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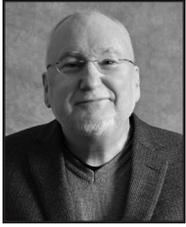
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A RESPONSE TO FR. ANTHONY GITTINS, C.S.SP.



Dr. Ronald C. Arnett
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...having at least two different "habits of the heart" assists in texturing individual discernment and communal direction.

I am pleased to be part of this lecture experience. Fr. Gittins brings to this community an extraordinary body of scholarship.¹ His ideas are important for the Spiritans, this university community, and the West in general; his thoughtful analysis offers a corrective for the West. Fr. Gittins moves us from singularity of commitment and locality into pragmatic admission that having at least two different "habits of the heart" assists in texturing individual discernment and communal direction.²

Fr. Gittins articulates the importance of geographical and social mobility; he frames a practical rationale for bicultural perspectives in community. He speaks otherwise than cosmopolitanism, the popular emphasis that invokes a modern sentiment of standing above and apart from the often problematic complexity of our human sociality. Fr. Gittins offers a practical embodied alternative—engaged bicultural understanding. He examines the challenge of singularity of perspective within religious communities with an emphasis on pragmatic bicultural insight. Fr. Gittins takes us into a world of embodied learning and comprehension via a stance of multiplicity. Fr. Gittin's enriched conception of community is akin to that of Maurice Friedman, who was the principal interpreter and biographer of Martin Buber. Friedman differentiated between a *community of otherness* and a *community of affinity*. For Friedman, a community of affinity is based on psychological liking whereas a community of otherness is centered on learning from others, even those we do not like. Friedman's understanding of a community of otherness assumes Buber's emphasis on a "common center" that pulls difference together. A commitment to a common center permits one to assist those with whom one is in disagreement. A community of otherness requires love for a communal common center that is greater than one's relational liking of persons within what Friedman termed a community of affinity.³ In a thoughtful and practical fashion, Fr. Gittins outlines how one can biculturally embrace and contribute to a community of otherness.

Fr. Gittins calls for an intentional movement toward intercultural communities constituted in practical bicultural obligations. Again, in the language of Friedman, he provides a vision of a community of otherness constituted not in mystical demands, but in practical application of a twenty-first century faith. Fr. Gittin's conception of community brings both Friedman and Buber into the story with Buber's definition of community functioning as a contrast to psychological or

liking-based conceptions of community. A community of otherness gathered around a common center requires protection and promotion of a good that is performatively enacted in life together.⁴ Love of and commitment to the common center of a community requires giving part of one's life to the maintenance, duration, and prospering of what gathers a community of persons together, even when one would prefer the absence of particular members.

Cultural diversity begins within oneself, with a human being permitting different formative cultures to meet in interior dialogue...

Fr. Gittins reminds us of a practical common center for the individual as well as the community: a multiplicity of perspectives. He frames the importance of bicultural knowledge and practices within any given person; such practices permit a twenty-first century manifestation of Immanuel Kant's notion of self-dialogue.⁵ Kant discussed the necessity of internal dialogue in his conception of the first stage of decision making and judgment. Kant's ethical system of self-legislation necessitates an initial encounter of differing positions within oneself. Fr. Gittins's bicultural orientation assists self-dialogue and self-legislation; one's ideas and positions must pass the test of self-examination before bringing them into the public domain of a given community. Cultural diversity begins within oneself, with a human being permitting different formative cultures to meet in interior dialogue—the first dialogue is with oneself, and for Fr. Gittins, that dialogue is bicultural.

Fr. Gittins contends that becoming truly cross-cultural requires linguistic skill in another language and patience with the cultural "other" who might naturally be slow to offer welcome. It takes time to learn about another and his/her culture, let alone to begin to embody elements of a new cultural perspective. Time spent in meeting and interacting with others cannot be truncated; otherwise, we attempt to "overrun [the] reality" of social and cultural knowledge. Buber writes:

The real essence of community is to be found in the fact—manifest or otherwise—that it has a center. The real beginning of a community is when its members have a common relation to the center overriding all other relations: the circle is described by the radii, not the points along its circumference.⁶

Caution abides within a resistive impulse to overrun reality in the acquisition of bicultural acceptance.

Fr. Gittins reminds us that groups demanding immediate assimilation discover limited success; such demands can lead to communicative acts of seduction with a managed smile of insincerity and, at times, the imposition of what Buber

termed neurotic guilt. While access to the public goods of society requires the demand of law, communities depend upon sentiments of inclusion over time. Communities of assimilation are modern creatures of amalgamation. They represent modernity at its height because modernity offers processes and procedures that attempt to eliminate differences.

Uniting the insights of Sissela Bok and Buber's understanding of common center, the points of common connection within a community require minimalist agreement. By this continuum, a minimal common center permits change and a maximal common center moves to ideological rigidity. Abiding by Aristotle's description of the dangers of excess and deficiency, there are two extreme points of error. First, one can enact a willingness to discount the importance of a common center. Second, one can require maximal adherence to a center, a consistency that morphs into dangerous ideology. Bok's minimalist conception illuminates a performative "how" in the engagement of diversity in a postmodern world. Alasdair MacIntyre offers a portrait of a postmodern world⁷ as a place of constant tension between and among differing virtue and narrative structures. MacIntyre thus suggests a conception of community that embraces a minimalistic common center that is vitally robust and publicly announced in daily practices within a community.

