. Luke had to deal with significant changes in hospital chaplaincy when the pandemic struck. He told me that he was accustomed to ministering at the bedside of patients, where the approach is very personal and very human. At the bedside, he told, the chaplain can make eye contact with the patient, hold their hands or shoulders, and anoint them. The chaplain can also touch their heads, shake their hands, and ask how they are. During the COVID-19, all of these can no longer be done. The pandemic prevented visitations to the sick and if the chaplain was allowed the chance to get near the patients, he will have to don a 'full battle gear' – a personal protective equipment – which he needs to protect himself and the patients. Currently, Fr. Luke does his ministry for COVID-19 patients in a separate facility from the hospital where he is assigned in. This facility houses patients with mild symptoms—he and his co-chaplains visit this COVID-19 facility weekly.

We accompany these patients spiritually because we believe that spirituality is a significant factor in the promotion of health. Spirituality is integral to holistic health, yet this is often not met during this pandemic. We see the disease not just as a physical issue but involving the whole person. We also want to meet their psycho-emotional and spiritual needs.

Fr. Luke described the routine of the chaplains during their weekly visit to the healthcare facility. They celebrate the Mass

wearing personal protective equipment and double face masks, plus face shields. He shared that wearing the PPE is uncomfortable, but he knows that it is necessary to protect the patients and himself. The Mass is usually attended by frontliners who are off duty. The Mass is being amplified using the hospital's sound system composed of microphones and speakers placed in front of the building lobby so that the patients inside the wards can hear the Mass. During his homily, Fr. Luke inserts encouraging messages for both the patients and healthcare personnel. They contain messages of hope and assurance that they are not alone in this trial. He tells the Mass attendees that even though their loved ones are physically away, their love is present and that the Church, represented by the priests, will stand by them in this trial. He also brings up the importance of keeping their faith during this pandemic and holding on to God, who has complete control over difficult situations. Part of their weekly routine in that healthcare institution is the procession of the Blessed Sacrament around the vicinity where the Eucharist is brought to the wards after the Mass. The chaplain shared that he witnessed up-close the faith of the patients and nurses who were intently praying while the Blessed Sacrament was passing by. Fr. Luke disclosed that he was so moved and inspired to see the people who expressed their desire for healing.

Fr. John believed that the pandemic shook up his ministry as a hospital chaplain. Firstly, he mentioned the anonymity of patients who cannot be called by their names but only by their number tags. He believed that the personal approach in ministry to the sick was taken away. Yet, he said that he was challenged to think of effective and creative ways to still connect with the sick. Fr. John goes to the same COVID-19 facility with Fr. Luke. Adding to Fr. Luke's narrative about the Mass and the mini procession of the Blessed Sacrament around the facility with a 120-bed capacity, Fr. John mentioned that they depend on the sound system to communicate with the patients inside the wards. He asks the patients to clap loudly or to shout if they were feeling okay or if they already want to go home

to their families. When the patients hear the voice of Fr. John, they immediately respond. The shouts and applause of the patients are already enough feedback for Fr. John. He said that he felt the desire in the patients' hearts to be healed as well as their struggle to be in isolation. The facility's administration installed internet connection inside the wards to allow the patients to communicate with their family members. "Communication-wise," Fr. John told, "the patients are still connected with their family members, which serves as one way for their recovery." During the chaplains' rounds to the wards, they give out booklets of the Novena to Saint Camillus and rosaries to the patients to aid them in their prayer life. Fr. John also talked about the online counseling they conducted for COVID-19 patients, PUIs, PUMs, and front-liners. Persons suspected of having the virus (PUIs and PUMs) usually tell the chaplain of the discrimination they experienced from other people. These people feel anxious and afraid because their community members tell them to leave.

In his homily last March 18, 2020, Pope Francis urged his hearers "not to distance ourselves from one another... (but) draw near to others through prayer, through help." The Pope emphasized that people have to get close to one another as God got close to them and accompanied them in life.²² *Getting close* is what the Frs. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have done so far in their ministry for COVID-19 patients. Although limited by the precautionary measures, the priests were able to *be with* the patients. Ferrel urged her readers to "forge innovative and clear pathways for chaplains" so that they can minister spiritually to the patients. She likewise acknowledged that chaplains have already been creatively adapting their care model to respond to the health restrictions during this pandemic.²³

²² Francis, "Morning Mass in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis: Our God is close to us and asks us to be close to each other," 18 March 2020. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2020/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20200318_pergli-operatorisanitari.html

²³ Ferrel, "The Urgency of Spiritual Care," e10.

Communicating to Families of COVID-19 Patients

The Camillian ministry to the sick also includes the patients' families. Fr. Matthew shared that he advises the patients' families to hold on to their faith in these trying times. He asks them to pray for wisdom and serenity to accept whatever will happen to their loved one who is sick. He encourages them to trust God and to trust the doctors who monitor and take care of their patient. The chaplain admitted that his ministry for the families of COVID-19 patients became a little difficult.

Imagine the pain that the families go through; how will you uplift their spirits? After the patients die due to the virus, the remains are immediately cremated. The family can no longer see their departed loved ones, and they cannot hold wakes. It's difficult to explain the pain. The chaplain should just be there to support them and be with them.

Fr. Mark had had the experience of blessing the remains of persons who were infected with COVID-19. He did it at the request of the family. The remains were already in the black body bag, and he was able to bless it at the hospital corridor after being discharged from the morgue. *I want to accompany the family in their grief.* Fr. Mark said that he helps the bereaved families to understand the restrictions because of the health emergency. "I make them realize that the protocols in place are for their protection. Understandably, the family is devastated, but we are helpless in this situation." Fr. Mark also shared that he was able to celebrate a Mass for the Dead. It was his way of accompanying the family as they mourn the loss of their loved one. He told: "The chaplain's presence for the family is significant. The process of grieving is long, but time heals all wounds. What is important is the assurance that they are not alone and that someone is praying for them."

Meanwhile, Fr. Luke said that he was not given the opportunity to minister to COVID-19 patients' families as his ministry was focused on the sick and the hospital workers.

Fr. John was able to minister to the relatives of COVID-19 patients online. He said that he listens to what they are going through and lets his co-Camillians help as well. The chaplain acknowledged the difficulty of not being able to grieve properly during this time of the pandemic and families do not have the opportunity to see their loved ones who passed away due to COVID-19 because often, the remains are cremated or buried at once. The normal process of honoring the dead include gathering as a family, praying together, and reminiscing the memory of the departed, slowly and solemnly. However, when the pandemic struck, the normal rituals of funeral and burial were suspended or limited. Fr. John remarked, "It's lonely to die during a pandemic." Fr. John mentioned his experience of being able to offer an online *Requiem* Mass twice. He admitted that it was awkward, but he did it anyway as a way of connecting with the grieving relatives and friends. He wanted to give the family a dignified manner of bidding goodbye to the departed. Fr. John shared about the difficulty of coping when one does not have control over the situation.

One person shared with me that in just a span of three days, his child was admitted to the ICU because his health dilapidated then died afterward due to COVID-19. Where is the time to let go, to bid goodbye, and to prepare yourself? So the emotions of the bereaved are very erratic: we are at the mercy of the situation, we cannot do anything. Letting go and letting God really matters this time. If there is a good side to this situation, it is when we see people having stronger and deeper faith.

During this pandemic, Cockell²⁴ noted that grieving people and those who sympathize with them must be inventive and creative because the pain of loss is now harder to bear and to adjust. For patients' family members, spirituality has become increasingly important during the COVID-19 pandemic, and chaplains usually lead in providing spiritual support like praying with and for the sick.²⁵

Caring for Carers

Spiritual care is not just limited to those who are sick and their families but also for healthcare workers. They are on the frontline and the pandemic has also taken a toll on them. The hospital chaplain should also address the wellbeing of distressed healthcare workers.

