



# The Periodical of the Professional Society of Religious Educators

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### Editorial

Welcome to the 2<sup>nd</sup> issue of Roots & Wings for 2025. Much in the news in past weeks has been the death of Pope Francis and the election of his successor, Leo XIV, born Robert Francis Prevost in Chicago, USA, but also a naturalised citizen of Peru. We therefore present short biographies of these two leaders of the Roman Catholic Church.

Further to that, we present a selection of writings which include Part 6 of our series, *Consider Curriculum*, and various article which address current issues.

### Contents

#### **Death of the Pope ..... 1**

From Jorge Mario Bergoglio to Francis, an account of his Argentine years.

#### **Biography of Leo XIV ..... 7**

Here is the biography of the 267th Bishop of Rome.

#### **The Nun Who Went Viral ..... 9**

The nun who uses platforms like TikTok and Instagram to reach young people

#### **Consider Curriculum: Part 6 (CPTD) ..... 12**

In this sixth part we look at methodology – the way we teach.

#### **Moses and Islamic Spirituality ..... 16**

Moses—called Musa in Islam—is the most frequently mentioned prophet in the Quran and a revered figure in all three monotheistic faiths.

#### **What Is the Kumbh Mela? ..... 17**

The Kumbh Mela is a 45-day Hindu pilgrimage during which millions of Hindus immerse themselves in the sacred Ganges River to cleanse their sins..

#### **Gaza War and Just Peace. .... 19**

The principles of CST enable us to examine the situation in Israel-Palestine through the lens of our faith, helping us work toward a future in the Holy Land marked by justice and peace for all.

#### **Artificial Intelligence fuels Global Tensions ..... 21**

Amnesty International's latest report delivers a sharp critique of AI

## Death of the pope: From Jorge Mario Bergoglio to Francis, an account of his Argentine years

*Pope Francis died on Easter Monday, April 21. When electing him in 2013, the cardinals chose a pope deeply marked by his Jesuit background as well as by the history of his country, Argentina.*

(Loup Besmond de Senneville)



*A pilgrim holds up a flag of Argentina as Pope Francis arrives to lead the weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square, Vatican City, 5 June 2019.*

“You know that it was the duty of the Conclave to give Rome a Bishop. It seems that my brother Cardinals have gone to the ends of the earth to get one... but here we are...”

When he appeared at the window of St. Peter's Basilica March 13, 2013, this man—unknown to the general public and, just a few hours earlier, still known as Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio—chose his words with care.

From “the ends of the earth...” Indeed, that is where Francis comes from—the man the cardinals had just chosen as pope. Just three weeks earlier, he was still in Buenos Aires, 11,200 kilometres away. Far from Rome.

Arriving at Fiumicino Airport February 27 on Alitalia flight AZ261, the Archbishop of Buenos Aires could never have imagined that he would never again see his country. A true Argentine to the core, he left “his” capital without bidding it farewell, even though their destinies seemed so intimately linked.

Telling the story of Jorge Bergoglio is to trace that of a generation of religious men. It means delving into a Latin American country rocked by political and economic crises, a military dictatorship, and a financial crash. It is also to observe that everything in his life resonated as a preparation for the demanding mission the cardinals would entrust to him one March evening in 2013.

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was born on December 17, 1936, in Buenos Aires. But his story began much earlier, when his father, Mario José, arrived in Argentina in 1929 from his native Piedmont, northwest Italy. Working as an accountant for a railway company, he was part of the fourth wave of Italian immigrants to the country. He almost didn't make it at all—the boat that he and his parents were initially supposed to take, sank in the Atlantic.

In Buenos Aires, Mario José met Regina María Sivori, and a few years later, they welcomed little Jorge Mario. The young boy was constantly reminded of his Italian origins. He would carry with him all his life the memory of being born into an immigrant family that had come to the New World, barely escaping death at sea—a fact that sharpened his awareness of the fragile fate of migrants.

#### **A love at first sight with God**

He grew up in a religious family, but at the age of 17, the eldest of five children experienced a love at first sight—with God in a confessional. On the evening of September 21, 1953, he would not go dance the tango with the young woman he loved. Retracing his steps from St. Joseph's Basilica back home, overwhelmed, he made the definitive decision to devote his life to God. In 1956, barely holding his diploma as an industrial chemist, he entered the diocesan seminary, where he met Jesuit mentors, whose spirituality and missionary zeal eventually inspired him to join their ranks.

But just as he was making this life-defining choice, Bergoglio was confronted with another event that would shape his entire existence. In August 1957, he was rushed to the hospital for pleurisy. There, doctors extracted 1.5 litres of water from his lungs. The pain was intense, and his sense of isolation was immense. For several weeks, he did not know whether he would live or die.

In November, surgeons operated on him and removed the upper lobe of his right lung. "I know from experience the feeling of those who are sick with coronavirus, struggling to breathe as they are attached to a ventilator," he would later say. From this formative experience, he would nurture a constant concern for the sick and a commitment to regularly visit hospitals—whether as Archbishop of Buenos Aires or as pope.

The young Jesuit continued his education in Latin America. In Santiago, he became a pillar of Casa Loyola. In the Chilean capital, encountering the poor was a required part of one's training. It was a first awakening—a "culture of encounter" that he would never abandon. In 1965, as a young professor of Spanish—and later—literature at the Colegio de la Inmaculada Concepción in Santa Fe (500 km northwest of Buenos Aires), he put that culture into practice

by inviting the already immensely famous Jorge Luis Borges to speak on literature to his students.

### **Heated debates after Vatican II**

The late 1960s were also a time when the entire church was in upheaval. With Vatican II completed in 1965, its reforms had to be implemented on the ground, and debates—often heated—swept through the Jesuit province of Argentina. While continuing his theological studies, Bergoglio advocated for a profound reform of the church. As a disciple of the French theologian Yves Congar, the young philosophy student, not yet 35, argued that true reform was not about incorporating contemporary ideas but about returning to the sources—a conviction he would later carry with him to Rome when it came time to reform the Curia.

