

## **Toward a Vibrant Church:**

### **The Ecclesial Visions of Cardinal Bernardin and Pope Francis**

Catholic Common Ground Initiative Spring Lecture

March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015

#### **INTRODUCTION**

2015 marks an important moment in the life of the church. As the Jesuit historian John O'Malley, SJ has pointed out, it often takes fifty years for the depth of a council's teaching to be fully received by the people of God. I can think of no clearer proof of this than what the Holy Spirit is doing with Pope Francis, the first pope ordained to the priesthood after the council, the first Jesuit pope, and the first pope from the Americas. In both word and deed, Francis, like Joseph Bernardin, embodies Vatican II's vision for a vibrant church, a vision that is at once faithful to the Catholic tradition *and* responsive to the needs of world.

But *what exactly does the council's vision for a vibrant church look like fifty years later?* Drawing from the ecclesial visions of both Cardinal Bernardin and Pope Francis, this paper will address this question in three steps. I will begin by briefly identifying three global social sins that underscore the continued relevancy of the council's vision. I will then highlight four characteristics or "marks" that are common to both Francis and Bernardin's ecclesial vision. And I will conclude by offering a few concrete suggestions for how this vision can be lived out today.

## **I. A WORLD IN NEED OF A VIBRANT CHURCH**

Much to the surprise of those who plan and follow papal events, Pope Francis's first official visit outside of Rome was to Lampedusa. The pope's request to visit the Italian island came at the last minute following the recent deaths of desperate migrants seeking refuge in Europe on overcrowded and dangerous boats. For the last several years, the small island, which is closer to North Africa than continental Europe, has witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of migrants fleeing dehumanizing conditions. Closer to home, we too see the reality of desperate migration as hundreds of thousands of human beings, including thousands of unaccompanied minors, have crossed into the United States irregularly with great personal risk. In 2014 alone, nearly 5,000 people are believed to have died on their journeys across seas and deserts around the world.<sup>1</sup> If the first few months of 2015 are any indication, we will likely surpass that number this year.

The drama of desperate migration in places like Lampedusa, Malta, El Paso, and the Australian coast illuminates the dark side of our present global reality. While globalization is deepening human interconnectedness it is also leaving far too many people on the margins of society. From a theological perspective, three deeper dimensions of this global reality surface. Each one of these social sins challenges the church to respond.

First, despite our interdependence, globalization is making it easier for us to detach ourselves from the sufferings of those near and far. In his homily at Lampedusa,

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<sup>1</sup> "IOM Director General Calls for Action to Save Migrants Lives on International Migrants Day 2014" (International Organization for Migration, December 16, 2014), [www.iom.int](http://www.iom.int).

Pope Francis introduced a phrase to describe this trend, a term that has become a major theme in his social teachings thus far. Drawing on the biblical account of Cain and Abel, the pope condemns what he describes as “the globalization of indifference,” an attitude which prevents people from responding to the plight of their brothers and sisters.<sup>2</sup> Even if people see the suffering of others, they appear unwilling or unable to do much to address it. “The culture of comfort,” the pope laments, “makes us live in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are insubstantial; they offer a fleeting and empty illusion which results in indifference to others.”<sup>3</sup>

This globalization of indifference is closely linked to our highly individualistic mindset and is evident in our recent failures to effectively respond to the humanitarian catastrophe in Syria and the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. For months we have seen the sufferings of people on news reports from the comfort of our own bubbles, yet have done very little to address it. This trend is deeply concerning. As Bernardin pointed out decades ago, the exaggerated sense of individualism and its social corollary in national isolationism not only cut us off from others, but ultimately it cuts us off from God and

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *Visit to Lampedusa: Homily of Holy Father Francis* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*; See also Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), no. 54, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

our deeper selves. Such a mindset, he writes, is “incompatible with human community and Christian faith.”<sup>4</sup>

This indifference relates to a second social sin of globalization, what Francis describes as the “throw away culture.” In a highly consumeristic society, everything, including human beings and the rest of God’s creation are reduced to “consumer goods to be used and then discarded.”<sup>5</sup> In many ways, this “throw away culture” stands in stark opposition to the consistent ethic of life that Cardinal Bernardin championed. Rather than seeing all persons as endowed with dignity and rights, human beings are treated as objects or collateral damage in our own quest for success. This is particularly deadly for the poor, the elderly, women, the disabled, the unborn, people of color, undocumented workers, and those who have different religious or political viewpoints. It also has taken its toll on our planetary ecosystem, which bears the scars of human exploitation.