Fr. Matthew takes care of the hospital employees by providing one-on-one counseling using video conferencing tools (Zoom and Facebook messenger). He also encourages them to continue their frontline job in battling COVID-19, even though it is exhausting. "One staff requested that I deliver a good homily to inspire them because many are already resigning from their jobs. I urge them to practice their faith in these difficult times by praying unceasingly. I also tell them that their job is an expression of service, of love for neighbor."

Fr. Mark shared that he also takes an active role in the Mental Health team of their hospital where the primary focus is the employees' wellbeing, especially those who were disoriented

²⁴ Nell Cockell, "COVID-19 and Grief : A Chaplain's Reflection on the Experience of Supporting Bereaved Parents and Widows in Lockdown," *Health and Social Care Chaplaincy* 8, no. 2 (2020): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1558/hsc.41757>

²⁵ Melissa Bakar et al., "The Role of Palliative Care in Caring for the Families of Patients With COVID-19," *American Journal of Hospice & Palliative Medicine* 37, no. 10 (2020): 867-868, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1049909120931506>

following the deaths of their colleagues. Fr. Mark told the researcher that the hospital employees were so afraid and suffer so much not just from their hazardous occupation but from the discrimination of other people. Fr. Mark listens to the stories of the employees' frustration and psychological pain. The employees cry even if they are just speaking through online platforms such as Zoom or Facebook messenger. Fr. Mark said that as a hospital chaplain, he had to be ready to pick up calls from the medical workers and listen to their struggles.

Fr. Luke talked about the Mental Health Awareness Program organized by the Camillian brothers and fathers for healthcare workers in their institutions. Some of the participants were previously infected with COVID-19 but were able to recover. The program became an avenue for participants to share their intense feelings during the lockdown especially when they discovered that they were infected with the virus.

I feel grateful for being a Camillian who was given the opportunity to listen to our frontliners' sacred stories. They gave powerful testimonies on how clinging to God, and having faith in him helped them get through their intense fears of dying or themselves and their loved ones being sick. Almost all of them shared that their faith gave them hope, and because of their faith, they were able to feel the love of God and their families.

Fr. John described a chaplain's relationship with healthcare workers as "crucial." He called the healthcare workers and himself as "instruments of healing" and mentioned appreciating the role of each one. "During my Masses, I emphasize the essential role, heroism, and sacrifice of our healthcare workers at this time. Our appreciation for them is what gives them strength." Fr. John had counseled healthcare workers who brought up feelings of guilt and fear. According to the chaplain, these healthcare workers feel that they are putting their family members in danger because of their

job. “We thought that our doctors and nurses are courageous, but they are also afraid. When they share their struggles to me, they cry, they tremble in fear; so it’s very important to make them feel that they are appreciated and that people are praying for them, that there are people who support them and are ready to listen.” Fr. John also mentioned the Camillian Mental Health Awareness Program. According to him, this program is intended for healthcare workers to release their tensions, similar to a stress debriefing to ensure their mental wellbeing.

Eilers²⁶ writes that any form of pastoral care of souls is influenced by or has a communication dimension reflected in the pastor’s dispositions. He adds that the minister should be friendly, has a caring openness to the people he serves, and is very much willing to listen and help. In situations like sickness and death, sensitivity and proper communicative action is required.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The communicative roles of the four Camillian hospital chaplains who served as research participants can be summarized to the following: listener, liturgist, counselor, comforter, and accompanier. These roles were performed in relation to patients, their family members, and hospital personnel.

The practice of these communicative roles of the chaplains were significantly affected by the pandemic in that their ministries had to be performed from a distance due to health protocols. However, the priests managed to be creative in the practice of chaplaincy by using low and high technology. The chaplains used video conferencing tools such as Zoom and Facebook Messenger (high technology) to conduct online counseling for patients, their

²⁶ Franz-Josef Eilers, *Communicating in Ministry and Mission: An Introduction to Pastoral and Evangelizing Communication*, 4th ed (Manila: Logos Publications Inc., 2018), 137-138.

families, and hospital personnel. Online counseling involved listening to stories, *being with*, and *grieving with* more than giving advice. Microphones and speakers (low technology) were used to amplify the rites of the Mass being celebrated by two of the chaplains in a healthcare institution so that the patients and healthcare workers can hear it in wards. Messages filled with hope and inspiration were woven into their homilies. Through the sound system, the chaplains ask the patients inside the wards to clap or shout if they are feeling OK. The use of technology in ministry was one of the practical recommendations of the World Health Organization²⁷ for religious leaders in the context of COVID-19. According to WHO, these virtual pastoral and care visits can be a means to strengthen people's mental and spiritual health, create a sense of calm, and contribute to the resilience of the broader community.

In terms of acting as liturgists, three out of four chaplains were able to minister in-person to COVID-19 patients by administering the Sacraments of Anointing of the Sick and Holy Eucharist, with a procession and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament in the hospital corridors. The Camillian chaplains also organized a Mental Health Awareness Program for the wellbeing of healthcare workers.

The chaplains noted the importance of courage and creativity in implementing new approaches to take care of people. In the Gospels, Jesus usually healed the sick close-range: he touched them, put spittle on a man's tongue, mud and saliva on a man's eyes. However, Christ also did healings from afar like the case of the servant of a centurion (Mt. 8:5-13), the daughter of the Syrophenician woman (Mk 7:24-30), and the Capernaum

²⁷ "Practical considerations and recommendations for religious leaders and faith-based communities in the context of COVID-19: Interim Guidance," World Health Organization, accessed October 8, 2020, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/practical-considerations-and-recommendations-for-religious-leaders-and-faith-based-communities-in-the-context-of-covid-19>

official's son (Jn 4:46-54). In these three mentioned cases, the sick never got to be physically touched by Jesus yet they were cured. This goes to show that the grace of God can transcend spaces and long distances if people just have faith.

The communicative role of the chaplains was effective in terms of reaching out to the COVID-19 patients, their families, and the healthcare workers. Through their ministry, the people felt accompanied. With the right precaution, the chaplains could also be involved in caring for the COVID-19 patients. Even if some people have reservations, this study has shown the valuable contribution of the hospital chaplains for the overall wellness of the patients and also their family members and other workers of the hospital. Both in-person and virtual presence can achieve meaningful pastoral care in this pandemic situation.

This study's results can be used as evidence for taking into careful consideration the essential role of chaplains in the COVID-19 pandemic. The WHO acknowledged the role of religious leaders as "major" and "primary" in saving lives, reducing illness, being a source of support, comfort, guidance, and direct health care and social service for the people they minister to.²⁸ Priest chaplains who are willing, healthy, and have followed the health protocols must be allowed inside COVID-19 wards to anoint and hear confessions of the sick and the dying or just *be with* the patients who suffer from isolation. If in-person ministry is not possible, government authorities, after referring to this study, could provide ways for hospital chaplains to reach out to the sick even virtually, for example, by connecting them to private and public hospitals or giving them communication technologies. This study can also catalyze the establishment of a national association of chaplains to share best practices and train a new breed of pastoral workers.

This study may also be used as a model for other hospital

²⁸ Ibid.

chaplains serving COVID-19 patients, their families, and hospital staff. The narratives are good examples of communicative techniques and dispositions that may be used in ministry. It is recommended that this study be replicated among other religious congregations focused on the wellbeing of the sick or among the diocesan clergy assigned as hospital chaplains.

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Muslim Youth and State Building: Challenges and Opportunities

Aina-Obe Shamsuddin Bolatito¹

ABSTRACT

The religious activities and appearance of Muslim youth in public lives has placed them in a struggle for equality and recognition in various communities and states. The feelings of alienation, persistent process of neoliberal globalization, geopolitics of neo-imperialism, the rise of a civilizational discourse in which “Islam” is positioned to be against anything “Western” has caused remarkable changes in the social composition of Muslim minority countries. This has caused Muslim youth to be deliberately alienated from “state building” processes, leading to dissatisfaction with the state, marginalization, unemployment, stigmatization, political exclusion, underemployment, becoming disruptive agents instead of agent of change, and being portrayed as prone to radicalism and deviance.

