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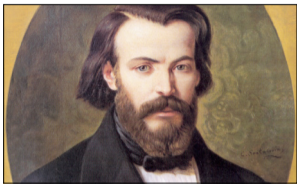
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VINCENTIAN HERITAGE



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Word of God”

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BIO

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Elizabeth Bayley Seton loved words, poetry, music, and song. Her heart exulted in sunsets. She kept birds, rode horses, and loved walking in the woods, along the seashore, or on garden paths. She enjoyed attending plays, dancing, and hearing “the *feeling tones* of [her] sweet *Piano*.”¹ Elizabeth had an imagination that soared, and emotions that had to be kept in check. She read widely and copied lengthy passages that nourished her heart, mind, and soul. She loved children, enjoyed deep friendships with some people, and warm relationships with many. Her correspondence is filled with underlining, exclamation points, and words writ large in capital letters to convey her feelings.

All these qualities were integral to Elizabeth’s passionate response to the Word of God. Her heart stirred not only for the written word, but for the spoken word, the sung word, words experienced in nature, and the Word of God received in Eucharist.

Early Familiarity with Scripture

Elizabeth’s familiarity with the Word of God appears early in her life. Her stepmother taught her the Twenty-third Psalm when she was six: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.” This song and prayer remained a favorite throughout her life. Its poetic expressions and pastoral images called forth something deep within the young child, and later, the mature woman—green pastures, still waters, a protective presence, peace, security, and abundance.²

Six-year-old Elizabeth taught her one-year-old half-sister Emma her prayers. Pointing out the setting sun, she explained to the toddler that God lived in heaven above, and they could go there. She took pleasure in caring for her infant siblings, singing little hymns over the cradle.³ During her childhood and early teen years she lived for long periods with her uncle William’s family on Long Island Sound; she loved to sit quietly by the water or wander along the seashore, humming and gathering shells. As she recalled, “Every little leaf and flower, or animal, insect, shades of clouds, or waving trees, [were] objects of vacant unconnected thoughts of God and heaven.”⁴

By age fourteen, she was enjoying the Bible as well as British poets. Engulfed in the glories of creation, she wrote of “hymns said on the rocks ... in transports of first pure Enthusiasm [evoking the evangelical spirit of the Second Great Awakening] – gazing at the stars – Orion – walks among the cedars singing hymns ... delight in sitting in the fields with

1 Letter 1.32, “To Julia Scott,” 3 November 1798, Regina Bechtle, S.C. and Judith Metz, S.C., eds., *Elizabeth Bayley Seton: Collected Writings*, 3 vols. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000–06), 1:52. Hereafter referred to as *Collected Writings*.

2 Document 10.4, “Dear Remembrances,” n.d., *ibid.*, 3a:510.

3 *Ibid.*, 3a:510–11.

4 *Ibid.*, 3a:511.



“All this and Heaven, too.”

Original watercolor in Daughters of Charity house, Emmitsburg, MD. By Rebecca Pearl.

Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online

Thompson,⁵ surrounded by sheep and lambs [echoes of Psalm 23], of drinking of the sap of the birch, and gathering shells on the shore.”⁶ By eighteen, Elizabeth was imagining “a little country home” where she could “gather all the little children round and teach them their prayers.” She expressed interest in staying at home and “philosophizing” rather than being absorbed in “the world,” as she referred to it.⁷

These practices—singing hymns, reading the Bible and poetry, walking alone by the shore, being captivated by sunsets and clouds—nourished Elizabeth’s reflective spirit. Sensing God’s presence, she took “pleasure in everything, coarse, rough, smooth or easy.”⁸ This pulsing life absorbed the young woman, serving as her entry into a “world charged with the grandeur of God.”⁹

As we hear Elizabeth’s description of her early years, we might ask: what Bible passages found resonance in her soul? What hymns was she singing? What poetry engaged her?

Her practice of privately reading the Bible as well as attending Anglican or Episcopal liturgies with her family, created for Elizabeth an intimacy with the verbal and musical cadences of Scripture—its heroes and villains, its struggles and temptations, and its prophecies and promises. The morning and evening services in the Book of Common Prayer were steeped in these texts, while singing and recitation of Psalms rendered in

5 British poet James Thompson (1700–1748) was known for “The Seasons,” four reflections on the landscape written in blank verse.

6 “Dear Remembrances,” 3a:511.

7 Ibid., 3a:512.

8 Ibid., 3a:511.

9 Gerard Manly Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur,” in *The Poems of Gerard Manly Hopkins*, ed. W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 66.

vernacular poetry were used throughout. The hymns and canticles, such as the exultant “Te Deum,” were saturated with Scriptural references. Many hymns focused specifically on the Psalms.¹⁰ Vernacular hymns had long been popular in the Anglican Church. Many were used regularly, such as Bishop Thomas Ken’s “Praise God from Whom All blessings Flow.”¹¹ One of the most prolific eighteenth century composers, Isaac Watts, is credited with “Christianizing the Psalter.”¹² His greatest and most recognizable hymn is “O God, Our Help in Ages Past.”¹³ While most Anglican hymns contained Scriptural themes, others employed Deist expressions exalting “the spacious firmament on high.”¹⁴ Seasonal hymns appeared during this period as well, including Watts’s “Joy to the world! The Lord Is Come,” based on Psalm 98.¹⁵

Many large congregations, such as Trinity Church and St. Paul’s Chapel in Manhattan (where Elizabeth attended services), invested in organs and featured choirs. Trinity was destroyed by fire during the American Revolution; when the rebuilt church opened in 1788, a new instrument was purchased and played by the eminent organist Dr. Edward Hodges. The organ at St. Paul’s, played by Hodges’s son, was considered “one of the finest in the country” with particularly “sweet and mellow” tones.¹⁶

The Book of Common Prayer, a psalter, and a hymnal served as texts for Anglican/Episcopal liturgies that were primarily services of the Word. The ritual opened with a metrical psalm led by the parish clerk with response by the congregation.¹⁷ The annual cycle of readings that followed included the Hebrew scriptures read through once each year, while the Christian scriptures were read three times a year. The reading from the Hebrew scriptures was followed by either the “Te Deum” or the “Benedicite,” a canticle composed from the Book of Daniel.¹⁸ The Christian lesson was followed either by the “Jubilate Deo,” based on Psalm 100, or the “Benedictus,” the Canticle of Zechariah from the Gospel of Luke.¹⁹ A penitential rite that concluded with additional psalms, hymns, and prayers followed. After the creed and a hymn to the Holy Spirit, the minister delivered a lengthy sermon based on

10 Martin Dewey Gable Jr., “The Hymnody of the Church—1789–1832,” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 36 (1967): 249, 251.

11 Lowell B. Harlan, “Theology of Eighteenth Century English Hymns,” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 47 (1979): 169. Cf. Ps 103:1, 2 Tim 1:9, James 1:17.

12 See Edith Blumhofer, “Women Hymn Writers,” in *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*, ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller, Rosemary Radford Ruether (Indiana University Press, 2006), 975.

13 Harlan, “Theology,” 170, 172. Cf. Ps 90.

14 Harlan, “Theology,” 172.

15 Ibid., 187. Cf. Luke 2:15–20.

16 Orpha Ochse, *The History of the Organ in the United States* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1975): 32, 94, 96, 97.

17 Luke 1:68–79.

18 Dan 3:57–88, 56.

19 Luke 2:68–79. The order of Sunday service described below is from Marion J. Hackett, “A Sunday Service in 1776 Or Thereabouts,” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 45, no. 4 (December 1976): 372–84.



Nineteenth-century etching of St. Paul's Chapel and Trinity Church.

From James McCabe, *New York by Sunlight and Gaslight: A Work Descriptive of the Great American Metropolis* (1882).

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the scripture readings of the day. Additional psalms and prayers were followed with the final blessing and dismissal.²⁰ Elizabeth's attendance at these liturgies deeply grounded her in Biblical expressions, melodies, and sentiments that shaped her relationship to the world around her.

Broadening Influences

As she matured, however, Elizabeth's attention was drawn to the social world of theater, dance, and social gatherings. She married William Magee Seton, and the first of their five children was born sixteen months later. The family lived in a fashionable residence on Wall Street and spent the summer and fall seasons on Long Island or at the Seton summer home along the Hudson River. Elizabeth loved her life, especially sharing relaxing evenings filled with music at home with her husband, children, and oftentimes her father. "I play all the little favorites, which is indispensable every Evening," she delightedly told a friend. Another time, the doting mother described "the darlings all hallooing and dancing – I have played for them this half hour."²¹

Throughout the 1790s, the decade of her late teens and early twenties, the busy young wife and mother practiced a "genteel" form of Protestantism, continuing to read her Bible, attend services, and have each of her children baptized. Her religious and philosophical

20 At this time the Communion service was celebrated only about six times a year. It included the "Gloria in Excelsis," and the singing of hymns.

21 Letter 1.63, "To Eliza Sadler," 9 September 1799, *Collected Writings*, 1:94; and letter 1.150, "To Rebecca Seton," n.d., *ibid.*, 1:198. See also letter 1.32, "To Julia Scott," 3 November 1798, *ibid.*, 1:52; and letter 1.89 "To Catherine Dupleix," 12 July 1800, *ibid.*, 1:126.

interests broadened; her social relationships became cosmopolitan. This was a time when Elizabeth was exploring new ideas: searching and comparing, influenced by both the rationalism and the romanticism of her day. One biographer concluded that during this period Elizabeth “subscribed to an idiosyncratic mixture of nondenominational Christian belief, philosophical inquiry, and stoic detachment,” where “reason and faith coexisted as easily as Rousseau and her Bible.”²² At an early age, she had admired Methodist spinning girls singing their hymns, and the pretty hats the Quakers wore.²³ Now she associated with people of various religious and political persuasions at social events, and in her work with the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children. Like others of her social class, Elizabeth believed that religion’s central purpose was to produce ethical, happy individuals,²⁴ telling a friend that “the first point of Religion is cheerfulness and Harmony, they who have these in view are certainly right.”²⁵

Elizabeth invested considerable energy into reading and copying material that captured her interest. Between 1788, when she was fifteen years old, and 1801, she filled hundreds of pages in three copybooks.²⁶ Her excerpts ranged from Greek, Roman, and English history to political, literary, and philosophical pieces. Familiar with controversial new publications, the young woman expressed sympathy with Mary Woolstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, which argued that women possessed the same rights as men.²⁷ In one copybook, Elizabeth transcribed eighty-seven pages of poetry representing thirty-two primarily English and Scottish bards. Beyond the classics of William Shakespeare and John Milton, she selected pastorals, elegies, odes, satires, and prayers²⁸ whose authors included such familiar names as Robert Burns, William Cowper, and Alexander Pope.

Excerpts from the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau never appear in Elizabeth’s copybooks, which is surprising because she was quite enamored of his novel, *Emile, or On Education*, through the summer and fall of 1799. “Every hour I can catch goes to Emilius,” she told a friend. Reading three volumes “with delight,” she professed her agreement with the author, “particularly respecting his Religious Ideas.” These included such positions as: “Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man.” Rousseau respected the Bible, but not organized religion, believing

22 Catherine O’Donnell, *Elizabeth Seton, American Saint* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 64, 68.

23 “Dear Remembrances,” 3a:512.

