

# **“ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH”**

## **Challenge and Celebration of Global Catholicism**

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## Introduction

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Catholicism is, in its essential nature, a global faith. The very word “catholic” implies a faith all-inclusive in its outreach to the peoples of the world. The belief that God’s salvific intentions encompass every human person is based not only on the biblical texts that explicitly state this, but also on the very meaning of the gospel message, that is, that an all-inclusive, communion-creating love wells up from the depths of the Triune God and flows out to the very ends of the earth.

What this means becomes more vividly impressed on our minds, hearts, and imaginations as globalization increases our connections with the peoples and cultures of our world. An honest encounter with cultures other than our own also brings a heightened awareness, not only of how the Christian faith has spread and embodied itself in myriad cultures, but also of how that expansion has at times come at the cost of the violation of peoples and cultures, and of the earth itself. It is to be hoped that the past can teach lessons for building a more positive future. We are at a historic crossroads, a potential moment of grace: How will we chart our course going forward, in living out a faith that is truly global—in a world that is powerfully connected, yet deeply divided—in fidelity to the authentic meaning of “catholic”?

The intention of this volume and the convention on which it is based is to explore, not only implications of and needed responses to that very broad question, but also what “global Catholicism” means, in the concrete ways in which it exists in the twenty-first century. This exploration is necessarily open-ended and will not be concluded here, but possible directions for the future will be considered.

The themes of “challenge” and “celebration” were deliberately chosen, to highlight significant elements to attend to, with regard to global Catholicism. “Challenge” and “celebration” are in tension, yet complement each other, and both are rooted in the gospel. The definite article was, also deliberately, left out of the subtitle of the volume, to emphasize the openness: there is no one-and-only that constitutes either “the” challenge or “the” celebration of global Catholicism. The possibilities are endless.

“Challenge” may be taken in at least two broad senses, summed up under the headings of “challenge to” and “challenge by.” What are the challenges presented *to* Catholicism by the world of the twenty-first century? These include the call to acknowledge the tragic legacies of a Christianity imposed by force under colonial expansion, with the insistence that its Western European form was normative for all times and places—to the devastation of non-European cultures and traditions. These include, as well, the call to learn what it means to be a faith that is inculturated among all the peoples of the world, to learn from, and be enriched by, myriad cultures, and to find new ways going forward that are truly inclusive of all. And, not least, “all the ends of the earth” evokes the reminder that being truly “catholic” implies responsibilities, not only toward all the peoples of the globe, but also toward the precious gift of the earth itself.

What are the challenges to be presented *by* the Catholic faith to the world at this juncture in its history? This question concerns the imperative to witness to the values of the gospel and to stand against the violation of all of God’s creatures, wherever this occurs around the globe. But it is also a challenge to be offered in humility, love, and companionship, acknowledging that we are fellow-pilgrims on a journey toward all that God’s creation was meant to be.

“Celebration,” as well, is intended here in at least two broad senses. Exploring the global dimensions of Catholicism ought to lead to a profound appreciation of the many ways the beauty of the faith has been embodied throughout history in peoples, places, and cultures. The inexhaustible richness of their perspectives and lived experiences is to be treasured, shared, celebrated, and welcomed into the mission of building up the Reign of God.

But what is perhaps most to be celebrated is the divine gra-

sciousness that grounds this richness and this history, including its present challenges. We are graced to be participants in the unfolding of God's plans of love for the human race and to be called to work in hope toward the culminating celebration of that love.

Our convention on global Catholicism was planned in the hope of raising up challenges facing twenty-first century Catholicism, as well as the vast richness to be celebrated. An intentional decision was made to invite theologians from the Global South as our plenary speakers, in the hope of affording our Society's theologians—most of whom are from the Global North—the opportunity to listen to, and to dialogue with, voices from other sectors of the Catholic world. We invited them to speak from the perspective of their own experiences of Catholicism in their own lived contexts. This provided the opportunity to learn from our sisters and brothers around the globe and to celebrate our one faith together.

