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"GO OUT TO THE HIGHWAYS AND HEDGES" (cf. Lk 14:23): PERIPHERAL ECCLESIOLOGY, THE ART OF ACCOMPANIMENT, AND STREET HOMELESSNESS.

Michael M. Canaris, Ph.D.

AN OPENING WORD

There is a danger in too blithely stringing together the buzzwords of this remarkable papacy: "missionary discipleship," "culture of encounter," "a poor Church for the poor."¹ In so doing, one can easily gloss over the radicality of the pope's vision. Yet, the pilgrim People of God journeying together ("caminando juntos"/ "synodos") in history and to the margins of society is perhaps *the* essential ecclesial vision of Pope Francis, one deeply indebted to his formative years in contact with the Argentinian *teología del pueblo*, and the work of Lucio Gera, Rafael Tello, and Juan Carlos Scannone. This brief essay will analyze the ecclesiological priority of cultivating the art of "walking with" the vulnerable and marginalized as informed by these ecclesiological conversations, especially regarding those "with neither den nor nest" (Mt 8:20), the homeless who can sometimes seem alone in the streets, but are always journeying with the human family (and thus the Church, of which many of our unhoused brothers and sisters are a part) through history. Truly in many instances the most invisible – and thus too often treated as the most "disposable" – members of society, it is my assertion here that it is precisely in accompanying, ministering to, and learning from this population that the Church can better manifest the pope's favorite image of the ecclesial community, and his inspiring call to arms in combating the "globalization of indifference" (Francis, 2013, July 8).

CO-LEARNING IN THE LORD

In the early twentieth century, Yves Congar offered an ongoing recalibration of the *ecclesia docens* and the *ecclesia discens*, realities which had been increasingly bifurcated in the preceding two hundred years (Congar, 1964, p. 398-99). His holistic vision contrasted with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century articulations of the understanding of this relationship, for instance Pius X's (slightly later [1906], but of the same intellectual era) *Vehementer Nos*, which somewhat infamously described the Church as "essentially an unequal society, that is, a society comprised of two categories of persons, the pastors and the flock, those who occupy a rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful... [T]he one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow the pastors" (Pius X, 1906, February 11). An article of this type and length is not the appropriate forum to contextualize this comment historically or to defend the unique prerogative and mandate of the episcopate in the Catholic tradition, realities which I respect immensely, but feel are misconstrued and tarnished by such a short-sighted and dismissive ecclesiological claim. Yet, Congar's contributions, along with Jesuit theologians like Francis A. Sullivan and Ladislav Orsy (1987),² helped articulate a vision of the Church that was able to move beyond such unhelpful binary understandings of the relationship between active-teaching and passive-learning cohorts within the Church. This was, of course, *ressourcement* more than innovation,

as the legitimate pluralism inherent in such an approach to the pedagogical and receptive dimensions of communion has ancient roots, as does a working understanding that all in the Church are called to be both learners and teachers, both disciples (*discipuli*/pupils) and apostles (*apostoli*/envoys). The Second Vatican Council can be seen as an illustrative golden example of this rediscovered mutuality of exchange, where the bishops in many ways sat at the feet of and drew upon the expertise of the *periti*. Such willingness to recognize the contributions of all³ within the community was a monumental re-discovery of a whole-body approach which has had a lasting impact on contemporary ecclesiology. Theologians and historians increasingly realize that it was the ultramontanes' paternalistic view of the laity, not ours or Congar's, that was anomalous.

I begin my reflections by highlighting this historical moment and its connection to our contemporary context precisely because the heritage of this reimagined and rediscovered co-learning Church has applicability to the population we are exploring together in this volume, those members of the human family who are among the most vulnerable on the planet, that is to say, homeless men, women, and, all too frequently, children. The essay will proceed to connect the disparate but converging ecclesiological streams of Pope Francis' vision of the art of accompaniment, the *teología del pueblo*, and Vincentian spirituality. It will close by offering some potential lessons the unhoused can provide for the wider Church. To be authentic to the missiological vocation out of which its fundamental existence flows, I here argue that the Church not only *needs to provide for* such human beings. Rather, and much more simply, the Church *needs* them.

