

CONVERSION AND WITNESSING: INTERCULTURAL RENEWAL IN A WORLD CHURCH

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Conversion and witnessing are closely linked throughout the New Testament, but in the Gospel of John the connection itself serves as a leitmotif.¹ In John 1:35–39, for example, we learn about the witnessing of Andrew and a second follower (possibly the apostle John).² Both are newly formed disciples from the school of John the Baptist. These two are sent to witness to what they have heard. Their “work” has a great effect on Simon Peter, Philip, and a skeptical Nathanael, a resident of Cana whose initial reaction to the arrival in his midst of the Savior was to blurt out: “From Nazareth—can there be anything good from there?”³ These testimonies become foundational for the Gospel of John. The Word made flesh introduced by John is *also* efficacious in and through those who have been transformed by an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ.

Even more noteworthy is a disputed line in the story of the Samaritan woman: “Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him because of *the word of the woman who testified*, ‘He told me everything I have done.’”⁴ Many Biblical critics, following Rudolf Bultmann’s Kierkegaardian interpolation, see the word of the Samaritan woman as imperfect “chatter.” Her faith was incomplete and did not lead to the direct conversion of the Samaritans. What she offered as a witness, they aver, is still in need of the formal legitimation that takes place when Jesus follows with a two-day mission. The Nigerian theologian Teresa Okure questions the widespread attribution of only a half-faith to the Samaritan woman. In fact, John Chrysostom had called the Samaritan woman “an apostle commissioned by faith.”⁵ Like Chrysostom but based wholly on historical-critical and textual analyses, Okure offers a convincing argument that the figure of the woman is a full-fledged Johannine

¹ See Teresa Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission: A Contextual Study of John 4:1–42* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988), 3; and Johannes Beutler, *Martyria: Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Zeugnisthema bei Johannes* (Frankfurt am Main: Joseph Knecht, 1972), 360. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theologik*, II (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1985), 13–23. Here von Balthasar treats the witness of Jesus Christ as the incarnated interpretation or exegesis of the divine Father. In my opinion, seeing the prime exemplar of all witnessing as an act of interpretation opens the door to an intercultural theology of witnessing.

² The importance of this example was reinforced by reading and discussing with friends Luigi Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1998), 36–48, 91–95; and idem, *Is it Possible to Live This Way? An Unusual Approach to Christian Existence, vol. 1: Faith* (Montreal: McGill-Queens, 2008). Giussani was the founder of *Comunione e Liberazione*. On the potential contribution of the new ecclesial movements to the theory and practice of witnessing, see Brendan Leahy, *Ecclesial Movements and Communities: Origins, Significance, and Issues* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2011), 112–18.

³ John 1:46.

⁴ John 4:39. Italics added.

⁵ See B. Foss Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1954), 163, as cited in T. Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission*, 169, n. 82.

paradigm of one who is to lead the listener to believe in Jesus as the Christ.⁶ Okure also argues that the statement that the Samaritans no longer believe based on *her* word is not a withdrawal of support for the efficacy of her witness.⁷ On the contrary, the new converts' confession of faith accords with the general Johannine pattern of subordinating the still valid testimony of human signs to the direct self-revelation of the divine Logos.⁸ Okure thus restores the full valency of the woman's witness without obscuring either "the sinfulness of her situation"⁹ or the hermeneutical difficulties of a challenging biblical text.

These intercultural models are distinctively Johannine. They are marked by a witness that is as much interpersonal as juridical.¹⁰ In the gospel of John, Christian witnessing is linked to face-to-face encounters and unanticipated offers of fellowship that cross cultural and gender boundaries.¹¹ Jesus of Nazareth makes an early mission to the foreign territory of Samaria. This short excursion is a prelude to the more well-known drama that unfolds in the ensuing narrative. It is also firm proof that there is no program for evangelization—old or new, then or now—that can circumvent the issue of intercultural dialogue. The models just presented also teach us how to think in a new way about the connection between conversion and witnessing. Genuine conversion is a process that does not end with the baptismal profession of faith but continues by its very nature through a mission that aims at the renewal of the church and the transformation of the world, viz., a world, to quote a recent homily of Pope Francis, "beyond our little fences."¹²

In reality, the connection between conversion and witnessing is not news, but there are two broader points about the connection that I will explore in this essay. First, the difficult interpretation of the event of witnessing has sometimes been shunted to the side by systematic theologians. Paying short shrift to the connection has been an issue in Catholic theology for several decades. Forty-one years ago, Karl

⁶ Ibid., 170–181. The eminent John scholar Francis J. Moloney apparently disagrees with this revisionary analysis (*Belief in the Word* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 168–75) but offers, in my judgment, a weak counterargument.

⁷ John 4:42.

⁸ T. Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission*, 179–81. Other instances of this pattern include Jesus' upbraiding of Thomas for not having believed the word of his fellow disciples (John 20:24–29) as well as the statements about the word of Jesus as that of the Father who sent him (John 14:10–12; 17:14, 20).

⁹ Ibid., 107–113, at 110.

¹⁰ Ibid., 171, n. 89 on the distinction between Johannine witnessing and witnessing of a purely forensic or halakic type and also 222–26.

¹¹ Examples include the wedding at Cana (ch. 2), the multiplication of the loaves (ch. 6), Jesus's anointing (12:1–11), and the washing of the feet (ch. 13). For an analysis of the wedding at Cana that justly highlights the foundational witness of faith of Mary, the mother of Jesus, see Francis J. Moloney, *Belief in the Word*, 77–92.

¹² See Pope Francis' recent homily for the feast of Corpus Christi: "Let us ask ourselves this evening, adoring the Christ truly present in the Eucharist: do I let myself be transformed by Him? Do I let the Lord who gives Himself to me, guide me to come out more and more from my little fence to get out and be not afraid to give, to share, to love Him and others?"

Available at

[http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2013/05/30/pope:_homily_for_corpus_christi_\[full_text\]/en1-696991](http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2013/05/30/pope:_homily_for_corpus_christi_[full_text]/en1-696991) (accessed on June 1, 2013).