Meanwhile, Bergoglio faced another reform. In 1973, after being appointed head of a Jesuit province in Argentina that was deeply divided over the importance of liberation theology, plagued by the departure of religious men and a precipitous drop in vocations, the 36-year-old provincial managed to set things right. But he was young—perhaps too young—even for someone already recognized as a man who loved to lead. This was barely three years after his ordination as a priest in 1969 in the Buenos Aires Cathedral.

In this context, the young Bergoglio was deeply affected by Paul VI's warnings to society. At the end of 1974, in Rome, the pope addressed the Jesuit leaders gathered for a decisive General Congregation: "To what extent is the life of prayer, contemplation, simplicity of life, poverty, and the use of supernatural means present today?" This was a question that the future Francis would carry with him.

In the 1970s, the echoes from Rome were still far away, and what troubled the young Argentine provincial was the establishment in 1976 of General Videla's military dictatorship. This dark period lasted until 1983. The country was gripped by fierce repression: 340 detention and torture centres, 15,000 political opponents murdered, 9,000 imprisoned, and 30,000 "disappeared."

### **The dark period of the dictatorship**

During these years, Bergoglio struggled to maintain an impossible balance: he had to both protect the Jesuits and aid the victims of the repression. For that reason, he never publicly denounced the regime. In February 1976, two Jesuit priests, Orlando Yorio and Francisco Jalics, working in a poor neighbourhood of Buenos Aires, were abducted by the junta. A few weeks earlier, aware of death threats, their superior had asked them to leave the neighbourhood—a request they refused. They were released in the fall, but Bergoglio would long be criticized for not protecting them—or even for having handed them over to the regime.

Caught in internal struggles, he became, from 1979 onward, the rector of Colegio Máximo, where he taught theology. The firmness of his leadership led many of his peers to accuse him of being a reactionary with authoritarian tendencies. While he urged his Jesuit students to serve the poor, some



reproached him for not truly tackling the cause of poverty. Tensions ran high, and he was eventually pushed out. In 1986, he spent a year in Germany working on a thesis he would never complete. When he returned, the divisions were still unresolved: in 1990, he lost his teaching post and was sent to a parish in Córdoba as a simple priest.

### **Exile as a simple priest in Córdoba**

For Bergoglio, it was exile: he was placed under house arrest, and even his close associates were forbidden from contacting him. His years of penance in Córdoba—a time of “great inner crisis”—became an opportunity for him to read the complete history of the papacy, a providential preparation for what lay ahead. Twenty-two volumes of *The History of the Popes* since the end of the Middle Ages, written by the historian Ludwig von Pastor, recounted the glories and vicissitudes of Peter’s successors—from 1305, the year Clement V was elected in Avignon, to the death of Pius VI in 1799.

“I could have read a novel or something more interesting,” he later reflected once in Rome. “But from where I am now I can’t help wondering why God inspired me to read them. It was as if the Lord was preparing me with a vaccine. Once you know that papal history, there’s not much that goes on in the Vatican curia and the Church today that can shock you. It’s been a lot of use to me!” These tensions, followed by his exclusion, would leave their mark.

Throughout his pontificate, he was labelled “the Jesuit pope” and was sometimes accused by his opponents of orchestrating the Society’s omnipresence within the Curia. In reality, however, he maintained difficult relations with the successors of Ignatius of Loyola. Never again after that crisis would he visit the Jesuit General Curia on Borgo Santo Spirito—as is customary for all Society bishops when they pass through Rome. He would not return until after he was elected pope.

It was the apostolic nuncio who pulled Bergoglio out of exile. One day in 1992, he was informed that John Paul II had chosen him to become an auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires. Five years later, this first step would lead to his appointment as Archbishop of Argentina’s capital. In the meantime, he grew close to the priests in the city’s suburbs, particularly those ministering to drug addicts.

### **Tireless worker**

Every weekend, he would venture into the slums of Buenos Aires. It was there that his vision of the church as a “field hospital” took shape—a vision he would defend in Rome at the very start of his pontificate. For Bergoglio, there was no doubt: the church and those who serve it belong to the poorest. “I’ve always thought that the world looks clearer from the periphery,” he confided in 2021 to his biographer, journalist Austen Ivereigh.

Upon becoming archbishop, he abandoned the episcopal palace about 20 kilometres from the capital, preferring a modest three-room apartment adjoining his office. The tireless worker kept an unchanging routine: after rising

at 4 a.m. and praying, he would sit at his desk, receive visitors, or head out to visit a parish or neighbourhood in his archdiocese.

In the Argentine capital, there was no question of using his predecessor's limousine. He took only public transportation. On a daily basis, he managed his own schedule. Even after becoming pope, Francis maintained this resolve—forsaking vast official residences by trading the Apostolic Palace for the Casa Santa Marta and keeping tight control of his agenda, much to the annoyance of some Curia officials.

His appointment to the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires was also marked by another event: the discovery of financial irregularities. For years, his predecessors had disregarded the rules in this area. The diocese, defrauded, even found itself owing \$10 million to a pension fund after making haphazard investments. The fund and the archdiocese eventually reached an agreement, but Bergoglio would long be haunted by police raids at the diocesan curia.

### **Washing of the feet**

A few months after becoming aware of the situation, in 1998 he initiated an audit of the diocese's finances, relying on external consultants. Their work resulted in the implementation of clear standards to enhance transparency and combat corruption—two objectives that would also become hallmarks of Francis' work in the Roman Curia. Twenty years later, in Rome as well, he would once again call upon audit firms to establish new rules.

Over the years, he cultivated close relationships with the poorest. Starting in 1997, he made it a habit to celebrate the Holy Thursday Mass among them. The very first celebration of its kind—held at Muniz Hospital, which cared for patients suffering from infectious diseases (including many with HIV/AIDS)—left a lasting impression.

In the midst of the celebration, the archbishop would kneel before the drug addicts, as well as commercial sex workers and transgender individuals present, and wash their feet. Even after becoming pope, he continued performing the gestures he had repeated every Holy Thursday as Archbishop of Buenos Aires—whether in prisons or homes for the elderly.