MacIntyre reminds us that communities can bring together different cultures and at the same time unite them on common narrative grounds.

MacIntyre reminds us that communities can bring together different cultures and at the same time unite them on common narrative grounds.⁸ People require narrative ground, common practices, and a story that connects persons. Stanley Hauerwas makes this point in *Community of Character*, his analysis of Richard Adams's novel *Watership Down*.⁹ Similarly, Dietrich Bonhoeffer considered it immoral to destroy the narrative ground of another,¹⁰ a point that undergirds Charles Taylor's emphasis on narrative in *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*.¹¹ Modernity, on the other hand, undercuts narrative ground in numerous ways, to the point of losing an external standard for judgment, a loss which then leads to an increasingly popular mode of decision-making in the West that MacIntyre terms "emotivism"—decision-making based upon personal preference alone.¹²

A common center contends with emotivism; it functions as a third, as an external standard of evaluation that calls members to account. Emotivism, on the other hand, is a decision-making method in the West that emerges from what I term *the social disease of individualism*. Alexis De Tocqueville published warnings about this disease in *Democracy in America*; he examined early life in this country and warned against

the myth of individualism that assumes that one can stand above the constraints of family, church, and friendships.¹³ He stated a preference for selfishness over individualism because selfishness necessitates taking into account other people as we navigate the social environment, even for our own benefit. De Tocqueville contended that only religion could possibly temper individualism; he offered the insight that when religion lost its import, individualism would trump. I contend that individualism is winning; individualism is the central social sin of the West, the sin that we export globally.

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Fr. Gittins's conception of community dwells at the heart of his faith and his love of community within the diversity of social orders in the church. He reminds us that faith lives within culture and the practices of social life, practices that generate meaning-making systems. Practices within a culture functionally shape social reality. Faith, for Gittins, is not challenged by differing cultural positions, but rather textured, nourished, and enhanced by multiplicity of perspectives. Differing cultural perspectives function as diverse communicative backgrounds that enrich conceptual understanding of interpretive engagements, framing foreground activity, ideas, and decision-making. My addition to the conversation thus far that centers on Buber, Bok, MacIntyre, and Taylor is a call to rethink what is background and foreground in a postmodern world of virtue and narrative contention. In such a moment, a common center of community can no longer be a taken-for-granted background; a common center must be nourished, supported, and witnessed to as a foreground public confession. Diverse cultural background engagements generate differences, as do the different understandings of multiple places, ideas, and communities. However, what gathers a single community is a publicly confessed common center that must remain at the foreground of attentiveness.

Fr. Gittins ties his work to the spirituality of St. Jerome in the fourth century (circa 342–384). St. Jerome traveled widely, studying with the best of teachers as he enhanced his reputation as a scholar of the Scriptures, but St. Jerome also called for active concern for those relegated to the margins of the human condition. Akin to St. Jerome, Gittins reminds us that spirituality is not a form of belief structured to the point of reification; instead, he calls for the embodiment of faithful selves who engage in practices that practically assist God's world. It is remembering the owner of existence that keeps our actions performed on behalf of something other than the self. Borrowing from the insights of Taylor, it is this demotion of the self that counters totalizing efforts to disenchant God's world.¹⁴ On a local note, this Spiritan campus of Duquesne University

of the Holy Spirit finds its performative identity within enchanted phrases, such as understanding this dwelling as a life-giving place, as a witness to the fact that the Spirit Gives Life. Such words are not mere slogans; they are performative practices, habits of the heart that infuse a place with a narrative common center—the Spirit that Gives Life.

...failure to learn from one another destroys the integrity of a community, and consistent with my earlier comments, failure to learn from one another obliterates the common center of community with a dismissiveness that fails to permit love to trump over liking.

Gittins points to inclusion based on difference...

Fr. Gittins offers a position on culture that is otherwise than convention. He contends that failure to learn from one another destroys the integrity of a community, and consistent with my earlier comments, failure to learn from one another obliterates the common center of community with a dismissiveness that fails to permit love to trump over liking. Gittins suggests that we must not only know about social locations but also recognize their formative power in our own lives and the lives of others, permitting learning to emerge from Same and Other. Gittins reminds us of a body of faith where acknowledgment of differences in physical and emotional activities underscores the reality of sickness and health as culturally coded. Learning requires attentiveness to a world occupied by the Other who deserves respect—without confusing him/her or me as the center of faith. We are part of God's community without being the sole focus; this perspective counters a therapeutic communication style in which the individual communicator becomes the sovereign propelled by emotivistic decision-making by personal preference. Gittins suggests that acknowledging contrasting attitudes toward issues of time and space wards off demands for a single manner of participation in God's world. Ethnocentrism, as Fr. Gittins states, however, is a fact of life; we must engage it by learning from differences with the constructive hope that we can thereby continue to assist the common center of a given community. Ethnocentrism void of such responsiveness to learning is, in Gittins's words, a cultural flaw or original sin; it is a utopia void of others. Gittins points to inclusion based on difference, reminding us that the way of the cross does not begin with the self, but with paths open to those in the margins.