UPENDING THE PYRAMID

The institutional ecclesiology present in the earlier Pian approach described above can clearly be termed both hierocratic and pyramidal. In reserving the teaching, pastoring, and governing functions to a select few in positions of power, such a model can today be recognized as a

societas inherently *im-perfecta*. It situates power and agency in a distorted view of the *munus docendi* and *munus regendi*, whereby only Church "officials" have an active role to play. Rather, as Ormond Rush points out, "The whole People of God is to participate in this teaching office, albeit in different ways and with different kinds of authority... The lay faithful's interpretive sense of the faith as they apply the Gospel to daily life is an important engine in the ecclesial transmission of the faith and, as such, must be allowed to contribute to, in some way, the formal judgment and the official formulation of Church teaching... To speak of the teaching office of the Church only in terms of official formulation, proclamation, and adjudication by the hierarchical magisterium is, therefore, reductionist" (Rush, 2012, p.97).

Pope Francis has explicitly and repeatedly critiqued any vision of the Church as holding the ordained above or vis-à-vis the wider faithful, and especially as distanced from the marginalized or outcast. Clericalism and careerism have consistently borne the brunt of his antipathy throughout his time as pontiff. In an enlightening address commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, he commented:

Jesus founded the Church by setting at her head the Apostolic College, in which the Apostle Peter is the "rock" (Mt 16:18), the one who must confirm his brethren in the faith (Lk 22:32). But in this Church, as in an *inverted pyramid*, the top is located beneath the base. Consequently, those who exercise authority are called "ministers", because, in the original meaning of the word, they are the least of all. It is in serving the People of God that each bishop becomes, for that portion of the flock entrusted to him, *vicarius Christi*,⁽²⁰⁾ the vicar of that Jesus who at the Last Supper bent down to wash the feet of the Apostles (Jn 13:1-15). And in a similar perspective, the Successor of Peter is nothing else if not the *servus servorum Dei* (21). (Francis, 2015, October 17)

I see reference to the Argentine *teólogos del pueblo* as influential here, and their shared ecclesiological perspective as directly applicable to global homelessness. In prioritizing the People of God at the top of this inverted pyramid, instead of as the passive remainder concept of the non-ordained, the pope has placed bishops, priests, and ministers as undergirding systems of support for the inherent mysticism incarnated in the lowly, as the *Aparecida Document* names it (§263), not dutiful foot-soldiers of the hierarchy tasked with dispensing doctrine and grace from oligarchical stockpiles. The Pian ecclesial model has not been discarded *en toto*, but rather turned on its head as it were.

The People now are given rightful prominence as the recipients to whom the Good News has been offered, and to whom the divine self-communication is addressed. Scannone, drawing on insights from Gera and Tello, has written about the ambiguity of this term (“People”⁴) in reference to the *teología del pueblo*. Ambiguous “not for its vacuity but for its wealth of meaning” as he puts it. He asserts that the “plural unity of a common culture, rooted in a common history, and projected forward toward a shared common good” can in fact be found in a profound and incarnational way amidst the marginalized, who “hold on to the historical memory of the People, and ensure that the interests of the People coincide with a common historical project of justice and peace, given that they may live in an oppressive situation of structural injustice and institutionalized violence.” Therefore in his context – Latin America – “the option for the poor coincides with the option for culture” (Scannone, 2016, p. 118-135).

