

# Globethics Repository

The logo for Globethics, featuring the word "Globethics" in white, sans-serif font centered within a solid blue rectangular background.

## Universalism in Catholic Social Thought

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository. More information on Globethics see <https://www.globethics.net>. Data and content policy of Globethics Repository see <https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy>.

Item Type	Article
Authors	Glenister Roberts, Kathleen
Publisher	Research Online ND
Rights	Creative Commons Copyright (CC 2.5)
Download date	2026-06-14 06:29:21
Link to Item	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/186490">http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/186490</a>

4-23-2012

## Universalism in Catholic Social Thought: 'Accompaniment' as Trinitarian Praxis

Kathleen Glenister Roberts  
*Duquesne University*, robertskg@duq.edu

ISSN: 1839-0366

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA  
Copyright Regulations 1969  
WARNING

This material has been copied and communicated to you by or on behalf of the University of Notre Dame Australia pursuant to part VB of the Copyright Act 1969 (the Act).

The material in this communication may be subject to copyright under the Act. Any further copying or communication of this material by you may be the subject of copyright protection under the Act.

Do not remove this notice.

### Recommended Citation

Roberts, Kathleen Glenister (2012) "Universalism in Catholic Social Thought: 'Accompaniment' as Trinitarian Praxis," *Solidarity: The Journal of Catholic Social Thought and Secular Ethics*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 4.  
Available at: <http://researchonline.nd.edu.au/solidarity/vol2/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you by ResearchOnline@ND. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Solidarity: The Journal of Catholic Social Thought and Secular Ethics* by an authorized administrator of ResearchOnline@ND. For more information, please contact [denise.mclinden@nd.edu.au](mailto:denise.mclinden@nd.edu.au).



---

# Universalism in Catholic Social Thought: 'Accompaniment' as Trinitarian Praxis

## **Abstract**

Cosmopolitanism is an ancient concept whose meaning and significance have shifted over the last two millennia. Most recently, cosmopolitanism has been resurrected to mean “world citizenship” – a renunciation of one’s national identity for the sake of the universal human family. While such an endeavor seems as though it should correspond to Catholic social thought, its iterations in academia and elsewhere have resulted in a preoccupation with personal identity and political doctrine rather than love. Cosmopolitanism is complex and harbors many weaknesses in both theory and practice. Considered in relation to universalism in Catholic social thought, one weakness is thrown into specific relief: cosmopolitanism as a personal identity or political doctrine lacks a unified philosophy of the human person. This essay recasts the desire to form solidarity across national boundaries as universalism within Trinitarian anthropology and discusses accompaniment as exemplary of the love this thought system requires.

## **Cover Page Footnote**

The author thanks Duquesne University for its generous support of this work through a Fr. Henry V. Paluse research grant.

## Universalism in Catholic Social Thought: 'Accompaniment' as Trinitarian Praxis

Kathleen G. Roberts

---

### Introduction

The multinational economic crises of the past three years produce uncertainty for the future of global growth, but also for the intellectual enterprises of “cosmopolitanism.” Cosmopolitanism, most simply described as “world citizenship,” represents the ideal of a universal human culture and has endured the same expansion and contraction that globalization has experienced over the past decade. Ten years ago the European Union, for instance, provided a rallying point for cosmopolitanism; today unity seems barely tenable, at least economically.

The problems of culture persist, however, and most especially in the context of Catholic social thought. Benedict XVI’s encyclicals *Caritas in Veritate* and *Deus Caritas Est* state unequivocally that the human person is called to love; that the Church is not a political entity but a recipient of God’s grace; and that solidarity is the responsibility of each individual.<sup>1</sup> Expounding on these ideas in his recent address to the Australian Catholic University, Cardinal Paul Cordes laments the secular social doctrine that has come to dominate human rights efforts and fears that an exclusively political perspective will overshadow Benedict’s call to love in truth.<sup>2</sup> What is needed, Cordes asserts, is not mere praxis but “a philosophical understanding of humanity and justice” rooted in Creation.<sup>3</sup>