An intercultural project attentive to nourishing an international religious community is a life-long project; Gittins suggests that such communities are an essential part of the faith within this century. A personal faith situated within good intentions is insufficient. The art of learning requires attentiveness to difference, otherness, and openness to novel insights ever propelled by tenacious hope. Neither truth nor community is a commodity—both are performative actions played out within an enchanted world that belongs to God, not to a single perspective. Fr. Gittins calls for a faith that challenges within a spirit of grace open to the unexpected.

The global church needs to be a place of inclusion without resorting to imposed assimilation, token inclusion, or radical takeovers.

...“home away from home.”

...receptiveness to difference and protection of a common center.

Gittins offers a practical solution that begins with an internal dialogue informed by multiple cultures.

Gittins asserts that answers in this century do not reside in the extremes of individualism or tribalism. From the vantage point of the West, I return to MacIntyre and his warning about individualism. He contends that the world has witnessed the dangers of imperialism and totalitarianism as these movements have devastated the globe; however, we have yet to understand what individualism is doing to the destruction of our social lives together. The tacit power of individualism is a performative exemplar of what Hannah Arendt called a “banality of evil.”¹⁵ Practically and socially, one must engage intercultural living as communal, eschewing the temptation of the monocultural. One must address the margins, even as one slowly works in the margins with the hope of gaining the trust of a different community home. The global church needs to be a place of inclusion without resorting to imposed assimilation, token inclusion, or radical takeovers. Such a faith invites a radical welcoming of new ideas, which can enhance, enrich, and assure an enduring common center for a community that is bigger than a provincial settler can encompass and more complex than surface observations of the novice.

Fr. Gittins concludes with three statements. First, those committed to bringing bicultural perspectives to community must build a home that is a “home away from home.” Second, one must remember that such integrated communities emerge organically, and one must engage such participation with patience. Third, the twenty-first century demands that we rethink how we think. Gittins cites material from Rudy Wiebe, who wrote a book on a fictional Mennonite community, *Peace Shall Destroy Many*.¹⁶ The novel illuminates Fr. Gittins’s thoughtful illustrations of the dangers of monoculturalism, ethnocentrism, and a refusal to learn from difference. Such actions destroy a common center and move the word “peace” into the terminological matrix of ideological oppression. For Gittins, faith within the twenty-first century begins with a commitment to bicultural formations.

Fr. Gittins ends with a discussion of good actions that testify to the reality of grace in a light of dawn that dwells within the eyes of another. Gittins calls for witnessing to an enchanted world that is beyond oneself and requires internal dialogue that seeks to enhance a given common center within a community. I suggest that as we engage such learning, there is a narrow ridge that we must walk¹⁷—receptiveness to difference and protection of a common center. Life nourished by individualism has singular direction, but community lived within the unity of contraries of burden and joy from learning—witnessing to the common center of the Spirit that gives Life—offers tenacious hope for this Spiritan campus

as a home for those who labor, work, pray, and learn. Such a place brings hope when it seems too distant, calling forth life in and for weary bones. Unlike the call to a cosmopolitan world, Gittins offers a practical solution that begins with an internal dialogue informed by multiple cultures. He guides us with a tenacious hope that lives within a faith that embraces learning while refusing to forget the power of a faith-filled community with a common center nourished by an enchanted phenomenological reminder—it is the Spirit that gives Life.

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Endnotes

¹Fr. Gittins is the author of 16 books, his most recent being, *Living Mission Interculturally: Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2015 and *The Way of Discipleship, The Way of Jesus*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016.

²Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. New York: Harper & Row, 1985.

³See Friedman, Maurice, *The Confirmation of Otherness, in Family, Community, and Society*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1983.

⁴Buber, Martin, *Paths in Utopia*. New York: First Syracuse University Press, 1950, 135. First published in 1949.

⁵Kant, Immanuel, “An Answer to the Question: What is the Enlightenment?” in *What is Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*. Ed. J. Schmidt, 58–64. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. First published in 1784.

⁶Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, 13.

⁷See Bok, Sissela, *Common Values*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1995.

⁸MacIntyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

⁹Adams, Richard, *Watership Down*. London: Rex Collings, 1972; Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Towards a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

¹⁰Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Ethics*. New York: Harper & Row, 1954.

¹¹Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

¹²See MacIntyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, 14.

¹³See de Tocqueville, Alexis, *Democracy in America, Vol. 1*. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

¹⁴See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*.

¹⁵Arendt, Hannah, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. 1963, Repr., New York: Penguin, 2006.

¹⁶Wiebe, Rudy, *Peace Shall Destroy Many*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972.

¹⁷See Buber, Martin, *Israel and the World*. New York: Schocken, 1948.