Together, the globalization of indifference and throwaway consumerism are ingredients in a deadly recipe that reinforces a third global social sin, the rise in ideological polarizations. Social, political and religious polarizations, as we know, were a major concern for Bernardin who worked tirelessly for dialogue both inside and outside

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Bernardin, “The Family Gathered Here Before You (1989),” in *Selected Works of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin*, ed. Alphonse P. Spilly, vol. 1: Homilies and Teaching Documents (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 57.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 53.

the church.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, polarization seems to have intensified in the United States and in the church since Bernardin's death. Politically, this has almost paralyzed our government from responding to the demands of the common good. In the church, ideological polarizations continue to divide Catholics from one another.

At its worst, ideological polarizations can lead to expressions of violence and extremism. While our attention in recent months has been on religious extremism in Islam, violent or radical extremist groups can be seen in Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and a new emerging ideology of anti-theism. Extremist groups of all types are aided by communication technologies, which make it easier to find and hold on to extremist positions, no matter how unreasonable they are. "Rather than challenging" the polarization that accompanies globalization as Vincent Miller points out, "the churches unfortunately conform to it."<sup>7</sup>

## II. FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF A VIBRANT CHURCH

How ought the church respond to these global social sins of indifference, consumerism, and polarization? Here, both Cardinal Bernardin and Pope Francis offer challenging ecclesial visions that call us to transform our global reality. In preparing this presentation, I have been struck over the past several months by the profound similarities

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Bernardin, *Faithful and Hopeful: The Catholic Common Ground Project, Address, Chicago, Illinois (October 24, 1996)*, ed. Alphonse P. Spilly, vol. 2: Church and Society (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Vincent J. Miller, "Where Is the Church? Globalization and Catholicity," *Theological Studies* 69, no. 2 (May 1, 2008): 417.

between these two Christian leaders. Beyond their shared experiences of being sons of Italian immigrants and metropolitans of major sees in the Americas, Bernardin and Francis have remarkably similar visions of the church and its role in the world.

For the two leaders, the Catholic Church has both an enormous potential and responsibility to be actively involved in transforming a world divided by sin and injustice. Our commitments and fidelity to the good news of Jesus Christ, they both insist, demand that the church respond to the social conditions of the world.<sup>8</sup> In his pastoral letter on the church, *The Family Gathered Here Before You*, Bernardin speaks directly to this “Catholic potential:”

the Catholic Church now has an opportunity enjoyed by no other community or organization in the world. It is the opportunity to influence for the better the values, attitudes, and structures of the whole human family...As the earth continues to “shrink” and becomes a “global village,” the Church as an important role to play, bringing the message of Jesus Christ to bear upon a new era in human history.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bernardin, “The Family Gathered Here Before You (1989),” 67.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 59; See also Joseph Bernardin, “A Vision of Church: Local Church and Universal Church, Address, The University of Mary, Bismarck, North Dakota (August 17, 1992),” in *Selected Works of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin*, ed. Alphonse P. Spilly, vol. 2: Church and Society (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 419.

But how do we do this? What does such a church look like today? Drawing from the teachings of Cardinal Bernardin and Pope Francis, I would like to identify four characteristics of a vibrant church today.