Rahner gave a symposium in Rome on the topic of witnessing.¹³ Rahner bemoaned that with the lone exception of Focolare theologian (and later Bishop of Aachen) Klaus Hemmerle the subject had been relegated exclusively to New Testament studies and early Christian studies.¹⁴ Rahner's pronouncement still remains valid even today although much has changed. Theologians like Johannes Baptist Metz, Ignacio Ellacuría, Jon Sobrino, Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, Maria Clara Bingemer, Matthew Ashley, William T. Cavanaugh, and Emmanuel Katongole have heeded the call for theological reflection on testimony.¹⁵ In addition, philosophical hermeneutics and post-hermeneutical phenomenology have analyzed the juridical, historical, temporal, and dialogical dimensions of the concept of witnessing.¹⁶ These analyses show, among many other things, the challenging polysemy of the concept as well as the urgent need to reclaim its centrality for theology.¹⁷

The concept of intercultural witnessing exemplifies what Rahner called the World Church. Interestingly, what Rahner *actually* said about this historical event is not easily translatable. He maintained that fifty years ago at the Second Vatican Council there took place *der erste amtliche Selbstvortrag der Kirche als Weltkirche*. The adjective *amtlicher* suggests that offices in the Church—and not just the lives of

¹³ Karl Rahner, "Theologische Bemerkungen zur Bedeutung zum Begriff <<Zeugnis>>," *Schriften zur Theologie*, X (Zürich: Benziger, 1972), 164–80. (English Translation: "Theological Observations on the Concept of 'Witness'" in *Theological Investigations*, XI [New York: Seabury, 1974], 152–68.)

¹⁴ *Schriften zur Theologie*, XI, 164, n.1 (= *Theological Investigations*, 13, 152, n.1.) A seminal Catholic text on witnessing that has recently been translated into English is Erik Peterson, *Theological Tractates*, tr. Michael Hollerich (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

¹⁵ In addition, the Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology at DePaul University in Chicago hosted a conference in November 2012 with Jon Sobrino and others entitled: "Witnessing: Prophecy, Politics, and Wisdom." The proceedings of this conference are being prepared for publication in an English edition with Orbis Press by Maria Clara Bingemer and myself.

¹⁶ The literature here is too vast to cite in its entirety. So I will cite only a small sampling of the relevant texts: Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), Jeff Lewis, "Attestation and Testimony: Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of the Self and Jean Nabert's Hermeneutics of Testimony," *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy, North America*, 3, aug. 2010, available at <<http://jffp.pitt.edu/ojs/index.php/jffp/article/view/15>> (accessed on July 22, 2013); Jean-Philippe Pierron, "De la fondation à l'attestation en morale : Paul Ricoeur et l'éthique du témoignage," *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, 2003/3 Tome 91, 435–59, Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Présence et parousie* (Paris: Ad Solem, 2006), and all of the contributions to *Revue Philosophie* 88 (2006), which is dedicated to the theme of *témoignage*. In part IV of this essay I engage directly some of the hermeneutical and phenomenological work on witnessing.

¹⁷ See, for example, *Witness of the Body: The Past, Present, and Future of Christian Martyrdom*, ed. Michael L. Budde and Karen Scott (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011); *Rethinking Martyrdom*, ed. Teresa Okure, Jon Sobrino, and Felix Wilfred (London: SCM Press, 2003=*Concilium*, 2003/1), and Larry S. Cunningham, "Non poena sed Causa: A Contemporary Understanding of Martyrdom," in *Martyr and Prophet for the New Millennium*, ed. Robert Pelton (Scranton, Pa.: University of Scranton Press, 2006), 59–72, and *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología* 27 (2010), entitled: "Conversión y esperanza: a los 30 años del martirio de monseñor Romero," which includes noteworthy contributions from J. Sobrino, G. Gutiérrez, M.C. Bingemer, and others.

individual Christians—went through a transformation at the Council. This development was most evident in the presence for the first time at a Council of bishops from outside of Europe but is also reflected in the theology of the episcopacy, of the laity, and of a broader consideration of the role of the Church as an inculturated institution in relationship to other Christian bodies, other religions, and the modern world. The noun *Selbstvollzug* implies that there was an intentional subjectivity to the Church as a self-realizing whole but in an interesting way leaves open when the process began or if it ever ended.

Today we can still learn from Rahner even as we move beyond his own horizon of understanding. Voices from the global South now speak from a myriad of offices in the Church even though their representation still remains inadequate at all levels. We now know better than ever that offering testimony is an intrinsically intercultural part of the act of conversion. As Lamin Sanneh has so eloquently demonstrated, the Gospel never was and never could be contained in a monochromatic cultural vessel.¹⁸ Its spreading through testimony is always intertwined with the dialogue of cultures. Now more than ever we need testimonies to the theological meaning of testimony that take this historical fact into account.

What connects conversion to witnessing, and how does this connection shed light on the urgent problem of renewal we face today? A variety of approaches to these questions must be considered. My answer to them proceeds along a certain path. First, I will show the fruitfulness *and limits* of a return to the original meaning of the connection. Second, I will take a glimpse at the panorama of contemporary solutions in global Catholicism, focusing on the contribution of two Latino/a theologians. No one can claim to be comprehensive in venturing a global survey. Like all theological tourism, there is the danger of losing sight of the forest for the trees, of gawking at variant expressions but sidestepping the deeper questions of method and of truth.¹⁹ So I will concentrate on questions and figures that seem illustrative of and fruitful for a renewal of a theology of witnessing that will serve the World Church in its present self-realization. In the next two sections, I connect witnessing to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, in the latter case by drawing upon an example of eucharistic witnessing from the film *Of Gods and Men*. I conclude by returning to the issue of ecclesial renewal.

I: Conversion and Testimony— Toward a New Testament Hermeneutics of Witnessing

The biblical portrait is varied and complex on the question of witnessing. What are the basic contours? First, the term is sometimes but not always defined in relationship to a courtroom metaphor that is prevalent in the Old Testament, e.g., in

¹⁸ See, for example, Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1989); and idem, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003).

¹⁹ For a relevant critique of certain antiquarian and ethnocentric forms of biblical hermeneutics as akin to modern tourism, see Nicholas Lash, “What might martyrdom mean?” in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament: Studies Presented to G.M. Styler by the Cambridge New Testament Seminary*, ed. William Horbury and Brian McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 193–94.

the controversy speeches of the Book of Job.²⁰ This fact does not suppress other elements of the Hebrew Bible like the *dabar* (“word-event”) revelation that add interpersonal dimensions to the witness of the community. Second, eyewitness accounts to the resurrected Lord play a foundational role in the faith of this community, a point underscored by Wolfhart Pannenberg and his admirers.²¹ We cannot ignore this fact, but we also need not treat it as exhaustive for the whole semantic field. Seeing the resurrected Lord in this life is never an end in itself; eyewitnessing the resurrected one is a *means* to getting to know him.²² Third, in the vocabulary of the New Testament, to witness and to testify are signified by the same verbs, verbs that can be used to represent the act of offering oneself unto death as an act of faith. One could therefore think of witnessing and martyrdom (including the martyr-like death of Jesus) as overlapping circles in a Venn diagram. But in the multi-layered transition from the earliest Christian community to the experience of persecution of the early Church, these two circles began to be drawn on top of one another. The multiple valences and translations of μαρτύριον (“witness,” “testimony,” and/or “martyrdom”) have led to well-known debates in the interpretation of the early Christian texts.²³ As a result, it is a mistake to discount the symbolic and real dimensions of the witness of the martyrs. It is also a mistake to elide the biblical theology of witnessing with the beginnings of a tradition of martyrology.²⁴

What are some of the other elements of a New Testament theology of witnessing?²⁵ In the New Testament μαρτυρέω can convey a merely factual report or testimony, but the verb also expresses an active and personal form of testifying.²⁶ In

²⁰ Cf. Allison A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 20–34.