This essay points out alternative routes to effective human rights practices through an appeal to Trinitarian anthropology. Within this work the Catholic tradition of “accompaniment” is explored as an application of universal human rights, with all their attendant discourses on behalf of culture, difference, justice, and the transnational good. First some documents pertaining to a Trinitarian ethic of universalism and solidarity in Catholic social thought are reviewed – including Paul’s epistle to the Galatians, Bonaventure’s *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, and the encyclicals *Deus Caritas Est* and *Caritas in Veritate*. These documents help to place Trinitarian anthropology in the context of a Catholic understanding of persons, culture, and community. Yet some of them are also problematized by social doctrine that fails to take Trinitarian anthropology into account, or that

---

<sup>1</sup> Philipp Gabriel Renczes, S.J., ‘Grace Reloaded: *Caritas In Veritate*’s Theological Anthropology’, *Theological Studies*, Vol. 71, No. 2, 2010, p. 287

<sup>2</sup> Cardinal Paul J. Cordes, ‘Not Without the Light of Faith: Catholic Social Doctrine Clarifies Its Self-Understanding’, Address at Australian Catholic University, 27 November, 2009, n. 9

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

abandons theology altogether in favor of instrumentalist practices. These problems will be described briefly. Finally, accompaniment is discussed as part of the Catholic tradition of universalism but also as a unique praxis in its own right. Accompaniment may be seen as a response to secularist notions of cosmopolitanism and human rights and also as a significant representation of Trinitarian commitment in the Catholic Church.

### **Locating Trinitarian Anthropology**

The nature of God in Three Persons – the mystery of the Trinity – is accepted as a given. The implications that flow from this mystery and impact human relations form the focus of Trinitarian anthropology. Human understanding that we are created in God’s image, and that God is inherently communal, suggests that we are one universal family. Such ideas have been propounded in Catholic thought since the apostle Paul, whom Badiou calls “the founder of universalism.”<sup>4</sup> Paul’s significance for universalism is apparent in these passages from Paul’s letter to the Galatians:

The Law was our confining custodian until the advent of Christ, in order that we should be rectified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under the power of that confining custodian. For you are—all of you—sons of God through the faith that is in Christ Jesus. There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is no “male and female”; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

From this very first of the letters of Paul, and further into his travels and epistles, we see that Paul aggregated all cultures into universal salvation through Christ. The implications of this for universalism have also been a matter of debate for scholars. It is not possible to recount all these previous arguments, but a most compelling one is that Paul’s universalism elides the subject of equality and instead insists on *unity*.<sup>6</sup> The difference between “equality” and “unity” is vast in this context, but has too often been misread. Paul’s baptismal formula “there is neither Jew nor Greek” implies *neither* that Greeks are now equal to Jews, nor that these categories literally do not exist anymore. Paul himself invoked his Roman citizenship in several occasions, and no married person then or now would say that the categories “man” or “woman” are nonexistent. Rather, there is new unity in Christ to the extent that “it is not a question of” man or woman, Jew or Greek, just as today there are obvious ways in which cultural preferences color Catholic practices; and yet they form one holy Catholic and apostolic Church.<sup>7</sup> People, city, empire, territory, social class: all of these are devoid of identity when Paul approaches law as subjective

---

<sup>4</sup> Alain Badiou trans. Ray Brassier, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, Stanford University Press, California, 2003

<sup>5</sup> Gal. 3:28

<sup>6</sup> Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* Doubleday, New York, 1997

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

declaration. Ultimately, Paul is he who “deciding that none was exempt from what a truth demands and disjoining the true from the Law, provoked – entirely alone – a cultural revolution upon which we still depend.”<sup>8</sup>

What exactly did this cultural revolution look like? In many respects Christianity is radically different from any religion that came before it. Of the six unusual aspects of early Christianity listed by Meeks, two are especially pertinent here.<sup>9</sup> First, they used peculiar, passionate and intimate language. They talked about “love” for each other and in Christ in ways no other religion had before. Second, they were institutionally self-sufficient and communal. When Christians joined a local congregation, there was also “a strange sense of being a supralocal fellowship.”<sup>10</sup> These emphases on love and universalism have not faded.