This is a vital connection to our project at hand in this essay, namely to think ecclesologically about the relationship between the Church, “the household of God” (1 Tim 3:15) and those who are unhoused, for any length of time. The *Aparecida Document*, in whose construction then-Cardinal Bergoglio was instrumental, speaks directly to this relationship. In its steadfast demand for the missionary disciple to promote full and flourishing human life, and for the works

of mercy and charity to “go hand in hand with the pursuit of true social justice,” (Latin American Episcopal Conference, 2013, §385) the statement enjoins its readers to be “travelling companions” to the poorest, “even as far as martyrdom” (§396). It connects this clarion call explicitly with the street homeless in sections 407-410. There the Christian community is called to offer immediate care where needed, but also to “deal with the causes” (§408) of the issue, so as to more fully encourage “participatory development projects in which [the homeless] themselves become active agents in moving back into society” (§407). Globalization has moved beyond oppressing and exploiting this population. Today they suffer a more devastating fate, “social exclusion” (§65), which can be read as being stripped entirely of this agential potency. They are no longer merely victims, but are rather viewed as “surplus” and utterly “disposable.” (§65). In my words, not the *Document*’s, they are in effect deemed to be *ex-humans*, in the etymological not chronological use of the prefix.⁵ They are interpreted to be “outside the human,” and as no longer even belonging to society. Homeless men and women are thus all too commonly treated accordingly by those with social stability and/or influence, whether that be in interpersonal settings, or in policy-making decisions.

TO THE ENDS OF POVERTY AND BEYOND

The counter-witness to which Christians are called resonates with the biblical image I have chosen to frame the title of this essay, where the Host of the Great Banquet instructs his servants to set out for the “highways and hedges” to compel those they find to enter the festivities. The most vulnerable and forgotten, the men and women who are *en camino* and not *en casa, sin techo* but never *sin dignidad*, the unsheltered and undefended, are given precedence over those elsewhere described as sumptuously stretched on ivory couches and eating their fill (Amos 6:4-7). Could any phrase better describe many of the urban metropolises with high rates of street homelessness than inebriated on the “revelry of the loungers,” as the prophet Amos puts it?

Remember that in Christ's parable, the ultimate attendees are not simply the indiscriminate "poor." Certainly, they are invited first, from the *plazas* and centers of activity in the towns, "the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame" (Lk 14:21). However, the servant returns and says "What you have ordered has been done, and yet still places remain" (Lk 14:22). So he is sent forth once again, to the extremities of those somehow even more excluded than these precarious categories of vulnerability. I suggest that it is precisely to the "socially excluded," to those perceived as *ex-humans*, that the servant, representing the whole body of the faithful present in the Church, extends the universal invitation, and through him/us that it is presumably accepted and received. Again, the mutuality of co-reception is emphasized here. The excluded on the lowest rungs of society receive those seeking them out on the streets, and the Host, along with his emissaries, receive into the celebrations those previously thought to be out of sight and of social consciousness.

Anyone who is even cursorily familiar with the initiatives and teachings of Pope Francis knows well his critique of the inert, static, or "self-referential" Church, his condemnation of a prodigal son or daughter approach to ecumenism and wider ecclesial realities, and his related encouragement to go out to the peripheries of human existence, both materially and existentially. All of these are found throughout his corpus, in both word and gesture, and particularly powerfully in seminal form in the pre-conclave intervention that proved so influential to the cardinal electors before choosing him to serve the universal Church as the local Bishop of Rome in 2013.⁶ Those who study the pope's thought at a deeper level are likely also aware of his critics' charges that his agenda is couched in what they condemn as "vague" notions of "accompaniment," "mercy," "discernment," and "listening." Instead he should, they feel and point out stridently, be focused more on things like "conversion," "clarity," "truth," and "teaching."

But Francis continues to move forward, giving life and flesh to an ecclesiological interpretation of

the Second Vatican Council where the "medicine of mercy" (John XXIII, 1962, October 11) is dispensed not from a sanitized sanctuary, but in the *campos* and *calles* of a "field hospital" (Spadaro, 2013, September 30).⁷ All of this can be read as echoing the conciliar fathers' decision to place the chapter on the People of God ahead of that devoted to the subset of the hierarchy in *Lumen Gentium*, as Ormond Rush and Myriam Wijlens have highlighted (Wijlens, 2017; Rush, 2009, p. 187). Francis has consistently brought the language of the "santo y fiel pueblo de Dios" ("the holy and faithful People of God") to the forefront of public consciousness and discourse during his pontificate, in a way largely unrivalled since the council. Along with the bishops and theologians, the People are then an integral part of the triad of voices of the *sensus fidelium*, and need to be respected as such. (The former two obviously also being members of the latter!)