He was a man of the people rather than of high society. Bergoglio shunned formal dinners and glittering receptions. His scathing *Te Deum* on every May 25, Argentina's "Day of the Homeland," rattled the political class; he was wary of the powerful, whom he suspected only wished to see him to further their own interests. And when, in 2000, he entered a new phase of meetings with Argentine political leaders, it was during an unprecedented economic crisis that nearly drove the country to bankruptcy.

Is it from this troubled period that Pope Francis drew his lessons on the excesses of capitalism and his unequivocal condemnation of speculation? Undoubtedly. In the early 2000s, Bergoglio witnessed firsthand the concrete effects of the rapid impoverishment of the population. At the time, Argentina was on the brink of collapse—its downfall was largely attributed to American vulture funds buying up Argentine debt at rock-bottom prices.

### Rome, too far from the field

Buoyed by these early commitments as archbishop, Bergoglio was created a cardinal in 2000. Clad in red, he participated as vice-president in a Synod of Bishops assembly in Rome in 2001. Fourteen hours' flight from Rome, he avoided visiting the Eternal City as much as possible, deeming it too removed from the realities on the ground. Above all, he shunned cliques—especially the pre-conclave discussions surrounding the end of the Polish pope's pontificate.

More than anything, he despised being co-opted by a clique without his consent. This led him, during the 2005 conclave, to thwart the anti-Ratzinger faction that wanted to make him pope. After garnering the votes of 35 cardinals in the first round and 40 in the second, the Archbishop of Buenos Aires called for a vote for Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. Benedict XVI was elected in the third round.

In 2007, at the Marian sanctuary of Aparecida in Brazil, he took part in a meeting of the bishops of Latin America. He was then asked to prepare the document that would close the session. Under pressure from the bishops and representatives of civil society, he discovered demands concerning a region he barely knew at the time: the Amazon. Back then, the Archbishop of Buenos Aires was somewhat annoyed by the persistence of those advocating for that part of the world.

Bergoglio would come to grasp both the importance of the Amazon—which would later be the subject of a Synod of Bishops assembly in 2019—and the ecological urgency that the region represented. Over time, his initial annoyance transformed into a deep awareness. This period not only made him recognize the significance of the Amazon but also the pressing need to address ecological issues—a theme that, as we know, became central to Pope Francis' pontificate.

It was also during this plenary assembly that he spoke of a “culture of waste” and, for the first time in public, of “existential peripheries”—a phrase he would later repeat in 2013 before all the cardinals, playing a decisive role in his election at 76 as the 265th successor of Peter.

<https://international.la-croix.com/religion/death-of-the-pope-from-jorge-mario-bergoglio-to-francis-an-account-of-his-argentine-years>



## Biography of Pope Leo XIV, born Robert Francis Prevost

*Prior to his election as Pope Leo XIV, Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost was Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops. Here is the biography of the 267<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Rome.*

(Vatican News)



The first Augustinian Pope, Leo XIV is the second Roman Pontiff - after Pope Francis - from the Americas. Unlike Jorge Mario Bergoglio, however, the 69-year-old Robert Francis Prevost is from the northern part of the continent, though he spent many years as a missionary in Peru before being elected head of the Augustinians for two consecutive terms.

### First Augustinian Pope

The new Bishop of Rome was born on September 14, 1955, in Chicago, Illinois, to Louis Marius Prevost, of French and Italian descent, and Mildred Martínez, of Spanish descent. He has two brothers, Louis Martín and John Joseph.

He spent his childhood and adolescence with his family

and studied first at the Minor Seminary of the Augustinian Fathers and then at Villanova University in Pennsylvania, where in 1977 he earned a Degree in Mathematics and also studied Philosophy.

On September 1 of the same year, Prevost entered the novitiate of the Order of Saint Augustine (O.S.A.) in Saint Louis, in the Province of Our Lady of Good Counsel of Chicago, and made his first profession on September 2, 1978. On August 29, 1981, he made his solemn vows.

The future Pontiff received his theological education at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. At the age of 27, he was sent by his superiors to Rome to study Canon Law at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum).

In Rome, he was ordained a priest on June 19, 1982, at the Augustinian College of Saint Monica by Archbishop Jean Jadot, then pro-president of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, which later became the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and then the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue.



Prevost obtained his licentiate in 1984 and the following year, while preparing his doctoral thesis, was sent to the Augustinian mission in Chulucanas, Piura, Peru (1985–1986). In 1987, he defended his doctoral thesis on "The Role of the Local Prior in the Order of Saint Augustine" and was appointed Vocation Director and Missions Director of the Augustinian Province of "Mother of Good Counsel" in Olympia Fields, Illinois (USA).

### **Mission in Peru**

The following year, he joined the mission in Trujillo, also in Peru, as director of the joint formation project for Augustinian candidates from the vicariates of Chulucanas, Iquitos, and Apurímac.

Over the course of eleven years, he served as prior of the community (1988–1992), formation director (1988–1998), and instructor for professed members (1992–1998), and in the Archdiocese of Trujillo as judicial vicar (1989–1998) and professor of Canon Law, Patristics, and Moral Theology at the Major Seminary "San Carlos y San Marcelo." At the same time, he was also entrusted with the pastoral care of Our Lady Mother of the Church, later established as the parish of Saint Rita (1988–1999), in a poor suburb of the city, and was parish administrator of Our Lady of Monserrat from 1992 to 1999.

In 1999, he was elected Provincial Prior of the Augustinian Province of "Mother of Good Counsel" in Chicago, and two and a half years later, the ordinary General Chapter of the Order of Saint Augustine, elected him as Prior General, confirming him in 2007 for a second term.

In October 2013, he returned to his Augustinian Province in Chicago, serving as director of formation at the Saint Augustine Convent, First Councillor, and Provincial Vicar—roles he held until Pope Francis appointed him on November 3, 2014, as Apostolic Administrator of the Peruvian Diocese of Chiclayo, elevating him to the episcopal dignity as Titular Bishop of Sufar.

He entered the Diocese on November 7, in the presence of Apostolic Nuncio James Patrick Green, who ordained him Bishop just over a month later, on December 12, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in the Cathedral of Saint Mary.