### **A. Evangelizing**

First, a vibrant church is an evangelizing church. Both Pope Francis and Bernardin insist on the centrality of evangelization to the Church's life and structure. To evangelize means to share the good news and teachings of Jesus Christ in the world. The gospel, as Francis reminds us, is fundamentally about the Kingdom of God, God's reign, which has already begun in history (Cf. Mk. 1:15).<sup>10</sup> "The kingdom is here, Francis writes, "it returns, it struggles to flourish anew. Christ's resurrection everywhere calls forth seeds of that new world; even if they are cut back, they grow again, for the resurrection is already secretly woven into the fabric of this history, for Jesus did not rise in vain."<sup>11</sup>

This is good news for those of us who know the sufferings of a world torn apart by sin, conflict, and division. The incarnation and resurrection that we celebrate each time we gather around the Eucharist table is good news. And with any good news we should want to share this with others. All the baptized are called to participate in the church's fundamental mission of sharing and celebrating this good news through both word and action. But we would never know this if we looked at many parts of the church today. How many Christians, how many parishes seem, as Francis laments, like "Lent

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<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 180.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 278.

without Easter.”<sup>12</sup> A vibrant church needs an approach to evangelization that is that is filled with joy, peace, and zeal for the Kingdom of God. We cannot evangelize, to quote Pope Francis, if we are “disillusioned pessimists, ‘sourpusses.’”<sup>13</sup>

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, the pope describes this call as a mandate to “go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the gospel.”<sup>14</sup> Making a similar point, Bernardin frames evangelization as “reaching out” to welcome those who are alienated from the church and from society.<sup>15</sup> How many Christians or church institutions are willing to go forth and reach out? Like all institutions, the institutions of the Catholic Church are naturally conservative. This, however, can be dangerous as it leads to what Francis describes as a “practical relativism” that ignores the presence of both God and people who are poor.<sup>16</sup> As people of the gospel we cannot ignore the presence of the living God and living people around us.

Since Vatican II the exact nature of what constitutes the church’s evangelizing mission has been a subject of intense debate. Broadly, we can identify two dangers. On the one hand, there is a risk of focusing only on the social dimensions of evangelization, what some have called “horizontalism.” Here, evangelization is reduced simply to action

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., no. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., no. 85.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., no. 20.

<sup>15</sup> Bernardin, “The Family Gathered Here Before You (1989),” 75.

<sup>16</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 80.



for justice, inter-religious dialogue, and charitable service.<sup>17</sup> All of these are important elements, but they easily fall apart without a spiritual and Christological core.

On the other hand, there is an opposing danger of focusing so much on the transcendent elements of evangelization that one neglects the social demands of Gospel. What I would call “verticalism.” Here, Jesus Christ is proclaimed but nothing is said about the poor. People are invited to come to the church but not challenged to act for the liberation of the marginalized. Like horizontalism, an approach to evangelization that neglects the marginalized and the reality of the world has little lasting substance.

Like the model of mission proposed by Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder in their book *Constants in Contexts*, both Francis and Bernardin challenge the church to adopt a holistic approach to evangelization that takes seriously the social and the spiritual demands of proclaiming the gospel.<sup>18</sup> In short, a vibrant church is a church that evangelizes by prophetically witnessing to the totality of the Kingdom of God, in both its social and spiritual content.

## **B. Enlivening**

Second, a vibrant church is an enlivening church. It is a community that is alive in the presence of the Holy Spirit who empowers the people of God to active participation

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<sup>17</sup> See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007), no 3, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>18</sup> Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

in both the church and in the world. It is a community that is continually nourished and supported by Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life (John 6:35).

In his address to the 1989 Parish Vitality Day, Bernardin described his dream of the parish as “a faith community where a new spring is ushered in so that new life can burst forth.”<sup>19</sup> This vision can also be applied to the church as a whole—a global community where new energy bursts forth in all sorts of ways from the creation of a local ministry for unemployed youth to advocacy efforts on behalf of Syrian refugees at the United Nations.

At its best, the Catholic Church is a life giving community. Think, for example, of the countless women and men who devote hours of their lives to church ministries or the thousands of vowed religious who dedicate their lives to mission. A vibrant church gives meaning and purpose to people’s lives.