Though both Carlos Maria Galli and Pascal Bazzell have highlighted the homeless in their work revolving around Latin American and urban ecclesiologies respectively, relatively little has elsewhere been written on the intersection of the street homeless with the Church, beyond the ubiquitous if nebulous mandate to care for "those in need," a superficiality I accuse neither Galli nor Bazzell of displaying. A few recent dissertations by Tobey O. Pitman and Roddy Keith Youree⁸ explore some ethnographic research with homeless populations, and David Nixon's biographical studies read through a theological lens provide a sophisticated entrée into the conversation (Nixon, 2013). Yet this important if underpublicized vein of study needs the theological support and specificity that the conference in which this volume is rooted had as its goal, that is to say an intentional commitment to contemplating anew the existing resources and deeper Catholic engagement with homeless men and women; a population that Bazzell (2015) – along with Spencer Cahill and Lyn Lofland (Cahill & Lofland, 1984)⁹ – crucially identify not as a disparate cacophony of anonymity, isolation, impersonality, and menace, but instead as a "community." Thus,

my interest lies in contributing an explicitly *ecclesiological* perspective to complement the sociologists', ethicists', and moral theologians' indispensable reflections on the dialogue between the Church and those dwelling on the streets. I want both to situate this community in, and offer them as uniquely and irreplaceably important representatives of, the People. This includes the related but not coterminous "People of God" and "People of the culture(s) in which they live."

Oftentimes true reforms come from the "protagonism of the peripheries and the peripheral" (*protagonismo de las periferias y los periféricos*) as Galli insightfully draws from Congar's *True and False Reform of the Church* (Galli, 2017, May). We are in a position today across the globe where individuals of every ideological persuasion or theological bent agree that reform is necessary in various contextual spheres: political, economic, social, ecclesial, curial, and pastoral to name but a few. I am in this note then building upon such claims that are latent within the *teología del pueblo* to encourage the ecclesial community to turn to the "community of the streets" as a new *locus theologicus* where this protagonism can be found.

Rafael Luciani cites Pedro Trigo's interrogation of the systems, be they socio-economic or ecclesial that ignore those on the peripheries.

The established order has no place for a decent life for most of the *barrio*: neither material space nor working conditions, nor recognition, nor services... It simply isn't that there's no place, but that the established order positively states that there isn't, that it is superfluous, that it would be better if they went away, that they will not find work, that they don't have the minimum requirements for getting married, that it is irresponsible for them to bring children into the world, that there are no places for them in hospitals, nor water, nor electricity for them, nor schools for their children, that they are parasites, that they ought to go

somewhere else. That is, life is positively denied them. They are deprived of it. (Luciani, 2017, p.47)¹⁰

One is perhaps reminded here of Hannah Arendt's famous formulation of those lacking "the right to have rights." The *teología del pueblo*'s answer to such a challenge is a re-imagining of the entire activity of the Church, which exists in this perspective to convert us not only to God, but also to our brothers and sisters in the human family. As Luciani puts it, "This new universal mode of being Church, manifested in conversion to the other as brother/sister, is embodied in the route of the poor" (Luciani, 2017, p. 48). Only in this new ecclesiological attitude can one recognize those without material possessions as true and full agents in the Kingdom of God, as a "People who can humanize us with their own values and gifts" (Luciani, 2017, p. 48). The Church does not serve primarily as the "voice of the voiceless," but rather exists so as to put us in conversation with those heretofore silenced but existent and legitimate voices of the oppressed and forgotten, so that they too can teach, convert, and serve as the "cantors of the universe" (Heschel, 1966), along with the rest of the human race. As we have seen above, the homeless still in too many ways remain outside of or parallel to this well-trod "route of the poor," that has inspired so much theological and social action in recent decades.¹¹ Little is made of the membership of many of the street homeless in the Church, and less of their capacity to offer something of transformative value to their housed brothers and sisters.