This volume is organized according to the themes emphasized by our plenary speakers. Maria Clara Lucchetti Bingemer opened our convention by a reminder of what is central to the gospel, the “nonnegotiables” of Christian theology, justice and peace. Her lecture brings a Latin American perspective to the crises facing our times, and particularly the crisis of the identity and credibility of Christianity itself. Responding to these and finding God in the midst of their challenges is to be done by walking with the “little ones,” just as the Incarnate One did, and as the Latin American bishops called the church to do at Medellín. Impelled by the “urgency of love,” Bingemer writes, Christianity offers the mystery of “solidarity and communion,” if the followers of Jesus “refuse to give up on investing in bold initiatives to build justice and peace.”

The essays in Part I explore various dimensions of this imperative of justice and peace. Perhaps no symptoms of injustice today are more massive and portentous than the migration crisis and environmental destruction. In “A Green Church on the Move,” James Dechant demonstrates that the two are closely linked, since destruction of land, resources, and food supplies has forced migration on vulnerable populations. He notes that “place” is essential to shaping our embodied being, and that loss of place threatens personal and cultural identity—as happens

under colonization and forced dislocation. The church is called to acknowledge this loss and its cost, and to “listen to the voices of ecological refugees,” because the places of the earth, and those who live in them, *matter*.

Continuing the theme of the intertwining of ecological and social justice, John Sniegocki’s article places the work of Vandana Shiva, an ecofeminist activist and scholar, in dialogue with Catholic social teaching, particularly Pope Francis’s *Laudato Si’*. Though there are convergences in their thought, especially in faulting the mind-set that reduces the earth to a resource to be exploited and that undermines the interdependence of living beings, there are also significant ways that Shiva’s more detailed analysis of critical issues and attention to the lived experiences of women extends and deepens Francis’s teachings.

Daniel Rober brings the thought of Argentine scholar Walter Mignolo into dialogue with that of Pope Francis. The former argues that the modern West has left a legacy of “dark deeds” that victimize the darker peoples of the world, as attested by the slave trade and the extermination of native peoples in the name of colonial projects of “progress.” Mignolo’s concept of “cosmopolitan localism,” entailing “communal nodes” that cooperate from the local level—rather than the center-periphery model—has both important convergences with and divergences from Francis’s ideal of synodality. Both offer needed correctives aimed toward subverting an (ecclesial) paradigm that maintains the distinction between the center and the periphery, with its attendant privileging of the former.

Tracey Lamont’s essay titled “Postmodern Theological Curriculum Theory” follows this up by calling attention to the vulnerable “other” to be found in our very classrooms. It raises the important question about the assumptions that underlie even the way we teach Christian theology. Every teacher—indeed, every person of faith—needs to be aware of our built-in biases and to make a hospitable place for difference to be honored and respected.

Sister Shalini Mulackal offers a view of the state of Catholicism in India and sets the tone for Part II’s theme of negotiating borders and barriers. Her survey reminds us that Christianity was already an ancient religion in India, prior to the arrival of Western Europeans. Over the centuries, Indian Catholics have

found ways to coexist with other denominations and other faiths. Today, as a religious minority, their situation is tenuous, and, as with Christians throughout the world, they are called to address situations of injustice, sometimes even within the church itself. Their experiences shed light on pathways toward negotiating borders with the “other” and surmounting barriers to communion.

The other essays in Part II reflect on the theme of negotiating borders and barriers in various ways. Michael Hahn’s essay points toward some hopeful possibilities for global Catholicism. He sheds light on how to negotiate the tension between safeguarding ecclesial communion and expanding and deepening that communion through authentic synodality. His explanation of key characteristics of such synodality suggests hopeful pointers going forward that can complement the ecclesiological vision of Pope Francis and “reshape ecclesial communion.”

Stewart Heatwole takes up the important matter of inculturation as another avenue of possibilities for the global church. But he cautions against confusing inculturation with “cultural appropriation.” Using examples from Saint Paul’s dialogue with the Athenians, Heatwole lays bare the dialectic between “cultural appropriation” and inculturation, providing guidelines for recognizing and avoiding the former and supporting the latter.

In her research that resulted in the essay “West African Catechists,” Maureen O’Brien investigated the real-life experiences of those who carry out an essential ministry. Her report includes segments of interviews that tell a story of the liminal nature of their status in the church and the challenges they face in navigating the borders between lay and ordained ministry, between their communities and the clergy—challenges, we might note, that play out in many settings across the world church.