24 O’Donnell, *Elizabeth Seton, American Saint*, 63.

25 Letter 1.8, “To Eliza Sadler,” 8 February 1796, *Collected Writings*, 1:8.

26 Ellin Kelly, “Elizabeth Bayley Seton’s Commonplace Book of Poetry, Archives, St. Joseph Provincial House, Rare Book 31,” *Vincentian Heritage Journal* 29, no. 1 (2009), <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol29/iss1/4>.

27 Daughters of Charity Archives, Province of St. Louise, Emmitsburg, Maryland, *Rare Book #32*, 133.

28 Kelly, “Commonplace Book of Poetry,” 37.

in a God of love and beauty.²⁹ Enamored by the philosopher's ideas, Elizabeth feared losing the "circumspection" she had so long practiced. "[D]ear JJ. I am yours,"³⁰ she effused to her friend Eliza Sadler.

In other correspondence, Elizabeth discussed inspirational works. The Scottish clergyman Hugh Blair's belief in the importance of imagination and feeling over reason so impressed Elizabeth that she excerpted several pages of his sermons into one of her copybooks.³¹ She wrote to her friend Julia Scott and quoted a lengthy passage from the English moralist Jane Bowdler, who wrote on themes of sensibility, politeness, and the pleasures of religion. Elizabeth told Julia that she had transcribed "almost half the volume" for her young daughter Anna.³² Elizabeth also cited James Hervey, an Anglican cleric who urged acceptance of all "Divine Dispensations" and spoke of the "allseeing eye" that preserves an exact harmony and maintains a watchful care over his rational creatures.³³

Elizabeth, like many of her time, was balancing conflicting intellectual influences. A variety of ideas were afloat, most drawn from European schools of thought adapted to the American cultural milieu. The historian Bernard Bailyn described this trend as "random eclecticism," where many ideas blended, resulting in sometimes striking incongruities and contradictions.³⁴ So, while Elizabeth was enthusiastically responding to Rousseau's Romantic ideas, she was using Deistic and Rationalistic language in her letters, referring to God as "the Author and conductor" of the present and the future;³⁵ as having "reliance on Superior Providence";³⁶ and "ador[ing] that Power" that gave her "the sacred charge" of caring for the sick.³⁷

Rekindling a Biblical Focus

The late 1790s found Elizabeth burdened with family responsibilities, illnesses and deaths of family members and friends, and problems stemming from the pending bankruptcy of her husband's shipping business. However, just as circumstances seemed bleakest a new clergyman, Rev. Henry Hobart, arrived at Trinity Church in late 1800. He was to play a significant role in igniting Elizabeth's religious fervor, giving new life and direction to what was buried deep in her spirit.

29 R. R. Palmer and Joel Colton, *A History of the Modern World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 297.

30 Letter 1.64, "To Eliza Sadler," [1799], *Collected Writings*, 1:95–96.

31 Archives, Province of St. Louise, *Rare Book #31*, 74–79.

32 Letter 1.19, "To Julia Scott," 16 May 1798, *Collected Writings*, 1:30–31.

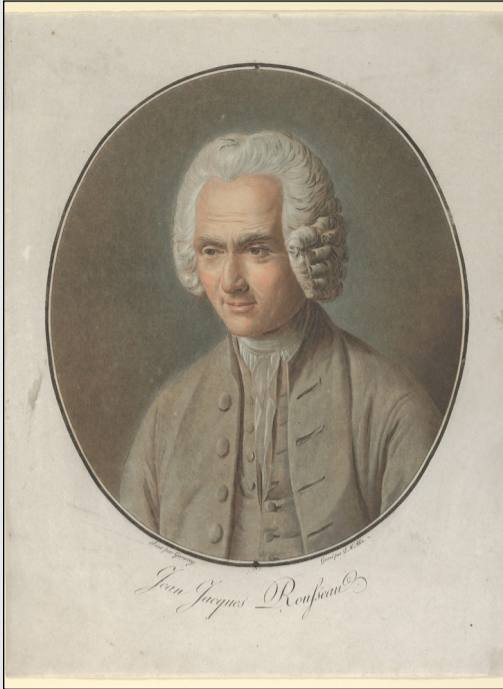
33 O'Donnell, *Elizabeth Seton, American Saint*, 80.

34 Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 22, 33–34.

35 Letter 1.30, "To Julia Scott," 28 October 1798, *Collected Writings*, 1:49.

36 Letter 1.34, "To Julia Scott," 19 December 1798, *ibid.*, 1:55.

37 Letter 1.43, "To Julia Scott," 20 April 1799, *ibid.*, 1:68–69.



***Portrait of Jean-Jacques Rousseau dated 1791.
By Pierre Michel Alix. Collection des Grands
Hommes.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, N.Y.
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The young cleric arrived full of zeal and piety. Well-educated at Princeton University, his lively temperament and warmth of spirit attracted many and “it was generally said of him that his presence in a room was like a ray of sunshine.”³⁸ Hobart’s personal appearance gave the impression of vigor and energy, while his poor eyesight led him to commit his sermons to memory rather than reading his text. His content was solidly Scriptural, his style simple and direct. An effective orator, his sermons combined a reasoned explanation of scriptural passages with an animated and inspiring delivery.³⁹ In addition to being a stirring preacher, Hobart published devotional manuals, urged members of the parish to pursue personal holiness, and organized societies to stimulate the involvement of the laity.⁴⁰

Elizabeth was among those deeply affected by Hobart’s arrival at Trinity. Once she came under his influence, her involvement in the church grew rapidly. His preaching style and piety ignited the love of God in her soul. Elizabeth told her sister-in-law, Rebecca Seton, “Mr. Hobart this morning – language cannot express the comfort the Peace the Hope.”⁴¹ She made efforts to learn where and when he would be presiding at liturgy and lamented the times she could not be present. She told Rebecca Seton on one such occasion to “give H[enry] H[obart] a *look* and a *sigh* for me. ... [and] remember to tell me the text.”⁴²

38 Morgan Dix, ed., *A History of the Parish of Trinity Church in the City of New York*, 6 vols. (New York: Putnam, 1898), 2:208.

39 Mary Kathleen Flanagan, “The Influence of John Henry Hobart on the Life of Elizabeth Ann Seton” (PhD diss., Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, 1979), 88, 99.

40 William Wilson Manross, *A History of the American Episcopal Church* (New York: Morehouse-Gorham, 1959), 210, 217.

41 Letter 1.102, “To Rebecca Seton,” n.d., *Collected Writings*, 1:144.

42 Letter 1.121, “To Rebecca Seton,” 14 June 1801, *ibid.*, 1:162.

Encouraged by Hobart, Elizabeth's reading of Scripture took on new energy and freshness. Turning from her eclectic reading habits, she focused on the Bible and allowed its inspired Words to have a transformative effect, telling Rebecca, "*I read our testament at least two hours of the day—too happy.*"⁴³

Hobart's influence can be detected in the tone of Elizabeth's writings as well. While earlier she referred to God as a "Superior Providence," the "Author and conductor of life," now she used relational language that echoed Scripture: "Father-Friend – and never failing Support,"⁴⁴ "my adored refuge."⁴⁵ In one reflection, referring to her children as her "little flock," she wrote, "Bless the gracious Shepherd who preserves them Safe in his refuge – feeds them with his hand and leads them to the refreshing stream."⁴⁶ She also began to identify her family's health and financial problems with the sufferings of Christ, reflecting "The cup that our Father has given us, shall we not drink it?"⁴⁷

Elizabeth began to incorporate Scriptural references into her correspondence. She did this in her many notes to Rebecca Seton who shared her newfound devotion, as well as those to other relatives and friends. When concerned about the care of her children if her health failed, she told her father, "I can but leave them with the good shepherd who laid down his life for them."⁴⁸ Elizabeth expressed concern about Julia Scott's daughter in another letter, telling Julia, "O how I pray that the tares [weeds] may never choak [sic] her Harvest."⁴⁹

In addition to Elizabeth's new enthusiasm for attending liturgy and reading Scripture, she borrowed books from Hobart that nurtured and deepened her prayer life. Among those were Robert Nelson's *A Companion for the Festivals and Feasts of the Church of England: With Collects and Prayers for Each Solemnity*,⁵⁰ and Philip Doddridge's *The Principles of Christian Religion and of Hymns Founded on Various Texts in the Holy Scriptures* that she told Rebecca Seton she had put under her pillow, "hoping to continue the blessed influence."⁵¹

Hobart loaned her George Horne's *A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*; Horne praised the Psalms as the "Epitome of the Bible." Before she owned it, Elizabeth copied

43 Ibid.

44 Document 8.4, "Sitting on a little bench . . .," 31 December 1799, *ibid.*, 3a:18.

45 Document 8.16, "And do I realize it . . .," n.d., *ibid.*, 3a:32.

46 Document 8.17, "Friday the day after Ascension . . .," n.d., *ibid.*, 3a:33. Cf. Ps 23.

47 Document 8.7, "Tarry thou thy Lord's leisure . . .," 26 July 1801, *ibid.*, 3a:210. Cf. John 18:11.

48 Letter 1.104, "Draft to Richard Bayley," [early 1801], *ibid.*, 1:146–47. Cf. John 10:11.

49 Letter 1.165, "To Julia Scott," 16 November 1802, *ibid.*, 1:213. Cf. Matt. 13: 24-30.

50 Letter 1.198, "To Rebecca Seton," n.d., *ibid.*, 1:237; letter 1.202, "To Rebecca Seton," n.d., *ibid.*, 1:239.

51 Letter 1.116, "To Rebecca Seton," Thursday Morning [1801], *ibid.*, 1:158, and letter 1.132, "To Rebecca Seton," 15 July 1801, *ibid.*, 1:174.



THE RIGHT REV. JOHN HENRY HOBART, D. D.
(See page 193)

Portrait of Rev John Henry Hobart.

From George Hodges, *Three Hundred Years of the Episcopal Church in America* (1906).

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extensive passages from the Preface and commentaries on the first twenty-eight Psalms (that encompass over forty printed pages in *Elizabeth Bayley Seton: Collected Writings*).⁵² In 1802 Hobart gave her Horne's book, which she continued to use well into her Catholic life, marking passages and writing comments in the margins.⁵³

Elizabeth also copied extensive sections of George Glasse's *Contemplations on the Sacred History* (these cover sixty-five printed pages in *Collected Writings*).⁵⁴ Glasse's book included fifty-two reflections on gospel texts extending from Zacharias and Elizabeth to the Ascension. Elizabeth made notes on forty-five of these with an emphasis on texts related to the passion of Christ.