²¹ On the epistemological issues, one could consult here Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968); and idem, *Systematic Theology*, II (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 277–396. Pannenberg’s foundational probing into the question of the truth of the testimony is an approach that I would generally support without at all endorsing its quasi-Hegelian underpinnings.

²² See C.F. Evans, *Resurrection and the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1970), 132: “The resurrection was both corroborated by, and was itself known through, that to which it gave rise, and it is part of the Christian knowledge of the resurrection to trace these effects, and to see how they are the effects of this particular cause.” Evans takes the fact of the resurrection to be probative. Regarding the new perspective inaugurated by resurrection faith, he nicely shows that “like Janus, it looks both ways, and in opening into what is new brings with it that which is old and otherwise past (142).” Resurrection faith also illuminates cosmology, as is shown in *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, ed. Ted Peters, Robert John Russell, and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002).

²³ See, for example, Candida R. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies, and Traditions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 93–94.

²⁴ In other words, a follower of Jesus Christ witnesses in life and in death. To choose one to the detriment of the other makes one’s commitment to the path inaugurated by Jesus Christ less than fully compelling.

²⁵ See also Edouard Burnier, *La Notion de Témoignage dans le Nouveau Testament. Notes de Théologie Biblique* (Lausanne: F. Roth&Cie, 1939).

²⁶ See, for example, the entry *mártys* (and related terms) in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged in one volume, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985), 564–70. For insight into the “conceptual haziness about who qualifies as a martyr in the Catholic tradition,” see Lawrence Cunningham, “Christian Martyrdom: A Theological Perspective,” in *Witness of the Body*, 3–19.

certain cases, like those of Peter and Paul, the act of witnessing culminates in a martyr-like death,²⁷ a connotation that grows in importance and complexity in Hebrews 12:1 (“A cloud of witnesses”).²⁸ In Luke 24:48 and Acts 1:22, we hear about a witness who is a person present at the ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.²⁹ These reports of a direct encounter with the Risen Lord as well as the epistemological warrants that make the reports credible shape the life of the community.

In many places in the New Testament, there is *also* a continuum that links the witness of the word with the witness of the body.³⁰ In Acts 23:11, two senses of witnessing are placed in a parallel construction. Jesus stands by St. Paul in the night and says to him: “Be of good cheer, Paul: For *as* thou hast given solemn testimony (διεμαρτύρω) of me in Jerusalem, *so* must thou bear witness (μαρτυρήσαι) also at Rome.”³¹ The author of Acts reports here that the Gospel was preached in two places. More importantly, he imbeds Paul’s personal act into a tradition of witnessing that follows the pattern: “As in Jerusalem, so in Rome.” Rome is represented here as Babylon, and Babylon is the imperial city where King Nebuchadnezzar had once cast the faithful of Jerusalem into a fiery furnace.³² The passage underscores the coherence between the missionary *telos* of Paul’s words and the placement of his overall witness into a living memory of buried, broken bodies. Thus, words (i.e., professions of faith) and human bodies (both individual and social ones) are intertwined in matters of life and death.³³

²⁷ Cf. William R. Farmer and Roch Kereszty, O.Cist., *Peter and Paul in the Church of Rome: The Ecumenical Potential of a Forgotten Perspective* (New York: Paulist, 1990).

²⁸ W.H.C. Frend, a scholar whose work opened up the field of theological reflection on witnessing, writes, citing T.W. Manson: “The change of meaning of the word (martyr) took place in the early Church, but preparation for it had begun much earlier, and it can be traced in the Old Testament and in the extra-canonical Jewish writings.” W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (New York: New York University Press, 1967), 59, citing T.W. Manson, “Martyrs and Martyrdom,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 39 (1957): 464–65. The public and liturgical dimension of early Christian traditions are well worth exploring in the context of the convergence I will highlight. This theme has been explicated brilliantly in Robin Darling Young, *In Procession Before the World: Martyrdom as Public Liturgy in Early Christianity* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 2001).

²⁹ *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul Achtemeier (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 1218. For example, Acts 1:21–22 reads: “Therefore, it is necessary that one of the men who accompanied us the whole time the Lord Jesus came and went among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day on which he was taken up from us, become with us a witness to his resurrection.” See also Acts 10:39.

³⁰ See Robin Darling Young, “In Procession before the World,” 59–60, here commenting on Clement of Alexandria and Origen: “[M]artyrdom is still, in their view, the giving of testimony to the true God, along with the offering of a living victim. In that respect, it has changed little since the time of Ignatius, and it is still a sacrifice in imitation of Christ’s and in parallel to the Eucharist. Like those sacrifices, it contains a verbal proclamation of the truth, and an offering that brings life to the Christian churches and to the as-yet unbelieving world.”

³¹ Acts 23:11: “Τῆ δὲ ἐπιούσῃ νυκτὶ ἐπιστάς αὐτῷ ὁ κύριος εἶπεν· θάρσει· ὡς γὰρ διεμαρτύρω τὰ περὶ ἐμοῦ εἰς Ἰερουσαλήμ, οὕτως σε δεῖ καὶ εἰς Ῥώμην μαρτυρήσαι.”

³² See Daniel 3:6.

³³ For more details, see Stephen Fowl, “The Primacy of the Witness of the Body to Martyrdom in Paul,” in *Witness of the Body*, 43–60.