For many others, the experience of the Catholic Church can also be life saving. For example, Cardinal Bernardin was a major champion of Catholic healthcare, which believed saw a concrete way for the church to live out its mission. Even in the United States today, Catholic healthcare ministries offer much needed treatment to under served populations. In a different, but still important way, the church’s spiritual counseling, quality education, charitable services, and advocacy for human rights can also be life

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph Bernardin, “A Pastor’s Vision, Parish Vitality Day, Address, Mundelein, Illinois (February 10, 1989),” in *Selected Works of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin*, ed. Alphonse P. Spilly, vol. 2: Church and Society (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 405.

saving to those on the margins of society. These are all signs of what a vibrant church looks like.<sup>20</sup>

What prevents us from becoming such a community? A living church is especially hampered today by social attitudes that seek to transform its members from active agents in evangelization to passive observers. In a consumer culture, it is not uncommon for the church to be seen as a service provider, more like a sacramental Wal-Mart than a community of believers alive in the Spirit. Consumer Christians “go to” church not to participate in the Paschal Mystery and the unfolding of God’s redemptive love, but often to feel good about themselves. Such an approach to Christian faith clearly reinforces the globalization of indifference that Francis decries.<sup>21</sup>

Like consumerism, clericalism also reduces the majority of Catholics to passive objects rather than active protagonists. In order to be a vibrant church, we need to realize, as Bernardin points out, that “we are the Church in the world today.”<sup>22</sup> Vatican II’s *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* makes this point even more directly. The Christian,

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<sup>20</sup> Joseph Bernardin, “Evangelization: Integrating Focus of All Ministry, Catholic Evangelization Association, Keynote Address, Chicago, Illinois (June 12, 1983),” in *Selected Works of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin*, ed. Alphonse P. Spilly, vol. 2: Church and Society (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 436.

<sup>21</sup> See William T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Bernardin, “The Family Gathered Here Before You (1989),” 44.

it teaches, who “fails to make their proper contribution to the development of the Church must be said to be useful neither to the Church nor to themselves.”<sup>23</sup>

This, of course, does not mean that there is no place for the ministerial priesthood, formal lay ministers, or bishops. Rather, it means rethinking church leadership in terms of pastoral service as Pope Francis repeatedly insists. Bernardin makes this same point in speaking about the priesthood. “The priest,” he reflects in a beautiful address, “is called to be a challenger, enabler, life-giver, poet of life, music-maker, dreamer of dreams.”<sup>24</sup>

In sum, a vibrant church is an enlivening church. It is a church full of creative initiatives and communities that burst forth into the world. A living church is a church where all members, empowered by the gifts of the Holy Spirit and sustained by the Eucharist, recognize themselves as active participants in the people of God. To paraphrase the *Epistle of St. James*, a church without active protagonists is dead (Cf. Js 2:26).

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<sup>23</sup> Second Vatican Council, “Apostolicam Actuositatem, The Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People (1965),” in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, trans. Father Finnian, New Revised Edition, vol. 1 (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1998), no. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Bernardin, “I Am Joseph, Your Brother, Homily, Evening Prayer with the Presbyterate, Archbishop-Designate of Chicago, Holy Name Cathedral, Chicago Illinois (August 24, 1982),” in *Selected Works of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin*, ed. Alphonse P. Spilly, vol. 1: Homilies and Teaching Documents (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 284.

### **C. Encompassing**

Third, a vibrant church is an encompassing church. It is a movement, which assisted by God's grace, unites a range of communities across time and space into one family, one body comprising of many different parts (Cf. 1 Cor. 12: 12-14). The vast array of people from all types of professions, ethnicities, classes, sexual orientations, and ages is a true blessing and richness for the church. Few organizations can claim such a wide-ranging membership. I was struck by this several years ago when the Catholic Common Ground Initiative organized a conference on inter-generational dialogue. It was truly amazing to see people from all ages and walks of life coming together to speak about their shared faith. It made me realize how few spaces we have in the United States for inter-generational dialogue.