His episcopal motto is "In Illo uno unum"—words pronounced by Saint Augustine in a sermon on Psalm 127 to explain that "although we Christians are many, in the one Christ we are one."

### **Bishop of Chiclayo, Peru, from 2015 to 2023**

On September 26, 2015, he was appointed Bishop of Chiclayo by Pope Francis. In March 2018, he was elected second vice-president of the Peruvian Episcopal Conference, where he also served as a member of the Economic Council and president of the Commission for Culture and Education.

In 2019, Pope Francis appointed him a member of the Congregation for the Clergy (July 13, 2019), and in 2020, a member of the Congregation for Bishops (November 21). Meanwhile, on April 15, 2020, he was also appointed Apostolic Administrator of the Peruvian Diocese of Callao.

### **Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops**

On January 30, 2023, the Pope called him to Rome as Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops and President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, promoting him to the rank of Archbishop.

### **Created Cardinal in 2023**

Pope Francis created him Cardinal in the Consistory of September 30, 2023, and assigned him the Diaconate of Saint Monica. He officially took possession of his titular church on January 28, 2024.

As head of the Dicastery, he participated in the Pope's most recent Apostolic Journeys and in both the first and second sessions of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on synodality, held in Rome from October 4 to 29, 2023, and from October 2 to 27, 2024, respectively.

Meanwhile, on October 4, 2023, Pope Francis appointed him as a member of the Dicasteries for Evangelization (Section for First Evangelization and New Particular Churches), for the Doctrine of the Faith, for the Eastern Churches, for the Clergy, for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, for Culture and Education, for Legislative Texts, and of the Pontifical Commission for the Vatican City State.

Finally, on February 6 of this year, the Argentine Pope promoted him to the Order of Bishops, granting him the title of the Suburbicarian Church of Albano.

Three days later, on February 9, he celebrated the Mass presided over by Pope Francis in St. Peter's Square for the Jubilee of the Armed Forces, the second major event of the Holy Year of Hope.

During the most recent hospitalization of his predecessor at the "Gemelli" hospital, Prevost presided over the Rosary for Pope Francis's health in Saint Peter's Square on March 3.



### **The nun who went viral: How Sister Albertine is bringing faith to a new generation**

*The nun from the Chemin-Neuf international Catholic religious community and a social media influencer who uses platforms like TikTok and Instagram to reach young people, shares how an unlikely generation is turning toward Christ.*

(Albertine Debacker)

For years, people spoke of the "death of God" as a foregone conclusion and the decline of faith as a matter of fact. In a society obsessed with individualism, superficiality, and self-image, it was hard to imagine any room

for the Other. Predictions pointed to a future stripped of religion, mystery, and depth — a world without God.

### **And yet, something is happening.**

A new longing is stirring. A desire is bubbling to the surface. It's not just the growing number of catechumens knocking on the church's door. There's something broader, subtler, even underground — but no less real. Young people are asking questions, searching for meaning, and speaking about God openly and without shame. Some confide in private Instagram messages. An entire generation, almost inexplicably — and perhaps to our own surprise — is turning to Christ.

Social media, once eyed with suspicion as too fleeting and shallow to hold spiritual weight, has become part of this story. We're starting to recognize it as a new kind of mission field. Today, 78% of catechumens say social media played a role in their path to baptism.

### **An unexpected opening**

What once seemed too noisy a space for speaking about God is turning into a point of contact. A surprising crack in the wall. Often, it's behind a screen that a heart opens, a question is voiced, or a message resonates — not because it's perfect, but because it's spoken in a language that reaches someone at the right moment.

For many, social media is an unexpected stepping stone. It sparks a first “yes” — maybe a fragile one, but a real one. And that first yes can change everything. Especially when it doesn't stay isolated. What's truly powerful is how young people become witnesses for one another. They talk among themselves. They invite, encourage, and pass the word. The Gospel is shared from heart to heart along paths we didn't plan.

Then came what felt like a jolt: the overwhelming attendance at Ash Wednesday Mass. So many young people, some completely disconnected from church life, stepped into churches. No one expected them. And yet they came—not chasing a trendy spiritual moment but bringing with them a sincere question about God. It wasn't wellness culture or nostalgia drawing them in but a deeper search for meaning. They don't just want to feel better. They want to learn how to pray. They want to meet someone.

Every day, I'm struck by this truth: God shows up where no one expects Him. There's almost something playful in how He reaches the heart of this generation. Just like on that first Easter morning, when Jesus appears to His disciples and they don't recognize Him right away. He's there — present, alive — but in a new form. That's what we're seeing today. New faces are showing up in our churches. Faces we never imagined as “churchgoers.” And yet, He's the one walking through the door. This is how He works — unpredictably.

### **Faith is not a habit. It's an adventure.**

We know Easter is a passage. But we often imagine it without transformation. The disciples didn't recognize Jesus after the Resurrection because He wasn't

exactly the same. The Risen Christ is not a ghost of the past — He is the Living One, transfigured. And that's the kind of transformation we're all called into. We must let go of old ways of thinking, doing, and believing to embrace a new face of God — and perhaps a renewed version of ourselves.

The church is living its own Easter moment. What's happening isn't a "religious comeback" in some nostalgic sense. This isn't a time for reconquest. We're not being called back to what was but forward into what God is already preparing. Let's resist the temptation to wave around these conversions as victory banners. Christ's resurrection isn't a flag to be flaunted. It's a quiet fire. A breath that warms. A light that calls. And it demands something of us.

So how are we welcoming these signs? Are we ready to change our ways — to be converted ourselves? What God is doing now is an invitation to each of us. He asks: Do you want to be born again, too?

These young people aren't just seeking God. They are already witnesses. They remind us of something we may have forgotten: Faith isn't routine — it's a bold journey. It's not about repeating the familiar. It's about being surprised. At the centre of this journey burns an immense longing for true brotherhood. Not a decorative one. A real one. A church that's embodied — not idealized. That's where they're waiting for us. And that's where God is waiting, too.

### Who is Sister Albertine? A nun with hundreds of thousands of followers



In just three years, Sister Albertine Debacker has gathered 161,000 followers on TikTok and 285,000 on Instagram. At 29, this vibrant, plainspoken influencer describes herself on YouTube as "passionate about evangelization and mission work with young people and on social media."