Likewise, the Book of Revelation records in vivid, almost iconic expressions the tragic destiny of early Christian bodies under the Roman empire. Because of the pregnant virgin in Revelation, chapter 12, Jean-Pierre Ruíz and David Sánchez have brilliantly demonstrated a parallel to the Guadalupan event and even to mural paintings of *La Morenita* in the barrios in East Los Angeles.³⁴ A different angle on witnessing emerges in the monumental study of Isabelle Donegani.³⁵ She traces resonances of the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel in the Book of Revelation's creedal formula "because of the Word of God and the witness of Jesus." She discovers what Marcel termed "co-presence," i.e., a place of personal nourishment where the spirituality of attesting to an Absolute you is welcomed and becomes fruitful.³⁶ Looking at the same archive of witnessing, namely, the one that is said to have been recorded by John at Patmos, Latino/a theologians thoughtfully hold up the horizontal and social dimensions of the text, and a French-speaking Swiss religious extracts a transcendental horizon disclosed through an unbounded event of dialogical meaning. This interplay of readings is an example of what Fernando Segovia calls the intercultural strategy of "reading across."³⁷ The material signifiers of social liberation are intrinsically polyvalent, pointing to the future. The transcendent sources of meaning inscribed into the text by persecuted communities are similarly irreducible.

So this survey of New Testament texts ends with the fitting paradox that witnessing seldom allows for a single, univocal interpretation, neither as an archive of memory nor as an event of meaning in the present. The radical openness to an abundance of meaning is an acknowledgement of the unknowable depth *in and beyond* the expressed Word. This recognition brings us back to a key Johannine theme. As Okure and others remind us, it is the unfathomable love of the Father expressed in the incarnate life of Christ that draws disciples into a pattern and life of Christian witnessing.³⁸

³⁴ Jean-Pierre Ruíz, "Biblical Interpretation from a U.S. Hispanic American Perspective: A Reading of the Apocalypse," in *Cuerpo de Cristo: The Hispanic Presence in the U.S. Catholic Church*, ed. Peter J. Casarella and Raúl Gómez, S.D.S. (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 78–105, at 90–96; and David Sánchez, *From Patmos to the Barrio: Subverting Imperial Myths* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

³⁵ Isabelle Donegani, "'A Cause de la Parole de Dieu et Du témoignage de Jésus...' *Le témoignage selon l'Apocalypse de Jean. Son enracinement extra-biblique et biblique. Sa force comme parole* (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1997).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 49, n.79, citing Gabriel Marcel, "Note sur l'attestation créatrice," in *Le Témoignage*, ed. Enrico Castelli (Paris: Aubier, 1972), 533–34.

³⁷ Fernando Segovia, "Reading-Across: Intercultural Criticism and Textual Posture," in: *Interpreting Beyond Borders*, ed. Fernando Segovia (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 59–83.

³⁸ T. Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission*, 83: "it is the Father himself who draws disciples to Jesus." See also Adrienne von Speyr, *The Farewell Discourses. Meditations on John 13–17* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987), 96–113; J. Beutler, *Martyria*, 265–71, 289–93, and 356–7; Paul S. Minear, *John: The Martyr's Gospel* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1984), 103–12; Mansueto Bianchi, "La testimonianza nella tradizione giovannea. Vangelo e Lettere," in *Testimonianza e verità*, ed. Piero Ciardella and Maurizio Gronchi (Rome: Città Nuova, 2000), 110–38, at 128; and E. Burnier, *La Notion de Témoignage*, 50–51.

II: Intercultural Testimonies in the World Church Today

How does one enter into the polyphony of voices in the World Church? Should one approach the issue chronologically (i.e., in terms of post-Vatican II developments), regionally, or thematically? The application of the doctrine of the *sensus fidei* in Catholic practice involves listening to diverse voices in order to discern an ecclesial harmony. To discern this harmony, we will need to bring into accord views that are sometimes seen as opposed. Robert Schreier has addressed this issue in his work on intercultural hermeneutics. Schreier laid out his thinking in his groundbreaking book from 1997, *A New Catholicity*.³⁹ Schreier there proposed a new definition of catholicity as communication and opened a way to dialogue about the Church in an age of globalization. Schreier sees his redefinition of Catholicity as cut of the same cloth as Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* and more broadly as part of the progressive branch of contemporary theological discourse represented by the journal *Concilium*. Reflecting back ten years after publishing *The New Catholicity*, Schreier began to recognize an alternative discourse about catholicity, one that emanated not from *Concilium* but from *Communio* and not from *Gaudium et Spes* but from Biblical and Patristic sources.⁴⁰ In the past, he argued, the *ressourcement* theologians had ignored cultural analyses altogether. But now distinguished theologians such as Joseph Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar as well as their younger contemporaries like David Schindler, Tracy Rowland, and Graham Ward had developed a "Neo-Augustinian" theology of culture that yields a very different approach to catholicity. So-called "Neo-Augustinian" catholicity started from above and sought to analyze contemporary global trends theocentrically; catholicity as communication begins from below and seeks to demonstrate the convergences and divergences between social analyses and the new ecclesiologies of liberation.

I would like to suggest one way to get beyond this particular impasse, one that does *not* involve the Herculean task of trying to reconcile two historically divided and globally complex theological movements. My approach will take as its point of departure two shining examples of post-conciliar theologies of witnessing: Emmanuel Katongole and the early Joseph Ratzinger. Katongole, a Ugandan priest and eyewitness to the Rwandan genocide, defends the witness of martyrs in terms of ecclesial processes of social reconciliation. Citing the Guatemalan poet Julia Esquivel, Katongole reminds us that we can be "threatened with Resurrection" both by the perpetrators of deadly violence and by their victims.⁴¹ The victims may be

³⁹ Schreier developed his own ideas about catholicity as communication in *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985); and *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997).

⁴⁰ See HIMIG UGNAYAN, a theological journal of the Institute of Formation and Religious Studies Vol. VIII, SY 2006–2007. A critical response to Schreier from the African perspective can be found at:

<http://tonyakinwale.com/read.php?d=Publications/Papers%202008/Catholicity.doc> (accessed on July 23, 2013). In 2009 the Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology at DePaul University sponsored a colloquium on Schreier's paper.