Although Elizabeth's fortunes did not improve with the arrival of Rev. Henry Hobart, her deepened reliance on God effected a significant change in her life. She became firm in her belief that if God sent her trials and difficulties, God would be her support and give her strength to respond. It was with this disposition that in fall 1803, she, her husband, William, and their oldest daughter embarked on a sea voyage to Italy in hope of restoring William's health. Among the items Elizabeth carried were her "Treasures"—her Bible, the Horne and Glasse commentaries, and Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*. These were, as she described them, "visible, and in continual enjoyment—When I cannot get hours, I take minutes."⁵⁵ Another "treasure" was her "little book of Dear H[obart]'s sermons,"⁵⁶ a

⁵² Document 8.23, "Extracts from George Horne's *A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*," n.d., *ibid.*, 3a:38–81.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 3a:41, 69–70.

⁵⁴ Document 8.24, "Excepts from George Glasse's *Contemplation on the Sacred History*," n.d., *ibid.*, 3a:82–147.

⁵⁵ Document 2.6, "Journal to Rebecca Seton," 19 November 1803, *ibid.*, 1:250.

⁵⁶ Document 2.7, "Journal to Rebecca Seton," 20 November 1803, *ibid.*, 1:255.

collection of notes Elizabeth had copied. Like Horne, Hobart urged “recourse to the Divine Compositions of the Psalmist of Israel” as an animating guide and a companion to Heaven.⁵⁷ Elizabeth’s “little book” contained an extensive reflection on Psalm 23 along with notes on five other scripturally-based sermons.⁵⁸ The imagery of Psalm 23 resonated with her sentiments during this trying time when she referred to her husband William’s deteriorating health as “the Shadow of death,” and her own situation after his death as “walking in the valley of the Shadow of death.”⁵⁹

The weeks-long quarantine at the port of Livorno upon her family’s arrival in Italy was an experience of exile in the desert for Elizabeth. Stripped of the comforts and supports of normal life, she described her dwelling as “an immense Prison bolted in and barred.” Forced to call upon her deepest reserves, she found strength in her “Treasures,” her constant companions and continual comforts. Throughout the journal she kept during this ordeal are entries such as “passed an hour or two with King David, the Prophet Isaiah, or become elevated by some of the commentaries”; “my books always go with me”; and “read our Psalms and the 15th Chapter of Isaiah.”⁶⁰ Prayer permeated her days and nights. On one occasion she noted that she “read prayed wept and prayed again.”⁶¹ She also sang hymns from the Book of Common Prayer, Advent hymns,⁶² and hymns based on the Psalms.

Immersion in Catholic Culture

After the Setons’ release from quarantine and William Seton’s death in late 1803, Elizabeth spent several months with the Filicchi family: Filippo, his brother Antonio, and Antonio’s wife, Amabilia. She welcomed the time and space afforded her as she processed her husband’s death,⁶³ pined for her children at home, and prayed. She wrote, “My God you are my God, and so I am now alone in the world with you and my little ones, but you are my Father and doubly theirs.”⁶⁴ While continuing to “say [her] dear Services,” she became increasingly moved by the generosity and piety of the Filicchis as they took her to visit impressive Catholic churches and shrines in Florence and Livorno. Filippo Filicchi gave her a copy of Saint Francis de Sales’s *Introduction to the Devout Life*, which became her constant companion.⁶⁵ He also engaged her in conversations about Catholic beliefs and

57 Document 8.14, “Do we wish to view religion ...,” 26 September 1803, *ibid.*, 3a:29.

58 Document 8.25, “Notebook of Psalm 23 and Rev. John Henry Hobart’s Sermons,” n.d., *ibid.*, 3a:147–70.

59 Document 2.7, “Journal to Rebecca Seton,” 14 December 1803, *ibid.*, 1:271; *Ibid.*, 25 December 1803, 276.

60 Document 2.6, “Journal to Rebecca Seton,” 4 December 1803, *ibid.*, 1:250; Document 2.7, “Journal to Rebecca Seton,” 19 November 1803, *ibid.*, 1:252; and *ibid.*, 29 November 1803, 1:261.

61 Document 2.7, “Journal to Rebecca Seton,” 19 November 1803, *ibid.*, 1:256.

62 *Ibid.*, 1:257.

63 Document 2.8, “Journal to Rebecca Seton,” 3 January 1804, *ibid.*, 1:278.

64 Letter 2.11, “To Rebecca Seton,” 28 January 1804, *ibid.*, 1:289. Cf. Psalm 63.

65 Letter 2.11, “To Rebecca Seton,” 29 January 1804, *ibid.*, 1:289.

practices, causing her to reflect on what her own church believed and practiced. By the eve of her departure for home, she wrote to Rebecca Seton, “All the Catholic Religion is full of those meanings which interest me so.”⁶⁶

For the nine months after her return to New York, Elizabeth engaged in a titanic struggle over whether to remain in the church of her birth or become a Catholic. Filippo Filicchi and Henry Hobart each wrote a lengthy manuscript full of Scriptural references to verify each one’s claim that their respective church was the true church of Jesus Christ. In addition, each man gave Elizabeth apologetic works supporting his position. Elizabeth spent endless hours reading these books and manuscripts, searching for truth. “I read the promises given to St. Peter, and the 6th chapter John every day,” she told Antonio Filicchi, adding, “I read my dear St Francis [de Sales], and ask if it is possible that I shall dare to think differently from him or seek heaven any other way.”⁶⁷ A month later she confessed to Antonio, “I went to my knees in my little closet to consider what I should do Should I again read those Books I first received from Mr. H[obart]—my heart revolted Should I again go over those of the Catholick [sic] Doct[rine] ...?”⁶⁸ She read the lives of Saints Augustine and Mary Magdalen, as well as returning to Thomas à Kempis who, she was impressed to learn, was a Catholic writer who was “wonderfully versed in the knowledge of the holy scriptures.”⁶⁹

And she prayed. Pouring herself out to Antonio, she told him, “Prayer at all times, in all places ... I have and do pray so much that it seems every thought is Prayer ... and the poor eyes are really almost blind with incessant tears.”⁷⁰ Elizabeth prayed herself to exhaustion. “There is a sad weariness,” she told Amabilia Filicchi, “an unworthy dejection which rises I believe from continual application of mind to these multiplied books.” To Antonio she wrote of a “doubtful distracted mind, a confusion of fears and hesitations, trembling before God.” She said, “The Scriptures once my delight and comfort are now the continual source of my pain, every page I open confounds my poor Soul, I fall on my knees and blinded with tears, cry out to God to teach me.”⁷¹ Through these months Elizabeth’s constant prayer became: “Thy will be done.”⁷²

By March 1805, Elizabeth had decided to join the Catholic Church. Her anguish and indecision ended abruptly and, while her exterior trials continued, she entered a period

66 Document 2.14, “Journal to Rebecca Seton continued,” 18 April 1804, *ibid.*, 1:296.

67 Letter 3.7, “To Antonio Filicchi,” 30 August 1804, *ibid.*, 1:317–18.

68 Letter 3.9, “To Antonio Filicchi,” 27 September 1804, *ibid.*, 1:321.

69 Document 3.31, “Journal to Amabilia Filicchi,” 1 November 1804, *ibid.*, 1:371; and document 3.20, “Draft to Rev. John Cheverus,” [after 25 March 1805], *ibid.*, 1:347. One of the books Filippo and Antonio Filicchi gave to Elizabeth Seton was Alban Butler’s *Lives of the Primitive Fathers, Martyrs, and Other Principal Saints*, cf. Appendix B—2, *ibid.*, 3b:611.

70 Letter 3.9, “To Antonio Filicchi,” 27 September 1804, *ibid.*, 1:324.

71 Document 3.31, “Journal to Amabilia Filicchi,” 28 August 1804, *ibid.*, 1:368; letter 3.10, “To Antonio Filicchi,” 11 October 1804, *ibid.*, 1:327; and letter 3.15, “To Antonio Filicchi,” 13 December 1804, *ibid.*, 1:338.

72 Matt 6:10.

of spiritual consolation that lasted for the next four years.⁷³ On the day she first received Catholic Eucharist at St. Peter's she exulted, "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered."⁷⁴ And recalling images of King David, she told Antonio, "All the excesses of my heart found their play and it danced with more fervour – no must not say that, but perhaps almost with as much as the royal Prophets before his Ark."⁷⁵ Extending her newfound joy, she "set the piano wide open and let the children dance till they were tired."⁷⁶

Despite her conversion having strained relations with her family and friends, and facing financial insecurity and uncertainty about her future, Elizabeth expressed a joyful spirit to Antonio: "You cannot imagine a creature more forlorn in externals.... but with all the accumulated difficulties that surround me for the present and in prospect, He who lives within my Heart never suffers me to forget that the seed I am now sowing in tears shall certainly be reaped in joy."⁷⁷

Elizabeth was not without support through this period. Antonio Filicchi remained in the United States well over a year after her entry into the Catholic Church, assisted her financially, and connected her with Bishop John Carroll and other clergy. Her friends began to supply her with Catholic publications. Rev. John Cheverus of Boston sent her *The Roman Catholic Manual, or Collection of Prayers, Anthems, Hymns, etc.* that included traditional Latin hymns as well as English hymns.⁷⁸ Elizabeth used this prayer book until the end of her life, writing "prayers and petitions on the fly leaves, while the lower edges of the pages for the Ordinary of the Mass wore thin."⁷⁹

At the same time she resolved "to have gathered every word our Saviour ever said in the Gospels."⁸⁰ Acquiring a notebook, she copied forty-seven pages of excerpts from chapters 3 through 15 of the Gospel of Matthew. Later that year, Antonio gave her a Douay-Rheims edition of the Bible recently published by Matthew Carey.⁸¹

When her young sister-in-law Cecilia Seton followed her into the Catholic Church, Elizabeth told Antonio Filicchi, "I have been in a sea of troubles since you left me but the guiding star is always bright, and the master of the storm always in view."⁸² A year later she

73 Fay Trombley, S.C.I.C., "Towards Eternity: Elizabeth Seton's Experience of Suffering and Hope," *Vincentian Heritage* 14, no. 2 (1993): 368. See: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol14/iss2/8/>.

74 Document 3.31, "Journal for Amabilia Filicchi," 25 March 1805, *ibid.*, 1:377.

75 *Ibid.* Cf. Ps 68, and 2 Sam 6:14.

76 Letter 3.25, "To Antonio Filicchi," 22 April 1805, *ibid.*, 1:355.

77 Letter 4.5, "To Antonio Filicchi," 2 October 1805, *ibid.*, 1:387. Cf. Ps 125:5.

78 Thomas E. Wangler, "The Earliest Philadelphia Hymn Collection," *American Catholic Studies* 117, no. 3 (2006): 51–52. According to Wangler, John Cheverus published three hymn collections between 1800 and 1811 for the church in Boston.

79 Document 11.51, "Elizabeth Seton's Prayer Book," n.d., *ibid.*, 3b:71n1.

80 Document 10.5, "Gospel of Matthew Notebook," n.d., *ibid.*, 3a:524n4.

81 Philadelphia publisher Matthew Carey issued the first Roman Catholic edition of the Bible printed in the United States in 1790. In 1805, he published another edition that was "newly revised and corrected according to the Clementin Edition of the Scriptures."