FROM VINCENT TO THE CATACOMBS

One of the great insights of Vincentian spirituality is a movement away from service to a fetishized "noble poor," heroically if inconspicuously virtuous in their deprivation, toward a mission to *all* of those who suffer. Vincent recognized that there are no unspoken qualifiers in Matthew 25 to visit the imprisoned *who are unjustly accused*, or to care for the sick *without addiction or mental health issues*. We do not feed and clothe and bathe and attend to those *who deserve it*, or who share our societal norms and values. "For if you love

those who love you, what credit is that to you?” (Lk 6:32; Mt 5: 46).

The central Vincentian virtues of simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification, and zeal¹² have ecclesiological cognates in the Church’s approach to the global homeless population. If the Church is going to embody the inverted pyramid and dialogical ecclesiology as a “poor Church for the poor,” as Pope Francis has encouraged, it will by necessity be called to embody these qualities of self-sacrifice and dynamism to share the “joy of the Gospel” and the “balm of Gilead” to those of *our human family* who are wracked and wounded by the systems of exclusion in society, and sadly even in currents of the Christian community. It will without question and unceasingly have to reach out and allow itself to be transformed by those among us deemed to be *ex-human*.

Cardinal Walter Kasper has highlighted the importance of the document that has come to be called the Pact of the Catacombs in the ecclesiological vision of Pope Francis. Though it is an understudied element forgotten in too many of the ongoing initiatives exploring the official and unofficial histories of Vatican II, the original text signed in 1965 at the Catacombs of Domitilla as the council came to a close contained a pledge by many of the bishops gathered to reject wealth, ostentation, and privilege and to serve “the two-thirds of humanity who live in physical, cultural, and moral misery” by supporting “urgent projects” at the local level and adopting “economic and cultural structures” at an international level which can contribute to the agency poor countries ought to be living out to move to “free themselves from their wretchedness.”¹³ While – like so much else of the increased attention on liberation in theological circles in the last fifty years – the signatories framed the comments in terms of those generally destitute or impoverished, their agenda is not unrelated to the global scourge of homelessness.

Closely connected to the Pact is a thematic reproach of “spiritual worldliness” to which both Kasper and Francis have repeatedly returned. The pope has condemned its perniciousness in

Evangelii Gaudium and in his comments to the 36th General Congregation of the Jesuits, where he cited both Paul VI and DeLubac as warning it to be “the worst temptation that can threaten the Church” (Kasper, 2015, p. 71). He says elsewhere “We need to avoid [this potential malady of worldliness or *spiritus vertiginis*] by making the Church constantly go out from herself, keeping her mission focused on Jesus Christ, and her commitment to the poor. God save us from a worldly Church with superficial spiritual and pastoral trappings! This stifling worldliness can only be healed by breathing in the pure air of the Holy Spirit who frees us from self-centeredness cloaked in an outward religiosity bereft of God” (Francis, 2013, November 24, #97).

Note that even the imagery he uses seems to prefer the open airs of the “streets” to the relative security of the “structures” of the Church. When read through the commitments made in the Pact of the Catacombs, which has so obviously inspired Pope Francis’s approach to the Petrine ministry, the condemnation of material and spiritual worldliness calls the Christian community to a new relationship with the vulnerable. While most identified with the Ignatian and Franciscan spiritual traditions in which he is steeped and claims to find explicit inspiration, Pope Francis is here also quintessentially Vincentian.

TOWARDS AN ECCLESIOLOGY ATTUNED TO THE “COMMUNITY OF THE STREETS”

For those who dwell in the precarious liminality of homelessness or the “community of the streets,” a Church, even a well-intentioned one, which talks *at* them instead of walking *with* them remains at best an elusive and sometimes enigmatic resource for triage involving material, social, or psychological aids when emergency situations demand it, and at worst a patronizing intrusion into the already difficult realities which only intensifies the exploitation, marginalization, and victimization of the unhoused.