⁴¹ What follows is drawn principally from "'Threatened with Resurrection': Martyrdom and Reconciliation in the World Church," in *Witness of the Body*, 190–203. See also Emmanuel Katongole with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2009); and Emmanuel Katongole and

dead, but the testimony that they leave also offers a dangerous memory and thus wakens us to new life. Katongole underscores two of the ways that martyrs keep the Church awake: 1) they fertilize the church's struggle by drawing the church into a restless posture of lament and 2) they call us back to the everydayness of the struggle for peace. Katongole's highly compelling approach yields pivotal insights but remains perhaps overly dependent on the fluid act of narration.⁴²

As young academic theologian Joseph Ratzinger defended the category of witnessing as a bulwark against totalitarianism and espousals of social revolution that he thought had limited the freedom of personal conscience. Interestingly, Ratzinger's earliest contribution focuses on a fictional account of the life of Bartolomé de las Casas written by the German anti-war activist Reinhold Schneider. I have written at length about Ratzinger's theology of conscience elsewhere.⁴³ A similar view of the universal witness of conscience is found in the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* when John Paul II cites Justin Martyr: "As Saint Justin put it: 'the Stoics at least in their teachings on ethics demonstrated wisdom thanks to the seed of the Word present in all peoples and we know that those who followed their doctrines met with hatred and were killed.'"⁴⁴ Accordingly, Stoic wisdom concerning the seeds of the natural moral law includes the idea of giving up one's life for the truth and is thus a natural precursor to Christian martyrology. The notion of witnessing here is powerful in its universality, but its connection to the kinds of social testimony addressed by Katongole needs further elucidation. Are these seeds of the Word planted equally in all cultures, and, if so, why do internecine rivalries lead to such terrible bloodshed? The convergence of a Christian and a Stoic model has the incipient potential to display interculturality while at the same time remains detached in a rationalist fashion from the violence and ambiguity of history. It is that detachment that I seek to redress in what follows.

One way in which these two senses of witnessing—witnessing to justice and witnessing to the interior truth of conscience—come together is through the encounter with beauty.⁴⁵ Beauty here is not the detached scrutiny of an art critic or museum-goer. Pope Benedict XVI in a 2009 address to artists pinpointed the unique transformation performed by beauty: "Indeed, an essential function of genuine beauty,

Chris Rice, *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace, and Healing* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2008).

⁴² See Emmanuel Katongole, *Beyond Universal Reason: The Relation between Religion and Ethics in the Work of Stanley Hauerwas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), especially 214–51, in which he begins to stipulate some of the metaphysical pre-conditions for exploring ecclesial "politics beyond tribalism and liberal agonistics." In my opinion, the tension between this nascent metaphysics of creation and the narrative approach to ecclesiology remains very fruitful but still unresolved in Katongole's work.

⁴³ See my essay, "Culture and Conscience in the Thought of Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI," in: *Explorations in the Theology of Benedict XVI*, ed., John Cavadini (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 63–86. Ratzinger's essay on Reinhold Schneider can be found in an English translation as "Conscience in its Time," in Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology* (New York: Crossroad, 2008), 160–72.

⁴⁴ *Veritatis Splendor*, encyclical by Pope John Paul II from August 6, 1993, no. 94.

⁴⁵ Elsewhere in this volume the insightful plenary address by Linda Hogan, "The Ethical Imagination and the Anatomy of Change: A Perspective from Social Ethics," brings out the moral and artistic dimensions of this connection more fully than I am able to do here.

as emphasized by Plato, is that it gives [us] a healthy ‘shock,’ it draws [us] out of [ourselves], wrenches [us] away from resignation and from being content with the humdrum -- it even makes [us] suffer, piercing [us] like a dart, but in so doing it ‘reawakens’ [us], opening afresh the eyes of [our] hearts and minds, giving [us] wings, carrying [us] aloft.”⁴⁶

The late Cuban-American theologian Alejandro García-Rivera similarly writes about beauty in terms of the experience of “wounded innocence.”⁴⁷ He was born in Cuba, emigrated to the United States, became a Lutheran pastor, and later returned to the Catholic Church, becoming a professor at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley. Alex wrote as a witness *in media res*—telling the little stories in which the poor proclaimed the beauty and holiness of the saints. Little stories, he maintained, can be used as the building blocks for a Christian mosaic of lived realities.

He tells the story of a two-month-old Puerto Rican child named Estefanía.⁴⁸ She died of AIDS in a shabby housing project. He narrates it as a former Lutheran pastor called by her parents to perform a burial in a barren lot overrun with weeds. The father of Estefanía was also buried in this lot. Pastor Alejandro recognized a pauper’s grave and a seed in the faith of these people. The epiphany of beauty that he witnessed he termed *kalokagathia*, the place where beauty and goodness meet. The place of the burial was later to become the St. Martín de Porres Lutheran Church in Allentown, Pennsylvania, an irony that was not lost on the local Lutheran bishop who was expecting the Church to be named after another Martin.

To paraphrase Roberto Goizueta, García-Rivera moves toward a liberating theological aesthetics.⁴⁹ He sees like Thomas the Apostle that the one who perceives beauty does so in the recognition of the absence of God. The agonizing experience of God’s absence in the pain and suffering of the marginalized is a form of presence. García-Rivera shows the coincidence of two truths that have diverged in our contemporary Catholic discourse and experience: 1) the beauty and goodness in the wounded innocence of the poor of Jesus Christ and 2) a theology of cultural difference rooted in a semiotic understanding of faith and a new perspective on reality.

His book *A Community of the Beautiful* begins with Hopkins’ poem “Pied Beauty.”⁵⁰ This poem is transformed into a theory of praise for the cosmic and social

⁴⁶ “You are Custodians of the Beauty,” address of Pope Benedict XVI to artists of Nov. 22, 2009, available at <http://www.zenit.org/article-27631?!=english> (accessed on March 23, 2012).

⁴⁷ Alejandro R. García-Rivera, *A Wounded Innocence: Sketches for a Theology of Art* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003). What follows is a condensed version of my homage to Alex that appeared as “Beauty and the Little Stories of Holiness: What Alejandro García-Rivera Taught Me,” in *Diálogo* 16, 2 (Fall 2013): 53–8. That issue of *Diálogo* contains important reflections on the legacy of García-Rivera by Robert Schreiter, Roberto Goizueta, Michelle A. Gonzalez, and others.

⁴⁸ Alejandro García-Rivera, “The Church is Beautiful and Holy,” in *The Many Marks of the Church*, ed., William Madges and Michael J. Daley (New London: Twenty-Third Publications, 2006), 69–73, at 71–73.

⁴⁹ Roberto S. Goizueta, *Christ our Companion: Toward a Theological Aesthetics of Liberation* (Marykoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2009), 109–56.

⁵⁰ Alejandro García-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999), at 18–19.

community of signs. García-Rivera embraces the difference between creator and creature. Through the U.S. philosopher C.S. Peirce and the Franciscan theologian Duns Scotus, he takes up the formal distinction as a lens for grasping the semiotic community of difference in created reality as good in itself.⁵¹ His theology of cultural difference builds on this semiotically construed ontological realism. He draws upon the Magnificat of Mary as well as the liturgical canticle of the three youth in the furnace (the same passage indicated above in Acts 23:11 as Jesus's own allusion to pre-Christian witnessing). These exegetical starting points suggest that an inculturated "lifting up of the lowly" will foreground a new aesthetic mode of interpretation. He writes:

Redemption, in light of God's ordaining power, is less a state of mere existence or an invisible inner reality than an ordained existence, a common reality in the midst of marvelous differences, a community where the invisible becomes visible by the power of a bold and daring spiritual imagination which makes manifest communities of Truth, Goodness, and above all, the Beautiful.⁵²

The greatness and the vulnerability of this vision lie in the power of the creative imagination to give expression to what Scotus called "thisness" or what I would call the *actualidad* of beauty.