82 Letter 4.24, "To Antonio Filicchi," 10 August 1806, *Collected Writings*, 1:414. Cf. Matt 2:2 and 8:26.



Bishop Jean-Louis Lefebvre de Cheverus.
By Gilbert Stuart. Oil on canvas, dated 1823.
Bequest of Mrs. Charlotte Gore Greenough
Hervoches du Quilliou.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA.
Public domain

continued in this peaceful spirit. After describing to Antonio some of the “tedious” details of her situation, she continued, “So much for the external affairs – for the internal, the Peace and consolation I daily, hourly and constantly experience ... make all the secondary considerations appear trifling.”⁸³

When Elizabeth and her daughters relocated to Baltimore in June 1808 to open a school for girls, they moved to the center of the Catholic community in the United States. Bishop John Carroll encouraged an open, humanistic approach to the practice of Catholicism, stressing Scripture, the imitation of Christ, and ecumenism.⁸⁴ The Sulpician priests who welcomed Elizabeth to their campus held similar values. Having founded the first Catholic institution of higher learning in the United States, they were known for their piety and were praised by Bishop Carroll for their contribution to improving the liturgical life of the Church.⁸⁵ Elizabeth experienced this upon her “first arrival in Baltimore at the door of St. Mary’s chapel – the rolling Organ – *Kyrie Eleison* – awful ceremonies seen for the first time.... Anina’s [Anna’s] frequent stollen [*sic*] glance of surprize [*sic*] and pleasure this CORPUS CHRISTI – day of wonders to us, and consecration of St. Mary’s.”⁸⁶

Elizabeth was warmly embraced by the Sulpician community as her sense of inner peace continued. She wrote to Cecilia, “I am daily and hourly recieving [*sic*] the most Precious

83 Letter 4.46, “To Antonio Filicchi,” 10 August 1807, *ibid.*, 1:456.

84 Joseph P. Chinnici, O.F.M., *Living Stones: The History and Structure of Catholic Spiritual Life in the United States* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 8–10, and Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 108, 109, 209.

85 Christopher J. Kauffman, *Tradition and Transformation in Catholic Culture: The Priests of Saint Sulpice in the United States from 1791 to the Present* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 44.

86 “Dear Remembrances,” 3a:520.

Consolations ... gently gratefully offering to resign them in the very moment of enjoyment.”⁸⁷ Elizabeth’s Paca Street house, nestled in the shadow of the newly dedicated St. Mary’s chapel, proved a haven; her days took on an almost conventual rhythm: “The Angelus bell rings morning, noon, and night, at half past 5 in the morning precisely – again before 2 in the day, and again before 8 at night.”⁸⁸ Elizabeth described their daily schedule: morning chapel from six until eight, after morning classes came the Litany of Jesus, dinner was at one, school at three, and chapel at 6:30 p.m. for examination of conscience and rosary.⁸⁹ She exulted in daily Mass with Holy Communion every day and in her many visits to the Blessed Sacrament.⁹⁰ “Every night we have Benediction,” she told Cecilia, “imagine twenty Priests all with the devotion of Saints clothed in white, accompanied by the whole troop of the young Seminarians in surplusses [sic].” Elizabeth spoke of “songs of our Patriarch’s composing – and sung in our little chapel, but I can never send you the sweetness of the music.”⁹¹

The “sweet music” Elizabeth had loved so much while at Trinity in New York was also available in Baltimore, and she took it to Emmitsburg, a small village west of Baltimore. Several editions of Catholic prayer books and hymnals, such as the one Cheverus had given her, were available to and used by the sisters and their students. Some of the hymns were in Latin, the rest in English. They included translations of Catholic works, those borrowed from Protestant compositions, and American originals.⁹²

When Elizabeth and her companions moved to Emmitsburg to form the Sisters of Charity, her life was taken up with a daily schedule of prayer, teaching, involvement in the students’ and orphan girls’ lives, community business, and personal correspondence. Once again Elizabeth spent long hours copying and translating excerpts from the works of the saints and spiritual writers for her personal use, but also in preparing instructions and meditations she gave for the sisters, and for the sisters’ use for spiritual reading.

A significant influence in Elizabeth’s life during these years was Rev. Simon Bruté. An esteemed theologian, teacher, and pastor, the young Sulpician formed an instant bond with Elizabeth when he was assigned to teach at Mount St. Mary’s in 1812. She taught him English, and he became her spiritual director. Before long the two were not only devoted friends and confidants but also kindred spirits in their quest for God. Within six months of his arrival, and realizing that Elizabeth had made extensive underlining and side-markings

87 Letter 5.5, “To Cecilia Seton,” 8 July 1808, *ibid.*, 2:21.

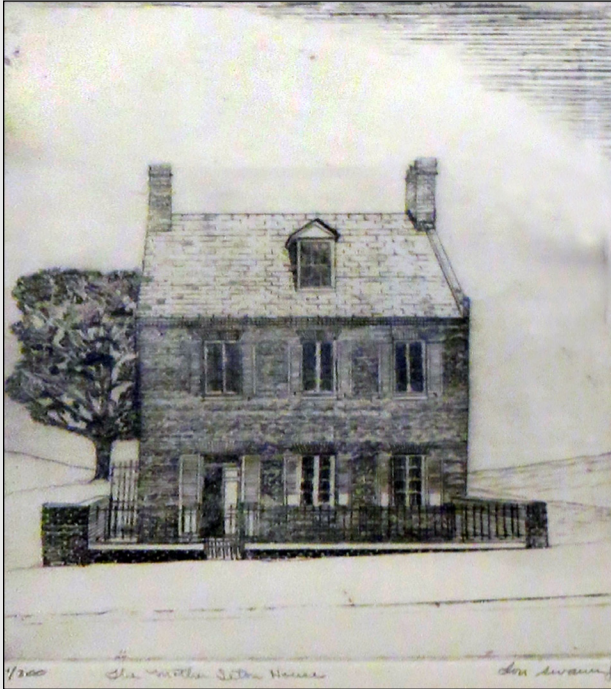
88 Letter 5.6, “To Cecilia Seton,” 12 August 1808, *ibid.*, 2:25.

89 Letter 5.9, “To Cecilia Seton,” 5 September 1808, *ibid.*, 2:31; and letter 5.10, “To Cecilia Seton,” 6 October 1808, *ibid.*, 2:34.

90 Letter 5.5, “To Cecilia Seton,” 8 August 1808, *ibid.*, 2:25; and letter 5.14, “To Antonio Filicchi,” 16 January 1809, *ibid.*, 2:45.

91 Letter 5.22, “To Cecilia Seton,” 3 April 1809, *ibid.*, 2:65; and letter 5.23, “To Cecilia Seton,” n.d., *ibid.*, 2:67.

92 Joseph Agonito, “Ecumenical Stirrings: Catholic-Protestant Relations during the Episcopacy of John Carroll,” *Church History* 45, no. 3 (September 1976): 262; and Wangler, “The Earliest Philadelphia Hymn Collection,” 36–39.



Period etching of the Paca Street house in Baltimore.

Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online

throughout her Bible, the priest asked her to exchange Bibles with him so he could share her responses to specific passages.⁹³ For the remainder of her life, Elizabeth used the priest's Bible where she made further markings and personal comments on passages she found important.⁹⁴ In addition, Bruté owned a substantial library that Elizabeth used extensively for her own enrichment and that of her community.

Simon Bruté came to know Elizabeth intimately as they conversed and exchanged frequent notes. When recording his own observations on Elizabeth's ardent affection for the Word of God, he highlighted her "early devotion. Love of the Holy Scriptures, pouring over the Psalms and Prophets. Sometimes shut up for these devotional delights, the very shutters of the windows close."⁹⁵ So inspiring was Elizabeth's reading of the divine word that Bruté described it as a "breathing out from a Moses', an Isaias', a David's, a Daniel's, a Job's, a Jeremiah's heart! – from the heart of Zacharias, of Simeon, of John, of MARY herself! May I feel the devotion Mother felt when opening the sacred page ... O, the faith and love of Mother!"⁹⁶

93 Ellin Kelly, *Elizabeth Seton's Two Bibles: Her Notes and Markings* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1977): 32, 34–37.

94 Ibid., 25, 43. When Elizabeth Seton died, Simon Bruté returned Elizabeth's Bible to her daughter, Catherine, and in return received his Bible. Elizabeth Seton's Bible is at the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana; Simon Bruté's Bible is at the Bruté Library, The Old Cathedral, Vincennes, Indiana.

95 *Mother Seton: Notes by Rev. Simon Gabriel Bruté* (Emmitsburg, MD: Daughters of Charity, 1884), 47.

96 Ibid., 145.

In addition to her Bible, music continued to be an integral component in Elizabeth's life. Her piano, well used at St. Joseph's, still adorns the classroom there. All three of her daughters played piano, and music teachers were an important part of the faculty of St. Joseph's Academy. Music and song, both sacred and secular, echoed through the rooms. Elizabeth described how "the girls resound the house with their hymns." To comfort a dying sister, hymns were often sung. Anna Maria, Elizabeth's oldest daughter, requested that her two younger sisters sing "The Peace of a Soul that Loves Jesus Christ" as she lay dying,⁹⁷ and as Sister Maria Murphy was on her deathbed just a few months later, Elizabeth reflected: "so many canticles, so many psalms and lessons" sung as Maria contemplated "our Big, Big, Reunion."⁹⁸

During these years, instead of copying others' poetry, Elizabeth wrote verses of her own, often commemorating her love for someone recently departed. She wrote of the deaths of her daughters and of the sisters, noting their strong faith, and how they had now passed into "real Life." At Anna Maria's death she wrote:

Spirit leave thy House of clay
Lingering dust resign thy breath
Spirit cast thy chains away
Dust be thou dissolved in Death

Then the Guardian Angel sang
As he bore the soul on high
While the Alleluyas [sic] rang
All the regions of the sky⁹⁹

The refrain of another of Elizabeth's verses held that no matter what sorrows or hopes are dashed:

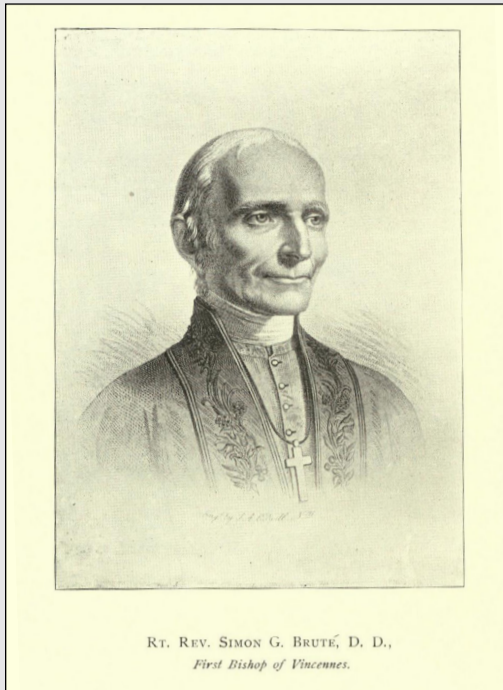
Still in the Lord will I rejoice
Still to my God will lift my voice;
Father of mercies! still my grateful lays
Shall hymn thy name exulting in thy praise.¹⁰⁰

97 Letter 6.100, "To Eliza Sadler," 19 March 1812, *Collected Writings*, 2:213n2. This hymn was published in *Hymns for the Use of the Catholic Church in the United States of America*, (Baltimore: John West Butler, 1807), 9.