Maintaining this unity in diversity, however, is not easy, particularly in a global culture that thrives on ideological polarization. In a culture of consumerism, it is tempting to seek out parishes and church groups which are "enclaves of the likeminded" where everyone looks, like you, votes like you, and speaks the same language.<sup>25</sup> Clearly, there are many pastoral benefits to ministries for targeted groups from a beautiful Mass in the Zairian Rite for Francophone Africans in Boston and a celebration of Las Posadas in Houston, to a specific program for Melkite teenagers in Detroit. But, there is always the danger, particularly given our human sinfulness, for these diverse expressions of faith to "lead to separation and even division...Instead of enriching us," Bernardin's pastoral letter on the church warns, "racial, ethnic, and cultural difference sometimes divide us."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Miller, "Where Is the Church?," 421.

<sup>26</sup> Bernardin, "The Family Gathered Here Before You (1989)," 52.

This is why, as Catholics, our attention to pastoral specificity must always be exercised through a lens of universality. The catholicity and unity of the church at the local and global levels, however, continues to be threatened by ideological polarizations, which in many ways are far more divisive than cultural differences.

For the late cardinal, ideological polarizations within the people of God, particularly when they are coopted by political and economic interests, is a serious threat to the vitality of the church. Polarization, he taught, “strikes at the very heart of the Church as a communion.... We cannot afford to allow the vitality of the Church to be further sapped” by extreme positions.<sup>27</sup>

But how do we address polarizations within the church? We cannot do it by imposing one model. As both Francis and Bernardin have made clear, ecclesial unity is not uniformity. Rather unity is found in dialogue, encounter, and hospitality to the so-called “other.” Importantly, their approach to difference does not seek to reduce the church to the lowest common denominator. Nor does do they seek to limit the conversation only to those in a supposed “middle.” Rather it is an approach that proactively goes out, like the good shepherd, to welcome everyone, including women and men who hold different visions of the church, and even those who have left the church completely.

Sadly, the call for dialogue, hospitality, and encounter is not very popular. Staunch ideologues who benefit from the status quo generally resist calls to dialogue. Bernardin experienced this after calling for the Catholic Common Ground Initiative and

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<sup>27</sup> Bernardin, “A Vision of Church: Local Church and Universal Church, Address, The University of Mary, Bismarck, North Dakota (August 17, 1992),” 422.

Pope Francis is experiencing this now. But this does not make this task any less important.

Bernardin sums this up well in a 1986 lecture:

It is not east to be a truly “catholic” Church. Catholicity is something given, a grace. But it is also something to be achieved in the future. It is both a tradition and a dream to be handed on. It has demanded and will continue to require great and bold efforts and sacrifice.<sup>28</sup>

A vital church, then, is an encompassing church. It is a community of welcome, encounter, and dialogue that gathers together people of different cultures, perspectives, and ages to the same banquet table. It is the church that we pray for when we sing the song *All Our Welcome* by Marty Haugen, a song that opened the installation Mass of Archbishop Blase Cupich.

#### **D. Eucharistic**

Last, but not least, a vibrant church is a Eucharistic church. The grace and blessing of the Eucharist is deeply connected to everything we do as a Catholics from our communal gatherings to our daily lives of discipleship. It is here that we experience in a profound way the person of Christ, the depth of divine love, and the reign of God.

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<sup>28</sup> Joseph Bernardin, “The Church in the Third Millennium: Age-Old Values and New Challenges, The Eugene M. Burke, C.S.P., Lectureship in Religion and Society, Address, University of California at San Diego, California (October 28, 1986),” in *Selected Works of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin*, ed. Alphonse P. Spilly, vol. 2: Church and Society (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 386.

Without the Eucharist, our evangelization and mission in the church would be empty and make little sense. The Eucharist, as Bernardin writes, is the “lifeblood of the Church.”<sup>29</sup> It is “a sign of and an initial participation in the heavenly banquet where we will be in total communion with God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”<sup>30</sup>

Vatican II, as we know, describes the Eucharist as both the “source and summit of Christian life.”<sup>31</sup> Again, we see here the power of the Catholic “and”— source *and* summit; fidelity *and* dialogue; horizontal *and* vertical; mission *and* institution; faith *and* action; unity *and* diversity; charity *and* justice, etc.