Raised in a Catholic family in Lille, she studied finance in Paris and worked in consulting. At 24, she joined the Chemin-Neuf community in Lyon, east-central France, and took religious vows.

Her goal: to share the Good News and make it accessible. "Social media is a mission field," she says. She's unafraid to tackle tough topics and bust stereotypes about religious life — all with a modern, relatable tone.

"People sometimes ask if I ever get bored being a nun," she said with a smile. "I don't even understand the question — though I get why they ask. To me, Christianity is anything but boring. God is alive, and He's calling us to constant transformation."

<https://international.la-croix.com/religion/the-nun-who-went-viral-how-sister-albertine-is-bringing-faith-to-a-new-generation>



## Consider Curriculum: Part 6

Written and compiled by Paul Faller for the Catholic Institute of Education

This series of reflections is intended to refresh our understanding of the subject, Religious Education, and the contexts within which it takes place and to promote discussion among religious educators about the theory and practice of what we might regard as the living spring at the heart of curriculum.

Here is an overview of the series.

Part 1 Religious Education – What is its nature? (Vol 10 No 1)

Part 2 The Rationale – Why do we have it? (Vol 10 No 2)

Part 3 the Student and the Teacher – Who is involved? (Vol 10 No 3)

Part 4 Contexts and Perspectives – Where does it happen? (Vol 10 No 4)

Part 5 Scope and Sequence – What does it contain? (Vol 11 No 1)

**Part 6 Methodology – How do we do it? (Vol 11 No 2)**

Part 7 Assessment – How do we rate it? (Vol 11 No 3)

We began this series considering the nature of Religious Education. We then turned in Part 2 to the question of rationale: why do we insist on it when the State effectively has pushed it to the sidelines? In the third part we considered who is involved, namely the student and the teacher. In the fourth part we looked at where it happens as we explore key contexts and perspectives. In the fifth part we explore the question of the content of Religious Education. Now, in this penultimate section, we explore the critical question of methodology.

### Methodology

#### How do we do it?

*All her books assume that we are adventurers, and that faith and spirituality have more to do with how we travel, adventure and discover than they do with right belief or correct disciplines.*

(Larsen 2000:41 – on Madeleine L'Engle)

How do we go about teaching in Religious Education? This will be determined by a number of factors we can list as basic principles which should apply across the curriculum.

#### Some Methodological Principles

- Be mindful of the basic teaching-learning process – experience, reflection, expression.
- Start from students' experience and the experiences mediated to them.
- Make space for searching and questioning.
- Allow negotiation in the way teaching and learning takes place to ensure identification with the practice.

- Achieve a balance of teaching and learning strategies.
- Be inclusive, catering for a range of abilities and needs.
- Cater for multiple intelligences.
- Link lived experience to aspects of the community story.
- Develop study skills and attitudes in the different processes, e.g. suspending judgement when studying another religion, or critical thinking and evaluation of religious realities for personal relevance.
- Incorporating activities that lead to learning about, learning from, and learning for religion.
- Correlate method with process.
- Expose learners to the riches of a variety of cultures and religions, giving options for resources to suit different contexts.

### ***A Range of Methodologies***

Most curriculum statements call for a set methodology that incorporates logical steps to facilitate learning. But what are the consequences of such a decision? Does it lead to predictability and a gradual loss of interest on the part of the students as a result? Perhaps the teacher needs to be familiar with and confident to apply a range of methodologies chosen to suit a particular process or topic. Would one use the same methodology to teach Theology and Morality, or Scripture and Philosophy, for instance?

While it might be confusing for students to be confronted every day with a new approach, the nature of a particular lesson should require something different if the objectives are to be achieved effectively. Kevin Treston offers a number of different ways of engaging in the teaching and learning process in Religious Education. He calls them styles or models. We present some of them here using a topic in each case to illustrate the use of the model.

#### ***1 Basic Movement - the simplest way of teaching***

Topic: *Social Justice Issues*

ENCOUNTER: The topic is introduced by linking it to the life experience of the students. For example, students are presented with such questions as: Where have you had experiences of justice and injustice in your life? How did you feel when these events occurred? What were the reasons for these incidents?

EXPLORATION: Study the theme 'Social Justice Issues'. Use research, exposition, film, discussion of the concept of Christian justice, and the model of Jesus for the world.

DEPTHING: Examples of the process of going deeper into the topic would be: making a collage of justice issues round the world; having a guest speaker to inform students about the work of Amnesty International; giving a report about ways in which students can act to make their situation a more just one.

CHRISTIAN FOCUS: Exploration of responses to the theme from a Christian perspective: How is striving for social justice in society related to my life? What is my response to those situations that are in need of change?

## 2 Contract - working in groups or alone

Topic: *Life in Palestine at the time of Jesus*

**FOCUS:** A group or an individual is assigned a task that will help in learning more about the topic. The teacher gives directions or sets the boundaries of the topic so that decisions can be made about what, when and how the topic will be covered and presented.

**PARTICIPATION:** Time is given for the group to meet or the individual to research the topic. The process is faithful to the 'contract' which was made at the focus stage.

**EVALUATION:** After the contracted time has been reached, the group/individual reflects on and evaluates the effectiveness of the contract and his/her own participation.

**MODIFICATION:** In the light of the evaluation, a new contract is developed for further study, or the process is terminated.

## 3 Problem Solving

Topic: *Moral decision making*

**PROBLEM POSED:** A problem is selected or arises out of discussion with the class, for example, a moral issue such as abortion, euthanasia, with the question: what is the Christian decision about the issue?

**ANALYSIS:** Exploration of various dimensions of the problem: Why is this a moral issue? What are the various options and consequences of each of them? What does the Bible and the Church teach about the issue?

**RESEARCH:** Trace the issue through Scripture, excerpts from the Catechism, film, literature and examples from history and other religious traditions.

**FORMULATION:** Formulate a decision in terms of the issue, the consequences, the teaching of the Church and the individual's own opinion with supporting reasons.

