

THE CHURCH WE WANT
African Catholics Look to Vatican III

Editor

AGBONKHIANMEGHE E. OROBATOR

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to begin again and take the next step through us and because of us as a church community.

The bishop-theologian or teacher needs to respond to the actual lived reality in the spirit and practice of listening deeply, discerning what the Spirit seems to be saying to the churches, and engaging in a dialogical process with the people to promote and build a *sensus fidelium* that will allow God's Word and the mission of Jesus to be incarnated anew in the unfolding reality of people's lives and especially the most vulnerable members of our communities and societies.

The topic of bishops as theologians poses the following questions, among others: How do pastoral experience, pastoral sensitivity, and pastoral reflection affect the church's living theological tradition? Is it possible for pastoral reality to reform or shape church teaching so this can be understood and experienced as relevant and valid for our particular time? Should not pastoral ministry be a most powerful and necessary "source" of theology shaped by our African context with its widespread poverty, disease, wars, millions of refugees, and the struggle many go through to live minimally decent lives? Should a bishop's particular pastoral perspective with his people be a key factor in this dynamic?

In that sense, a bishop is or should be a theologian par excellence and constantly invite professional theologians to respond and commit to renewed partnership with all bishops and pastoral workers, because together we seek to discern God's Word and the meaning of faith and evangelization in the reality in which we live and minister.

THE CHURCH OF POPE FRANCIS

An Ecclesiology of Accountability, Accompaniment, and Action

Stan Chu Ilo

This essay undertakes four important and related tasks. First, as the world is presently enchanted by the freshness of Pope Francis and the Francis effect, I pose a hypothetical question of what kind of pope an African cardinal would have been if one had been elected to the chair of Peter instead of Jorge Bergoglio. Second, I argue that Pope Francis is not ushering in a new ecclesiology; the germs of what Pope Francis is doing are all hidden in the spiritual treasures and teachings of the church, especially in the ecclesiology of Vatican II. Third, I show how the words and deeds of Pope Francis have become an exegesis of the spirit of Vatican II. Fourth, I propose that the pope's teachings and ministry offer a model for the renewal of African Catholicism through a "triple A" ecclesiology—an ecclesiology of Accountability, a pastoral theology of Accompaniment, and a spirituality of Action. I argue that these three A's should be present in the priorities and practices of the church in Africa because they are present in the life of the Trinity as the foundation of the church.

Could Africa Have Produced a Pope Francis?

Although we may not be able to predict how the Holy Spirit would have worked in an African pope, my fear is that if any African cardinal had emerged, he may not have been as courageous or as revolutionary as Pope Francis. An African pope would seek a more centrist approach to church governance and would be cautious about embracing any changes dictated by Western social pressures.

An African pope would wholeheartedly enforce a rigorous interpretation of authority in the church while proposing unquestioning obedience to church authority with a top-down exercise of authority. In addition, an African pope might reject the concerns in the church for an urgent solution to the problems and pains caused in the church by such burning issues as celibacy; the place of women in the church; separated, divorced, and remarried Catholics; unresolved questions about polygamy, especially in Africa; and the questions about the use of condoms in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

An African pope would not be amenable to granting greater autonomy to local churches and confronting the unacceptable and unhelpful prevalence of clericalism in the church. Most of these challenges would be interpreted by an African pope as the results of a spiritual or moral crisis, Western cultural bereavement, cultural relativism, and religious syncretism that arose as a result of an inadequate understanding of the faith.

In response to these challenges, an African pope would call for more spiritual depth, a life of holiness and prayers, faith formation, sacramentalization of the people, and greater spiritual devotions and pious activities. He would also draw a clear line between faithful Catholics and the rest and make a distinction between the true Catholic Church of Rome and other ecclesial communities outside the Catholic Church.

My guess is that an African pope would also emphasize a syncretizing and transcendental ecclesiology rather than embrace a contextual, historically sensitive, and dynamic ecclesiology of communion. Contextual ecclesiology would be seen by him as ecclesiological relativism or tribal Catholicism. An African pope would be wary of African Pentecostalism, Catholic charismatic spirituality, popular piety and devotions, and African initiatives in Christianity because they do not fit into the liturgical norms and rituals of the church or the Catholic canon of orthodoxy. He would also be cautious with regard to ecumenism, interfaith dialogue, and joint actions with other Christians and people of goodwill in faith and nonfaith contexts.

Although an African pope might speak out against poverty, secularism, materialism, neoliberal capitalism, and the rough edges of globalization, I am not sure he would renounce the papal palace and reject most of the trappings of power and authority at the Vatican; he would use those trappings to validate his authority.