Indeed, love and universalism provide rich sites of Catholic thought. Consider Bonaventure’s *coincidentia oppositorum* as an example. For Bonaventure the foundation of unity – and thus universalism – is located in the interplay of opposites. Christ described Himself as the alpha and the omega. He contains within Himself the dialectics of death v. life and human v. divine. Within the person of Christ, Bonaventure points out, these opposites coexist. Further, they are interdependent on one another; they interpenetrate; they are conjoined.<sup>11</sup>

But the opposites within Christ are, especially for Bonaventure, significant within the context of the Trinity. He does not treat Christ as a separate figure marked by *coincidentia oppositorum*: the paradox of the Trinity itself – being one in three Persons – is itself a coincidence of opposites. The Trinity is both unified and differentiated.<sup>12</sup> The plurality of the Trinity epitomizes the relationality foundational to God’s love for human persons, and thus the universalism that is “a plurality of persons in a communion of love.”<sup>13</sup>

It is fairly easy in retrospect to see that musings on the Trinity point to imperatives of love and universalism for the human family. These imperatives form the foundation for Catholic social thought. Yet Catholic social thought, discussed in the contemporary moment, sometimes becomes conflated with general social justice initiatives and becomes detached from its history and tradition. A crucial example of this is the attention that has been paid in the last several decades to *Gaudium et spes*, a pastoral constitution which emerged from Vatican Council II.

---

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15

<sup>9</sup> W. Meeks, & In Hawkins, P. S. (ed.), ‘Saint Paul of the Cities’, in *Civitas: Religious Interpretations of the City*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1986

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22

<sup>11</sup> Ilia Delio, O.S.F., ‘Religious Pluralism and the Coincidence of Opposites’, *Theological Studies*, Vol. 70, No. 4, 2009, p. 832

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 833

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 835

In large part the attention paid to GS is richly deserved, because it represents a turning outward for the Church. Addressed to the whole world, the pastoral constitution answered an important exigency regarding the Church's role in the modern world. The time of its promulgation is not at all far removed from the Second World War – a war that made desperately plain the need for commitment to universal human rights. By Vatican II it was clear that the principles of the United Nations' 1948 Declaration on Human Rights were remote and proving difficult to attain. The new world order the UN had hoped to achieve had not come to fruition.<sup>14</sup> No wonder then that by 1963 Pope John XXIII observed that "Political life in the modern world... is unequal to the task of protecting the common good of all peoples."<sup>15</sup>

GS draws attention on the topic of universalism in particular because although they did not use the term "globalization," the members at the Council were certainly cognizant of its effects. As discussed above, a belief in the universal destiny of human beings is an ancient one that stems from the very beginnings of Christianity. But in the moment of Vatican Council II, globalization seemed more palpable than ever before.<sup>16</sup> GS addresses Christian anthropology and community directly. While these themes are not new to the Catholic tradition, their inclusion in GS represented bold and radical steps in 1965. Kasper<sup>17</sup> points out that GS is a "complete novelty" because it "signals the first time that a council has consciously endeavored to set forth a systematic account of Christian anthropology in an independent thematic context."<sup>18</sup>

GS is highly unique among Church statements not just because it was addressed to non-Catholics but also because it explains in detail a Christocentric approach to human being. In and of themselves, these are highly positive features of the document. The pastoral constitution develops universalism in its address to all of humanity, which is characterized by faith and hope. GS says quite succinctly: "[humans] can fully discover [their] true nature only in a sincere gift of [themselves]."<sup>19</sup>

In outlining the Church's thought on universalism, it is important to note in GS that culture is perceived as a necessary and very positive part of human life. GS defines "culture" as "the cultivation of natural goods and values," and a person can only attain a "full and authentic humanity" within it.<sup>20</sup> This is in contrast to some contemporary scholars who consider culture to

---

<sup>14</sup> Pedro Morandé, 'The relevance of the message of *Gaudium et spes* today: The Church's mission in the midst of epochal changes and new challenges' *Communio* Vol. 23, 1996, 144

<sup>15</sup> Pope John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*. English translation: On Establishing Universal Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty. (11 April 1963), p. 135

<sup>16</sup> Andrea Riccardi, 'An historical perspective and *Gaudium et spes*', *Journal of Catholic Social Thought*, Vol.3, No. 2, 2006, pp.243-255

<sup>17</sup> Walter Kasper, 'The theological anthropology of *Gaudium et spes*', *Communio*, Vol. 23, 1996, pp.129-140

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.129

<sup>19</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, p. 24

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53

be mere social construction, something artificial and potentially damaging.<sup>21</sup> But, this acknowledgment of goodness in culture is also balanced in GS by genuine Christian formation.<sup>22</sup> Efforts to strike this balance distinguish the contemporary work of many groups who implement Catholic social thought.<sup>23</sup>