98 Document 11.8, "Well now our Dearest...", n.d., *Collected Writings*, 3b:7.

99 Document 11.5, "My Darling dear...", n.d., *ibid.*, 3b:4-5.

100 Document 11.48, "Altho' the fig trees...", n.d., *ibid.*, 3b:63.



Portrait etching of Simon William Gabriel Bruté de Rémur (1779–1839).

From the Memorial Volume of the Centenary of St. Mary's Seminary of St. Sulpice (1891).

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Another, written on Pentecost, described a sister bringing a rose to Elizabeth's room, that led her to a reflection on the coming of the Holy Spirit in the form of a rose:

This morning was beautiful mild and serene
All nature had wak'd from repose
Maternal affection comes silently in
And plac'd on my bosom a rose.

The poem continues:

Whitsuntide was the time, the season of love
Methought the blest spirit had chose
To leave for a while the mild form of a Dove
And come in the blush of the Rose
Come heavenly Spirit descend on each heart
And there let thy blessings repose
As thou did'st on Mary thy temple of rest
On Mary! our Mystical rose.¹⁰¹

Elizabeth combined her verse and music in a composition highlighting her deep longing for eternity. In a letter to Rev. Simon Bruté, she jotted down four lines:

101 Document 11.43, "The Rose," Whitsunday 1813, *ibid.*, 3b:58-59.

Jerusalem, my happy home
How do I long for thee
When shall my exile have an end
Thy Joys when shall I see.

Continuing, she wrote: “So far from some old Methodist hymn I believe – and your poor Mother, enchanted with the lamentations in the Sanctuary in holy week, turned a music of her own from them, and added [three more verses] on Aninas [sic] bed ... – everybody crys at the words and music.”¹⁰²

The verses Elizabeth added were:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Jerusalem
No sun or moon in borrowed light
Revolve thy hours away –
The lamb on Calvarys mountain slain
Is thy Eternal day.

From every eye he wipes the tear –
All care and sorrows cease.
No more alternate hope and fear
But everlasting peace –

The thought of thee to us is given
Our sorrows to beguile
To anticipate the bliss of heaven
(In) His everlasting smile.
Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Jerusalem.¹⁰³

It is likely that both the hymn and the music were completed in the spring of 1812, shortly after her daughter’s death. When it was printed around 1818, it gained Elizabeth the distinction of being one of the first women in the United States to have a hymn published.

102 Letter 7.297, “To Rev. Simon Bruté, S.S.,” n.d., *ibid.*, 2:690.

103 Clark Kimberling, “Two Early American Women and their Hymns: Elizabeth Ann Seton and Matilda Durham Hoy,” *The Hymn* 67, no. 3 (Summer 2016): 19–20.

Issued under the title “Jerusalem, A Hymn, Written and Composed by a lady,” it was included in *Carr’s Musical Miscellany in occasional numbers*. The publication consists of two versions of the hymn, one for chorus and one for organ. It was reprinted in hymnals through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, and Elizabeth was listed as the composer.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

The language, expressions, and sentiments of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures were natural attractions for Elizabeth Seton’s reflective spirit and lifelong search for deep meaning. Her exposure to the Bible through both her family members and her upbringing in the Scripture-centered Protestant tradition created an intimacy with the texts that became deeply rooted in Elizabeth’s interpretation of life and its meaning.

Elizabeth found mentors along the way, each as deeply influenced and drawn to her as she was to them. Inspired and guided by her goodness and devotion, they became devoted friends and loyal supports. Henry Hobart was instrumental in leading Elizabeth to a mature relationship with the Word of God, while Filippo and Antonio Filicchi opened new possibilities for nurturing her spirituality. Simon Bruté, a kindred spirit, joined Elizabeth in her quest as he led her more deeply into the Scripture she loved and the goal she sought so fervently—union with God. And through the years she has served as a mentor, model and inspiration to many who wish to travel the same path.

This future saint read widely and plunged deeply into her Bible along with the poetry, music, and literature that fed her attraction to the good, the true, and the beautiful. In these, Elizabeth found joy and comfort as the deep rudders that steered her life. They were critical to her passionate response to the Word of God. Her “treasures”—the Bible and her commentaries—strengthened her spirit and provided meaning through even her most severe trials. They were her consolation and support in the Italian lazaretto where she passionately, almost desperately, clung to their words. She turned to these sources as she struggled with momentous decisions that would affect her future and that of her children. She relied on them as she charted new paths in her ministry as founder of the first American congregation of women religious.

Translating Ozanam: French Translation Students Explore a Foundational Vincentian Thinker's Student Days

Clara Orban, Ph.D.

BIO

CLARA ORBAN is professor of French and Italian at DePaul University. She has published books, book chapters, articles, and presented papers on surrealism, futurism, language pedagogy, AIDS literature, sports, TV, wine, Hungarian and Italian film, and a novel, *Terra Firma*. She is also a certified sommelier and has taught Geography 350: The World of Wine at DePaul, at times including study abroad trips. She has written two wine books, *Wine Lessons: Ten Questions to Guide Your Appreciation of Wine*, and *Illinois Wines and Wineries: The Essential Guide*. Her latest book, *Slow Places in Béla Tarr's Films: The Intersection of Geography, Ecology and Slow Cinema*, was published in 2021.

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Relevance is relative. Finding pedagogical materials and realia to use in a language classroom in order to make learning a second language relevant to students can be challenging when there is a generational gap between teacher and student. Furthermore, many textbooks provide materials that may have been relevant when published but that quickly lose their timeliness—one of the pitfalls of being relevant seems to be the speed with which something seems irrelevant. In my years teaching French 321: Translation, it seemed particularly important to incorporate “real life” final projects for students to show that translation is one of the most timely postgraduation possibilities for those perfecting a second language. Students in French 321 at DePaul University are introduced to economic, medical, legal, and “leisure” translation (sports, travel, etc.) This allows them to see if translating in any of these fields might be appealing as a career. In the United States, legal, medical, and business translators allow for the free flow of information, for the expansion of American business, and for the empowerment of individuals and communities who find themselves in need of legal or medical services. In past iterations of this class, students have translated websites for the French Consulate in Chicago, pamphlets on AIDS prevention already in use in English-speaking Africa for distribution in French-speaking Africa, and so forth. In winter 2021, the students and I took a detour that might at first have seemed irrelevant: translating a series of letters by Frédéric Ozanam. In this article, I would like to provide some context for the classroom project, introduce the texts we translated, and then conclude with excerpts of the letters translated to see how a key figure of Vincentian history came alive for DePaul students.

In Italian, there is a saying, “traduttore, traditore”: the translator is a traitor. In some instances, the translator can produce a text that is neither a satisfying rendition of the original, nor an original work based on a text in another language. That represents the dilemma of translation: to what extent should the original text be modified, and how? Translation recreates a text into another sign system, another language, for a new set of readers. In this way, translation expands the text and inevitably moves it away from its original context. But a good translation should not lose sight of the original in flavor and texture. The translator must of course understand the content of the text, and the context in which it was written. The translator must also convey the tone of the text, capture stylistic nuances, figures of speech, and in the case of poetry or other texts with prescribed forms, decide to what an extent the rhyme scheme or meter can be left as in the original or if instead it should be transferred (think, for example, of translations of Shakespearean iambic pentameter). Each translator approaches an individual project from a unique perspective and must decide to what an extent



Portrait of Frédéric Ozanam (1813–1853).

Painted by his brother-in-law, Charles Soulacroix, circa 1845-1850. Original work is in the international headquarters of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Paris.

Courtesy of Ralph Middelcamp.

Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online

to “copy” the original (finding cognate equivalents for words, maintaining syntactic length of the original, and so forth), or to try to adapt the language to the audience. For that is the goal of good translation: to make a text live again, in another context, in another time and another place. To accomplish that may mean straying from the original so that the text resonates with new readers in new context as it did in its original.

For the translation teacher, conveying the approach to translation provides the basis for classroom pedagogy. First, students need to understand the text, the time in which the text was written, and any particular vocabulary or culture reference that might be necessary. Then, they need to grapple with sentence structure, decide if it would be best for an American reader to try to replicate lengthy sentences with subordinate clauses or make several sentences from one longer one in French. Rather than a theoretical introduction, we found plunging into the French text and dealing with individual issues as they arose to be a more practical way of introducing the art and science of translation into the classroom.

For readers of this journal, Ozanam, founder of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, needs no introduction. But for current students, even at DePaul, Ozanam’s importance to the mission may have been unknown. While I was on the lookout for a final project, Matthieu Brejon de Lavergnée, Holtschneider Chair of Vincentian Studies at DePaul, approached me about possibly retranslating some of Ozanam’s letters. This is part of larger project to translate his collected letters. To my knowledge, Joseph Divin, C.M., had produced the only available translation of a selection of Ozanam’s letters, published in 1986 with the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.¹ Brejon de Lavergnée’s project aims to modernize the translated

¹ See *Frédéric Ozanam: A Life in Letters*, trans. and ed. Joseph I. Divin, C.M. Lindell, and Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Council of the United States (St. Louis, Missouri: 1986).

letters and complete the translation for English-speaking readers. I immediately saw that this type of project, culminating in a published work, would provide students not only with valuable “real world” experience, but a résumé line as well.

The project had already assigned a translator, Walker Parrish, to the bulk of the letters so for the student project I selected letters not yet reserved or undertaken.² For that reason, the letters our class translated do not follow in exact order because some letters in the series had already been translated. As it turned out, many of the letters left for us were from Ozanam’s student days. This allowed the class project to revolve around letters Ozanam wrote when he was about the same age as the students in the class: eighteen to twenty-five years old.

Once I selected the group of letters, I divided them into more or less equal length projects for either students groups of two or three or individual students. Students provided a first draft, presented portions of the translation for the entire class, and then produced a revised version that they presented as a final project. I then reedited the letters before sending them to Brejon de Lavergnée and his team. They will be subsequently edited for uniformity of style and vocabulary. The letters I present here, therefore, may be further modified once they appear in the collected volume.

Students wrestled with various aspects of translation and how to bring writing from almost two centuries ago to modern readers. First of course is the day-to-day French words that might appear even today: students in this class were at an advanced level but all except one were still learning French as a second language. This means that many common words in French may still have been difficult for some of the students. There were issues of ecclesiastically oriented words that might have seemed obscure to some students (“Lent,” musings on biblical passages, etc.) There were numerous cultural issues tied to the realities of life in nineteenth-century France that had to be explained. For example, someone of Ozanam’s social class would probably not have had a bank account in our modern sense but would have transferred money through a legal service (Maison Périsse, mentioned in letter 131). The letters about money transfer had to be contextualized for the students to be able to undertake the translation. Another example, Ozanam mentions a coach service—Laffite et Caillard in letter 129—by name, just as today we might say that we are going to New York “on United,” and our peers would recognize this as the name of an airline. The economic, legal, medical, and leisure translations the students had provided up to the midpoint of the class did not prepare them to understand Ozanam’s historical context nor the style of

2 Letters were selected from Frédéric Ozanam, *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam. Lettres de jeunesse (1819–1840). Publiées avec le concours des descendants d’Ozanam par Léonce Celier, Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, Didier Ozanam.* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1960).

nineteenth-century French nonliterary writing. Together, we explored the historical period and grappled with appropriate levels of linguistic familiarity for the letters.³

Most obscure, even to me, were inside jokes, and references to practices in universities. The reader will find a discussion of red, white, and black balls when Ozanam is discussing his exams. Parrish, the translator working on the project, provided a presentation to the students where he revealed that the different colored balls indicated the examiner's satisfaction with the students' responses. Also important for our undertaking was a general knowledge of some historical moments, figures, or practices (the Chamber of Commerce's influence in getting Ozanam a chair, for example). In each case of translation difficulties, the collaborative nature of our enterprise allowed us to move closer to a finished product.