African Catholicism as it is today cannot produce a reforming and transforming pope who would courageously challenge the church to move away from self-referential assertions and triumphalist ecclesial claims. An African pope might not desire to change some of the practices and priorities in the church that lead to what Pope Francis calls "a form of leprosy,"¹ and spiritual worldliness.

African Catholicism has not been very successful in producing enduring theological movements, spiritual traditions, and forms of ecclesial action that have become very influential in the shaping of African Catholicism and with an impact on the wider African society. No one should expect African Catholicism to produce a Pope Francis when African Catholicism has few reforming and transforming local priests, nuns, bishops, and cardinals. This is not to deny, however, that some clergy and religious in Africa have incarnated in their lives of faith and pastoral practices the lifestyle of the poor man of Galilee and have sacramentalized the values and virtues of an incarnational ministry and humble service to God's people.

Despite the claims in contemporary discussion on world Christianity that Africa is the new center of gravity for world Catholicism, I am calling for a more sober discernment of African Christianity and Catholicism in particular. This invites African theologians to move away from a merely sociological analysis of the demographics of church expansion in Africa to a theological interpretation and judgment. This requires raising fundamental questions as to the foundation, nature, character, and identity of African Catholicism. What does God say about who we are, where we are, and what is moving forward in the life of faith in our continent? What ecclesiological images and models are discoverable in the pastoral priorities and practices of African Catholicism that reflect the family traits of what one may clearly identify as Catholicism and as originating from the heart of the Trinity?

Though these questions are not easy to answer, doing so is fundamental to understanding why African Catholicism may not be able to produce a Pope Francis at this time. It will also help us ask some serious questions about the nature and shape of African Catholic ecclesiology and

¹ See Pope Francis's address to the community of the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, June 6, 2013, in Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy: A Vision for the Church* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2014), 115.

offer realistic pastoral proposals for the future of the Christian enterprise in Africa.

Five factors among many could explain the present state of affairs in African Catholic ecclesiology. These factors are presented also as challenges that need to be addressed to bring about the kind of church we want, or rather, the kind of church God wishes to bring about in Africa. The first is Catholic education that is truly Catholic and truly African. Catholic education in Africa is very generalized, normative, and very Roman and Western. In many instances, it lacks historical context and is not open to critical engagement with history or the forces of social change.

The "banking" approach to education is still prevalent in African seminaries and Catholic schools. The bank, in this context, is the Congregation of Catholic Education and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples that approve, control, and supervise the curriculum, syllabus, and structure of the academic programs of our seminaries and Catholic universities in Africa. They also approve the teachers in African theology faculties and seminaries. In addition, there is a cargo-based formation that promotes a generic educational content and delivery without regard to differentiated learning needs and the uniqueness of each person and the specific socialization and faith formation dictated by cultural contexts.

How can we bridge the gulf between the classicist theological traditions of Rome that have been replicated in African seminaries and faculties of theology and the need for empirical and contextual approaches to theology? How can we make the mission of God central and a guide to discovering the mission of the church as the faith crosses different cultural and religious frontiers in Africa? The catechetical instruction for African children and young people is still based on memorizing catechetical formulas and repeating and assimilating doctrinal claims and creeds without questioning them.

The second factor deals with pastoral formation brewed in an African pot. The type of pastoral formation African priests and religious receive, contrary to the teaching of *Ecclesia in Africa* (nos. 11, 57, 62, 63, 79, 94, 95) and *Africae Munus* (nos. 10, 15, 37, 38, 109, 137) does not prepare them adequately to meet the personal, professional, pastoral, and contextual challenges of ministry in Africa. Rather, it prepares them to see themselves more as Roman or Western than as African in their understanding of Catholicism and in the choice of pastoral priorities and methods in pastoral ministries. This explains why the rise in Pentecostalism in Africa, for example, and

the exploitation of our poor faithful have not been met with a different Pentecostal/charismatic Catholicism that goes beyond the magical, the immediate, and the pragmatic with regard to problem solving or Christian discipleship in the face of limit situations.

The third factor is lay formation that prepares the African faithful to bear witness to the faith in the Africa of today, the kind of ecclesial life that is being offered to the laity in Africa that makes them spiritual clients and pastoral beneficiaries of the pastoral ministries of the clergy and the hierarchy. It also limits the baptismal rights of Catholic laity as full members of the church and equal stakeholders in shaping the church and in realizing the eschatological fruits of God's kingdom (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 30). Ours is still a highly clericalized and male-dominated church that is top-down in its approach to pastoral life, and elitist, essentialist, and neoscholastic in its theology and pastoral approach.