The late beloved auxiliary bishop of Miami, Monseñor Agustín Román knew about this *actualidad*. He recounts how a young mother and her daughter enter a local church and gaze with admiration at the depictions in stained glass of individual saints.⁵³ When the girl is later asked by a catechist about the identity of the saints, she comments: "The saints, the saints, the saints are the windows of the Church!" After considerable laughter at the child's naiveté, the little girl offers a startlingly accurate theological explanation: "The saints are the windows through which the light of Christ enters the Church." The anecdote reveals how the saints—official and unofficial—inform the life of the faithful. As Miguel Díaz has written with respect to our Lady of Charity, witnessing to holiness is *un camino*.⁵⁴ The Spanish word maintains better than an English translation a direct link to the act of walking (*caminar*).⁵⁵ Walking with the Virgin through the streets of a country where Catholicism had recently been banned and still lacks complete autonomy, as was the case in 2012 in Cuba when 5 million Cubans accompanied her, is a highly expressive

⁵¹ See my analysis in "Beauty and the Little Stories of Holiness," 54–55 as well as the incisive, albeit more critical evaluation of Daniel P. Castillo, "Agony in the Garden? Evaluating the Cosmology of Alejandro García-Rivera in View of the 'Little Story' and the 'Principle of Foregrounding,'" *Diálogo* 16, 2 (Fall 2013): 65–68.

⁵² Alejandro García-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful*, 195.

⁵³ Raúl Gómez, S.D.S., "Veneration of the Saints and *Beati*," *Commentary on the Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2005), 21–22.

⁵⁴ Miguel H. Díaz, "Dime con quien andas y te dire quien eres: We Walk with Our Lady of Charity," in: *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology*, ed. Orlando O. Espín and Miguel H. Díaz (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1999), 153–71.

⁵⁵ Cf. Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995), 1–17.

act.⁵⁶ When you walk on this path, you are accompanied not only by the Virgin, but whether you like it or not by the poor, the elderly, those hurrying home from a night shift, and many others.⁵⁷ The Johannine “way” (*hodos*) that Christ showed his followers can convey the dual sense of a concrete road and a path of learning.

García-Rivera’s theological aesthetics opens up precisely this twofold sense of *un camino*. If there is any myopia in his bountiful vision, it lies in his overconfidence regarding the faculty *as such* of the imagination. He rightly recognizes that the poor are indeed invested with a powerful imagination through their indigenous and unmodern traditions of popular Catholicism, but his artistic model of redemption still suffers from a touch of romanticism. The late Ada-María Isasi-Díaz counterbalances this idealizing tendency with her theology of *lo cotidiano* (“the everyday”).⁵⁸ She argues on the basis of her engagement with and on behalf of Latinas that they have understood central Christian texts not in abstract discourse but rather in thoughtful implementation. The difference between these two Cuban-American theologians is subtle but important. García-Rivera holds firm to a vision of beauty and justice rooted in cultural difference. Isasi-Díaz sees the convergence of love and justice in the slow and patient process of social engagement at the level of the grassroots. She is complementing cosmogonic theories with practical wisdom. Her “*mujerista* account of justice...has to announce our *proyecto histórico* in a precise enough way so as to make choosing necessary, so as to force an option against injustice and for justice.”⁵⁹ The problem with García-Rivera’s cosmic liturgy is that the solution seems to be present wherever you look. Isasi-Díaz sat with women who inherited practical wisdom from their mothers and grandmothers. What they offered in their simple stories—their accounts of how to arrive at *un poquito de justicia*—is the lasting truth of the community’s beauty.

III: Witnessing to Christian Unity

Ecclesial witnessing is not just a Roman Catholic affair. I assume that the reason that witnessing has not always enjoyed a wide berth in Catholic systematics is the association that we have sometimes created between witnessing and proselytism. This is a genuine concern. I too recoiled at the idea of personal witnessing when I was taken at the age of seventeen by my Colombian cousins to a Pentecostal training camp on the rural outskirts of Cali. For many of us, especially for many of us Latino/as, facing this challenge is as much a family affair as a professional responsibility. Consequently, one important dimension of the end of self-referentiality recently preached by Pope Francis is to see that a truly dialogical

⁵⁶ This took place in 2012 during the celebration of the 400th anniversary of her appearance on the island. This walk was thoroughly theological but not without social significance.

⁵⁷ See my essay “The Painted Word,” *The Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 6 (November 1998): 18–42 for an example of walking with the people in reverent silence on the streets of Washington, D.C.

⁵⁸ Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz, “*Un poquito de justicia*—A Little Bit of Justice: A Mujerista Account of Justice,” in *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 325–39.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 338.

theology of witnessing necessarily opens up to ecumenical and interreligious concerns.

Many people working on global Catholicism like Philip Jenkins, John Allen, Jeffrey Gros, and Thomas Rausch have pointed to the need to speak more forthrightly about the relationship between Catholics and Pentecostals. The dialogues sponsored by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity have also made enormous contributions in this area. The late Ralph del Colle forged new paths of understanding that beckon both Catholics and Pentecostals to contemplate the possibility of growth towards a differentiated consensus.⁶⁰ He called upon his fellow Catholics to witness in a manner that brings others through sacraments of initiation to faith in Jesus Christ. “How can bishops, priests, deacons, religious, spiritual directors, and others who exercise ministry promote the formation of evangelistic apostolates for the future?”⁶¹ His answer: “It all comes down to whether one can share the Gospel of Jesus Christ to one another out of the divine love that mission embodies.”⁶² Here we see his bold sense of purpose that came out of his involvement with an Ignatian ecclesial movement.

Del Colle wrote an essay about Mary in 2007.⁶³ He challenges Pentecostals to acknowledge the Spirit in the liturgical prayers of Catholics, and he challenges Catholics to see a form of ecclesial communion in Pentecostal/charismatic assembly. Del Colle’s ecumenical theology of the Spirit enables him to articulate an integral Mariology: she is neither just a “type” of the whole Church (“ecclesiotypic orientation”) nor just an individual example of faith in Christ who stands apart from the Church (“christotypical”). *Abiding within the ecclesial communion and the concrete praxis of Christian faith* go together in Mary’s life of discipleship. Catholics see Mary as a watermark of the Church’s being, he states, only because she can thus point out for each of us individually the path to follow Christ.⁶⁴ Mary’s witness of faith thus bears fruit within the life of the Spirit. I turn now to a reflection that will illustrate how witnessing functions in an interreligious context.