The heart of GS is not necessarily a nod to pluralism in a growing postmodernity, or a submission to the end of Christendom (the medieval era of Church-state partnerships in Europe). Neither is the heart of GS a grudging admission that the Church consists of human beings living alongside others in contemporary society. Instead, GS posits a new and radical vision of community: not as the Church, or attempts to grow the Church; rather, the promise of GS is universalism.<sup>24</sup> This is clear when the Fathers state that “the Church by her very universality can be a very close bond between diverse human communities and nations.”<sup>25</sup> The pastoral constitution’s message urging all people to participate in “this family spirit of God’s children”<sup>26</sup> is based on the universalism of the Gospel<sup>27</sup> and of Pauline theology.<sup>28</sup>

GS puts forth a theology of the human person that is correct and accurate, but has been criticized on two counts: First for its lack of sustained emphasis on *Trinitarian* theology, and second for its lack of clear instruction on how Catholic social thought ought to be practiced. Kasper points out this first difficulty.<sup>29</sup> Though GS seeks to emphasize the human community, the second half of the document moves away from Trinitarianism into Christocentrism. This move undermines the uniqueness of Catholic universalism. Christomonism is potentially damaging since Christ must be understood within the context of the pluralistic Trinity.<sup>30</sup> To focus on Christ alone is to omit the overflow of love from the Father and the fundamental communicative field of the Holy Spirit. Plurality – let alone universalism – is not possible in purely Christocentric teaching.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Mark S. Latkovic, *Gaudium et spes’s vision of the moral life. After Forty Years: Vatical [sic] Council II’s Diverse Legacy*, St Augustine’s Press, Indiana, 2007

<sup>22</sup> Peter J. Henriot, S.J., ‘A church in the modern world of Africa: the Zambian experience’, *Journal of Catholic Social Thought*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2006, p. 312

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 313

<sup>24</sup> Paul J. Roy S.J., *The Developing Sense of Community (Gaudium et spes). Vatican II*, Paulist Press, New York, 1987, p. 198

<sup>25</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, p. 59 n7

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42

<sup>27</sup> Riccardi, ‘An historical perspective and *Gaudium et spes*’, p. 247

<sup>28</sup> Kathleen G. Roberts, *Alterity and Narrative: Stories and the Negotiation of Western Identities*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2007

<sup>29</sup> Walter Kasper, ‘The theological anthropology of *Gaudium et spes*’, *Communio*, Vol. 23, 1996, pp.129-140

<sup>30</sup> Ilia Delio, O.S.F., ‘Religious Pluralism and the Coincidence of Opposites’, *Theological Studies*, Vol. 70, No. 4, 2009, pp.822-844 at 844

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 825

No wonder then that Catholic social thought may sometimes seem adrift. *Gaudium et spes* is valuable in its announcement of intentions, but falls short in providing a blueprint for action. Ratzinger critiqued GS for its “astonishing optimism” when the document first emerged and his commitment to Trinitarianism in action has not waned since.<sup>32</sup> For Benedict XVI, the service of charity is equally essential to the Church as the Word and the sacraments.<sup>33</sup> GS asserts that the Church is a partner in the world and renews an ancient commitment to universalism and social justice. Yet as Benedict points out: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”<sup>34</sup>

The next section of the essay, then, attempts to answer these two challenges from *Gaudium et spes*. There are potential dangers for Catholic social doctrine if, first, the lack of sustained Trinitarian theology is not answered; and second, if the “astonishing optimism” of mere ideology is permitted to substitute for genuine charity and grace. The essay takes each problem in current iterations of universalism in turn, answering each with Benedict’s teachings and with interpretation from Cardinal Paul Cordes’ 2009 address “Not without the light of faith” at Australian Catholic University.

### **Problems of a non-Trinitarian Universalism**

In his 2009 address to Australian Catholic University, Cardinal Paul Cordes highlighted the teachings of *Caritas in Veritate* and underscored our need for them by identifying the detours to which social doctrine has been prone in the last several decades. As he noted, “The Church holds that Revelation is complete with the death of the last Apostle. Certain versions of liberation theology were thus wrong to identify Revelation with ever new and changing events from life experience, replacing theory by praxis”.<sup>35</sup> Led thus astray, the responsiveness to political realities has led to a preoccupation with teleological ethics. Almost exclusively, he points out, the goal of social doctrine has been social change – a separating out of mercy and love from justice. The fear here is that even the most recent Church teachings – such as *Caritas in Veritate* – will be overshadowed by political goals.<sup>36</sup>