Muslim youth gender, class, and cultural divisions seem not to be differentiated but are all homogenously treated as same, leading to depression and deprivation prevailing in high rate among a vast segment of Muslim youth. This means that “the transformation into adulthood for ‘state building’ will be something problematic in certain communities.

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This paper therefore intends to make an empirical analysis of these challenges and provides sustainable reforms and values. It also contributes a problem solving mechanism from the viewpoint of socio-political, economic moral authorities for discipline, control, and formulates policies for young Muslims and the Muslim youth authorities. The paper concludes with recommendations and suggestions for a way forward.

Keywords: *Muslim youth, state building, youth development, communities, activism.*

1. Introduction

Young Muslims worldwide have attracted a great deal of political and media attention since the disturbances of 9/11 terrorist attacks, Al-Shabab in Somalia and in neighboring Kenya, Boko Haram in Nigeria, and the Arab spring, which set a tone for what has followed young Muslims across the globe. The moral panic engendered by presumed actions of young Muslims and the Islamist slogan has been amplified by various terrorist attacks involving them such as the recent ISIL and Global Jihad Movement across places. The failed attacks and foiled terrorist plots are all underlined as the reality of being young Muslims. As a result, the issue of the identity and values of young Muslims have remained at the forefront of media prejudice and political discourse. This is evidenced by the Trump administration's action of banning citizens of seven Muslim countries (Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Libya, Sudan, Somalia and Syria) from entering the United States for a period of 120 days at the inception of his administration.

However, these discourses have involved certain assumptions about young Muslim identification and any prioritization that Islamic faith might represent. This paper seeks to contribute to a growing body of research exploring the challenges

and opportunities in contributing to state building and national development involving Muslim young people. The method is used to illuminate and discuss key inter-related questions. The first question is whether young Muslims have problems identifying with their nationality and faith proclamations; and secondly, whether being a young Muslim is a hindrance to state building. This paper further discusses an empirical analysis of recent policies that have framed these concerns with young Muslim identification.

2. The Disequilibrium Transitions

The differences in the stages of development have influenced the mind of young Muslims. While often referred to as the leaders of the future by the state elites and various political and non-political establishments, the young are also stigmatized and feared as “disruptive” agents prone to radicalism and deviance, forgetting that youth unemployment, exclusion, civil conflicts, scarce livelihoods and many other economic factors are believed to be dangerous recipes that lead to political instability and civil wars in majority of African dominated Muslim states and several other sizeable Muslim minority states in Africa and beyond. A prevailing claim made in media and policy circles is that Muslim youth constitute the driving force behind radical religion and politics in the Islamic mainland and in Europe, and hence pose a serious security threat worldwide (Beehner,2007).

Esposito and Mogahed (2007: 67–68) write in *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think*: “The conventional wisdom, based on old and deeply held stereotypes and presuppositions about extremists, has often fallen back on an intuitive sense that a combination of religious fanaticism, poverty, and unemployment drive extremism and terrorism.” Their analysis of a Gallup World Poll representing 90% of the world’s Muslims (1.3 billion people) in 35 countries, calls these assumptions into

question. They concur that although unemployment and poverty are both major social problems, “neither unemployment nor job status differentiate radicals from moderates. No difference exists in the unemployment rate among the politically radicalized and moderates; both are approximately 20%” (Esposito and Mogahed 2007: 71). Similarly, the realization after 9/11 that some of the perpetrators of the attacks and their leaders were highly educated, employable, from well-connected families, and not all observant Muslims, was evidence that other explanations were needed to understand youth involvement in not only radical groups, but also in a spectrum of movements.

3. The Generational Framework

Youth alienation in state building and transformation agenda cum proper management and implement of various youth charters has aroused the consciousness of a number of young Muslims to see being actively engaged in politics as a way of contributing to the political life of the state. However, they also see it as a means of developing themselves, an opportunity to break out of their own frustration, and at the same time, claim their identity, dignity, and, ultimately, increase their chance of escaping abject poverty and the side-lines syndrome.

Youth is a force to be contended with because youth is technically a stage of life and one is expected to outgrow one’s youthful tendencies, hence making a generational change a reality. There is a need for Islamic guidance and instruction to help Muslim youth in their transition to adulthood. This reality of transitioning to adulthood grows into a reflexive resistance against the existing state hegemony resulting in a desire to be politically active. This conviction stems from a belief that the government is misappropriating national resources for its own fraudulent benefits and uses. There is a belief that corruption and the act of syphoning public fund must be held in check and the culprit

punished; hence, the discourse for young Muslim identifications and prioritization of Islamic faith during state building.

4. Changing Profile

While Muslim regions are seen as conflict zones, a battleground galvanizing young Muslims worldwide, especially the various US invasions and war on terrorism, not forgetting the Arab springs, the Muslim dominated regions and zones, has been pegged as the world's most dangerous regions due to extremist groups recruiting in a cross-section of Muslim communities and society. In addition, when there is no shift in the demography and geography of extremism, the socio-economic profile of the extremist will not change. Terrorists recruit from the rich, the poor, the educated and less educated in the community making the identity of Muslim youth in public lives a struggle for equality and recognition in their various communities and states.

In the light of this, there is need for a total profile change of identification and recognition of young Muslims as state builder and developer of an authentic Islamic spirituality and human value. The profile of being agents of positive change and improvement in society can be achieved through:

- a. Proposing constructive solutions instead of being perceived as “a problem”;
- b. Responsible civic engagement;
- c. Building networks with people of goodwill from all communities for advocating and promoting social and economic justice, ethical business, creative philanthropy, stewardship models of management, and protection of the environment, etc. In this way, the excellence and the professional capacity of young Muslims will influence public opinion and public policy, hence bringing a new identity into light.

5. Active Citizens

The Muslim youth are struggling to exert their youthfulness in the present world by acting in their own ways and manners that demand awareness and attention from their respective governments in various regions and nations. As a developing generation, understanding and engaging the youth will inevitably continue to be vital for research and action. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of interest in youth issues in general and especially in Muslim youth. Series of publications from academia, nongovernmental and governmental organizations, international institutions, and development organizations examine youth conditions, youth behaviors, and their roles as conduits of development and change. The problem relates to security, anxiety over the youth bulge, unemployment, inequality, civil and regional conflicts, political participation, HIV/AIDS, drug use, extremism, and gang violence must be adequately addressed and tackled to formulate answers as antidotes in forming effective and efficient young Muslims.

Governmental bodies and youth organizations alone cannot adequately tackle the challenges confronting young Muslims; hence, there needs to be a wider range of support, regulation, influence, and incorporation of the young into the institutions. Writing with reference to the African continent, Jean and John Comoroff persuasively argue, “One of the hallmarks of the present moment, of the age of globalization and post-coloniality, has been a diminishing of the capacity of governments—if not the market forces they foster—to control adolescent bodies, energies, or intentionsThe nation-state plays host to forces that it can no longer adequately rein in” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005: 22). A good deal of youth-related policy and research coming out of establishment institutions—such as United Nations agencies, the World Bank, the U.S. State Department, European Union, and U.S. think tanks—that work closely with nation-states place a strong emphasis on the economy (i.e., trade) and security within a discourse of democracy and human rights. In

much of this framework, youth are treated as a group that needs to be understood and trained for purposes of political containment, ideological monitoring, and economic reform. Massive projects of social engineering, from global educational reforms to related human capital planning, are imaged by their architects as the way to move human societies on paths of poverty alleviation, international security, and economic and political liberalization (Herrera 2008).

6. Transforming Frustration

To understand the features of a global generation, as well as the subset, or “generational unit” (Mannheim 1952) of Muslim youth in this discourse requires a good understanding of key historical factors hindering their progress as panacea to young Muslim redundancy in the state. This must be built through state administration, economic engagement, educational development, political participation, and cultural acquisition, as well as issues relating to lifestyle and livelihood that contribute to shaping a generational consciousness required in credible state governance.