⁶⁰ The recently published *A Man of the Church: Honoring the Theology, Life, and Witness of Ralph del Colle*, ed. Michel Rene Barnes (Eugene, Oreg.: Pickwick Publications, 2012) was assembled by Ralph’s colleagues at Marquette. This volume records and honors his overall contribution. I focus here just on del Colle’s breakthrough in the area of Mariology. See also his “Aesthetics and Pathos in the Vision of God: A Catholic-Pentecostal Encounter,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* Vol. 26, No. 1 (2004): 99–117. On “charismatic v. sacramental,” see his essay “Pentecostal/Catholic Dialogue: Theological Suggestions for Consideration,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, Volume 25, No. 1, (Spring 2003): 93–6.

⁶¹ Ralph del Colle, *Talking with Evangelicals: A Guide for Catholics* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2012): 80–81.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶³ Ralph del Colle, “Mary, the Unwelcome (?) Guest in Catholic/Pentecostal Dialogue,” *Pneuma: Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, Volume 29, No. 2, (2007): 214–225.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 217. Mary and the saints thus transform elements of temporal existence into manifestations of eschatological and eternal realities according to Ralph del Colle, “Trinity and Temporality: The Relationship between Time and the Divine Being,” *The Spirit & Church* Vol. 4, No. 1 (2002): 36–37.

IV: The Eucharistic Witness of the Monks of Tibhirine

The Trappist monks of Tibhirine were warned by French authorities that their lives were in danger.⁶⁵ They were in an impossible situation. Their witness as monks was their *raison d'être*, and as such they felt a call to continue to offer hospitality to their Muslim neighbors. Their community had been part of the Algerian people and the Algerian Church for more than half a century. The civil authorities, however, considered them obstinate for ignoring the near certainty of an assassination.

Recent philosophical discussion about witnessing has drawn attention to the question of whether in some instances it may not even be possible to bear witness. The monks of Tibhirine faced a situation not altogether different from that of the poet Paul Celan. After Auschwitz, Celan, a Jew from Romania writing in his mother's native tongue of German while living in France, recognized that the problem of witnessing was a problem of language itself.⁶⁶ Jacques Derrida's reflections on his poetry attempt to expose the outer limits of the very notion of witnessing. Derrida presents a hypothesis: "All responsible witnessing involves a poetic experience of language." Derrida shows that a poet facing the Shoah recognizes the *impossibility* of conjuring up victims through words. Language is no medium for memorializing what one can do *for another* after the fact. Stretching the German tongue to speak into an abyss created by the Nazi authorities simultaneously "seals and unseals" Celan's poetry. The ambiguous nature of the task is unavoidable. Celan has difficulty functioning even as a counter-witness.⁶⁷ Celan, whose life ended in suicide, remains true to this insight and writes in German to give utterance to this unspeakable paradox, what Derrida terms the "secret" of Celan's poetry. For Derrida the deconstruction of words to subvert unjust and irresponsible acts of speech is the only response possible, and it must be rendered poetically. Such an ethical recognition, Derrida avers, may lead as a corollary to an erasure of selfhood as a subject of testimony.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ The information in what follows is based upon Fr. Armand Veilleux, "The Witness of the Trappist Monks of Tibhirine," available on his personal website: <http://www.scourmont.be/Armand/writings/witness-tibhirine.html>, and idem, "The death of the monks of Tibhirine: facts, questions, and hypotheses,"

<http://users.skynet.be/bs775533/Armand/wri/hypothesis.htm> (accessed on June 5, 2013). I thank Fr. Veilleux for providing me with a copy of the first paper before he posted it online.

⁶⁶ On the impossibility of witnessing to Auschwitz, there is an extensive body of literature that includes: Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 2002); and Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M.D., *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁶⁷ Ecclesial counter-witnessing is a different category altogether. This category has been developed by Michael Budde in his essay "Martyrs and Antimartyrs: Reflections on Treason, Fidelity, and the Gospel," in *The Witness of the Body*, 151–68.

⁶⁸ I restrict my criticism here to the question of witnessing on the edges of language and do not intend to dismiss a more positive reading of Derrida in other domains. Marie Baird, for example, comes to a different and more positive conclusion about the theological import of Derrida on witnessing by considering the witness in the face of alterity. Marie Baird, "Witness as a Relation to Alterity: Rahner, Derrida, Levinas," in *Encountering Transcendence: Contributions to a Theology of Christian Religious Experience*, ed., Lieven Boeve, Hans Geybels, and Stijn Van den Bossche (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 39–56.

Certain apophatic theological readings could be fruitfully brought into this conversation, but a side-by-side comparison obscures the radicality of Derrida's approach and the irreducible seriousness of the Shoah.⁶⁹ The Derridean poetic witness to such an injustice is forced by the unspeakability of the act to stay within language and lose selfhood in the process. The Christian witness to witnessing might suggest an alternative starting point for thinking about this very limit of language. So I offer an inversion of the underlying Derridean principle that reads as follows: "For Christians all responsible witnessing involves a eucharistic experience of self-giving."⁷⁰

The movie *Of Gods and Men* includes a scene that makes this very point.⁷¹ The movie recounts the last days of monks who were killed by Algerians, the identity of whom remains a secret. The characters are historical figures whose lives for the most part ended in a beheading. The scene I will analyze, however, is fictional and takes place without dialogue. It is sometimes referred to as the Swan Lake Scene (because of its use as the musical score) or the Last Supper Scene. In the scene the monks enter a room silently. Br. Luc Dochier, a monk who is also a medical doctor, was known for his conviviality. He serves wine. The camera pans over their faces. Each visage communicates resolve, anguish, and a commitment to remain together in this hour of trial. The scene is one of the most poignant in this extraordinarily subtle film.