All the blame cannot be laid at the feet of instrumentalist liberation theology, however. There is no doubt that solidarity and universalism have been in sharp decline, especially in the West. It is fairly obvious that most people are unwilling to accept the vision of Love the Church has

---

<sup>32</sup> Philipp Gabriel Renczes, S.J., *op. cit.*, p. 275

<sup>33</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*. English translation: To the Bishops Priests and Deacons Men and Women Religious and all the Lay Faithful on Christian Love. (25 January 2006), n. 22

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 1

<sup>35</sup> Cardinal Paul J. Cordes, *op. cit.*, n. 9

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

offered.<sup>37</sup> This is a grave problem, for the idolization of political justice at the expense of love will only perpetuate social problems. As Benedict writes, “Love – *caritas* – will always prove necessary, even in the most just society. There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love.”<sup>38</sup> A philosophy placing justice before love will never work; instead, the Church must work to enable understanding of the nature of relational human community.<sup>39</sup> Neither can institutions solve social problems; each individual must take responsibility for solidarity and universalism.<sup>40</sup> As Cordes explains:

The human person can no longer be seen as the object of a process, but appears as its very subject: the human person, who has come to know Christ, works actively for change such that Catholic social doctrine does not remain a dead letter.<sup>41</sup>

Yet here too is a potential pitfall: an individual who assumes responsibility for solidarity veers perilously close to self-aggrandizement at worst, a dubious identity formation at best. The trend toward “cosmopolitanism” in the last decade encourages individuals to claim “world citizenship” (a pragmatic and ontological impossibility, of course). Disturbingly, most individuals wishing to do so are economically and politically privileged. Their desires to travel the world and sample its delights are not attempts at solidarity, but attempts to disconnect their identities from (from their perspectives) culpable nation-states. Renczes agrees that these “inflated concepts of love and peace are all too easily compromised by self-illusion and various distortions.”<sup>42</sup>

The cosmopolitan identity claim is certainly one of these distortions, and it is problematized by globalization. Given the potential for inequality and displacement present in most globalizing projects – economic, political, corporate, or otherwise – the challenges of this historical moment must be given special attention by the Church. However, specific praxes driven toward solving the unique problems of globalization are not what are required here. *Caritas in Veritate* underscores the Trinitarian nature of human relationships and the need for mercy and love that are the hallmarks of Christianity, and always will be. Benedict therefore provides guidance for all times, not just a time of global change.<sup>43</sup>

It is nonetheless useful to bring a Catholic intellectual perspective to globalization and other world events. Cavanaugh is most helpful here in describing globalization not as a liberating or

---

<sup>37</sup> Philipp Gabriel Renczes, S.J., *op. cit.*, p. 275

<sup>38</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *op. cit.*, n. 28

<sup>39</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*. English translation: To the Bishops Priests and Deacons Men and Women Religious the Lay Faithful and all People of Good Will on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth. (29 June 2009), n. 38

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, n. 11

<sup>41</sup> Cardinal Paul J. Cordes, *op. cit.*, p. 10

<sup>42</sup> Philipp Gabriel Renczes, S.J., ‘Grace Reloaded: *Caritas in Veritate*’s Theological Anthropology, p. 279

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273

unifying force, but merely another panopticon: another monolithic scheme for domination designed by the nation-state.<sup>44</sup> While the Church does not seek to be a political entity nor does it interfere in the politics of states, in its practices the Church ironically provides the only viable solution to social problems.<sup>45</sup> This the Church accomplishes in its understanding of Creation and the practices that reflect this understanding. Cavanaugh's work makes this point well. Responding to the seemingly-hopeless trap of globalization and the nation-state, he turns instead to the Eucharist – the “world in a wafer” – as profound metaphor for solidarity across cultures and boundaries. His study of the Eucharist is restorative of the universalism of the Catholic Church and its apostolic traditions.

A similar practice, and one that pertains more directly to Catholic social thought, is accompaniment. Accompaniment grows out of the long tradition of Catholic social thought and is exemplary of the Trinitarian universalism this essay proposes. The final section of the essay defines accompaniment, places it in the context of Catholic social thought, and discusses the ways in which accompaniment resolves contemporary challenges to charity in universalism.