Modernization and globalization have provided opportunities for young Muslims to pursue a better education. However, continuing to open the chances for them to attain social, economic, and political mobility must be a global agenda for world conferences and summits of this nature. They are vital tools for alleviating youth corruption in all ramifications, nepotism ideals and values, poverty, unemployment, societal alienation and dependency theory among young Muslims.

There needs to be a concrete global agenda set for young Muslims like that of the late Imam Hassan Al Banna who calls for cross boundary moral behavior and norms in accordance to the Quran and Sunnah. Similarly, “To be a Muslim” by the late Fathi Yakan and the reformed Quranic generation as elucidated by ideology of Shahid Sayyid Qutub are literatures manifesting

universal roles for young Muslims. When denied and alienated from governmental position and civic engagement, they feel threatened and insecure toward their fate and their future. This will hinder their Islamic identity and ability in building the state expected of them.

7. Young Muslim Resurgence in Politics and Governance

There is no doubt that in certain areas, Muslims must be observant in prayers, fasting, specific dress code, and family values, etc. and to reject what they see as the failures of secularism and political nationalism. Alternatively, religious symbols such as the Islamic party, Islamic governance, Islamic Banks, Islamic financial Systems and anything tagged 'Islamic' are illegitimate, thereby becoming heresy. Young Muslims who share this view must return to study the legacies of Islamic Spain called Al Andalusia during the golden age of Islam. This period of Islamic reign over Europe for about 800 years lay the foundation of modern day civilization and global governance. Islam is a religion of 'Al-din wa Dawla'. Separating Islam from state affairs is like separating the soul from the body. Therefore, young Muslims must be reawakened to be dutiful to their various states by laying the foundation for a religiously based ideology and vision for their societies.

Major global issues of political and social injustice (wealth disparity, authoritarian governments, repression, corruption) are intertwined with state administration and present governance. This necessitates the engagement of reformed young Muslim minds to rescue the affairs of the state and bring back the golden age of Islam. This is the way to proclaim and rewrite the records that Islam is not a threat to the global community but a comprehensive framework for global governance based on religious respect, justice and moderately balanced society for both public and private life.

8. A New Media Identity for Young Muslim

There is no doubt that various extremist and terrorist groups operating in the name of Islam and associated groups have invested in information and communication technology (ICT), turning it into its principal propaganda machine by uploading their extremist ideologues materials on the Internet. The new communication technologies, especially the World Wide Web, email, blogs or domain page and websites, are effective platforms to reach out to the youth who are computer and Internet savvy. Today, virtually every young person obtains his/her references or sources of information on the Internet. With extremists and terrorists seeking to influence both worlds, the threat in the West is primarily spreading against Islam and Muslims as if they are the foes on the web. Western educated Jihadists trained in the sciences, law, and international relations use the web to indoctrinate a new generation of leaders, members, supporters, and sympathizers. These innovative and powerful tools are used to communicate ideas, facilitate communication, and energize believers spurring recruitment and fundraising.

Consequently, this platform should be reoriented to focus on preventing the next generation from falling victims to extremist ideology and brainwashing. The status quo must change. Young Muslims must be liberated from the shackles of online extremist plots and seek to invest in community activism and development, a means by which ordinary young people can relate to a political consciousness impacting on spheres of power to focus on the next generation. Combating online extremism and home grown terrorism as ethics against violence, the Muslim world should focus on formal and informal education, initiatives to regulate online hate crime, and building partnerships with Muslim community institutions to propagate restraint and moderate religious views as panacea to radicalization coming through cyberspace. This should be related with a global network of scholars, clerics and teachers

nurtured and supported to counter the radical online views, texts, doctrines and mindsets developed as a result of war on terrorism and beyond causing a wide range of implications for the rest of the Muslim world.

9. Global Opportunities

On a massive and growing scale, young Muslims use the mass media as a tool for peer interaction, leisure, consumption, generating and consuming information, and an array of direct and indirect political actions like their global counterparts who have become technological and communications revolution. New information and communication technologies (ICT), from the mobile phone to the Internet, have changed the landscape of youth learning, culture, and social and political engagement. This generation, the “e (electronic)-generation” or “Internet generation” should be protected to operate in a more interactive scope for mutual influence, and can be adopted to help play an important role in state building among Muslim states for Islamization of ICT as tools for spreading and propagating the authentic and genuine message of Islam. No doubt that Muslim majority countries like Qatar, Kuwait, Brunei, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Oman and UAE are blessed with mineral wealth which can help in development of Muslims in skills and capacity.

10. Recommendations

1. Implementing a global Muslim world campaign to combat indoctrination of young Muslim minds either through online means or formal teaching by building networks with people of goodwill from all communities; and advocating, promoting social and economic justice, ethical business, creative philanthropy, stewardship models of management, and protection of Islamic identity.

2. Providing more employment and educational services that create jobs. The quest for a prosperous future should be developed from now to avoid wasteful practices, promote new generation of social services that provide adequate training for young Muslims to assist in the betterment of and increase in their knowledge, skills, and ability to advance to leadership positions for state building.
3. A global Muslim monitoring agenda should be on alert and be made aware of the problems that have arisen nowadays involving the youth. Beneficial youth activities should be actively organized to provide them with a good experience of living within the society of both Muslim majority and non-Muslim majority countries. Additionally, the monitoring agent should be concerned with hate crime media either prints or electronics by adopting means that have been established to control and remove any unfavorable and unsuitable media programs which are offensive to Muslims.
4. As they struggle to make something good of themselves, young Muslim should be encouraged not to end up breaking moral rules for economic survival, but to opt for political activism which enhance their economic prospects and favorably shape their future.
5. Young Muslims should be encouraged to volunteer with Muslim and non-Muslim organizations to gain experiences from community leaders in terms of building networks and lasting relationships outside the organization for their political start-up.
6. The Muslim state governments should be alert and aware of the problems that have arisen nowadays involving the youth. Beneficial youth activities should be actively organized to provide them with a good experience living within the society. Additionally, Muslim organizations and institutions should be concerned with the prevalence

of violence in television programs. They must control and remove any unfavorable and unsuitable television programs so that the children will not be inclined to what has been broadcasted on television.

11. Limitations and Future Directions

This study has a series of limitations that need to be addressed before a study like this is replicated. The first limitation that needs to be addressed is the events that affect young Muslim on global and continental level. The effort of the researcher has been to empirically define young Muslims as agents of positive change and improvement in society, by looking at how youth engagement and societal development can potentially bring back the lost glory of golden Islamic State for human values.

12. Conclusion

This paper gathered that discrimination and the lack of opportunities, training, mentoring programs, support, guidance, influential leaders, political experience, and funding have hindered young Muslims' full participation and engagement in main stream political movement aimed at achieving advancement. In other words, it can be said that the effects of globalization may influence the young generation in term of their lifestyle, character and level of intellectualism. Hence, it is the role of parents and Muslim educational intuitions to educate their children at the beginning of their lives by exploring historic education to promote tolerance of difference faiths and cultures for a better and just community.

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BOOK REVIEW

Mee-Yin Yuen, Mary. *Solidarity and Reciprocity with Migrants in Asia: Catholic and Confucian Ethics in Dialogue*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 239 pp.

With her extensive experience in pastoral concerns, her theological and ethical competencies, and her sincere concern for the migrant women in Hong Kong, Mary Mee-Yin Yuen wrote this book to help in moral and ethical discernment. This book is essential because globally, there are thousands of migrants and refugees who die each year.¹ Migrants in Hong Kong were affected by this perilous global migration journey and experienced discrimination from their employers and the residents.² Yuen wrote this book employing an interdisciplinary approach, bringing into dialogue different disciplines in moral discernment. Drawing from virtue ethics and blended it with Catholic Social Teachings (CST) and looking at the different traditional practices and ethical principles of Confucianism is her way to articulate a hybrid approach to understanding migration issues in Hong Kong.