Forgetting the “*and*” in any of these pairs can get the church into trouble. If one perceives the Eucharist and the church’s sacramental life, as *only* the source of our actions and witness in the world, we risk ignoring the transformative role of our liturgical life. Like the starting point in a marathon, liturgy, prayer, and sacraments are too often left in the dust as we go on in our busy lives of taking care of our families, working for social justice, or in administering important, and no so important, church institutions.

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<sup>29</sup> Bernardin, “The Family Gathered Here Before You (1989),” 66.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Bernardin, “Christ Lives in Me (1985), A Pastoral Reflection on Jesus and His Meaning for Christian Life,” in *Selected Works of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin*, ed. Alphonse P. Spilly, vol. 1: Homilies and Teaching Documents (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 122.

<sup>31</sup> Second Vatican Council, “Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (1964),” in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, trans. Colman O’Neill, New Revised Edition, vol. 1 (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1998), no. 11.



On the other hand, if we see the Eucharist and sacraments more broadly *only* as the summit of Christian life, we risk closing ourselves off in liturgical bubbles. We risk becoming a “a closed caste with nothing authentically ecclesial about it.”<sup>32</sup> The temptation is to spend a tremendous amount of money and time focusing and revering the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist but with little attention to the face of the Lord in the poor and the outcast.

This is not a new problem. In *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, Pope John Paul II quotes St. John Chrysostom in reminding us that the Church cannot ignore the material needs of the poor “in favor of superfluous church ornaments and costly furnishings for divine worship.” In some cases, he continues, “it could be obligatory to sell these goods in order to provide food, drink, clothing and shelter for those who lack these things.”<sup>33</sup>

Both Bernardin and the pope have frequently highlighted the profound connection between our sacramental life and our relationship to the world. Bernardin, for example, is clear on this connection in his pastoral reflection on Jesus:

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<sup>32</sup> Pope Francis, “Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis,” February 15, 2015, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>33</sup> John Paul II, “*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, On Social Concern (1987),” in *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, ed. David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, Expanded Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), no. 31.

No one can partake sincerely of the sacred banquet while remaining indifferent to his brothers and sisters. The Eucharist unites us in the love of Christ, and this is a love to be shared with others, a love that commits us to their devoted service.<sup>34</sup>

In his pastoral letter on the church, the cardinal is even more explicit as he urges readers not to falling into the trap of detaching our sacramental worship “from the rest of our lives. It must be the key to everything we do.”<sup>35</sup>

In sum, a vibrant church is a Eucharist church actively engaged in the world. It is a community of believers who are regularly nourished by their ongoing participation in the Paschal Mystery and who offer their lives to God in loving service. Of course, there is little sense in speaking about a Eucharist church if people have no access to the Eucharist. Recently, I was speaking with a Maryknoll friend of mine who lamented the presence of “Eucharistic deserts” in many parts of East Africa. Throughout the world, many Christian communities are forced to go weeks, if not months, without regular experiences of the Sacramental Eucharist. In the United States, with the changing demographics of the ordained priesthood, it is very likely that we will soon see an increase in Eucharistic deserts. This is a crisis and it is not just about parishes. We need to also be concerned about the absence of the Eucharist on college campuses, hospitals, prisons, and immigrant detention centers. As a church, we are challenged to make the Eucharist present in these spaces that are often on the margins of society.

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<sup>34</sup> Bernardin, “Christ Lives in Me (1985), A Pastoral Reflection on Jesus and His Meaning for Christian Life,” 123.

<sup>35</sup> Bernardin, “The Family Gathered Here Before You (1989),” 72.