## 4 Inquiry

Topic: *Rituals*

**FOCUS:** This theme of the topic is agreed upon - what is meant by rituals, religious and secular?

**EXPERIENCE:** They reflect and discuss rituals that they have experienced - Graduations, Orientation for School/High School, First Communion and everyday rituals such as cleaning teeth, etc.

**RESEARCH:** The group investigates various sacred rituals: the Passover meal, funeral services, marriages, bar mitzvah, confirmation, eucharistic liturgy. The elements of each of these rituals are identified.

**LOCATION:** The group then works together to prepare a religious ritual for a particular event such as an end of the school year ceremony, reconciliation liturgy, celebration for the school's patron saint.

## 5 Concept Attainment

Topic: *Covenant*

IDENTIFICATION: of the concept of 'covenant'.

GATHERING PERCEPTIONS: Students are invited to share their understandings of and stories about relationships and promises.

INVESTIGATION: Using a variety of resources, such as texts, dictionaries and readings, the group examines various meanings of 'covenant'. Characteristics of the concept of covenant are listed from this research.

ARTICULATION: Using the data obtained from the research, students make a first attempt to define the concept of covenant against their research findings.

INSIGHT: Students examine the process of how they reached a definition of a religious concept. Other religious questions could be suggested for this kind of approach.

## 6 Field Experience

Topic: *Community Service*

ORIENTATION: The group discusses a forthcoming experience of community service, clarifying the purpose, setting out the reasons for the service, setting parameters for behaviour, involvement etc.

FIELD STUDY: Visitation for community service. Places for this could include a shelter for homeless, a soup kitchen, frail-age centre, nursing home. A journal could be kept that detailed each visit.

REPORT AND DEBRIEFING: Sharing of the observations and issues that arose from the experience.

CHRISTIAN REFLECTION: If appropriate, the group might be invited to discuss the implications - benefits, difficulties and challenges of community service for all those involved. For a Christian perspective discussion on Matthew 24:34-40 could be included.

## 7 Peer Learning

Topic: *Friendship*

GROUP SEARCH: Small peer groups are constituted to research the theme, perhaps using different criteria or medium - music, literature, film etc.

FORUM: Each group shares insights with other groups in a general forum.

EXTENSION: The peer groups are re-formed to extend the scope of the inquiry to consider what the Christian approach to friendship - who were Jesus' friends, how did he relate to them? What lessons can Jesus teach us about friendship?

SYNTHESIS: Small groups form once more to formulate key ideas on the theme by incorporating the various ideas from the groups and the forum. A celebration in the form of a liturgy could be prepared by designating particular tasks to each of the groups.



## Moses and Islamic spirituality

*As Jews and Christians recently marked Passover and Easter, Muslim historian Daoud Riffi reminds readers that Moses—called Musa in Islam—is the most frequently mentioned prophet in the Quran and a revered figure in all three monotheistic faiths.*

(Daoud Riffi)



Daoud Riffi is an associate professor and historian. Publisher (Tasnîm Editions), consultant, and trainer specializing in the history of Islamic thought.

Few people know that before Ramadan was established as Islam's obligatory month of fasting, the fast of Âshûrâ was linked to the Jewish Passover. Following the practice of the Jews in Medina, the Prophet Muhammad observed this day to

commemorate Moses' crossing of the Sea of Reeds—a reflection of Mûsâ's central place in Islamic tradition.

In a compelling new collection on the spiritual legacy of Moses across Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Islamic scholar Tayeb Chouiref highlights that Moses is the most cited prophet in the Quran. He is one of the five *ulû l-'azm* *endowed with great resolve, and* his Quranic journey offers countless spiritual lessons drawn on by generations of Muslim scholars.

### The Golden Calf as the ego

The Quran and hadiths or sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad—are rich with references to Mûsâ's life—some stories parallel the Bible, while others are unique to Islamic tradition. From these sources, spiritual masters have extracted essential wisdom for the inner life. The Exodus from Egypt, for example, is interpreted as “a symbol of liberation from the constraints of the ego and rational knowledge—a passage from intellectual awareness of divine oneness to the direct contemplation of the One in all things.”

Likewise, the 10th-century mystic Sulamî offered this reflection on the episode of the Golden Calf: “Every man's Golden Calf is his own ego.”

### A unique Quranic tale: Moses and Khidr

One distinctive narrative in the Quran tells of Mûsâ's journey with Khidr – “the Verdant One”—a mysterious, long-lived traveller and initiator of saints. Convinced he was the most enlightened of men, Mûsâ is corrected by God, who tells him, “At the junction of the two seas, there is a servant of Mine who knows more than you.” Moses sets off in search of this man, whom he is destined to meet when a fish he is carrying escapes and finds its way back to the sea.

When Mûsâ finally meets Khidr, he asks to be taught by him. Khidr agrees, but warns that true mystical knowledge is hard to bear: “You will not be able to remain patient with me. How could you be patient with what is beyond your understanding?” What follows is a series of shocking and seemingly irrational acts by Khidr, each of which prompts Mûsâ, despite his promise to remain silent, to object. Eventually, Khidr declares, “This is where we part ways. I will explain to you the meaning of what you could not bear patiently.” He then reveals the hidden wisdom behind each of his actions.

This story has become a cornerstone of Islamic mysticism, offering a model for the spiritual bond between master and disciple. It illustrates the esoteric knowledge granted by God – referred to in the Quran as “Knowledge from Us.” As the great Sufi poet Rûmî wrote: “When the sheikh accepts you, beware: surrender yourself to him. Endure with patience all that is done by a Khidr free of hypocrisy, so that he may not say, ‘This is where we part ways.’”

