

December 2017

Editor's Introduction

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Recommended Citation

Schmalz, Mathew (2017) "Editor's Introduction," *Journal of Global Catholicism*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 1. p.2-5.

DOI: 10.32436/2475-6423.1018

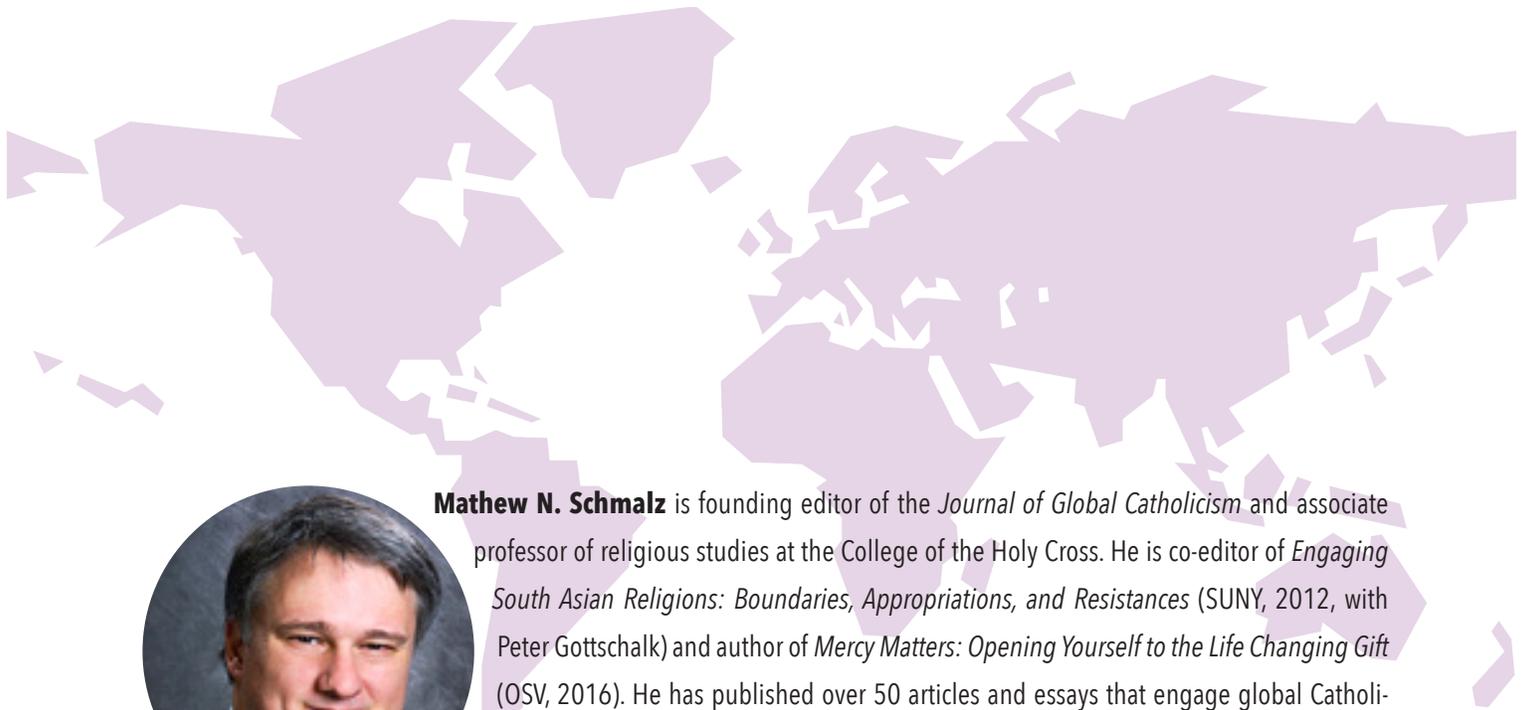
Available at: <https://crossworks.holycross.edu/jgc/vol2/iss1/1>

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MATHEW N. SCHMALZ

Catholicism in Africa

Part Two: Retrospect and Prospect



Mathew N. Schmalz is founding editor of the *Journal of Global Catholicism* and associate professor of religious studies at the College of the Holy Cross. He is co-editor of *Engaging South Asian Religions: Boundaries, Appropriations, and Resistances* (SUNY, 2012, with Peter Gottschalk) and author of *Mercy Matters: Opening Yourself to the Life Changing Gift* (OSV, 2016). He has published over 50 articles and essays that engage global Catholicism (particularly in South Asia), Catholic theology and spirituality, Mormonism, and The Watchtower movement.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Writing in 2004, Tanzanian theologian Laurenti Magesa asked the following questions in relation to the Catholic Church in Africa:

What happens when the faith and the church are brought from one geographical location and/or social situation to another? What happens when they are made to move across peoples and cultures? In other words, in their long history of evangelizing peoples, how have the Christian faith and the church inserted themselves into different socio-cultural and economic-political situations?¹

Of course, the questions raised by Magesa concern the entire history of Christianity. With regard to Africa, Christianity, in general, and Catholicism, in particular, have been conventionally understood as foreign imports — a perception that often ignores how “inculturated” Catholicism has always been in Africa since Christianity first emerged from its Jewish context. But Magesa’s reflections are not simply about Euro-centric forms of Christianity, which certainly do have a history and continuing influence on the African continent. Instead, they also implicitly reference the diversity of African cultures and societies of which Catholicism is a part.

This third issue of the *Journal of Global Catholicism* brings together articles and essays that address the past and future of African Catholicism not as a monolithic whole, but as a varied and variegated phenomenon that has changed and will continue to change. The pieces range broadly, from considering the nuances of ecclesiology and dialogue to understandings of wellness, witchcraft, and selfhood. As a whole, the contributors and their contributions attest to the vibrant diversity of African Catholicism and to the scholarly importance of African Catholic experience.

The issue begins with [Fordham University](#) Professor [Bradford E. Hinze](#) addressing the implications of Pope Francis’ ecclesiology for the African Church. In surveying themes articulated by the current Pope, Hinze draws particular attention to the

1 Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church In Africa* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Press, 2004), 1.

vision of a synodal, or more locally centered and responsive, Church. Hinze argues that Pope Francis' ecclesial vision offers potent opportunities for “decolonializing” institutional Catholicism in Africa.

The second article is a tightly focused study of the relationship between religious denomination and quality of life. In their piece, Sr. [Mary Gloria Njoku](#), dean of the School of Postgraduate Studies at [Godfrey Okoye University](#), and Babajide Gideon Adeyinka focus on Abeokuta, capital of Ogun State, Nigeria. Among the many interesting questions raised by their research are those that surround how “well-ness” can be defined — not just in terms of social scientific investigation, but more broadly in terms of African needs and desires as they emerge in response to the challenges and opportunities of urban life in Nigeria.

In the next scholarly contribution, [Matthias Scharer](#), professor emeritus in the faculty of theology, [University of Innsbruck](#), draws upon his decades long training and experience in interreligious dialogue, particularly as informed by the work of [Ruth Cohn](#). Professor Scharer speaks of the transformative possibility of interreligious encounter, though we must always be “barefoot” when walking on the ground of the religious “Other.”

For the fourth article of the issue, [Bernhard Udelhoven](#) reflects on the continuing legacy of his own religious order, the [Society of Missionaries of Africa](#), more commonly known as “The White Fathers.” As a Catholic priest in Zambia and an anthropologist trained at the [School of Oriental and African Studies](#) in London, Fr. Udelhoven's theological and historical reflections emerge as a theological vision focalized through an ethnographic lens. In addition to interrogating Western pre-understandings that so often have informed missionary work in Africa, Udelhoven suggests intriguing possibilities for reconsidering witchcraft within a Catholic framework that move beyond the exoticism and rancor that so often accompanies the topic.

The volume concludes with two essays, written in different tones, which address issues of importance as African Catholicism moves into its third millennium. Sr. [MaryGloria Nwachukwu](#) articulates a vision for African Catholicism that is pre-

mised upon appreciating the diversity and beauty of African experiences. She also lauds her mentor and colleague Sr. Teresa Okure who has made formative and long-lasting contributions to African Bible scholarship. With his second contribution to the issue, Fr. Bernhard Udelhoven directly engages African and Western understandings of self-hood with the intent of charting a more nuanced appreciation of the multiple dimensions of human identity and quest for wholeness.

The contributions of Bradford Hinze, MaryGloria Nwachukwu and Matthias Scharer emerged as part of projects developed and sponsored by the [Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology](#), De Paul University. The [McFarland Center for Religion, Ethics and Culture](#) values this collaboration and expresses gratitude for the work of [Dr. William T. Cavanaugh](#), [Fr. Stan Chu Ilo](#), and [Ms. Karen Kraft](#). Special acknowledgments are due to the co-editor of the Journal of Global Catholicism, [Dr. Marc Loustau](#), to Ms. Danielle Kane who expertly edited and formatted the contributions for this issue, and to the professional assistance and collegial patience of Ms. Lisa Villa, digital librarian at the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts, USA. Finally, as always, many thanks to the director of the McFarland Center and [Catholics & Cultures](#), [Thomas M. Landy](#).

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December 2017, Worcester, MA, USA