The results were, I believe, quite promising and student reactions were positive. Student testimonials include: "I wanted to say it was an honor to translate texts with purpose and nonetheless from a historical figure so closely related to our university and our collective mission," and "This is one of my favorite projects that I've worked on as a French student. It was really interesting to translate these letters for the first time alongside my peers and observe others' work. I'm really grateful to have had this hands-on, tangible learning experience as an undergraduate student at DePaul." Knowing that this project was not only perceived as relevant because it provided a future publication and résumé line, but that it also brought students closer to the foundations of the university in which they are studying was perhaps for me the most gratifying end product of this enterprise.

In what follows I provide excerpts of the letters translated as part of this class project, that I have selected to show how Ozanam resonated with student concerns even today. On all the letters, I am the translation editor, but each letter produced here includes the name of the student translators immediately following the letter's signature line. As you will read, these letters from Ozanam's youth provide snippets of the daily life a student might have encountered in Paris, with definite connections to student life today. He discusses university life: his progress on exams, the professors (the ones who are boring, or considered particularly tough on exams), and the need for books. He writes about how much he spends on food, his budget, and asks for money to round out the month, even so far as to provide an itemized expense list in letter 59. Not only the prices are astonishing. The items a student needed for success—paying the school ushers for an exam robe—may seem strange. And yet, students now can rent books as well as purchase them, go out for an occasional beer, and have to buy luggage and tickets to get home when the term ends, just as Ozanam did.

3 Students were encouraged to annotate their letters, highlighting words, phrases, expressions they did not understand. Then students had to decide if the word or expression would be unfamiliar to an American reader, in which case the annotation can become a footnote in the translation. This process will appear most fully in the published translation, but the student translators began thinking about what words they might annotate and footnote in a finished translation.



Ozanam walking the streets of Paris. Illustration from *Apostle in a Top Hat* (1962).

Courtesy of Ralph Middelcamp.

Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online

All of these details may seem mundane, but ultimately, they allow our current students to read for themselves of the daily life of their peers two centuries ago. Ozanam talks about housing, the need to move, and the interruptions in studying that daily life can bring, as well as holiday breaks and vacations, such as returning to Lyon or going on holiday to Italy. He discusses the weather and other factors about his student surroundings. Something to which this particular group of students can relate in this time of COVID-19, Ozanam mentions the cholera epidemic in Paris. He talks of illness, of his health, of attempts to get well (through leeches), about homesickness, and about family and how important it is to him. And finally he talks about tragedy, the death of a family friend, and then, in the last letter our group translated, the death of his father.

In the presentation that follows, I have extracted sections of each letter the class translated to give a flavor of the project to come. To make the letters easier to include in this article, I have eliminated references to where letters are found which will appear in the edited volume. I also eliminated subheading summaries of the letters that appear in the French edition thinking this elimination might make the reading here less cumbersome.

In these letters, Ozanam, moves from a student-centered life to the life of a co-provider for his family now that his father has passed away. It is the same temporal arc in which most of the students in French 321 found themselves. Although from centuries ago, these letters still speak to us, and to our students, to bring a founder of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul to life once again.

41, TO PIERRE BALLOFFET, *Paris, 10 December 1831*

My Dear Balloffet,

... So, I have seen famous Paris, this large city we have so often discussed. I have seen it, I am here in it, it is no longer a dream. It is really old Lutèce with her beauties and horrors, her monuments and her shacks, her lights, and her corruption. I have seen almost everything you can admire here; palaces, churches, monuments of every kind, the Louvre, the Tuileries, the Carrousel. I have seen everything we were dying to see, and I am not satisfied. The realities did not live up to what I had imagined. I was not astonished or overwhelmed. Only two things moved me: the museum and the organs in the churches. Because you cannot imagine the beauty of our religious ceremonies. Saint-Etienne du Mont, my parish, one of the oldest churches in the city, is the only one with a rood screen ...

I started my law class, and I am up to my ears in *Institutes* and *Code civil*. The professors that I chose are very knowledgeable, well skilled but vague and often boring; what's more, they seem to be weak in the philosophy of Law—really the most important consideration since legislative details can change at any time and only general concepts remain. Thus the penal code was partially reformed though they talk about a total reform: but the base of all these reforms is the philosophy of Law. It alone is the baseline that can lead through the labyrinth of successive and contradictory laws. Study first, for example, how property in its natural and abstract form is viewed by the legislator, and then you will understand more easily the statutes that regulate property. You will discover some of the problems and you will learn some of the solutions....

Upon analysis, I am not well. The distances are so great that visits take up a large part of the day. You would have to withdraw from the world if you want to accomplish anything. This solitude gnaws at me and makes me sad:

Your Friend:

A.-F. Ozanam

Translator: Kristina Beck

46, TO HIS PARENTS, *Paris, 16 May 1832*

My Dear Parents,

... Paris is far from cheerful, there prevails a general anxiety for political affairs; the death of Monsieur Cuvier is a terrible blow to the scientific superiority of France ... The cholera outbreak is diminishing....

I am pained to see that you have five thousand francs to pay: that will be uncomfortable for you, my dear parents. I am also greatly bothered. I just paid three francs for mending five pairs of stockings and the tailor who has my shabby blue suit asked me for 6 francs to

fix it. Add to that 20 sous to fix my cashmere pants that rip all the time because the fabric burned....

A.-F. Ozanam

Translator: Kristina Beck

47, TO HIS MOTHER, *Paris, 26 May 1832*

My Dear Mother,

My last letter was rather short; this one will hardly be longer. The sad news that I have to announce to Father does not make me feel like discussing unimportant and futile things.

I had let Father know about Monsieur Sérullas' illness; I feared to have to soon tell him of the death of this excellent man; every day I went to check on his status. Yesterday I found his door closed: he passed away at 2 o'clock in the morning ...

Your son who loves you:

A.-F. Ozanam

Translator: Kristina Beck

49, TO EDOUARD LE JOUTEUX, *Paris, 23 July 1832*

My Dear Friend,

... The beautiful sky of Touraine, the Loire's fertile banks, and kind and peaceful communities: these are the sights you are enjoying. Moreover, you are living in the countryside, where ideas become more pleasant, the spirit more calm, health more vigorous, science less austere, and religion even more enjoyable and consoling....

Courage: something we undoubtedly need in the era in which we live, and even more crucial to have in the era in which we are going to live.... There is a destructive hate between the parties. I believe, therefore, that a civil war is imminent, and all of Europe, caught in the web of freemasonry, will be its theater. However, this formidable crisis will be pivotal. Upon the ruins of broken nations, a new Europe will arise. Catholicism will then be understood and will consequently be responsible for carrying civilization to the ancient Orient. This will be a magnificent era: we will not see it....

Frédéric Ozanam

Translators: Anthony Bevevino, Elle Heinzen, Spencer Weis

50, TO AUGUSTE MATERNE, *Paris, 6 August 1832*

My Dear Friend,

... Bring me your wisdom if you have any and certainly do not forget to bring me Cuvier's *Les Révolutions du Globe* that I lent you, because that is my father's book. As for Thucydides, I do not need it: you can keep it if you want. Since I will leave some of my books here you may also take what might be useful to you. If you do not want to come and see me yourself at the appointed time, let me know when and where I can see you in Paris....

Farewell, my dear friend. Why haven't we seen each other more this year? Don't you know that I still love you very much and that it will be so until our deaths?

Yours,
Ozanam

Translators: Isabelle Leffler, Amber Malik

51, TO HENRI PESSONNEAUX, *Lyon, 6 October 1832*

My Dear Henri,

... I have found my beloved city of Lyon slightly more beautiful than before. The Place de Terreaux clean and cleared of the enormous theatre that obstructed it, the Feuillée bridge completed, and another wrought iron bridge almost completed at the location of the former Saint Vincent bridge. Only Fourvières is damaged by a square observatory, a heavy structure built next to the church and which half obstructs it. From the moral point of view, Lyon has barely changed. Here is the whole picture: always a foundation of honor and religion, a certain dose of small-mindedness and of pettiness in ideas, charity more active than ever. The factions form and outline themselves in a more compact and distinct manner. Peaceful people and those who uphold principles almost always converge with royalism and confess out loud or in secret that the Restoration was better than the current system. On the contrary, the young troublesome nonreligious men gather themselves under the banner of Republicanism....

A.-F. Ozanam

Translators: Isabel Rocha, Grace Urban

52, TO HIS PARENTS, *Paris, 29 December 1832*

My Beloved Parents,

This letter will reach you as you celebrate together the arrival of the new year. Happier than me, it will attend this family celebration where hearts pour out with pleasure. At least it can represent me among you and bring you the expression of my tenderness ...

I did not send you poetry this year because this habit might end by becoming boring and monotonous for you. For that reason, I promise to send you the first piece of poetry that my quill will have the time to bring forth....

Once again receive my best wishes and embrace and be always certain of the profound affection of your son.

Frédéric Ozanam

Translators: Isabel Rocha, Grace Urban

56, TO HIS MOTHER, *Paris, 16 April 1833*

My Dear Mother,

... Every morning, for my six centimes the owner of the hotel gives me a bowl of hot milk and a little roll. I add a piece of chocolate to it. Then I tried to have dinner at the restaurant, and for 25 to 30 centimes, I found a pretty good meal. But when our housing is set, we will look with Monsieur Serre for something better....

Nonetheless, my twentieth year is approaching, and I am so miserable ... it must have been the nearness of the recent holidays, I think, that puts me in a bad mood, and I want to sulk....

(unsigned)

Translators: Brady Bush and Emily May

57, TO HIS MOTHER, *Paris, 10 May 1833*

My Dear Mother,

... So, this past Tuesday, ferocious leeches were applied on me, which drew an abundance of blood and yet, I barely notice it today. Still, I have toothaches, headaches, restless sleep, weakness of body and impetuosity of mind, etc....⁴ However, I am feeling a little better and I hope that with a refreshing diet, I will get through this. On this occasion, I have much to praise for the kindness of my friends. First of all, Monsieur Laguayte applied the leeches to me himself, then he stayed there for part of the morning with two medical students, his colleagues, who were joined by Serre, Henri, and Lallier. Chaurand did not miss it either, especially since he resides in the hotel and specifically below my room. As you see, I bled in good company. One would have thought that Seneca was having his veins opened in front of his friends and his assembled disciples. The only slight difference is that the old fool let himself die to please the tyrant and that I, the new—wiser—Seneca delicately tended to my wounds. Then by the world's greatest grace, I ate my chocolate, to the great edification of the public. So ends this tragedy or comedy, as you like, with the difference that a comedy ends in a marriage and my own tragedy has ended in lunch....