<https://international.la-croix.com/religion/moses-and-islamic-spirituality>



## **What is the Kumbh Mela, the ‘largest pilgrimage in the world’?**

*The Kumbh Mela, which began January 13 in Prayagraj, northern India, is a 45-day Hindu pilgrimage during which millions of Hindus immerse themselves in the sacred Ganges River to cleanse their sins. The event featured spiritual rituals, processions, and blessings from ascetics.*

(Youna Rivallain)



### **What is the Kumbh Mela?**

Often described as the “largest pilgrimage in the world” and the “largest human gathering,” the Kumbh Mela is one of Hinduism's most sacred pilgrimages. Recognized as part of UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, it attracts tens of millions of participants each time. Following Hindu mythology, pilgrims perform ablutions in the Ganges or another sacred river to purify their sins and free themselves from the cycle of reincarnation. This event rotates on a 12-year cycle among four cities: Haridwar, Allahabad (recently renamed Prayagraj), Nashik, and Ujjain. This year, the Kumbh Mela is taking place in Prayagraj, the largest of the four celebrations. Organizers anticipate over 100 million attendees, possibly as many as 400 million, during the 45-day festivities.

### **What is the history of this pilgrimage?**

The origins of the celebration are traditionally attributed to Adi Shankara, a philosopher and spiritual leader of Hinduism. In the 8th century, he sought to organize large gatherings for philosophical discussions around Hindu monasteries in the Indian subcontinent, aiming to solidify doctrine and rejuvenate Hinduism, which had faced challenges from the rise of Buddhism and Jainism. However, historical records of these large gatherings only appear in the 19th century.

Kumbh Mela translates to “festival of the sacred jar.” According to legend, in ancient times, the devas (gods) and asuras (demons) formed a temporary alliance to produce amrita, the nectar of immortality, with the intention of sharing it. When the kumbha (jar) containing the amrita appeared, the demons seized it and fled, pursued by the gods. For 12 divine days and nights—equivalent to 12 earthly years—the gods and demons battled to possess the jar. During the conflict, four drops of amrita fell to Earth, landing in Prayagraj, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nashik.

### **What are the rituals of the Kumbh Mela?**

According to the United Nations, “the event encapsulates the science of astronomy, astrology, spirituality, ritualistic traditions, and social and cultural customs and practices, making it extremely rich in knowledge” and that it is “attended by millions of people irrespective of caste, creed or gender.”

At the start of the festival, the host city holds a ceremonial parade to welcome the “holy men,” led by sadhus. These ascetics renounce society to pursue moksha (liberation from illusion, cessation of the rebirth cycle, and union with the divine or cosmic consciousness). The pilgrimage’s main event is the immersion in the river when its waters are believed to transform into amrita, the nectar of immortality. Hindu devotees believe a complete immersion at this time cleanses them—and their ancestors for 88 generations—of all sins, enabling them to achieve prāyaścitta (atonement or restorative action). The most auspicious days, determined by astrological calculations, are known as shahi snan (royal baths) days.

On these occasions, large groups of sadhus lead a “royal procession” that culminates in their immersion in the sacred river. After their ablutions, they cover themselves with ash and are followed into the water by their sects. Ordinary pilgrims can then access the river. The Kumbh Mela is also a time for religious ceremonies, blessings from sadhus, saints, yogis, and darshan (ritual contemplation believed to transmit spiritual energy). Beyond its spiritual significance, the event is a celebration for the Hindu community, featuring fairs, exhibitions, conferences, monk gatherings, and entertainment events.

[What is the Kumbh Mela, the ‘largest pilgrimage in the world’? - Catholic news – La Croix International](#)



## **Catholic Social Teaching – Think and Link the Gaza War & Just Peace in Israel-Palestine \***

*“... we must actively take sides, the side of justice and peace, freedom and equality. The international community must help us by recognizing that the root cause of this war is the negation of the right of the Palestinian people to live in their land, free and equal... Let us keep hope alive, knowing that peace is possible”.*

(Michel Sabbah, Emeritus Patriarch of Jerusalem, 2024)

The principles of CST enable us to examine the situation in Israel-Palestine through the lens of our faith, helping us work toward a future in the Holy Land marked by justice and peace for all.

On Oct. 7, nearly 1,200 people in Israel were killed in Hamas’s brutal attack; 251 more were taken hostage. As of this writing, at least 48 348 Palestinians have been killed in the months since by Israel’s unprecedented military assault in Gaza. Due to Israel’s widespread bombing, whole family lines have been decimated and tens of thousands injured. The majority of Gaza’s two million residents are now displaced, lacking food and basic services of medical care, education and adequate shelter.

In the face of these infringements on human life and dignity—which amount to war crimes on the part of both Israel and Hamas—Catholic leaders have, for months, been calling for an immediate and permanent cease-fire, the release of hostages, and robust humanitarian aid to Gaza. At the same time, in Israel, the society is still reeling from last year’s surprise attack by Hamas, waiting in anguish for those kidnapped to be returned, fearing continuing rockets overhead, and anxious about the possibilities of further regional escalation. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Palestinians live under Israeli military occupation; as a stateless population, they are denied many fundamental rights.



## Human Dignity

The basis of CST is the inherent dignity of all people and their right to life. This principle reminds us that every person, regardless of nationality, religion, culture, or other characteristics, is created in God's image and likeness and is thus deserving of life, safety, and basic human rights.

Catholic social teaching's commitment to the inherent dignity of all persons and their right to life encourages us to be attentive to those who are most vulnerable and to make assisting and accompanying them in their struggles a primary concern. Both Israelis and Palestinians suffer tremendously in the Holy Land—the two communities have experienced great trauma and violence. Still, the Palestinian loss of life is much higher, and they bear the brunt of an unequal system, which amounts to structural violence and discrimination.

Acknowledging these realities and advocating for Palestinian rights is wholly consistent with a commitment to ensuring the rights, safety and dignity of Jewish Israelis. Catholics have a responsibility to uphold these commitments. Upholding the preferential option for the poor is not about “taking sides” but ultimately is about caring for the most vulnerable, identifying root causes of violence and injustice, and working toward solutions that benefit all. This connects to the notion of the “common good”—working toward a reality where social conditions facilitate human flourishing for all.

## Commitment to Common Good

Catholic social teaching also reminds us not to prioritize the needs of our own group over those of others. As Christians, we should be attentive to the plight of those who share our faith. At the same time, our faith compels us to have the same care for Muslims and Jews. We are called to defend the rights and dignity of all who suffer in Israel-Palestine, regardless of their religion, ethnicity or nationality. A commitment to the common good enables us to envision and support a political solution that would provide freedom, equality, safety, and rights to Palestinians and Israelis alike.