In this review, I will highlight several thought-provoking themes. The first theme is on “Migration and women migrants in Asia and Hong Kong.” Under this theme, I will present the author’s viewpoint and purpose about migration’s essence and its impact on women migrants. The second theme is on “Justice and

¹ Tara Brian, and Frank Laczko. “Fatal Journeys: Tracking Lives Lost During Migration.” (2014), accessed March 17, 2021, https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/fataljourneys_countingtheuncounted.pdf

² Piyasiri Wickramasekara, *Asian Labour Migration: Issues and Challenges in an Era of Globalization*. Geneva: ILO, 2002, accessed March 17, 2021, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_160632.pdf

human dignity in Catholic social teaching.” I will lay out Yuen’s main points about justice, human dignity and how these values are relevant in women’s migration narratives. I will also present the different Catholic social teaching (CST) approaches to the development of the Catholic human rights discourse and the limitations of the rights language as presented in the book.

The third theme is on “Christian relational virtues (hospitality, compassion, and solidarity).” Under this theme, I will explore how Yuen illustrates the three social and relational virtues hospitality, compassion, and solidarity in moral discernment. Furthermore, I will present the striking ideas of Yuen on the theological virtue of charity. Moreover, I will also consider how the virtue of prudence is vital in Christian moral decision-making. The fourth theme is “Human relatedness, benevolence, and reciprocity in Confucian and Neo-Confucian ethics.” I will be exploring how the author presents Confucianism and the features of virtue ethics in early Confucianism.

Furthermore, it is also important to examine how the author discusses about the relational self and human relatedness. Exploration will be extended to the nature and essence of “ren” and the notion of harmony in society. Finally, I will also include how the author understands Neo-Confucian ethics, particularly in terms of the unity of knowing and acting.

Migration and Women Migrants in Asia and Hong Kong

Immediately in the preface, the author provides the context by presenting a glimpse of migration in Asia and how this phenomenon implicitly and explicitly affects the life of migrants. The migration phenomenon in Asia has a long, diverse, and complex history.³ Migration

³ Graeme Hugo, *Migration in the Asia-Pacific Region*, (Genebra: Global Commission on International Migration, 2005), accessed March 17, 2021, https://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/policy_and_research/gcim/rs/RS2.pdf

cannot be separated from the complex interplay of social, economic, class, religious, and political factors that interact to displace people from their homelands.⁴ At the start of the twenty-first century, the world saw the development on a colossal scale inner and outside relocations made conceivable by reasonable worldwide travel, advanced broadcast communications, and broadband web.⁵ Pope Francis, in his concern about the situation,⁶ called on society to overcome what he labeled “the globalization of indifference.” Responding to the Pope’s call, Yuen explored how the Church’s social teachings (CST) interact with Confucian ethics in regards to the pressing issue of migration in Hong Kong, with considerations of some ethical theories and emphasis on virtue ethics.

In chapter 1, Yuen argued that “migration has undoubtedly been one of the most common and relevant experiences in the history of humankind since its very beginning.” She noted that migrants “are often treated like outsiders or ‘the other,’ being excluded from the mainstream society.” Yuen reminds her

⁴Anthony Rogers, fsc. (Ed.). *The Migrant Family in Asia: Reaching out and Touching Them*. Manila: FABC-Office of Human Development, 2009. pp. 238.

⁵Jonathan Y. Tan “Migration in Asia and Its Missiological Implications: Insights from the Migration Theology of the Federation of Asians Bishops’ Conferences (FABC).” *Mission studies* 29, no. 1 (2012): 45-61.

⁶ Recall that in his first official trip outside Rome after his installation as a Pope he went to visit the tiny island of Lampedusa off the coast of Sicily on Monday to show solidarity to African migrants who risk their lives trying to immigrate to Europe. Pope Francis liken this crossing boarder experience as “a thorn in the heart.” See Alessandro Special, Religion News Service, July 8, 2013, Pope Francis decries ‘globalization of indifference’, accessed, February 7, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-faith/pope-francis-decries-globalization-of-indifference/2013/07/08/ec7ac762-e80b-11e2-818e-aa29e855f3ab_story.html

readers that “treating the poor and the marginalized with care and hospitality has always been an important teaching and lived experience of Christians in different ages of the Church.”

In line with this, Yuen presents three teachings: the foundational level of motivations, the directive level of norms for life in society, and the deliberative level of conscience. These teachings are to be actualized to mediate objective and general norms in concrete and particular social situations. Yuen explains that the first level is the heart level, motivating people to care and act. The second is the rational level which refers to norms, principles, and themes to help people interpret reality and discern various courses of action. The third level is the integrative level challenging people to link these norms to their everyday lives. These are three different activities.

Yuen argues that it is essential to emphasize the “other-regarding” dimension of virtue ethics. Harmonious relationships, spiritual or religious practices relevant to moral cultivation, and virtues that can transform a person and communities to be more compassionate toward the underprivileged are considered necessary.

In chapter 2, the author applies the “Pastoral Cycle” or “Social Analysis”⁷ to the migration situation in Hong Kong. The Pastoral Cycle is a particular theological method developed by the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), designed to help Asian bishops, church leaders, and pastoral workers better understand Asia’s social realities. Applying these methods to the phenomenon of labor migration in Hong Kong, Yuen concludes that migrants are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. Among

⁷ Brian Macallan, and Jurgens Hendriks. “A post-foundational Practical Theology? The pastoral cycle and local theology.” *NGTT [Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif]* 53, no. 3&4 (2012): 194-205.

the migrants, almost half are women. Very often, they have to face the problems of sexism, racism, and classism. They are too often victims of human trafficking and heinous exploitation. Women play an increasing role in all regions, and all types of migration⁸ and the migrant is a gendered subject.⁹

Furthermore, Yuen presents issues related to “women labor migration and social exclusion.” Yuen suggests that we can understand more how they are excluded and marginalized in a society by employing social exclusion and inclusion to examine the case of women migrants. Yuen argues that social divisions in Hong Kong in terms of class, ethnicity, and gender have increased, and the migrant population is among the worst affected. She notes that in Hong Kong, there is a hierarchy of citizens. There are citizens of the ethnic Chinese elites, the new Mainland migrants, Europeans, Americans, East Asian expatriates, and marginals such as Filipino, Thai, Indonesian, and Nepalese workers. Racial inferiority in Hong Kong is not merely varying degrees of disdain for others. It is the product of a system of differential exclusion of resident peoples from political power. The social structure and changes further segregate the poor, the marginal, and the minority from full participation in this semi-ethnocratic milieu.

To illustrate this claim, Yuen presents the narratives of three groups of women migrants in Hong Kong. The narrative of a Filipina

⁸ S&F Online, accessed March 20, 2021, http://sfonline.barnard.edu/work/print_hochschild.htm

⁹ Women comprised approximately 70 percent of export labor, the majority of whom are in domestic service work. The new international division of labor defines female roles in terms of sexuality, reproduction, and domesticity with a market ethos of commodification. In the Philippines, Yuen noted that the feminization of export labor and the commodification of migrant labor had become the main features of the labor export policy.

who was often scolded and treated rudely by her employers.¹⁰ Likewise, she narrated the story of ethnic minority women from South Asia. She explains that ethnic minorities are migrants who have settled in Hong Kong and have become Hong Kong residents. Sarah, a woman from Pakistani is an example of a migrant who experienced discrimination because of her culture.

Another example is the case of “new migrants.” New Chinese immigrants look similar to native Hong Kong people and speak Chinese. However, they speak different dialects and come from different cultural backgrounds. Thus, they often face many challenges related to communication, employment, housing, living conditions, and interpersonal relationships. The new immigrants who are employed work long hours in unstable working environments with low wages and few benefits. Yuen claims that there is a gap between native Hong Kong people and new immigrants from China. Culturally, the images of Mainlanders portrayed in mass media are often negative, depicting them as uncivilized, having poor hygiene habits, and prone to violence and crime. Thus, they are often in tension with the local people.