But if the community of the Church instead puts accompaniment and co-traveling intentionally at the center of its mission, if it reaches out to those

that are not only deprived but systematically excluded and dehumanized, then the whole body of the Church can in fact *encounter* and *accompany* the homeless not only to “help” them but to “learn from them.” This is the true essence of peripheral ecclesiology. Breaking bread with heretofore rejected and oftentimes physically, psychologically, and spiritually wounded men and women is utterly different from ladling them soup, or holy water. Every believing member of the community needs to become vulnerable enough to allow him- or herself to be taught and transformed by the weakest among us, by those on the edges or outside many familiar traditional boundaries, even those on the edges or outside of the conventional standards of poverty.

The poor, and *a fortiori* the homeless, both contribute to and play an integral role within the culture in which they live. They are themselves “agents of evangelization and of comprehensive human promotion” (Latin American Episcopal Conference, 2013, §398). We return then to the Congarian dynamic with which I opened this essay. Those without housing are not merely to be envisioned as the passive objects of other’s paternalistic kindness, Christian charity, or the touchstone papal theme of “mercy.” The learning Church waiting to be instructed or changed. Rather, as Francis writes in *Evangelii Gaudium*:

They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the centre of the Church’s pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom

which God wishes to share with us through them.

(Francis, 2013, November 24, #198)

We must move the Church ever-closer to those viewed as *ex-human*, in an effort to humanize not only *them*, but in so doing the entire *community* – most especially those housed members of it – so as to more perfectly reflect the superabundance of the divine as a People. For God searches out and receives humanity to Godself endlessly, and the transcendent is never ultimate confined to the House of God, nor to the housed.

An important process here is the movement from social exclusion to *integración*, and the related integral ecological and human development. The pope has contrasted such movements toward development with “the atrophied system” we face today, with its economic, technical, and efficient advancements serving merely as “cosmetic implants” that dehumanize the vulnerable in a “a dizzying whirlwind of waste” [*vertiginosa dinamica dello scarto*] (Francis, 2016, November 5). Again, as above, we see the pope’s partiality toward linguistic constructions that highlight these “vertiginous” realities that we face. In such a system, when the limits of social exclusion are reached, as oftentimes is the case with homeless populations, human beings go from being disregarded to discarded.

SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Luciani makes an insightful ecclesiological claim in *Pope Francis and the Theology of the People*:

The global situation thus poses a new challenge to the ecclesial community: to rethink its sociocultural location from the peripheries, because it is from there that the Church may again become a credible sign – there, where the excluded of all kinds, including those who are ecclesiastically excluded, are to be found... [It] must reject any self-referentiality and let itself be evangelized by the poor. That means being a Church that can no longer understand its relationship with the world

solely from the standpoint of what it offers sacramentally. (Luciani, 2017, pp. 86-87)14

This recalibration of the Church's posture away from one identifying *merely* as a repository of goods to offer to those dispossessed of any riches, whether material or spiritual, is a vital one. A co-learning, co-traveling Church is one attuned to the protagonism and agency of the most excluded. This does not negate the truth that the Church does in fact have something to offer to cultures and individuals. But we must recognize the demands of our day require us to bring forth from the storehouse things both old *and* new, both familiar *and* trailblazing (Mt 13:52). It is an admission that the People of God can never be reduced to one homogenous and homogenizing identity, but rather must always exhibit a polyhedral character reflecting "the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness" (Francis, 2013, November 24, #236).¹⁵ The People, as with the Church itself, ought ever more perfectly to manifest its authentic *rostrum multiforme*, its many-faceted face (Scannone, 2015, February 13). Yet, it remains for all of us to realize that that face may in fact be covered in grime or missing a few teeth or perspiring on a sweltering park bench or shivering beneath a ramshackle cardboard lean-to in a *villa miseria*.

It is self-evident that one cannot preconceive with clarity and thoroughness what the unhoused (whether baptized or not, whether participating in the liturgical life of the Church or not) can teach their fellow human beings. But we can, perhaps, envision a few potential paths where such a project of accompaniment and co-learning may be fruitful, without falling into pious but hollow platitudes. Three come immediately to mind.