It is not surprising that the African Catholic laity remains largely a quiescent majority, lacking basic information and deep knowledge of the faith or Catholic social teaching. They are also ill-equipped to hold the clergy accountable and to take an active part in shaping the church in Africa and Africa itself. The basic Christian communities should become a more effective and dynamic instrument for new evangelization rather than new ways of developing channels for fund-raising for church projects.

The fourth factor is concerned with Rome being the center of Catholicism and Africa being on the margins. African Catholicism is still under the "protection" of *Propaganda Fidei* as a mission church. This has wide implications with regard to the degree of autonomy local African churches can exercise in their relationship with Rome and in choosing their pastoral practices, the nature of Catholic education, and the liturgical life of local churches. African Catholic dioceses see themselves as administrative outposts of the Vatican because they are financially dependent on Rome. Most pastoral plans, strategies, and programs for the formation of the clergy, the religious, and the laity are often replications of generic patterns and forms approved by or copied from one office of the Vatican or another. Some of these norms and regulations were received from pre-Vatican II missionaries and have remained unchanged since then.

The inculturation of the church in Africa and the dialogue and reconciliation called for by the two African synods seem to be marginal in the life of African Catholicism. This is because of the sad ecclesial drought of inactivity

in the areas of inculturation of the local churches in Africa. In most cases, these local churches are strangled by rules and guidelines from Rome and seem incapable of creativity and innovation in meeting the local challenges and pastoral opportunities of the times.

Creativity and innovation in African Catholicism will require more than seminars, synods, and statements by episcopal conferences. The prophetic witnessing required in meeting the challenging social context in which most Catholics in Africa live will demand more than good homilies, soothing Lenten pastorals, and occasional letters and statements directed against the government. It will also go beyond the uncritical assumption of an African *ubuntu* or of the Africa in which life and family are revered and where community is primary.

Indeed, creative and transformative ecclesiology in Africa will require a more direct harvesting of the riches of the faith through a living faith in communion with a learning faith for all members of the church that brings about authentic and credible witnessing to the Catholic faith through experiential and contextual faith in action. It will require some measured experimentation led by the Holy Spirit and some courageous steps by local parishes and dioceses in liturgical and pastoral faith formation. It needs fully engaged laity who are respected as adults in the church with significant contributions to make beyond financial contributions or receiving honors and awards. Above all, it will require clearly planned integrative steps for deep faith and spirituality, social transformation, wealth creation, and social engagement. This I believe will produce giant Christians and transformative Catholic churches in Africa that are signposts to other communities of faith and nonfaith of how to live together as salt and light in diverse societies in Africa.

The fifth factor is concerned with the status of Catholic bishops in Africa as vicars of Christ rather than legates of Rome. Contrary to the teachings of Vatican II,² most Catholic bishops in Africa see themselves as vicars and legates of the pope instead of the vicars of Christ. Their fidelity to Rome has been elevated to a metaphysics. Doing the will of Rome—whatever that means—or “according to the Holy Father” has become an art and

² “The individual bishops are the visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular churches, which are constituted after the model of the universal church; it is in these formed out of them that the one and unique Catholic Church exists” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 23).

sometimes a veneer laid over glaring pastoral failures on the part of many Catholic bishops in Africa to become true shepherds of the local church where the Catholic Church is fully present according to the teaching of *Lumen Gentium*.³

What Rome says becomes a convenient excuse offered by many Catholic bishops to legitimate concerns about the use and abuse of ecclesial power and authority and the ongoing concerns about accountability and transparency in the use of the spiritual and temporal treasures of the church (*Afflictae Munnus*, no. 104). African bishops should not shirk their responsibility through appeals to Rome in matters that lie within their competence, especially now that Pope Francis is asking local churches to do more in being creative, faithful, and transformative in meeting local pastoral challenges and opportunities (*Evangelii Gaudium*, nos. 32–33, 129). In the church led by Francis, Rome wants to know what the local/particular church wants for itself and how to support it in doing so. Rome wants to live fully the principle of subsidiarity—one cannot take away from a local church and place in the hand of Rome that which the local church can handle on its own.

How Did Pope Francis Emerge?

Pope Francis did not just drop down from heaven. He exemplifies the kind of local church in which he was socialized. He is the product of the Latin American church, which championed the theology of accompaniment of the poor through the theology of liberation. He emerged from a Latin American church that pioneered grassroots evangelization and an activist faith formation of the people through small Christian communities truly rooted in the living faith experience of the people and popular piety.

The church that gave us Pope Francis has many challenges, as do other churches in many parts of the world. However, it is a church that bears the marks of humility and still carries the wounds of being battle tested through prophetic witnessing and courageous confrontation with the worst forms of dictatorship in Latin America. Such a church immediately marginalized those clerics who kowtowed to the oppressive regimes of the times or who were more interested in the hierarchy of power and authority than they were in embracing with humility the privilege of service.