Your devoted son,
A.-F. Ozanam

Translators: Brady Bush, Emily May

4 This ellipsis is in the text.

59, TO HIS PARENTS, *Paris, 7 August 1833*

My Dear Parents,

I received a letter from you yesterday morning full of encouragement and consolation. Your indulgence has reassured me, now I must make an appeal to it: I hardly passed the exam, I only obtained a little more than what was strictly needed to be a passing candidate – four red balls.

I will have over a thousand explanations to give you face-to-face—at this moment it suffices that I say a few words to you. Without doubt, I had not prepared enough for my exam to deserve better than this humble result. The occupations about which I have spoken to you had delayed the start of my preparation and, although I had already studied for months, it was not until the last week that I could do some really legitimate work. But this week has been quite well spent, especially the last three. However, I would have spent two more weeks the same way and not advanced much further. Because, among the questions that I was asked, there were several quite foreign to my subject matter for which one could not prepare. To add to that I had among my examiners two of the most severe professors at the school. There was a third one whose questions I answered perfectly who, I do not know by what whim, nevertheless gave me a red ball. Among the candidates who went with me, there was one who knew most of his subject matters very well and who passed like me; another, who knew much less, received two white. We were generally surprised by the results. For me, without being satisfied, I still consider myself happy, because three of my friends, all hardworking and very intelligent who took exams yesterday and today, got one black and three reds. Furthermore, I knew most of the Civil Code reasonably well, and for the procedure, I also knew the main points. I therefore hope that you will respect the promise to be kind enough to forget this fault which was not dependent on my dedication. Next year I will try again, and I think I can do everything better....

I had to spend:

Half a month's rent at a hotel from July 20 to August 8	14 fr.
7 dinners 25 sous a piece	8 fr.
7 lunches, beer, second helpings, etc.	7 fr.
Purchase of law books and rental of other law books for exams	11 fr.
To the tailor for mending	5 fr.
For the school usher who rents the exam robe	3 fr.
For the boy at the hotel who cleans my clothes and for tipping same	3 fr.
For three opera performances which I bought you	2 fr.
For a small case to carry my black suit without wrinkling it	2 fr.

For the deposit to the transport company	15 fr.
Miscellaneous expenses	4 fr.
	120 fr. Total

Your son who loves you:
A.-F. Ozanam

Translators: Isabelle Leffler, Amber Malik

60, TO FRANÇOIS LALLIER, *Paris*, 7 August 1833

My Dear Friend,

I assure you that I am endlessly touched by the charitable solicitude with which you have asked me to share the results of my exam with you. It would be my pleasure to do it myself today at half past 11 in the evening, and I enjoy it all the more that I cannot be vain about it.

Examiners: Portets, Demante, Morand, Ducourroy. Conclusion: 4 reds. As we are colleagues of thoughts, feelings, work, here we are more or less like brothers of misfortune. But this misfortune is easily forgotten on the road from Rouen to LeHavre or from Paris to Lyon. For me, I will leave the memory in the bottom of my night cap and be happy for it having happened this way....

A.-F. Ozanam

Translators: Isabelle Leffler, Amber Malik

61, TO PIERRE BALLOFFET, *Rome*, 28 September 1833

My Dear Friend,

... And finally, here in Rome the great, the holy, with its past ruins and its new pomp. On one side, the Pantheon, the Colosseum, the Forum, the temples of the gods who sent terror to all the corners of the earth. On the other side, Saint Peter and the Vatican: Saint Peter, the largest of the high churches to the true God; the Vatican, the largest monument consecrated to genius. It is difficult to give you an idea, but imagine that these two buildings next to each other, together occupy a space six times larger than Belle Cour, and that this space is filled with everything that painting, sculpture, architecture and mosaic gave birth to most admirably.

But one should not believe, as some people would try to suggest, that all this majesty dates from the fifteenth century and that since this time Rome is dead or at least lives only on its accumulated glory. On the contrary, the last popes have left almost no ground empty without digging into it in the interest of science or without making any embellishment in the interest of art. At this time there are still numerous works taking place in several



François Lallier (1814–1886).

Considered the second founder of the Society, Lallier drafted the first Rule with Emmanuel Bailly, and in 1837 became its first Secretary General.

He remained close to Ozanam throughout his life.

Public Domain

locations. Positive studies are not neglected either. There is a university in Rome that has forty professors for law, medicine, science, and literature. There is much translation of French books being done and you will judge the freedom that the bookseller enjoys when you know that Lord Byron and the *Book of the Hundred One* are displayed there. We speak little of politics, but I know from good sources that not a single person has been executed for political crime and there are very few in prison. The pope is very much loved by the people and these people did not seem to me, I assure you, inferior to ours in intelligence and virtues. This morning we had the honor of being presented to the Supreme Pontiff who welcomed us with heavenly goodness, spoke to us about Lyon with great interest and gave us his blessing. I was very moved to see this old man up close, the one whom after God we most accurately name our father and from whom all these rays of Catholic charity depart as from a star. I speak to you like this, my dear Balloffet, because of all my old middle school friends, you are one of the only ones who still follows the path we used to follow together and with whom I can still pray to the same altars. I assure you that our modern unbelievers appear very small from St. Peter of Rome. And those who believe the source of such great wonders is declining are foolhardy....

Your friend,
A.-F. Ozanam

Translator: Julie Kalsow

62, TO FRANÇOIS LALLIER, *Rome*, 29 September 1833

My Dear Friend,

... The people of Italy have generally [appeared] better than their reputation to me. No doubt we see that they lack the courageous activity of the Northern peoples; no doubt, in a few corrupt cities where the old revolutionary spirit has made rapid progress, there is a licentiousness and wickedness worthy of Paris itself. But the countrymen, the mass of the craftsmen and the bourgeoisie, offer the spectacle of a deep piety in which fanaticism has little part....

A.-F. Ozanam

Translator: Julie Kalsow

64, TO HIS MOTHER, 30 November 1833

My Dear Mother,

...You would not know how useful it is to a young man isolated in the midst of all kinds of dangers to find himself from time to time to be in the presence of his parents whom he respects and loves, to share his thought with his pen, and to be somehow obliged to let them see his state of mind....

Thank God, I will leave the room I am occupying the 13th of next month. I am taking back my room from last year at Hôtel des Ecoles. Chaurand will take the room next door that, if we want, is interconnected through the balcony, so that it will be like we are lodged together. Later, Serre will join us there. As for the sheets and towels, the doorman at this hotel did not know how to respond. He will talk about it to the owner, and I will tell you what he says. Besides, my wallet is not compromised, especially since I received from Papa the indication of the person who would pay me my salary because I was a little worried not to see it mentioned in your letter. Besides, for my books and for any kind of expenditure of amenities, I hope to receive some revenue from the *Revue européenne*. Papa asked me how much it pays for each printing. The *Revue* does not pay so much by the issue, but depending on the size of the article, they pay 80, 60, or 40 francs.

However do not think, my good mother, that this contribution commits me to indulge myself too much in a kind of work that would hurt my law studies and I am unable to give you the consolation you ask of me in your letter. Yes, I will not do much philosophical work which, foreign to my current duties, would tire my mind without helping me to succeed. But if I am allowed some recreation, I will use it to practice easy topics, historical or literary subjects, that will bring a little pleasure to my mind and the grace that the thorns of jurisprudence cannot give me. Thus sometimes in the evening, Virgil or the Dante next to me, I will have fun writing some of my impressions of Italy to solitarily renew this beautiful journey that I took with you....



The grave of Frédéric Ozanam's parents, Old Loyasse Cemetery, section C-24, Lyons, France.

Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online

This is a long story, my dear mother, but I am out of paper. Monsieur Louis Meillan neither found me nor left his address: I do not know where to find him. I embrace you with all my heart and promise to try to be wise. Then you will plead my case with Papa if I have any setbacks at exams, because I will have done, I hope, what I could have. So far the difficult arrival, moving, new habits to make, all that has prevented me from carrying out my plans, yet I did accomplish something: I will try to do better.

Your son who loves you,
A.-F. OZANAM

Translator: Julie Kalsow

119, TO HIS PARENTS, *Paris, 31 May 1836*

My Dear Parents,

Here is some good news, praise God.

Your last letters came to console my sorrows and disturb a little my resolutions. I was so behind in my work, my poor soul was so overwhelmed and so empty, the difficulties appeared so great, I was really fearing abusing the goodness of heaven, and I was about to betray your trust in me. However, the thought that I would prolong your worries, the faith in your good prayers that have been sustaining me ... made me decide to motivate myself today. So this morning, exhausted, feeling and recognizing my complete helplessness, I surrender my cause in the hands of the Omnipotent, and I went to this meeting where I feared to find pitfalls and humiliation. But at this meeting, merciful Providence had

preceded me and paved the way. Out of six professors, it turned out that there were four whom I knew and who had my best interest at heart. During the hour and a half that the exam lasted, they spoke for forty-five minutes, then treated me with much leniency and they gave me a passing grade with three white balls and three red: it is a good grade without being spectacular. It is much more than I dared to hope. My good friends Lallier, Balloffet, Chaurand, Serre, shared my joy ...

Yours truly,
A.-F. Ozanam

Translator: Nadia André

120, TO DE LA NOUE, *Paris, 11 June 1836*

My Dear Friend:

I am deeply grateful for the poetic confidence that you have placed in me. Your idea seems very interesting, and I believe that you have all it takes to develop it in a powerful manner. As for me, I will not be able to shed light on the grey areas that you are pointing out to me. Aside from my own inadequacy, there are some unclear points that no light has ever pierced. We do not know anything, I believe, on the world before the Flood except what the *Book of Genesis* tells us. The two races of Cain and Seth, their primitive struggles, their fatal unions, a larger and more vigorous nature, some lives from many centuries ago, the alliance of energy, of science and of sins, all three in a gigantic state: here are the images rushing between the closed door of Eden and the opened torrential rain of the deluge. Evoke these images, poet, and they will obey you; they will pose themselves brightly on the scene that you have prepared for them. The silence of history is the freedom of poetry ...

A.-F. Ozanam

Translator: Nadia André

122, TO ERNEST FALCONNET, *Paris, 25 July 1836*

My Dear Friend:

I went to see you the day before you left on rue de la Bourse but I did not find you. Today, I went to rue du Dragon no. 7 as you had indicated, and the concierge insisted that he did not know anyone with your name. I have inquired at numbers 4, 8, 10, 12, 16, I have searched the courtyard du Dragon: all of my attempts were fruitless, and I had to return home, regretting not having found you. Nevertheless, I have an extreme desire to see you, so I urgently beg you to come to my house tomorrow or the day after tomorrow between...⁵

5 This ellipsis is in the text.

and 10 in the morning: I will be waiting for you. Please bring my Roman law notebooks, I need them for my thesis.