¹⁰Like Yuen this reality was also recorded by different authors. See for example French, 1986a, 1986b; Asian Migrant Centre 1991. In the article written by Nicole Constable she said “In Hong Kong, as in China, patterns of household work have undergone important changes over the past decade and a half. By the early 1990s, approximately 100,000 Hong Kong Chinese households employed “foreign domestic helpers” (FDHs), as they are officially called by the labor and immigration departments. In 1995 there were 150,000 such workers, including 130,000 from the Philippines and another 20,000 from Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, and Nepal. The vast majority of those from the Philippines are unmarried, Roman Catholic women between the ages of 25 and 35. Although some foreign workers are of Chinese or mixed Chinese ancestry, they are also generally regarded as “foreign” by the people of Hong Kong.” (Constable, Nicole. “Jealousy, chastity, and abuse: Chinese maids and foreign helpers in Hong Kong.” *Modern China* 22, no. 4 (1996): 448-479).

Justice and Human Dignity in Catholic Social Teaching

In Chapter 3 Yuen introduces the relevant themes of Catholic social teachings (CST), particularly the notions of justice and human dignity. She discusses the ethical approaches of CST that aim at addressing different audiences—Catholics and non-Catholics. After that, she delineates the Catholic human rights discourse development and its relationship to the natural law approach. Yuen argues that “justice is both a key theme in the Scripture and CST and a cardinal virtue in the Catholic tradition.” In the Scripture, justice has the meaning of showing concern for the weak and vulnerable. For her, justice is understood as a habit whereby a man/woman renders each one his/her due with a constant and perpetual will. Justice aims at restoring our right relationships with God, human persons, and creation. Furthermore, Yuen stresses that justice is a foundational principle in CST, as human persons are created in the image of God. Indeed, the author emphasizes that every person is an end in himself/herself, not a means to some other purpose. From this perspective, each migrant or migrant worker is a human person and should not be treated as a commodity or a mere workforce.

Since the Second Vatican Council, rights language has become a critical ethical discourse. It is important to note that, though employing rights language, the Catholic theory of human rights has distinctive features from the Western liberal tradition. In this chapter, Yuen explains the relevancy of justice and human dignity to the women migrants. She claims that in applying the principles of justice and human dignity to the lives of migrant women, sometimes we need to enter into conflict with oppressive structures of injustice. In the same manner, she further explains the different approaches of CST.

In chapter 4, Yuen brings forth the issues of migration, human rights, and obligations. She argues that the key is to reconstruct what human rights are from the Catholic perspective. She explains that the

Catholic account of human rights includes spiritual goods and material goods, civil rights, and economic rights. Moreover, Yuen discusses the natural law conviction of a social self with a communitarian nature. The centrality of her discussion is the argument that “the human person is an essentially social being.” Yuen believes that the common good is a higher goal based on a religious tradition. “Communitarian nature of the self” in the Catholic tradition would not lead to dislocation of the individual from society and neglect the virtues of a community that upholds the common good. She then further discusses in this chapter the “sacredness of human life.”

In chapter 5, Yuen discusses the relationships between migrants, receiving communities, and the dynamics of virtues. She explains the relevance of virtue ethics in nurturing people’s caring attitude in the receiving countries toward the migrants. Yuen argues and demonstrates that virtue ethics is not egoistic. She explains “why and how is Christian virtue ethics useful in motivating Christians to commit to social justice and show solidarity with the marginalized, mainly migrants.” Yuen concludes this chapter by saying that Christian virtue ethics offers a good prospect for motivating Christians to commit to social justice and extend solidarity with the marginalized, mainly migrants. These features include the human agency’s role and continual practice of specific actions, cultivating emotions and imagination, emulating moral exemplars and spiritual practices. Yuen argues that for Christians, taking Jesus as the role model in Christian virtue ethics entails Christians as disciples. To follow Jesus, we need to cultivate virtues through imitating Jesus with moral imagination in different contexts, not just copying what he did. In her observation, the different virtues, especially justice and solidarity, have been seen in social ethics literature. However, very often, they are employed as principles or duties rather than virtues. Hence, according to Yuen, it is necessary to demonstrate what roles they can play in individual Church members’ lives and what people practicing such virtues look like or will do.

In her presentation of Christian virtue ethics' social dimension, it is a kind of theological ethics rather than philosophical ethics. Virtue ethics emphasizes the notion of human good or end or *telos*, transitioning from who we are to who we could be. According to Yuen the optimal development for a human being is not to be wealthy or famous, or powerful but to be a presence of God's love and goodness in the world. On the issue of "human good and other-regarding virtues," Yuen proposes that virtues are both self-regarding and other-regarding. Furthermore, virtues are supposed to be culturally sensitive. Immersion, therefore, is a necessary move in making the right decision.

Christian Relational Virtues: Hospitality, Compassion, and Solidarity

In chapter 6, Yuen focused on the cardinal virtue of justice and three interrelated virtues: hospitality, compassion, and solidarity. These virtues are derived from the cardinal virtue of justice. For Yuen, these three virtues can be interpreted from the threefold dimensions of reason or intellect, affection or emotion, and practice or moral action. She further argues for the importance of the virtue of charity and the virtue of prudence. The former has the unifying function of directing their subject toward a personal union with God. In contrast, the latter can make the right decisions and right judgments about things being done, directing the various virtues to their ends with the right reason. These two are imperative in guiding Christians to love tenderly, act justly, and walk humbly with God and neighbor.

Chinese Confucian Ethics: Human Relatedness, Benevolence, and Reciprocity

In chapter 7, Yuen presents the Chinese Confucian ethics. Based on the history of New Confucianism development in Hong Kong and the colonial government's educational policy, Hong

Kong culture is a hybrid—a blend of Chinese and Western values. Confucian ethics is rich in virtue features, emphasizing becoming good or virtuous through moral cultivation, seeking excellence of character or disposition, and focusing on human subjectivity. She, therefore, discusses the social values and virtue features of Confucian ethics, with a focus mainly on its early Confucian texts. The virtue features of Confucian ethics exhibit the significant virtues of Confucian thought. These virtues include a relational person, caring for the other, taking care of people's needs, or putting them first. It also includes a ruler's moral integrity, forming the social virtues of benevolence, humaneness, and compassion among people and leaders, building a cordial and trustworthy relationship between the rulers and the ruled. These are beneficial to sustaining the well-being of human persons, mainly the migrants and other underprivileged, and the society at large and nurture the other-regarding virtues of a community.

In Chapter 8, Yuen makes an in-depth reflection on the thought of Wang Yang-ming on moral self-cultivation. She proposes that Wang's moral self-cultivation is an integrative approach, comprised of the fourfold dimension of knowing and learning, emotion/affection, establishing the will, and moral action by practicing inner scrutiny of every thought and reflection on every act in daily life. It is a holistic way of moral formation which helps to overcome the dualistic view of knowing and acting, spirituality and morality, personal ethics, and social ethics. Yuen also compares and discusses the commonalities and differences between Christian ethics and Confucian ethics. She finds that many Confucian ethics features are commensurable with Christian virtue ethics, although there are fundamental differences in the details. It also provides insight into transforming Christians and motivating them to actualize the moral vision of building a society that emphasizes common good and solidarity with the marginalized by focusing on the heart/mind, which guides both the cognitive and affective parts of our bodies. All these insights shed light on our understanding of CST.