³ See also *Lumen Gentium*, no. 21.

This is also a church that walked with the poor and is always socially engaged while shunning any form of compromise with the state or being a client to the officers of the state or a beneficiary of the filthy lucre that is often given by corrupt government officials.

Pope Francis is also the product of a church that became the voice of the people not only through the kind of theologies and theologians it produced but also because of the relevance of their theologies to the most pressing questions and challenges confronting the people. Pope Francis is the product of a church whose legitimacy was validated by the credibility of the simple lifestyle of the Catholic hierarchy, clergy, and religious.

We are told that when Pope Francis was a cardinal, he took public transport, cooked his own meals, and so on. One can recall the powerful statements of the Latin American church at Medellín (1968—*The Church in the Present Transformation of Latin America in Light of the Second Vatican Council*), Puebla (the third general conference of the bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, January 28, 1979) and the Aparecida document (May 29, 2007). Pope Francis refers to this document that he helped draft more than ten times in *Evangelii Gaudium*. I am not aware of documents from SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) that have had such a powerful and lasting impact in the shaping of African Catholicism that their promulgation is celebrated annually. What is the input of African bishops to *Ecclesia in Africa* or *Affricae Munus*? Can African Catholicism claim ownership of these documents? How is today's African Catholicism being led by the teachings, principles, and recommendations of these two synods?

My concern here is that the church in Africa would have given the world a pope who would not be like Pope Francis but who would bring the blessings and the limitations of African Catholicism to global Catholicism. How that could have played out is purely academic. However, I argue that the church in Africa has all it needs to begin the journey to becoming the kind of church that will help provide answers to the pressing questions in the hearts of many Africans.

The church in Africa is richly blessed by God to seize the moment of grace in our times toward the realization of the eschatological fruits of God's kingdom in Africa. Indeed, it is possible in our times for the church in Africa to become truly African and truly Catholic through a faithful commitment to the implications and challenges of these dual identities.

The Ecclesiology of Pope Francis as Rooted in *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8, and *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1

Pope Francis highlighted three key dimensions of Catholic ecclesiology in his words and deeds since becoming the bishop of Rome. One was an understanding of the church as a dynamic and diverse people of God called to communion of the Trinity with each other in the church and with the world and the cosmos. These people of God are led by the Spirit on a pilgrimage toward the realization of God's reign on earth. The beauty of these chosen people is reflected in the diversity of experience and expression of the selfsame faith in multiple ways.

The second dimension was an understanding of service in the church as an act of humility modeled after the example of Christ and the instrumental nature of all service in the church. The third dimension was the image of the church as the church of the poor and guardian of humanity and of creation. This image of the church is grounded in Vatican II's ecclesiology of the church. Pope Francis is not writing a new text for a new ecclesiology; rather, he is giving a practical application and concrete interpretation of the ecclesiology of Vatican II through his pastoral style, priorities, and mission.

Pope Francis's ecclesiology is an exegesis of *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8, and *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1, because following these important conciliar documents, Pope Francis wants a church that speaks of God and points toward Christ instead of a church that points toward itself. In addition, he wants a church that speaks of mercy and the eternal word of love spoken from the cross rather than a church bogged down by laws and prescriptions. He wants a church that cries out for justice for the poor more than a church that is enslaved by its systems and structures. The identity and mission of this kind of church could be summarized through an interpretation of the ecclesiology presented by the conciliar fathers in *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8:

1. Christ is the one mediator who established and ever sustains the church on earth; this society is structured in a hierarchy of service so that truth and grace may be communicated to all people. Divine communication is central to the mission of the church, and it happens in the diversity of peoples and cultures through a "communion

rooted in the initiating action of the Trinity, in the Eucharist and in anthropology.²⁴

2. The church is incarnational and sacramental, a mystery of the people of God in history. Therefore, it bears the marks of the heavenly and the earthly kingdoms. However, there is no dualism between the sacred realities embodied in the church and its earthly life, nor should there be a separation between the sacred and the secular, the good sheep and the bad sheep, the rejected and the beloved, the conservative and the progressive.

The sacramental nature of the church and the existence of the church in time serve the church as an organ or instrument of salvation, and its structures are alive, not dead, because of the Spirit of Christ that vivifies the church. This instrumental nature of the church calls it and its members to a spirit of humility, mercy, attentive listening to what God is saying through the signs of the times, and a ready openness to God and to one another. This dual reality puts the church at the juncture of both mediating heavenly realities to God's people as well as communicating God's transformative grace to the concrete situations of sin, evil, joys, brokenness, poverty, pains, hopes, and fears of God's people in history, especially those on the margins.