### III. THE TASK OF A VIBRANT CHURCH

Evangelizing, enlivening, encompassing, and Eucharistic. These are four common characteristics embedded in the ecclesial visions of Cardinal Bernardin and Pope Francis. Each is both a *gift* given to us by God and a task for us to accomplish.<sup>36</sup> In other words, becoming a vibrant church will take effort on our part. So how do we go about doing this? Let me conclude by briefly highlighting three areas of church life that need revitalization if we are to become a vibrant church.

#### A. Parishes: Communities of Dialogue and Encounter

First and foremost, we need to rethink and renew parish life in the United States. For the vast majority of Catholics, the fundamental experience of church, beyond the family, is the parish. While there are many good things happening in parishes around the country, more efforts are needed to ensure they can embody and respond to the challenges posed by Pope Francis and Cardinal Bernardin. The parish, as the pope writes in *Evangelii Gaudium*, is “the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Bernardin, “The Church in the Third Millennium: Age-Old Values and New Challenges, The Eugene M. Burke, C.S.P., Lectureship in Religion and Society, Address, University of California at San Diego, California (October 28, 1986),” 382.

<sup>37</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 28.

The strength and power of the parish is precisely its attention to and integration with the local context. As such, no single blueprint can be used across the board. Not surprisingly, one of the biggest dangers facing parishes today is that of parochialism. Rather than being communities of dialogue and missionary disciples, the parish risks becoming, to quote Francis, “a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few.”<sup>38</sup>

In the context of globalization, the institution of the parish is under great transition. In some parts of the country, parishes are growing, particularly with new immigrant groups. Existing structures often struggle to involve and engage new members, cultures, and linguistic practices. In other places, changing demographics, financial pressures, a shortage of ordained priests have led to parish clustering, mergers, and closings. These are often painful transitions and can result in the loss of committed members.

Resources and skilled personal are very much needed to manage these transitions. As Francis writes, we need to devote considerable attention to ensure that parishes are closer to realities of all their members in order to “to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented.”<sup>39</sup> Bernardin makes a similar point as he writes that parishes need “best available resources—the best ministers possible, the best structures for collaboration, [and] the best means for meeting people’s diverse needs.”<sup>40</sup> Clearly, this is all easier said than done.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Bernardin, “The Family Gathered Here Before You (1989),” 51.

## B. Movements and Organizations

The specificity of the parish and its attention to local realities needs to be complemented by the universal outlook and charisms offered by international Catholic organizations and church movements. Movements and organizations, then, are a second area for the church to develop in seeking to become a more vibrant force. The church is blessed with a wide diversity of movements including monastic communities, mendicant orders, missionary societies, women's congregations of apostolic life; lay movements; and social and charitable organizations of all types. When they are organized into small cell groups, they are "are powerful manifestations of the priesthood of all the baptized."<sup>41</sup>

Like parishes, movements too risk becoming self-absorbed into their own bubbles. The danger is that they become so enamored with their charisms, spiritualities and ways of doing things that they perceive others as less than perfect, dirty, or even competitors.<sup>42</sup> We need to move beyond petty competition as John Paul II urged in his apostolic exhortation on consecrated life.<sup>43</sup> If these movements in the church do indeed reflect charisms granted by the same Holy Spirit, how can we compete with one another?

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>42</sup> J.-M.-R Tillard, *Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ: At the Source of the Ecclesiology of Communion* (Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 2001), viii. See also Luca Diotallevi, "Catholicism by Way of Sectarianism? An Old Hypothesis for New Problems," in *"Movements" in the Church*, ed. Alberto Melloni, Concilium 2003/3 (London: SCM, 2003), 107–21.

<sup>43</sup> John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation On Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and in the World* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice

Among the movements active in the church today, I am increasingly convinced of the lasting value of the model of specialized Catholic action, where targeted groups of lay people are invited to join together and organize their own apostolic groups. Small groups led by lay people for lay people connected in national and international structures go a long way in living the four marks above. Locally, they connect people for collective discernment and action and globally they serve as voices for Catholics in the Church and in the world. Rather than competing with the parish or the diocese, specialized Catholic action is often integrated into existing church structures.