Finally, in chapter 9, Yuen presents an ethic of solidarity and reciprocity with the migrants, especially women migrants who are the most vulnerable in the migrant communities. Yuen proposes that the complementarity of the principles-based human rights approach and virtue ethics approach can provide a suitable ethical method in Catholic social ethics. Whether the human rights principle or principle of solidarity sets a direction or standard for others to follow, they can tell what kind of actions we should engage in. Principles such as justice and human rights are to transform the objective realities. Virtues are the skills that strengthen us to decide how to act in a good way for our being and others; relational virtues can transform a person to do well to others. Yuen argues that given the possibility of multiple conceptions of human flourishing and virtue in the rights-based conception of the common good in Catholic social thought, the virtue ethics approach in Catholic and Confucian traditions can thicken and enrich human rights language. Yuen compares the virtue ethics approach in Confucian and Christian ethics and pointed out the two approaches' commensurable insights. These insights can contribute to the formulation of a more contextualized and inculturated Catholic social teaching. Yuen applied them to three specific social and relational virtues. She demonstrated how people who possess these virtues would respond to the needs of the migrant women and cultivate these virtues through concrete practices, including practices in daily life and spiritual practices. With the virtues of hospitality, compassion, and solidarity, we would recognize the neglected migrants as neighbors, attend to the suffering of the migrants with affection, and support the migrants by advocating their rights and justice.

General Observations and Critique

In her presentation, Yuen takes the hermeneutic of suspicion¹¹

¹¹ Iben Damgaard, "Through Hermeneutics of Suspicion to a Rediscovery of Faith: Kierkegaard's pamphlet "What Christ Judges of Official Christianity" in relation to Ricœur's "Religion, Atheism

as her starting point of giving the context of her arguments. Her presentation of the experiences of the women migrants in Hong Kong is a case of articulating the painful and harsh experiences. It is a good starting point to emphasize the advocacy that she wants to promote. The message is clear; the book aims to convey ethical treatment of migrant workers, especially the women. However, her hermeneutic of suspicion fails to consider that Hong Kong has more than 300,000 foreign domestic helpers, primarily women from Indonesia and the Philippines.¹²

There are also stories of “light at the end of the tunnel.” *The Guardian* reports that in Hong Kong, maids can study at the university.¹³ There are testimonies that they are not just maids, but they are people of experience and many skills. Being a migrant worker is the start of their dream. There are also testimonies of good experiences.¹⁴ For instance, Asti Maria from Malang, East Java, claimed that she would not meet different people if she continued staying at home rather than learning things as she has in Hong Kong. It has opened her mind about life. She claimed that life is not only about money. Life is also about communication, connection, and friendship.¹⁵ Asti Maria said, “When I go back to my hometown I will feel confident because I am not only a migrant worker who sends money back home, but I also have more knowledge.”¹⁶

and Faith”.” *Studia Theologica-Nordic Journal of Theology* 72, no. 2 (2018): 198-216.

¹² The Guardian, “Domestic Workers in Hong Kong: what being a migrant means to me,” accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/sep/16/domestic-workers-in-hong-kong-what-being-a-migrant-means-to-me>

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

In the Philippines, the Department of Foreign Affairs reported that in Hong Kong, the Philippine Association of Hong Kong (PAHK) in June 2018, gave awards at the PAHK Charity Ball to the Most Valuable Pinoys (MVP) of Hong Kong in the following fields: Myrna Padilla (Technology), Leo Selomenio (Community Development), Dr. Michael Manio (Education), Lulu Salazar (Business and Professional Practice), and Xyza Bacani (Arts).¹⁷ These and many others are testimonies that virtue ethics has a chance in Hong Kong. Such testimonies are glimpse of hope that justice, fairness, the common good, and solidarity will sooner be also a lived experience in Hong Kong.

Furthermore, benevolence and love are the core concepts and the fundamental principles of Confucianism and Christianity, respectively, which are two different types of spirit. Confucianism emphasizes benevolence, which renders it a human-centered religion, whereas Christian values love, making it a God-centered religion.¹⁸

However, there are also possible issues that the readers may find in this book. Yuen presents the views from the Catholic perspective by presenting the CST. The issue here is if this book is intended for moral discernment of the migrants themselves, they should be knowledgeable about what this CST is all about. Note that a lot of Christians themselves are inadequately knowledgeable of CST. Similarly, she perpetuated the Confucian tenets and presented the virtues that could strengthen us to decide how to act in a good way for our being and others. However, just

¹⁷ DFA, Filipino Expat Group Awards Most Outstanding Pinoys in Hk, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://dfa.gov.ph/dfa-news/news-from-our-foreign-service-postsupdate/17056-filipino-expat-group-awards-most-outstanding-pinoys-in-hk>.

¹⁸ M. A. Lei, "The Comparison of Confucian Benevolence and Christian Love." *Studies in Literature and Language* 9, no. 1 (2014): 145-148.

like my first contention, not all migrants know Confucian tenets; hence, understanding Confucian virtues' whole context might lead to misinterpretation.

It is good to note, however, that her ethical decision-making approach is interdisciplinary. Yuen tries to explore the Rights Approach's blending, the Fairness or Justice Approach, the Common Good Approach, and the Virtue Approach. Each approach helps to determine what standards of behavior can be considered ethical, particularly in dealing with the migrant workers in Hong Kong.

However, there are still problems we may encounter with this approach. The first problem is that we may disagree on the content of some of these specific approaches. We may not all agree to the same set of human and civil rights. Other philosophers and ethicists suggest that ethical action is the one that best protects and respects the moral rights of those affected. For example, there is a debate over CEO salaries that are hundreds of times larger than the pay of a migrant domestic helper; many ask whether the vast difference is based on a defensible customary or whether it is the result of an imbalance of power and hence is unfair.¹⁹ We may disagree on what constitutes the common good. There is no general consensus on what is good and what is harmful. This is contextual and can always be understood only in its own context.

The second challenging issue is that the different approaches may not answer the question "What is ethical?" in the same manner. Nonetheless, each approach gives us vital information to determine what is ethical in a particular circumstance. Moreover,

¹⁹ HomeworkCrew.com, accessed March 21, 2021, <https://homeworkcrew.com/2019/12/12/the-final-project-for-this-course-is-an-analysis-of-the-legal-and-or-ethical-issues-involved-in-the-below-health-care-scenario-see-questions-to-be-answered-at-end-of-this-factual-scenario-below-i-ha/>

much more often than not, the different approaches do lead to similar answers. Finally, the book is an interdisciplinary work and that it is open for critique from different disciplines. One may look at its veracity in the theological view, others may look at it in ethical perspective, and so on. Hence, we cannot make a general conclusion in one particular discipline. It is a book open for interpretation.

Rico Casta Jacoba
Saint Louis University, Philippines

REPORTS

12th ARC INTERNATIONAL ROUNDTABLE

“Religious Communication During and Post Coronavirus Pandemic: Examining Present and Future Models and Strategies”

**5-6 November 2021
via Online Platform**

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Since the end of 2019, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic has been wreaking havoc in all aspects of life throughout the world. Although it has put life as we know it on a standstill, it has also presented opportunities for religious institutions and individuals to reconsider and evaluate their present and prior communication models and strategies. Certain familiar forms of communication had to be temporarily discarded due to social distancing and other pro-active measures to quell the spread of the virus. Even when people managed to be in somewhat close proximity of one another, communication was affected by the ever-present face covering that became the mandatory accessory regardless of gender, age, race, or religion. Communication strategies that employ digital technology oftentimes became the only option in the face of ever climbing infection curves. No doubt these changes in forms and instrument of communication presented great impact to religion and religious communication, not only during the time of the pandemic, but also beyond.

As the 12th ARC International Roundtable will take place at a time where the pandemic is projected to have been significantly mitigated by global vaccination efforts, it is important that the Roundtable not only examines how religious communication was affected by the pandemic, but also how it will be envisioned in

the post-pandemic world. Therefore, we are looking for papers that address either one or both of these aspects of religious communication in relations to the coronavirus pandemic. Suggested topics include but are not limited to:

- How the pandemic altered religious communication;
- The long term effects that the pandemic has exerted on religious communication;
- The challenges and opportunities that the pandemic presented to past models and strategies of communication by religion;
- The understanding of religious communication in the post-pandemic world;
- Interreligious communication during and after the pandemic;
- Creative models of religious communication for the post-pandemic world;
- Lessons for religion from the pandemic for the post-pandemic world;
- The role of religious communication in contributing to the resolution/escalation of the pandemic;
- The role of religious communication in resolving/intensifying pandemic related problems during and after the pandemic;
- Religious Studies and Religious Communication research in the post-pandemic context.