3. The church subsists in the Catholic Church, but the mission of the church is not to determine those who are within the Catholic family but rather to attract many to this fold and to be open to those who may not belong fully to this church. Through washing the feet of a Muslim on Holy Thursday, for instance, Pope Francis was teaching us that we are all brothers and sisters. Above all, he was reminding Catholics that there are elements of sanctification and of truth found outside the visible structures of the church that call us to unity in seeking the things that hold us together rather than the things that divide us. I recall a saying attributed to Saint Augustine: "Many whom God has, the Church does not have; and many whom the Church has, God does not have."²⁵

⁴ Bruno Forte, *The Church Lion of the Trinity: A Brief Study*, trans. Robert Paolucci (Boston: St. Paul Books and Media, 1991), 74.

⁵ Quoted in Richard P. McBrien, *The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 135.

4. Jesus entered into the chaos of human life in the mystery of redemption in poverty and oppression; for this reason, the church is called to follow the same path so it may authentically communicate the fruits of salvation to people as authentic witness to the risen Lord. The church is not set up for earthly glory; ministries in the church are for service, and all ecclesial actions should be directed to God's kingdom and carried on in a spirit of humility, self-denial, and service.

When Pope Francis speaks of a bruised church, a poor church for the poor, or of a dirty and hurting church in *Evangelii Gaudium* or of the church as a "field hospital," he is not saying anything new but is emphasizing an ancient truth and spirituality we have forgotten in the complex cultural climate of our times.⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8, was unequivocal in this regard in what could be termed the guiding charter of Pope Francis's papacy.

The Church encompasses with her love all those who are afflicted by human misery and she recognizes in those who are poor and who suffer, the image of her poor and suffering founder. She does all in her power to relieve their need and in them she strives to serve Christ.

This same message is found in *Gaudium et Spes*.

The joy and the hope, the grief and the anguish of the men of this age, especially of those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation

⁶ The encyclopedic study by Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 350–550, shows the rise of the church in the West and how the self-understanding of the church as the poor church for the poor and the instrumental understanding of wealth in the church competed for and ultimately triumphed over all other forms of philanthropy in the West.

which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.⁷

5. The church's power and treasures are not in structures, institutional privileges, the Vatican bank, or in what Pope Francis calls spiritual worldliness. The last paragraph of article 8 of *Lumen Gentium* is clear that the church is a pilgrim and faces persecutions because it cannot be conformed to the ideals of the world but seeks consolations from God, as Saint Augustine says. The power the church should seek in humility is the one it gains by announcing the cross and death of the Lord and relying on the power of the resurrection for strength.
6. Pope Francis, therefore, is living the total ecclesiology of Vatican II, which was an attempt to locate the center of the church at the very heart of the Trinity, to see our membership in the church as a call to be totally available to God, and to be open to listening to what God says to us about the church rather than what we say about the church. So for Pope Francis, it is not the church we want but rather the church God has given to us through his Son, led by the Holy Spirit. It is an invitation to be open to others and to the world and to find through the heightened attention that comes to the humble of heart the way the Spirit opens to us into the future.
7. The central ecclesial action of such a church is mercy, not judgment.⁸ The church is both the object and subject of mercy.⁹ The message of mercy has always been at the center of the church's preaching. In his

⁷ *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1.

⁸ In his address to participants in the plenary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization (October 14, 2013), Pope Francis taught: "We need Christians who make God's mercy and tenderness for every creature visible to the men of our day. We all know that the crisis of modern man is not superficial but profound. That is why the New Evangelization, while it calls us to have the courage to swim against the tide and to be converted from idols to the true God, cannot but use a language of mercy, which is expressed in gestures and attitudes even before words."

⁹ Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*, trans. William Madges (New York: Paulist Press, 2014), 157–80. On page 157, Kasper wrote, "The church encounters Christ himself in its own members and in people who are in need of help. The church is supposed to make present the gospel of mercy, which Jesus Christ is in person, through word, sacrament, its whole life in history, and the life of individual Christians. However, the church too is the object of God's mercy."

opening address at the start of Vatican II, Pope John XXIII pointed out that whereas the church would always oppose errors regarding the faith, in the past, it did this

with greatest severity. Nowadays, however, the spouse of the Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations.

John XXIII said that the church expressed through the council a desire "to show herself to be the loving mother of all, benign, patient, full of mercy and goodness toward children separated from her."¹⁰ This is indeed the church of Pope Francis!

The Renewal of African Ecclesiology in the Spirit of Pope Francis

The renewal of African ecclesiology in the spirit of Pope Francis can be accomplished through many ways. However, I have proposed three ways of being church that should be present in the pastoral priorities and practices of the church in Africa. I have termed this a "triple A" ecclesiology, namely, an ecclesiology of Accountability, a pastoral theology of Accompaniment, and a spirituality of Action.