Why did the director choose to include a parable of a liturgy when so much of the film already focused on the beauty of the monks' real liturgical prayer? The sense of eucharist in this scene is clearly figurative and reminds us that the original Greek term *eucharistia* means thanksgiving. They celebrate without words. Their silence and facial gestures affirm their extremely difficult but communally achieved decision to live out their witness in the most hospitable sense imaginable, by remaining with their neighbors. Fr. Armand Veilleux, a fellow Trappist who went in an official capacity to visit the monks two months before their assassination, witnessed their lives first-hand. He writes:

Those simple monks were authentic witnesses to Christian love. And that is the main aspect of their witness or "martyrdom." They were "martyrs" (=witnesses) by the way they lived more than by the manner of their death. The local population, that was composed of simple, ordinary Muslims, not of radical Islamists, saw them for what they were,

⁶⁹ I think, for example, of the annihilation of selfhood in John of the Cross' *Living Flame of Love* or some metaphors of eucharistic sacrifice in Gerard Manley Hopkins' *Wreck of the Deutschland*. See Peter Casarella, "The Expression and Form of the Word: Trinitarian Hermeneutics and the Sacramentality of Language in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Renascence* 48 (Winter 1996): 111–35. By leaving to one side the method of comparison, I do not mean to downplay critical analysis of Catholic attitudes towards the Shoah. A brilliant example of the latter is found in Brenna Moore's investigation of French Philo-Semitism in the circle of Raïssa Maritain. See Brenna Moore, *Sacred Dread: Raïssa Maritain, the French Catholic Revival (1905–1944)* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 97–121.

⁷⁰ My inversion could be considered to be an intercultural reading of the eucharistic "Hors Texte" in Jean-Luc Marion's *Dieu sans l'être* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991), 225–77.

⁷¹ *Of Gods and Men*, directed by Xavier Beauvois (2010; Culver City, Cal.: Sony Pictures Classics, 2011), DVD.

first of all a group of men dedicated to God and to prayer, and [also men who] saw their monastery as a place of contemplative prayer.⁷²

In the Christian Eucharist we encounter Christ's once and for all handing over of himself and are invited to enter into that mystery.⁷³ The measure of a Christian response to Christ's self-offering in the Eucharist is what we offer. The scene evokes images of a World Church because it recalls at once not only the martyrdom of Archbishop Romero, who died on a literal altar, but also the triple dialogue of the Federated Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC), namely, a dialogue of religions, of culture, and of living with the poor.⁷⁴ All of these elements are evident in the monks' lives and in their tearful *fiesta*. In this sense, I think that the scene, grounded in the *proyecto histórico* of the monks of Tibhirine, illustrates that selfhood is maintained by envisaging a transcendent source of language that is and is not expressible in words.⁷⁵ Selfhood is sustained by prayer and witness in a manner that is deeply eucharistic. This is the paradox of the Christian theology of the Word, namely, that it becomes most available in its dialogical openness not only in the recognition of its incarnateness but at the same time in its self-surpassing quality.

V: The Challenge of Ecclesial Renewal

St. Paul reminds us that, "in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love."⁷⁶ He reminds us, in other words, of just how closely conversion and witnessing are linked. God's free gift of faith makes the freedom to bear witness to Christ a real and urgent possibility for Christian existence. I have argued that the act of witnessing is altogether different from proselytism since the work of love enabled by the gift of faith can and should open up to an intercultural, ecumenical, and interreligious dialogue, as challenging as each of these encounters may be. I conclude with a brief reflection on the work of love directed *ad intra* or how the connection between conversion and witnessing can revitalize the World Church itself.

What process of renewal is being realized in the World Church four decades after Karl Rahner announced its emergence? First and foremost, it is one of rapid and irreversible Southernization.⁷⁷ This shift portends changes that we have only begun to

⁷² Armand Veilleux, "The Witness of the Trappist Monks of Tibhirine," 3.

⁷³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Spirit and Institution," in *Explorations in Theology*, IV: Spirit and Institution (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 209–43.

⁷⁴ Citing the triple dialogue as a positive theological reading of religious diversity, reporter John Allen notes that growing importance of this conference for the twenty-first century of Catholicism. John Allen, *The Future Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 370–71.

⁷⁵ Even more evidence for this thesis can be found in the published testament of the prior, Fr. Christian de Chergé. His untranslatable words to his Muslim brethren "Quand un À Dieu est envisagé" is much stronger than the English equivalent of farewell. In fact, it is a recognition of his brotherhood in God's face and love with all Algerians, even the perpetrators of his murder. The Cistercians have made the testament accessible in multiple languages. See http://www.ocso.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=100&Itemid=149&lang=en (accessed on July 23, 2013).

⁷⁶ Gal 5:6.

⁷⁷ I must thank Dr. Edmund Chia for bringing this particular expression to my attention.

fathom. Ecclesial renewal in the service of that emergent reality is perhaps the second most important theme. Witnessing prayerfully in word and in deeds, like the self-offering of the monks of Tibhirine, is a task that applies equally to individual Christians and to the Church as a whole. The specific reforms and the event of renewal of the Second Vatican Council need our concerted attention not simply as a matter of marking an anniversary but also to recognize the new form of communion in which we abide. In fact, both Councils that we memorialize this year, Trent and Vatican II, linked personal reform to ecclesial reform and vice versa.⁷⁸

Pope Francis echoed this theme in his very first homily as Pope. Offering a *début* of his new three-verb approach to homiletics, he explored the inner unity of walking in the light of the Lord (*camminare*), building the Church (*edificare*), and professing faith in Jesus Christ (*confessare*). The way he linked the witness of the word back to a personal and ecclesial journey summarizes with characteristic simplicity the ecclesial dimension of renewal that will come about by witnessing. Rather than treating the profession of faith (*confessare*) simply as an automatic result of on-going conversion, Pope Francis unfolds the interplay between coming to faith and living it out responsibly. He says:

We can walk as much as we want, we can build many things, but if we do not profess Jesus Christ, things go wrong. We may become a charitable NGO, but not the Church, the Bride of the Lord. When we are not walking, we stop moving. When we are not building on the stones, what happens? The same thing that happens to children on the beach when they build sandcastles: everything is swept away, there is no solidity.⁷⁹

All Christians are called to walk, build, and profess; however, the Pope knows you cannot renew the Church with a mantra of verbs. The movement of the Church, he continues, goes beyond the poetry of words:

Walking, building, professing. But things are not so straightforward, because in walking, building, professing, there can sometimes be jolts, movements that are not properly part of the journey: movements that pull us back.⁸⁰

By way of conclusion, I draw your attention to this highly instructive aside. We are called to reflect, think critically, and interpret precisely in the moments when we are pulled back from the anticipated movement of the ecclesial journey. The jolts are unforeseen and will test us. The challenge that we theologians face in the new World Church is to walk in the light of the Lord, renew the Church constructively, and witness reflectively, *all at the same time*. In short, our Latino Pope is showing us a way forward but also warning us that the path will be bumpy.

⁷⁸ I thank my friend Christopher Bellitto for instructing me on this point. See also John O'Malley, *Trent and all That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); and idem, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁷⁹ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130314_omelia-cardinali_en.html (accessed on June 5, 2013).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, translation altered.