If you would like to participate in this International Roundtable as a presenter, please send a 350-500 word abstract on or before 1 June 2021 to the following email address: arcstjohns.bkk@gmail.com.

We welcome submissions from professional researchers and MA/PhD candidates. Accepted papers have the opportunity to be published in ARC's scholarly journal *Religion and Social*

Communication. There is no registration fee for participants. We also welcome non-presenting participants for this event. If you would like to participate in this manner, please send us an email to register your participation by 1 October 2021. Participation is free of charge.

With warm regards,

ARC International Roundtable Team

CONFERENCE REPORT

First Memorial Lecture Series in Honor of Rev. Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD, PhD

Theology Cluster
University of Santo Tomas Graduate School
Manila, Philippines

An international webinar in memory of the late Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD (1932-2021) was organized by the Theology cluster of the University of Santo Tomas Graduate School, Manila, Philippines in collaboration with the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Offices of Social Communication (FABC-OSC) and Education and Faith Formation (FABC-OEFF) on April 19, 2021. The webinar, which was conducted via Zoom, explored the theme "The Challenges of Theology and Ministry in the Church," as tribute to Fr. Eilers, a well-known scholar in the field of Social Communication and founding father of the UST-GS Master Program in Social/Pastoral Communication.

The first memorial lecture was graced by several international personalities who shared their personal insights on the theme, especially in reference to their experience or encounter with Fr. Eilers. The first speaker in the program was Sr. Angela Ann Zukowski, MSHS, D.Min, the Director of the Institute for Pastoral Initiatives and professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Dayton (Ohio, USA). She is also the former president of SIGNIS, an international organization of Catholic professionals engaged in communication media including press, radio, television, cinema, video, media education, internet and new technology. In her talk, Sr. Zukowski spoke fondly of her friendship with Fr. Eilers over the years, and

highlighted his contribution and passion in promoting pastoral communication ministry in the Church. She also encouraged the participants to sustain this dialogue of like-minded people on pastoral communication in the Church.

Some Church personnel and dignitaries also took part in this memorial lecture in honor of Fr. Eilers. Among the speakers was Archbishop Larry Saldanha of Lahore archdiocese, Pakistan. He was also the former Bishop board Chairman of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences - Office of Social Communication (FABC-OSC) where Fr. Eilers was then the Executive Secretary. In his presentation, Archbishop Saldanha highlighted the contribution of Fr. Eilers in Communication Formation of the Church. According to Archbishop Saldanha, Fr. Eilers never hesitated to support all his communication initiatives in Lahore, Pakistan, a country known for its Muslim traditions.

The Dicastery for Communication of the Vatican was represented in this memorial lecture by Professor Nataša Govekar, Director of the Theological-Pastoral Department. Prof. Govekar expressed her admiration for Fr. Eilers' deep concern for Pastoral Ministry, particularly in the area of research. She was equally impressed by the familiarity and expertise of Fr. Eilers on Church communication documents. Indeed, Fr. Eilers is known to be able to quote or make references to various Church documents with great ease. In her presentation, Prof. Govekar also shared about her memorable encounter with Fr. Eilers as well as the cherished gifts of his communication publications that Fr. Eilers gave her.

Another known figure in the Church communication and education ministry was also present to extend his tribute to Fr. Eilers. He is Dr. Chainarong Monthienvichienchai, the chancellor of St. John's University in Bangkok, Thailand. Like Fr. Eilers and Sr. Angela Ann Zukowski, Dr. Monthienvichienchai was a former consultant to the Pontifical Council for Social Communication. He is an abled organizer and collaborator of Fr. Eilers in Thailand

whenever Fr. Eilers travelled to Thailand either for pastoral or academic concerns or both. Dr. Monthienvichienchai expressed admiration of Fr. Eilers in the research that he has conducted and facilitated over the years. In collaboration with a number of academicians from Asian religious traditions, Fr. Eilers and Dr. Monthienvichienchai founded the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) in 1999, presently based at St. John's University, Bangkok, Thailand. Besides cherishing Fr. Eilers' research contributions as an expression of Church Pastoral Communication, Dr. Monthienvichienchai also noted how Fr. Eilers valued the modern means of communication and their relevance and significance to Church pastoral ministry.

The memorial lecture also highlighted the friendship and professional relationships that Fr. Eilers had with scholars beyond the Catholic tradition. Among the participants who came from other Asian religious traditions was Professor Chandrabhanu Pattanayak, Director of the Institute of Knowledge at Centurion University in Orissa, India. As part of his tribute to Fr. Eilers, Prof. Pattanayak explored his ideas on the ultimate origin of knowledge, a topic that Fr. Eilers had for a long time encouraged him to research and write about.

Other speakers for this memorial lecture included Professor Pablo Baybado, the program lead for Theology Cluster of UST-Graduate School, Professor Padma Rani of Manipal Institute of Communication (India) as well as Fr. John Mi Shen, a Chinese priest, student, and spiritual director of Fr. Eilers. In his tribute, Fr. Mi Shen recounted many moving personal experiences with Fr. Eilers, especially in the last day and moments of his life.

As a whole, the first memorial lecture was a success aside from some technical glitches that were encountered due to some internet connectivity issues and some unavoidable circumstances in an online platform. The evaluation results that came from participants after the event overwhelmingly indicates the satisfaction of the

participants for this first program in the Memorial Lecture Series in honor of Rev. Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers. Indeed, the speakers from both Catholic and non-Catholic religious traditions demonstrated that Fr. Eilers' work in social communication was not limited to Church circles, but made an impact across cultures and religions, especially in the Asian context. In the age of COVID-19 where travel and in-person gathering have been severely curtailed, the online international event also confirmed the necessity and ingenuity of new information and communication technology to serve the social communication ministry of the Church and beyond.

*Jose Destura Jr.
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Philippines*

NEW ARC BOOK RELEASE

“Pastoral Creativity Amid the Covid-19 Pandemic: Global Experiences”.

Edited by Anthony Le Duc, SVD & John Mi Shen, 2021.

About the Book:

Pastoral Creativity Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: Global Experiences chronicles the pastoral responses that pastoral agents, ordained and lay, implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic from first-person narratives woven together to form a tapestry of rich and moving personal stories. The essays come from over a dozen countries around the world, with many of the authors working in cross-cultural contexts. It also enlists the collaboration of professional theologians to dialogue with these real-world experiences in order to present observations and insights that reveal themselves in these inspiring accounts. The book hopes to contribute to the ongoing conversation and reflection about the various dimensions of the pandemic, in particular, highlighting the pastoral creativity needed to sustain the life of the



Church during one of the most dramatic times in contemporary human history.

“What makes this book precious is that it is not a collection of ‘recipes’ for pastoral service, but rather an invitation to keep the dialogue open, to reflect on what we have learnt from this new condition, and on how the Church should answer to the need of belongingness that emerged from this unprecedented time...Concrete stories on concrete encounters is what inspires the desire and encourages the effort to prepare more encounters between God and humanity. After all, pastoral creativity - with or without the pandemic - is an art of preparing the encounters! And the pandemic probably helps us to understand it better.”

Prof. Nataša Govekar, Director of the Theological-Pastoral Department, Dicastery for Communication, Vatican

Religion and Social Communication

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- Facilitate, support and publish research on subjects related to Religion and Social Communication in Asia;
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- Develop a network of interested researchers and institution;
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Manuscripts may be in the range of 3,000-4000 words for essays and 6,000-8,000 words for research papers. All submissions should use the Chicago Style format for referencing. Please include an abstract of 300-400 words and information about the author (name, email, affiliation).

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