An Ecclesiology of Accountability

The biblical images for this proposal are from Saint Peter's call (1 Peter 3:15) to Christians to always be ready to give an account of the hope and faith they have embraced, the parable of the steward (Luke 16:2), the parable of the talent (Matthew 25:14–30), the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1–23), the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin (Luke 15:1–10), and the good shepherd analogy (John 10). Three things among many in these three passages help guide pastoral action and methods in ministry.

Accountability in scripture begins with recognizing that all good things around us, including the church, are gifts we have received in earthen vessels

¹⁰ Quoted in McBrien, *Church*, 159.

(2 Corinthians 4:7). Stewardship of these treasures requires affirming constantly their source and the model we have received from the Lord on how to live faithfully and fully the reality of these gifts. The Lord is the owner of the vineyard, the Lord is in charge, and the Lord is the one whose *logos* is our being; this *logos* is our mission and our ultimate destiny.

We are servants, not masters in the vineyard (Luke 16:2, 17:10; Romans 1:1-4). The Lord has given to the church in Africa the gift of faith and has planted in Africa different seeds of the Word. One can think of the rich spiritual, temporal, and cultural gifts of Africa and how we can ground our church life on gratitude, adoration, and praise. Therefore, it is necessary to begin African ecclesiology with fundamental questions: What is the Lord telling us through what is going on in our churches and wider societies in Africa? What does the Lord want us to realize in the church in Africa using the gifts God has given, especially the gift of his Son, who is the concrete norm of life for African Christians, and the gift of the Spirit, who continues to sustain the faith in Africa by giving comfort, strength, courage, and hope to many weath-er-beaten African faithful? How are we managing these gifts and temporal resources of the church? Are all the priorities and practices in our churches gifts from the Lord? How do we discern in the midst of our churches and the cultural shifts of our times what is of the Lord and what is not of the Lord?

Accountability in scripture also underlies the decisiveness of human agency, human freedom, and human cooperation with God in bringing about in history God's plans for Africa through the enthusiastic and unfailing faith of African Christians. It implies that a dialectic of relationship, partnership, cooperation, participation, and stewardship exists between the human subject and God and with creation. God's plan is not a magical irruption of the kingdom upon unwilling and disobedient children. On the contrary, it is the gradual emergence in history of God's kingdom through men and women who respond to God's initiative with full obedience and who work with God freely in realizing the divine purposes.

Thus, if we are singing today of the exponential growth in the church in Africa in terms of numbers, institutions, personnel, and so on, the question should also be asked about how the African church is harvesting the rich gifts of faith in our land through these channels. How have we used the talents of our laity, our priests, hierarchy, men and women religious, and our strong African women of faith who flock to our churches, chanceries, and rectories? What account do we give to the Lord of the rich cultural tradi-

tions of Africa and the rich history of our continent and its rich resources? In many instances, most of these gifts have not been well used to bring about human and cosmic flourishing and the eschatological fruits of God's kingdom.

Accountability as presented in scripture also speaks of the sad reality of division, loss, and despair. In the parable of the good shepherd and the lost coin, we see the grief of the master when he took stock of his treasures and his flock, and the grief of the woman, when she realized her loss. Here, one sees a link between this biblical insight and our ecclesial reality in Africa. I refer to the experience of those who are inside and those who are outside: those who are accounted for because they are in the house and those who are lost; those who are saved and those who are damned; those who are on their way to the Promised Land and those who are lost in the desert; those who are right and those who are wrong; those who are beloved and those who are rebels; those who are poor, voiceless, and powerless, and those who are rich and powerful.

An accountable church in Africa would also be concerned about what Africa is losing to global capitalism, of the wealth, resources, and talents of this continent that are being drained from Africa, and the thousands of refugee Africans who are dying and drowning as they flee across the Sahara or the Mediterranean.

This also brings to the fore the divisions in our churches and the needed reconciliation in the church in Africa. When the Second African Synod (2009) called for reconciliation, it was inviting African Christians to heal the wounds of division in our churches and wider society and to bring everyone home. This will require that all Christians are transformed into disciples of reconciliation while churches create through their pastoral plans and priorities a church of communion and of the Eucharist, where everyone can eat at the same table.

There should no longer be any Lazarus left at the gates of divine mercy and God's love in the church of the family of God. We must give account of the many Abels who are being slaughtered in violence, hatred, wars, terrorist attacks, and crimes; of the many Rachels whose children are dying of diseases or starving to death because of hunger, famine, and dislocation in refugee camps. We must give account to the Lord and to the poor in Africa of the many donations and grants that church officials ask for or receive in the name of the poor but that in some cases are diverted or misused.