Such a commitment also requires us to attend to the unique identities and narratives of both peoples and to understand the history they carry with them. For Palestinians, the mass displacement occurring in Gaza today is experienced as a continuation of the Nakba – the “catastrophe” in Arabic - when 750,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes and made refugees when the state of Israel was established in 1948. For Jewish Israelis, the nature of the Hamas attack on southern Israel, with families hiding in their homes, conjured up memories of the Holocaust and fears rooted in historic persecution.

Antisemitism, Islamophobia and anti-Arab bigotry must be opposed; these ideologies are an affront to the image of God in each person and are inimical to any hopes for justice or peace. Some in our Christian communities have wrongly labelled all Palestinians and Muslims as terrorists or have wrongly

blamed all Jews and Israelis for the actions of the Israeli government. This collective blaming is wrong and has led to further violence. As we stand firmly against collective blaming and stereotyping, we also recognize that criticism of Israel is not inherently antisemitic, and criticism of Hamas is not necessarily anti-Muslim. Charges of bigotry should never be used to silence genuine activism for human rights.

### **Solidarity and Subsidiarity**

The principle of solidarity—which entails accompanying others on the path to justice and peace—can inspire everything from large-scale political advocacy to quietly supporting individuals who are impacted. Catholics, other Christians, Jews, Muslims and people of conscience from all backgrounds have long collaborated to push for policies that would enable a better future in Israel-Palestine. This cross-religious solidarity, which is occurring both in Israel-Palestine and around the world, rejects dehumanization and defies the wrongheaded perception that this is an intractable conflict between religions.

While solidarity often focuses on the big picture, the principle of subsidiarity encourages us to zoom in, focusing our efforts locally and effecting change within our communities. This means that our activism could entail hosting talks or teaching, holding a fundraiser and donating to aid groups, organizing vigils or public demonstrations, proactively addressing bigotry, or making sure that, when we go on pilgrimage to Holy Land, we don't focus solely on the spiritual while ignoring the historical and present-day political injustices. The subsidiarity principle also reminds us to listen to those closest to realities to understand what is happening in each situation.

*\*We thank Julie Schumacher Cohen and Jordan Denari Duffner for their assistance in preparing this collaborative text, which is based on a previously published piece in America magazine and is shared in part here with their permission.*



### **Artificial intelligence fuels global tensions, threatens fundamental rights, warns Amnesty**

*Amnesty International's latest report delivers a sharp critique of AI, raises concerns about the increasing role of this technology in various forms of discrimination that fuel ethnic, racial, and social tensions.*

(Marin Paulay) April 24th, 2024

Amnesty International warns that artificial intelligence, often promoted as a solution for security and anti-discrimination efforts, actually exacerbates

racism and other forms of discrimination, thus undermining fundamental human rights.

"Artificial intelligences are touted as effective solutions for necessary security measures and combating discrimination. However, instead of solving these issues, they amplify racism and discrimination and perpetuate breaches of fundamental rights," said Katia Roux, advocacy officer for technology and human rights at Amnesty International, during the presentation of the annual "State of the World's Human Rights" report April 24.

These dangers are heightened by two main factors: a critical election year, with over half of the world's population called to vote, and an international balance disrupted by numerous high-intensity conflicts in places like Gaza, Ukraine, and Sudan. This precarious situation benefits AIs, which thrive in the absence of stringent regulation and feed these tensions.



### **Discriminations fuelled by algorithms**

According to Amnesty International, different AIs can have varied impacts depending on their use but contribute to racial or ethnic discrimination. "For instance, during the conflict in Ethiopia between 2020 and 2022, as well as in Myanmar and with the Rohingya, it was observed that Meta's (Facebook) algorithms amplified violent content that incited hatred against the Tigrayans. This emphasis on engaging violent content leads to surges of hate," analyzed Roux.

Beyond the algorithms of digital giants, newer technologies such as generative AIs – which can independently create content from a simple instruction – also disrupt political life. They do not spare democracies either. For example, in the United Kingdom, which is expected to have elections in January 2025, a series of "deepfakes" (images generated by artificial intelligence) of Labour MP and opposition leader Keir Starmer insulting employees were distributed, disrupting politics in a new way.

A similar incident occurred in the United States during the New Hampshire Democratic primary in January. A few months before the November presidential election, the campaign manager for Joe Biden's rival admitted to using AI to create a phone call in which the American president urges his voters not to vote against him. This fabricated audio disrupted the early primaries.

According to this latest Amnesty International report, facial recognition and emotion detection tools, which are also forms of artificial intelligence, further fuel unequal treatment, even if used by governments.

Europe, for instance, was criticized by Amnesty International for using the "iBorder Control" software, which acts like a lie detector during border checks. Used at Latvian, Hungarian, and Greek borders and funded by the European Union, this system is said to favour discrimination, the NGO argues.

"Borders are interesting for governments because they can test their tools on vulnerable people," said Roux. "iBorder Control, like others, is labelled as 'neutral' technology – a mere aid to human decision-making – but they are not because they are designed by humans who can choose the criteria and can be abusively used to target specific groups."

#### **Missed opportunity with the AI Act**

The widespread use of artificial intelligence for security issues, whose effectiveness and necessity have not been demonstrated, according to Amnesty International, is subject to very little regulation. The European Parliament, however, adopted March 24 the Artificial Intelligence Act, a regulation establishing rules on artificial intelligence across all areas, whether algorithmic, security, or creative. According to Roux, this regulation "does not go far enough. It was the first time in the world that we had a regulation addressing all these points, and it is a pity that some states did not pursue an ambitious project, especially regarding facial identification."

As the Olympic Games approach, France has become the first country in the European Union to legalize the use of artificial intelligence for surveillance purposes. This move concerns Amnesty International, even though the Ministry of the Interior assures that its use should be limited in time. Amnesty International fears that these systems may become a permanent fixture in everyday life.

[Artificial intelligence fuels global tensions, threatens fundamental rights, warns Amnesty - Catholic news – La Croix International \(la-croix.com\)](#)

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