### **Accompaniment**

Since Vatican II, Riccardi<sup>46</sup> notes, the Church “declares that she lives within the problems of history, that she is not far-removed but a companion: history is not only tradition but also contemporariness.”<sup>47</sup> This reference to the Church as “companion” connects to the theology of accompaniment, which has become an important practice in Catholic social thought. Padilla defines it as “walking together in solidarity which is characterized by mutuality and interdependence.”<sup>48</sup> The basis for this accompaniment, what the New Testament calls *koinonia*, is found in the God-human relationship in which God accompanies us in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>49</sup>

This definition is important in its precision, because it clearly subscribes to a Trinitarian anthropology. The parallels between accompaniment and the nature of Christ alone are obvious. In very basic terms, Jesus is God made flesh and his very name, Immanuel, means “God with us.” The fact that Christ came as a person and lived with us, took on human existence, provides a model for accompaniment that is both simple and profound. Beyond the Incarnation, Christ's death and resurrection provide the ultimate model of self-sacrifice. But none of these things

---

<sup>44</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, ‘The World in a Wafer: A Geography of the Eucharist as Resistance to Globalization’, *Modern Theology*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1999

<sup>45</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 9

<sup>46</sup> Riccardi, ‘An historical perspective and *Gaudium et spes*’

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254

<sup>48</sup> Rafael Malpica Padilla, ‘Accompaniment as an Alternative Model for the Practice of Mission’, *Trinity Seminary Review*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2008, pp. 87-98

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90

should be taken in isolation: accompaniment is Trinitarian, not merely Christocentric. Recall from Bonaventure that Christ, as one of three in the Trinity, embodies “the infinite depth of the Father’s love expressed in an overflow of personal love through the gift of the Spirit.”<sup>50</sup> Accompaniment emulates Christ not through a presumption that any one human can be Christ to another, but in the knowledge that Christ’s death is the fullest expression of the love of the God who is One in Three Persons. The call to love is therefore communal, not imitative.

In that sense, accompaniment is just one contemporary example of Christian love and universalism. Accompaniment is a modern term given to a range of acts taken for the past two millennia by Christians on behalf of their communities – including solidarity, vows of poverty, and even martyrdom. However, accompaniment provides a compelling case study in this particular moment for several reasons. First, individuals who choose to accompany others out of love do so in spite of utmost material and political security – their call to solidarity happens at a time when, for the most part, they are privileged by the highest standard of living the world has ever seen. Second, accompaniment invites a return to Trinitarian anthropology in response to the amorphous social doctrine that has impacted universalism in the past few decades. This invitation occurs simultaneously with papal focus on these issues, especially through *Deus caritas est* and *Caritas in veritate*. Finally, in the midst of trends toward cosmopolitanism and other expressions of humanist efficacy, accompaniment is an alternative route to universalism – one based not on instrumentalism, but on love.

Specific cases of accompaniment illustrate these features and more. Those volunteering to accompany others epitomize a kind of profound simplicity. One might only imagine what it would mean today, for instance, to relinquish all that is familiar about one’s life and leave for three years in a refugee camp in Kenya, as one Jesuit Refugee Service volunteer has done. This particular camp was built to receive about 90,000 refugees from Somalia yet now has swollen to well over a quarter million.<sup>51</sup> Mashau describes, in another example, how “the theology of hope and accompaniment” offers a precious opening to alleviating the pain of HIV and AIDS in Africa.<sup>52</sup> Mashau highlights the need for compassionate outreach to persons with HIV and AIDS and like Byamugisha he sees this outreach and “accompaniment” as a first step to helping stop the pandemic.<sup>53</sup>

In perhaps the most detailed example, Howard describes the accompaniment he and 19 other North Americans undertook to bring refugees in El Salvador back to their homes which had been bombed in 1982.<sup>54</sup> Reading Howard’s story, it is perhaps easy to conceive of the mission as a

---

<sup>50</sup> Iliia Delio, O.S.F., ‘Religious Pluralism and the Coincidence of Opposites’, p. 840

<sup>51</sup> David Hollenbach, S.J., ‘The Rights of Refugees in a Globalizing World’ Public Lecture

<sup>52</sup> Thinandavha Derrick Mashau, ‘Where and when it hurts most: The theology of hope and accompaniment in the context of HIV and AIDS in marriage and family life,’ *Exchange* Vol. 37, 2008, pp. 23-34