We must also give account to the Lord not only of those who are with us in every sense of the word but also of those who are not with us—divorced and separated Catholics, Catholics who are denied communion because of their marriage situations, our brothers and sisters from other denominations and from other faiths, those who have left our churches, the married priests and nuns, the abused and violated, those searching for their sexual or ethnic identities, and so on, and all those who are far from the home of the family of God.

The church in Africa must be a sign, symbol, and agency for hope for those who are outside, the minority ethnic groups, the marginal groups, and those who are condemned to die due to poverty, starvation, Ebola, HIV/AIDS, or neglect.

Pope Francis is reaching us that everyone counts and that we should not count anyone out whom God counts as belonging to God. It is no longer the kind of membership but the degree of belongingness to the church that should be decisive in an African ecclesiology grounded in Vatican II and the Trinitarian origin of the church.

A Pastoral Theology of Accompaniment

Pope Francis wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 169, of “the art of accompaniment” as the pastoral approach that would bring us closer to each other in solidarity; heal divisions, ethnocentrism, and nepotism; and cure the ailments of negative ecclesial spirit of rank segregation. This way of living would make the church a center of love and intersubjective connection, participation in the life of all, and communion with God, especially commitment to those who are poor and on the margins.

Bruno Forte argued that the Catholicity of the gospel message referred to the total ecclesiology that touched all the dimensions of the life of the Christian called to love and embrace the Word, the grace of God, and the gift of the church. According to him, every local church

must be a *travelling companion* [my emphasis] of the people to whom it proclaims the Word of God, so that the Gospel may be interlaced with the daily deeds of fraternity, where love becomes concrete and credible in the sharing of day-to-day life and in the choices taken on the side of the poor and the little ones of the earth.¹¹

Among other practices, Pope Francis recommends that we remove our sandals before others because when we come into the presence of another—no matter how weak or vulnerable—we must remember we are standing on holy ground. This accompaniment requires humility, listening to the other person, honest communication, conversion, openness of heart, and genuine spiritual encounter.

At the heart of this pastoral presence is the incarnational principle of totally identifying with other people, especially those in need, to experience what they are experiencing by a pastoral attitude of vulnerability. This is what Pope Francis highlighted in a speech to newly appointed bishops on September 19, 2013, when he taught that the art of accompaniment requires pastoral presence that has the following characteristics:

- (1) becoming pastors who have the smell of the sheep because the priests and bishops are in the midst of the people as Jesus was with his disciples;
- (2) walking together in love, knowing that ministry in the church is a service or office of love (*amoris officium*) as Saint Augustine pointed out. In this light, the priests and bishops who serve the people of God are not above the people of God:

The bishop journeys with and among his flock. This means setting out with one's faithful and with all those who turn to you, sharing in their joys and hopes, their difficulties and sufferings, as brothers and as friends, but especially as fathers who can listen, understand, help, and guide.¹²

- (3) Pope Francis also teaches that it is only through pastoral accompaniment that the leaders in the church can discern the *sensus fidei*, *sensus fidelium*, and *sensus fidei* of the people of God.¹³
- (4) *Walking together* also challenges pastoral workers to *work together* in helping one another, asking and receiving forgiveness, acknowledging

¹² Pope Francis, *Church of Mercy*, 86. He elaborates further on this in the same speech when he wrote, “A pastoral presence means walking with the People of God, walking in front of them, showing them the way, showing them the path; walking in their midst, to strengthen them in unity; walking behind them, to make sure no gets left behind, but especially, never to lose the scent of the People of God in order to find roads.” (See also *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 31.)

¹³ Pope Francis, *Church of Mercy*, 76.

¹¹ Forte, *Church Icon of the Trinity*, 76.

one's mistakes and limitations, and building flexible and open structures of accountability to one another and unity and love in the local churches. (5) The pastoral theology of accompaniment is the invitation to enter into the life of the poor, to move from providing social services, social activism, and social empowerment to psychosocial encounters that lead to social transformation. This way, the church in Africa can become an instrument for building on the spiritual and material assets of the poor rather than attending only to their needs, and the church can strengthen the poor to take ownership of their lives and future. This requires being present to the poor as they are present to us.

Many gulfs separate people in Africa, including the lack of physical, social, and spiritual proximity between the churches and the poor in many of Africa's cities. Accompaniment is being at home with the poor and making a home for them in our churches and homes. It is the mutual indwelling of hospitality between two people who see God's presence in each other no matter how diverse their social status or economic or spiritual circumstances are.