First, those living in the community of streets can perhaps help the Church re-appreciate anew both the community's and every individual's radical dependency upon God. This is a delicate lesson, for I am referring to a *theological* sense of dependency, rooted in creatureliness, not a

socio-politico-economic one reliant upon the "charity" of the housed, which would subvert the entire point of this reflection. Homeless men and women are dependent upon no other human being for authentic agential potency. But many could teach Christians profound lessons about the fragility, transitoriness, and futility of human accomplishment. The Church would do well to be reminded of the sentiments of Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem, whose toppled edifices of grandeur can speak to many ecclesial and capitalistic priorities of our day: "My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;/ Look on my Works, ye Mighty and Despair!/ Nothing beside remains. Round the decay/ Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare/ The lone and level sands stretch far away." The futility of the pride, vanity, and self-absorption with which the Church and society have been so tainted in our age may in fact be best critiqued by those deemed invisible by just such systems of exclusion and pomposity those huddled among the ruins of systems enamored with pageantry and their own fleeting magnificence.

Second, one can anticipate hearing a prophetic witness to the lived reality of integral ecology in a way foreign to many practicing Christians, who are more familiar with a wasteful overabundance of resources and sanitized separation from the sick and dying, than we are with being at the mercy of earth's relentless retaliation for the suffering and defilement we inflict upon it. In one sense, no one knows our planet's potential for destruction better than the poor and displaced who disproportionately shoulder the burden of climate change and the intensity of weather-related carnage. Perhaps from such a perspective, the housed are far more removed from intimate knowledge of our common home than are those who experience with immediacy the danger of its most violent extremes. The Church may in fact be more capable of offering viable paths to live out our responsibilities of stewardship and eco-justice if the voices of the homeless and displaced are better represented in our discourse.

Lastly, if we take Pope Francis's call to cultivate the art of accompaniment seriously, we must

reflect upon the aesthetics demanded by and present within such a reorientation, and their intersectionality with issues of global homelessness. We must realize that this mission presents us not only with a technical, practical, or skill-based approach to such co-journeying, but also provides a commentary on what it means to contemplate beauty in unforeseen ways. Dorothy Day and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, no strangers to suffering themselves, agreed that ultimately “the world will be saved by Beauty.” Grace Giradot, a colleague involved in homeless ministry in Chicago seemed to echo such sentiments when she shared with me a particular affinity for Ralph Waldo Emerson’s phrasing that “Earth laughs in flowers.” Pondering such a statement led her to reflect upon the beauty experienced by the unmediated *encuentro* between her students and the lives of those on the streets:

Especially here in Chicago, we experience many grey days – days that are monochrome in ways other than just the color of our environment. Our friends on the streets are the flowers along each of our paths. As we are in our normal routines, walking down Michigan Avenue perhaps, we see the beauty of our friends through a conversation with them. We let their beauty move something in our spirit, and perhaps the exchange is mutual. In fact, I know it is when our friends on the streets say that they have been worried about us with our finals, or when they express their joy to see us again as old friends having a weekly visit. Whether the encounter is full of joy and laughter, or full of sorrow, the connection that we make with our friends on the streets also serves as a moment of hope and a symbol of our shared humanity to both ourselves and those who pass us by. These relationships serve as a symbol of connection, not only to each other, but to our greater Chicago neighborhood and this specific geographical location. As you go out tonight, consider your time with our friends on the streets as adding colors

of joy and hope to the monochromatic cityscape, not only for those involved in the encounter, but also the community of

passersby. Allow yourself to be present to the laughter, that is, the joy and beauty, of our friends on the streets, ourselves, and this moment of mutual conversation and relationship building.

The Church, long a patron of the arts and humanist flourishing, albeit also a witting accomplice in many of the historical realities that birthed the most vile social ills of our day, must now re-commit itself to the promotion of the intrinsic connection between the beautiful and the good, that is to say between God, as the necessary condition for the possibility of beauty, (Vladesau, 1999) and the call to recognize the presence of that Beauty in the outcast.