Chicago has a long history of these movements and in particular with the Young Catholic Students, Young Catholic Workers, and Christian Family Movement. Even though they are no longer present in the United States, these movements are not dead by any means. The YCS, YCW, and International Movement of Catholic Students are still among the largest lay movements in the church and among the most dynamic Catholic voices for justice in the UN system.

We need to revive them and update them here in the United States. This is especially important for youth and student movements. Youth ministry needs to be more than CYO basketball, Eucharistic adoration and trips to World Youth Days for a select few who can afford the cost of travel. Young adults need to be made aware, as Bernardin

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Vaticana, 1996), no. 52,

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_25031996\\_vita-consecrata\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031996_vita-consecrata_en.html).

himself urged, that they are the church of the *here and now*.<sup>44</sup> College students and young professionals should be organized and supported to create their own Catholic student groups so that the “young can become the first apostles to the young.”<sup>45</sup> It’s fundamentally about participation, Christian citizenship, and lifelong discipleship. People of all ages need the support offered by lay apostolic movements and I believe the time is now to revive the movements of specialized Catholic action.

### **C. Frontline Ministries**

Finally, we need to re-center our institutions on mission and action for the marginalized. From our colleges to healthcare facilities, Catholic institutions are critical to our witness in the world. They are, as Doris Gottemoeller, RSM points out, the “*inculturation of the faith in a pluralistic environment*.”<sup>46</sup> They live “with one foot firmly planted in the Catholic Church and the other in our pluralistic society”<sup>47</sup>

Today, these institutions are undergoing profound changes as a result of several converging factors. Soon many institutions founded by religious congregations will no

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<sup>44</sup> Joseph Bernardin, “Here and Now (1994), Pastoral Statement on Youth,” in *Selected Works of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin*, ed. Alphonse P. Spilly, vol. 1: Homilies and Teaching Documents (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 221.

<sup>45</sup> Second Vatican Council, “Apostolicam Actuositatem,” no. 12.

<sup>46</sup> Doris Gottemoeller, “History of Catholic Institutions in the United States,” *New Theology Review* 14, no. 2 (2001), 27.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph Bernardin, “Catholic Institutions and Their Identity,” *Origins* 21, no. 2 (1991): 33–36.

long have vowed religious directly present in their day-to-day operations. Many of our institutions will no longer have committed Catholics in leadership positions. In this transition, some will close or merge. Others will give up their Catholic identity completely. But most will struggle to find a way to balance identity in a pluralistic context. From a different side, Catholic social institutions also face pressures from social trends including new regulations concerning government funding, educational reform policies, healthcare reform, and labor standards.

All of this demands careful attention. In the midst of these changes, the mission of the church and our attention to marginalized cannot be lost. We must pay careful attention that we do not allow our healthcare and educational ministries to become for-profit institutions that sell commodities to the wealthy and powerful. While many practical proposals could be made, here are a few suggestions. Each and every institution and Catholic organization should have a mission officer or a committee charged with promoting mission. These structures should operate at the highest level of leadership within the organization and they should avoid the temptation to become merely tokenistic. Mission officers, however, are not enough if staff members do not know the mission of their institution. Robust and dynamic training programs are necessary so that all people involved in the work, regardless of their own faith tradition, can have an appreciation for the history and identity of the ministry. Finally, these organizations can benefit greatly from annual celebrations to mark mission and the history of the institution (mission weeks, mission months, etc.). We have a lot to celebrate as a church, so let us not hide our identity. Like Christians as individuals, our institutions should not look like Lent without Easter.



As we move toward the second half of the Post-Vatican II century, there are many changes on the horizon for the church and Church communities around the world. It is not clear what the church will look like in fifty years, but it is clear that it will not look the same as it does now. As we seek to navigate these changing realities, the prophetic wisdom of Cardinal Bernardin and Pope Francis can assist us as we seek to become what we are called to be, a vibrant church alive in the Spirit and responsive to the needs of God's creation and, in particular, the poor and the marginalized.