Accompaniment also reflects the African sense of community and interconnectedness of all things through a vital union of participation. This reflects the inner harmony that comes about when we walk together for justice to reign on earth so all creation can enjoy the abundant life and peace in Christ (John 10:10). To borrow a phrase from US theologian James Keenan, when we enter "into the chaos of another's life" through a vulnerable mission, heaven floods our souls and God's kingdom begins to emerge in a renewal of creation. Roberto Goizueta wrote,

As a society, we are happy to help and serve the poor, as long as we don't have to walk with them where they walk, that is, as long as we can minister to them from our safe enclosures. The poor can then remain passive objects of our actions, rather than friends, *companeros* and *compañeras* with whom we interact. As long as we can be sure that we will not have to live with them, and thus have inter-personal relationships with them, we will try to help "the poor"—but, again, only from a controllable, geographical distance.¹⁴

¹⁴ Quoted in Michael Griffin and Jennie Weiss Block, eds., *In the Company of the Poor: Conversations with Dr. Paul Farmer and Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 130.

A Spirituality of Action

A spirituality of action requires the church in Africa to move from words to deeds, from ecclesial claims to ecclesial witnessing. It also challenges the church in Africa to conversion from glorying in the growth of Christianity in Africa or the majesty and splendor of our Catholicism and the solidity of our institutional prerogatives as the true apostolic church to showing through authentic and credible ecclesial being and deeds that we are living in the light of Christ. It involves performance, praxis, testimony, witnessing, martyrdom, and sacramentalizing what we profess.

African Catholic ecclesiology should be grounded in theological aesthetics that embrace the church and creation as gifts that we have received by seeing reality as filled with the splendor and love of God as revealed in Christ through the Holy Spirit, and theodrama, that is, seeing things as they have been saved and transformed in Christ through the Paschal mystery that is continued in the mission and ministry of the church in history. It should also be grounded in a transformative spirituality of action or deeds to change reality through an ecclesial mission modeled and renewed constantly through the priorities and practices of Christ to bring abundant life to God's creation and thus realize the will of God.

As Hans Urs von Balhassar proposed,

Following Christ, which has become possible through his self-surrender, will not consist in doing some right thing but in fundamentally surrendering everything, and surrendering it to the God who has totally emptied himself so that he can use (that right thing) for the world according to his own purposes.¹⁵

Living like Christ is the goal of all ecclesiology, and invariably, it is not our words and our claims that change people but our credible living out of the gospel.

This essay holds an intrinsic tension, in that I have considered African Catholic ecclesiology instead of African ecclesiology. I am not a prophet, but I believe the reality facing Africa today is a new realization that the

¹⁵ Quoted in Roberto S. Goizueta, "Theo-Drama as Liberative Praxis," *Cross* 1 (Fall 2013), 70.

denominational boundaries and exclusions we inherited in Africa from the West will need to collapse as we walk together to the future.

Maybe in the years to come, Africa will be a model of the new church of Christ in which there will be no more Catholics and Anglicans, no more Charismatic and non-Charismatic Catholics, and no more walls separating the traditional orthodox churches from African initiatives in Christianity. It may seem like a long journey in coming, but the convergence of meaning and the greater impulse and influence of cultural grammar in the shaping of Christian consciousness in Africa will lead to the realization of the common spiritual heritage and religious values that point toward a greater discovery of common grounds among all African Christians.

When I watched Pope Francis embracing a rabbi and an imam in front of the Wailing Wall, something told me that living in such a way was possible not simply as an external gesture but as the full realization of the Trinitarian origin of the church. I have tried to demonstrate how we can show the face of this God to Africa through an ecclesiology of accountability, a pastoral theology of accompaniment, and a spirituality of action following the examples of Pope Francis.

MILESTONES IN ACHIEVING A MORE INCISIVE FEMININE PRESENCE IN THE CHURCH OF POPE FRANCIS

Joseé Ngabula

The apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* includes several assertions that have generated much joy and hope in the Catholic Church. One is:

But we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church. . . . The presence of women must also be guaranteed in the workplace and in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures. (no. 103)

What can this mean in Christian communities today, especially in Africa? In my experience, I found that this expansion of opportunities must take urgent priority in the minds, attitudes, and hearts of males and females alike in our Christian communities. This happens at least at three levels: in relation to cultural prejudices, the relationship within the meaning of *fidelium*, and in relationship to the wounded hearts in the church.

Making Progress by Not Projecting Cultural Biases into the Biblical and Magisterial Texts

The texts affirming the equal dignity of men and women in the church are not rare but many.¹ But in pastoral practice, things happen as if these

¹ At least ten theological documents of the Catholic Church affirm the dignity of the woman, including Pope Paul VI's *The Place of Women in Society Today* (1975),