In conclusion, as Vincent puts it, the communal dimension of living the Gospel together “is the wine that cheers and strengthens travelers along this narrow path of Jesus Christ.”¹⁶ We are called to co-journey on that narrow *camino* together, with those perhaps already forced or choosing to dwell there for days or years in the “community of the streets,” and who have, it would appear, much to disclose to their brothers and sisters of the human and Christian family about the way.

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NOTES

¹ For consistency with many of the sources I draw upon, I have chosen to capitalize the words “Church” and “People” throughout. Both of these are to be interpreted as broadly as possible, and in no ways as endorsing denominational or populist exclusion of any kind.

² See for instance Francis A. Sullivan, *Creative Fidelity: Weighing and Interpreting Documents of the Magisterium* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996); *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist, 1983); and *The Church We Believe In: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988). My own monograph on Sullivan, *Francis A. Sullivan, S.J. and Ecclesiological Hermeneutics: An Exercise in Faithful Creativity* (Brill, 2017), may be of some small service in understanding his immense contribution. Orsy’s most pertinent book on the topic is *The Church: Learning and Teaching – Magisterium, Assent, Dissent, Academic Freedom* (Wilmington, DE: Glazier Books, 1987).

³ I recognize here that most feminist, liberation, and LGBTQ theologians would hold this “all” to be a growing edge for Christianity.

⁴ One would be remiss not to make the connection between “*pueblo*” and the biblical “*anawim*,” both of which connote a particular attention for the vulnerable and disenfranchised.

⁵ There are obvious resonances here with Gutiérrez’s consistent diagnosis that our era’s central theological problems do not concern “non-believers,” so much as “non-persons.” Cf. *La Fuerza Histórica de los Pobres*, (Lima: CEP, 1982), 77.

⁶ The handwritten notes of this short talk released by his colleague Jaime Lucas Cardinal Ortega y Alamino, then-Archbishop of Havana, Cuba are available here: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/17/popes-handwritten-notes-2013-speech-cardinals-now-published/>, accessed 17 May, 2018.

⁷ Pope Francis used this in his interview “A Big Heart Open to God,” with Antonio Spadaro, S.J., *America* 209, 30 September, 2013. He’s continued to use this metaphor throughout his pontificate.

⁸ Cf. Tobey O. Pitman, *Developing a Strategy for Congregationalizing Homeless People at the Brantley Baptist Center in New Orleans, Louisiana* (doctoral dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004) and Roddy Keith Youree, *Developing a Church-Based Model for Relational Ministries Among the Homeless* (doctoral dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), both cited in Pascal D. Bazzell, *Urban Ecclesiology: Gospel of Mark, Familia Dei, and a Filipino Community Facing Homelessness*, (New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015), 20, n69.

⁹ Bazzell cites their research, *Urban Ecclesiologies*, 19.

¹⁰ R. Luciani is here citing P. Trigo, “La cultura en los barrios,” *Revista SIC* 507 (1988): 294.

¹¹ Of course, I see Luciani as an ally in this application of the term, not one oblivious or opposed to it.

¹² Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission, II, 14. Cf. Anthony J. Dosen, “Vincentian Education and the Charism of St. Vincent de Paul,” *Catholic Education* 9 (2005): 47-55, at 52.

¹³ The full text is available in a variety of languages at www.PactoftheCatacombs.com. Forty-two bishops were present at Domitilla to sign it. Eventually over five hundred added their names.

¹⁴ This quotation includes an embedded reference by the author to the *Aparecida Document*, §550.

¹⁵ This consistent theme of the *teología del pueblo* is explicated in various places by Scannone, and particularly well by Emilce Cuda. Cf. *Para Leer a Francisco: Teología, ética, y política* (Buenos Aires: Manantial, 2016), 103-13.

¹⁶ Letter of Vincent to Hugues Perraud, 15 October 1651, as cited in Robert P. Maloney, CM. “On the Vincentian Family,” *Vicentiana* 41 (1997), available at <http://via.library.depaul.edu/vicentiana/vol41/iss2/11>

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