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Richard Howard, ‘Accompaniment: an Invitation’, in *America*, 1987, pp. 455-456

failure; Howard certainly seems to have felt that in the days following.<sup>55</sup> He and his group were not only deported, but upon their return were also reprimanded by an American ambassador and other officials who believed his group was naïve and reckless. But the moments Howard recalls when soldiers arrived – a mother thrusting her baby into his arms; a campesino begging them not to leave – are not just significant illustrations of how the act of *walking* with Others is a witness and a safeguard against danger. These moments comprise a glimpse of God:<sup>56</sup> a profound testament to the communion of persons, to the universalist alternative that resists the material instrumentality of mere political doctrine.

The ontological act of *giving witness* to the life of another human person – simply by walking with them – is profoundly human and testament to universalism. This is not to suggest that Catholic social action is *mere* witness without action. Certainly the promise of a better future is manifest in the preferential option for the poor, of which Goizueta finds accompaniment the greatest expression.<sup>57</sup> However, he also warned against the dehumanizing instrumentalism of liberation theology. Accompaniment should not be considered a “technique”: it is a praxis. To achieve this, accompaniment emerges as a “fusion” of beauty and empathy in relationship with another person.<sup>58</sup> Stout explains:<sup>59</sup>

Ignore justice and so-called solidarity becomes yet another form of oppression. Ignore [the beauty of the human person], and it becomes instrumentalized. Ignore flesh and blood people and it becomes distanced, detached, abstract, and irrelevant.<sup>60</sup>

Accompaniment is the very opposite of this distance and detachment, because it invites a “walking with,” a “keeping company with” real persons. Goizueta<sup>61</sup> believes that this is the only way to “know” the poor or perceive reality from their perspective: “literally and physically walking with particular poor persons.”<sup>62</sup> Accompaniment radically emphasizes that universalism and love is primarily *ontological*.<sup>63</sup> Padilla<sup>64</sup> points out that accompaniment is often described as a metaphor of “walking,” which suggests a closeness, a welcoming: “It implies accepting the invitation to accompany the other.”<sup>65</sup> Walking is willingness to share the burden.

---

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 456

<sup>57</sup> Roberto Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment*, Orbis, Maryknoll, 1995

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92

<sup>59</sup> Stewart Stout, ‘Review: *Caminemos con Jesus* (Goizueta)’, *Chicago Theological Seminary Registry*, Vol. 92, No.1, 2002, pp.38-40

<sup>60</sup> Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Rafael Malpica Padilla, *op. cit.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93

If there is danger to this “sharing of the burden” becoming too righteous, there is another important element to accompaniment which keeps it grounded in genuine human rights. Writing of the AIDS pandemic in Africa, Ndungane<sup>66</sup> suggested that by compassionate outreach and the theology of hope and accompaniment, Christians would put into place such destigmatizing practices that “No one shall die alone, but more importantly no one should care alone.”<sup>67</sup> Accompaniment is a relationship of equality as it flows from the universalism of the Trinity. Although materially the partners in accompaniment may be unequal, and although the intentions and relations between human persons will always be flawed, this equality is possible through love:

Because it is a gift received by everyone, charity in truth is a force that builds community, it brings all people together without imposing barriers or limits... Economic, social and political development, if it is to be authentically human, needs to make room for the principle of gratuitousness as an expression of fraternity.<sup>68</sup>

The “equality” is possible, economic and material differences notwithstanding, because in a Trinitarian universalism human beings can give only because they can be received.<sup>69</sup> So the person called in the context of Catholic social thought to accompany those who are suffering cannot falsely or self-righteously assume the burdens of the whole world (as one might be tempted to do in a “cosmopolitan” identity claim). Accompaniment coaxes Catholic social thought to a proper awareness of limits. The concept rests in interdependence: both need the Other. This need is nothing less than an opening to the wonders of the universe: “Within *accompaniment* we engage the other as an equal, as a gifted child of God, in whom we see God’s face and through whom God also comes to us.”<sup>70</sup>

This God who comes to us is, again, God in Three Persons. The coincidence of opposites we find in Christ, expounded by Bonaventure, is useful in understanding accompaniment further. From this perspective accompaniment is something of a paradox. It is both action and inaction; walking with and without destination; equal, yet unequal. As Cordes noted, Catholic social thought cannot be mere praxis.<sup>71</sup> Accompaniment is something of a paradox here too: informed by theology, it becomes a kind of practice – and yet its “outcomes” are states of being, grace and love. It might be said to be praxis and anti-praxis, another dialectic. Accompaniment is in many ways metaphorical to Christ. Accompaniment is the taking on of burdens, and also the taking on