Paul Schutz draws from the work of the Jesuit astronomer and philosopher of science William Stoeger to shed light on the vision of “splendid universal communion” described in *Laudato Si’*. In light of Christianity’s historical links with colonialism and environmental degradation, Schutz goes beyond Stoeger to locate in Buddhism a “hierarchy of compassion” that can be a resource for addressing Christian relations with native peoples and the natural world. He concludes by reflecting on how a Christian appropriation of these pristine Buddhist ideas might

become an act of atonement for the sins against native peoples and the environment.

The heading of Part III, "Following the Footprints of God," is drawn from Stan Ilo's plenary lecture titled "Reform from the Margins." Although they overlap with themes from the other sections, the essays in this section also bring our attention to the on-the-ground ways that Christianity is lived in the margins, on the borders, and in the everyday lives of ordinary Christians throughout the world. They underline the call to be attuned to what voices that are not at the ecclesial center have to tell us, as we explore anew what it means to be a world church.

Stan Chu Ilo argues against a static form of Christianity. He cautions against maintaining the old brand of Christianity, that is, a European-dominated Christianity overly concerned with ecclesiastical power and domination. Contemporary church reform will come to naught if its priorities continue to be shaped by this mentality. But Ilo thinks there is a way forward. To this end, he draws attention to signs of reform taking place outside the West and particularly in the Global South. He highlights the need for a "liberation historiography" that reverences the voices in the margins and calls us to a conversion from Western Christianity's "cultural hubris." Ilo argues for a reform that begins at the grassroots, that is open to the complexities presented by sincere listening to and presence to the lived experiences and sufferings of those outside the centers of power, and, especially, that is ready to "follow the footprints of God" among the peoples in the margins of the world.

Popular piety is of great significance in the lives of many of the world's Catholics, especially of those on the margins. Wilson Angelo Espiritu deals with a number of the misunderstandings and criticisms that have been leveled against popular piety, and argues that its practices can embody an authentic, lived relationship with God as well as provide fertile ground for movements of liberation.

Gregory Aabaa's essay returns to the theme of ecological crisis and how to ameliorate it. He argues that the Catholic faith must be open to a polyphony of voices, particularly the voices of indigenous peoples, such as the Akan of Ghana, who have a well-developed spirituality that guides their relationship with

the environment. Catholicism, he argues, has a lot to learn from this native African wisdom with respect to eco-cultic practices.

In “Decolonizing Ourselves,” Linda Land-Closson reminds us that “Northern Hemisphere Catholics” tend to forget that we are shaped by our dominant Western anthropology, with its values of colonization: independence, autonomy, dominance, and invulnerability. She raises the question of how well that anthropology coheres with the gospel, in addition to reminding us that it is not shared by everyone (or even the majority) in the global church. We would do well to learn from alternative models that underscore our essential relatedness—even with its attendant, and necessary, openness to suffering.

The final set of essays are from a panel on the work of the late ethnographer and anthropologist of South Asian religion Selva J. Raj. Although one of the themes of the panel participants is “transgressing boundaries and crossing borders,” also emphasized in Part II, they have been placed here as a way of gathering up many of the strands of this volume and of leaving us with the call to attend to and honor the myriad voices and cultures of global Catholicism, and particularly, those at the margins. Reid Locklin introduces the panel by noting the significance of Raj’s work and its attention to the popular practices of Indian Catholics. Raj was critical of favoring expressions of faith and forms of inculturation that are imposed from the top down over those that arise from the grassroots of lived faith.

The other panel essays attempt to develop implications of Raj’s work for “a theology of the world church.” Annie Selak describes how Raj is a faithful exemplar of the theological vocation, precisely because his “being present” to lived experience and to the reality of liminality was a faithful witness to the mystery of God in the diversity and complexities of the human situation. Susan Bigelow Reynolds examines Raj’s analysis of shared ritual, especially as practiced at the grassroots level by Catholic and Hindu worshippers, for its potential as “embodied dialogue” that builds relationships, more than dissolving differences. Finally, Mary Beth Yount highlights Raj’s critique of prioritizing the concerns of the ecclesial center over those of the faithful at the margins of power and privilege. She extends his ideas to argue for an ethics of “radical particularity” that requires actual presence among those



in the margins and empowering the organic development of faith initiatives and “decision making at the most local level possible.”

All of these are valued voices in a conversation that continues to unfold. It has no conclusion now; that is yet to come. We wait together in hope. May we be good listeners, faithfully heeding the promptings of the Spirit to be heard in *every* voice.