---

<sup>66</sup> Njongonkulu Ndungane, *A World with a Human Face: A Voice from Africa*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 2003

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62

<sup>68</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 34

<sup>69</sup> Philipp Gabriel Renczes, *op. cit.*, p. 283

<sup>70</sup> Padilla, ‘Accompaniment as an Alternative Model for the Practice of Mission,’ p. 95

<sup>71</sup> Cardinal Paul J. Cordes, *op. cit.*

of miraculous contradictions. The Christian is required to truly embody – “give flesh to” – faith.<sup>72</sup>

Needless to say accompaniment takes courage. This is significant, for it is a quality singled out by Benedict in *Caritas in Veritate*: “Love - caritas - is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace. It is a force that has its origin in God, Eternal Love and Absolute Truth.”<sup>73</sup> The highlight of “courage” here is important in distinguishing accompaniment from social doctrine and the pitfalls of instrumentalism. Accompaniment is “courageous” in the most purely etymological sense: it depends on strength of heart. This is no small requirement, for courage and generosity in love are nothing less than the search for God. The search for God is solely relational – accompaniment moves universalism from being-in-relation to being-in-communion, found in a renewed attention to the Trinity.<sup>74</sup>

The proof of this Trinitarian renewal emerges in accompaniment and other contemporary instances of love’s universalism in Catholic social thought. One need only look for this proof to the self-sacrifice and ontological humbling of those who choose to accompany others in their suffering, and find there a shadowy analogy to the crucified Christ. This imperfect analogy reminds us, as Delio writes, that “Sin is not the reason for Christ; the reason is God's excess love and mercy.”<sup>75</sup> Accompaniment is therefore not liberation to “fix” society, a praxis against which Benedict and Cordes have warned. Accompaniment is, rather, love for neighbor: a Christian imperative dependent on the nature of being, flowing from the Trinity.

### Conclusion

This essay has introduced accompaniment as exemplary of the Church’s foundational universalism that flows from Trinitarian anthropology. Given the rapid pace of globalization, and the concurrently shifting identities individuals may espouse, it is important to discuss and define universalism from the Church’s perspective.

The essay has shown that universalism is foundational since it is present in the Trinity. As a thought system universalism has been expounded by many Church thinkers, though this work was able to focus only on a few. Without understanding of being-in-communion, even well-intentioned attempts at peace, justice, or solidarity cannot succeed. These attempts become mired in political doctrine, Christomonism, instrumentalist theology, cosmopolitanism, or globalization. A renewed focus on Trinitarian anthropology is well underway in the Church, and has direct impact on Catholic social thought.

---

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, n.7

<sup>73</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 1

<sup>74</sup> Ilia Delio, O.S.F., ‘Religious Pluralism and the Coincidence of Opposites’, p. 825

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 844

Cultural difference is a puzzle and a paradox both in and out of the Church. Outside the Church culture has been described as an artificial construct. Within the Church there can exist an openness to the paradox of universalism that both exemplifies and elides cultural difference – uniting all as one in the Trinity – helping us to understand all manner of relational mysteries.<sup>76</sup>

Accompaniment may be one such “mystery” in that it is a unique practice of Catholic social thought. Accompaniment makes sense only in the context of the Trinity since it calls for being-in-communion. Accompaniment is a gift one can give only because another is willing to receive it: this is the way to truth.<sup>77</sup> Accompaniment is a universalist practice in its desire to be with and love others despite great differences and suffering. It differs from cosmopolitanism since it disregards all identity claims and “gives flesh” to faith.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps most importantly given the crises of social doctrine since Vatican II, accompaniment is significant in its ontological focus. Accompaniment is concerned less with material or instrumental practice than it is with love. As Benedict notes, love comes not from a lofty idea but from an encounter – with human persons, certainly, but also “with the Father of Jesus Christ, asking God to be present with the consolation of the Spirit to [us] and [our] work.”<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* , p. 840

<sup>77</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 52

<sup>78</sup> Cardinal Paul J. Cordes, *op. cit.*, n. 9

<sup>79</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est.*, n. 37