I hope your health is a little stronger.

So come see me.

Farewell. Your cousin,

A.-F. Ozanam

Translator: Nadia André

123, TO HIS MOTHER, *Paris, 6 August 1836*

My Dear Mother:

... If anyone is upset I did not plead a case, I do not think however that the fault should be on me who had asked why, who had worked hard to prepare for two weeks, who was present to plead it, who has even spoken up to be assigned to it, and who has nevertheless been frustrated by the disgraceful negligence of the junior officials of the Prosecutors Office. My father is recommending that I abandon my literature thesis to work on the one related to law. It has been three weeks since I worked on the literature thesis for which a war is being waged on me that would not have happened if I had used that same time to wander around or go around the world. I am not saying all of that to defend myself as a hard worker, even if I have this reputation up to a certain point; I do not deserve it. I am not passionate about work, it wears me out a lot, I enjoy having fun. Doing what I have to do comes at a cost to me but when I believe that I have done it, when I believe that I have obtained at a price what is most precious to me—my parents' satisfaction—it is hard for me to see that I was mistaken. I know that even regarding my work and my state duties, my conscience may have many things to regret. I however thank God that it has not been more hectic on other matters and that I have not had anything else to regret about my way of life! ...

Your son,

A.-F. Ozanam

Translator: Nadia André

126, TO ERNEST FALCONNET, *Paris, August 1836*

My Dear Friend:

I really would like to see you and I have some money to give back to you, but I am very busy with all kinds of obligations. Would you be able to come see me tomorrow from seven to nine in the morning at rue de Savoir (near rue St.-André des Arts) at the Bisson hotel, your cousin will really be pleased by that.

A-F. Ozanam

Translator: Nadia André

127, TO ERNEST FALCONNET, *Paris*, 30 August 1836

My Dear Friend:

I really wanted to see you these past few days for two reasons. First of all, the change in the Ministry which must put you in a new situation. Second of all, a pain in my leg is keeping me bedridden and prisoner in my bedroom per doctor's order. I still left today to submit the thesis for my doctorate, which was very successful. Now, I am dreaming about preparing my departure and I would like you to come see if my furniture really suits you. I still have to stay home until further notice: it would be an act of charity from you if you came to see me. These are some reasons which, in addition to our old friendship, are making me hope that we will have a long and pleasant visit together tomorrow or the day after tomorrow in the morning.

Farewell. Your cousin and very lovingly close friend.

A.-F. Ozanam

Translator: Nadia André

128, TO JACQUES LECOFFRE, *Paris*, 1 September 1836s

Sir and Dear Friend,

About ten days ago, I received the wonderful *Mois de Marie* for which I asked you. Would you be kind enough to let me know if you found the other publication?

I would also appreciate if you could let me buy the following books:

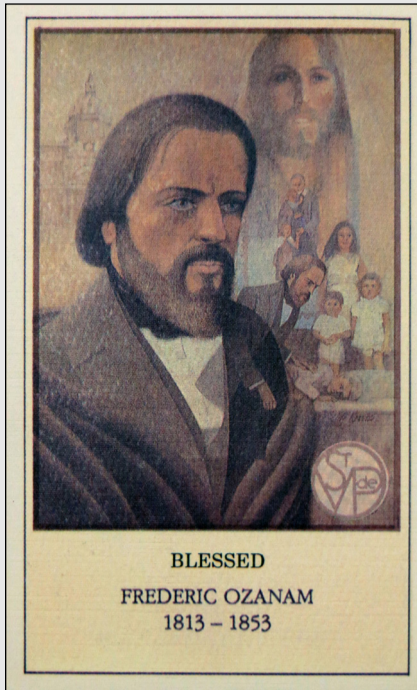
1. *Philosophie des Sciences* by Monsieur Ampère, volume 1, Bachelier Publications.
2. *Histoire de la Philosophie* by Monsieur de Salinis and Monsieur de Sorbiac, volume 1, Hachette Publications.
3. *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, composed according to the new edition of the Academy by Monsieur Charles Nodier. This work is very recent; I do not know in which bookstore you could find it. You may easily know.

I am taking the liberty to trust you with these errands because I must leave on Sunday, and for the past ten days, I have had an injured leg which has kept me indisposed and has not gotten better. Please send me the books and receipt by Sunday evening if possible....

Your devoted friend,

A.-F. Ozanam

Translators: Olivia Kennedy, David Moir



Holy card of Ozanam illustrating his works of charity and picturing the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the background.

Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online

129, TO ERNEST FALCONNET, *Paris*, 3 September 1836

Mr. Ernest Falconnet

Grande rue Verte #15, Paris.

My Dear Ernest,

I leave tomorrow at half past three by Laffite and Caillard. My leg is still weak and does not allow me to run and embrace you: that will have to wait until Lyon.

In the meantime, I am sending you a copy of my thesis. I am adding another copy and a copy of my shorter work which I would ask you to give Monsieur Sauzet on my behalf. I think that this gesture of respect at this time from a young compatriot cannot be unpleasant.

If I do not send you a copy of my *Deux Chanceliers d'Angleterre* for yourself, it is because you already have it in the *Revue européenne* and under this new formula, I have many fewer copies at my disposal.

Tomorrow, your protégé must come find me and I hope to find him a small, interim place.

Farewell, my dear friend, I would have liked your errands for Lyon. As I wait to see you again, I pray that you receive my fraternal embrace.

Your cousin who loves you dearly,

A-F. Ozanam

Translators: Olivia Kennedy, David Moir

130, TO JEAN-JACQUES AMPÈRE, *Paris*, 3 September 1836

Sir,

You cannot imagine how much I wanted to repay in Passy the pleasant visit with which you honored me a few weeks ago. A doctoral thesis to complete and a leg injury which kept me at home for fifteen days prevented me from fulfilling this desire. Today, my first outing was to see your sister whom I had the misfortune of never meeting. I left many books at her house, which you were kind enough to lend to me, as well as a copy of my thesis. You will also be given shortly a small book that I had the temerity to publish. They are two articles from the *Revue européenne* put together, elaborated upon, altered, and published with the encouragement of people that are perhaps too flattering. I feel, Sir, how wretched are these gifts by which to remember me, addressed to a family to which I owe so much, who, in the midst of so much glory and virtue, were kind enough to adopt and keep in their midst a young man who was a stranger, unknown, isolated, destined perhaps to make many errors, if Providence had not first given him such a shelter, such examples.

I am obliged to leave tomorrow; I hope that you, as well as Madame Ride and Mademoiselle Ampère will accept the assurance of my sincerest affection. I would be very grateful if you would remember me to Monsieur Ballanche and Monsieur Lenoir. I would be even more so if you did not forget the one whom you honored by calling him your friend.

A.-F. Ozanam

Translators: Olivia Kennedy, David Moir

131, TO JACQUES LE COFFRE, *Lyon*, 15 September 1836

Sir and Dear Friend,

You were kind enough to send me the books I asked you for the day before I left, but you did not enclose the invoice, so I left like a negligent debtor without paying my debts. I greatly wish to make up for this omission and I therefore ask you to send the invoice to me through Maison Périsse and order me to pay them what I owe you.

At the same time, I would like you to forward here about fifty copies of my short work *Deux Chanceliers d'Angleterre*. We hope to find some buyers in Lyon and the gentlemen at Périsse whom I have just seen are willing to take on the sale. It is already powerful recommendation for a book to be welcomed by a house as distinguished as yours.

I will not tell you how happy I am to be back with my family: but I want you to be aware that in the midst of the joy of my return, I remember with happiness the friends who helped to soften the time of absence in Paris. You are among them, and I assure you that you will always have a place in my memory.

Your all devoted,

A.-F. Ozanam

Translators: Olivia Kennedy, David Moir

138, TO FRANÇOIS LALLIER, *Lyon*, 12 December 1836

My Dear Friend,

... You know my humble book: *Les Deux Chanceliers*. Debécourt let me know that it is not advertised and is not selling. But Bonetty, d'Ortigue, St-Chéron, had promised me review articles; I was counting on Lamache and *L'Univers Religieux*. It appears that my absence has produced the singular effect of them forgetting their promises. Fortunately, I hope, this will not diminish our friendship. I dare to ask you to please do for me what I would do for myself if I were in Paris: speak to Monsieur Bailly, to Lamache, to Bonetty, to St-Chéron, to d'Ortigue if you can. Tell Lamache that I will consider him a traitor if I do not have an article from him in the next issue of *L'Université*. Please, go to the office of *L'Université* one night and beg them on my behalf, for an advertisement and some reviews. Further, I ask you to do for me what I cannot: please write an article on my book, either for *L'Univers*, if it does not yet have one, or for another journal: not too much praise, a short analysis, some critiques, two or three quotations....

With my loving embrace,
A.-F. Ozanam

Translators: Makenzie Lucas, Claire Rose

139, TO ERNEST FALCONNET, *Lyon*, 10 January 1837

... I may plead a case tomorrow and I have to be ready; I have started to write on historic topics, so frequent interruptions oblige me to painfully move from idea to idea, sentence to sentence. Just now, some people have come to dine with us, and my evening is threatened with necessary inaction....

Maybe if you think it a good idea, I will send you a letter for M. Ampère to replace those lost in the fire. As for *l'Université Catholique* I do not know which of the articles in the two last issues you reproach for intolerance; my reading, albeit generous, did not find anything extraordinary. In fact, I found the next-to-last issue ordinary ...

My never-ending thesis on the philosophy of Dante is finished. It is a very long work, and maybe in this respect will be found meritorious. I will defend it when I arrive in Paris as soon as the official examination list will be made, probably in a month....

Your cousin,
A.-F. Ozanam

Translators: Emily Grey, Jillian Morrison

144, TO EMMANUEL BAILLY, *Lyons*, 13 March 1837

Sir,

In about two weeks [sic]⁶ I will leave for Paris with both the intention of completing my doctoral thesis, and of trying for the Chair of Commercial law position about which I had spoken to you ...

However, this trip is not without difficulties for me. My father is not opposed to it, but he hardly welcomes it, more eager to see me advance in my law career than to applaud my attempts to enter a different career. I have his full consent, but I cannot ask for anything more and besides the many sacrifices that my parents have made for my law studies must bear fruit. I have two brothers, and no matter how fond they are of me, they might one day have cause for complaint if I run out of resources that they equally rely on.

I would like to find a job which could meet my expenses (about 100 francs a month) during the two or three months that I am going to spend in Paris, without, however, taking away too much time. I would consider myself happy if this job were to help edit *L'Univers*....

A.-F. Ozanam

Translators: Makenzie Lucas and Claire Rose

147, TO ALEXANDRE DUFIEUX, *Paris*, 22 April 1932 [sic]

... As soon as the illness which had greeted me on my arrival had subsided, I dedicated myself to knocking on all the doors where I hoped to find support. Monsieur Fulchiron, long warned by Monsieur Dugas, received me perfectly ...

All this seems to me to prove that the affair is languishing. The Chamber of Commerce, with the strong support of the deputies, should renew its request to the new ministry, thereby soliciting a prompt response. Finally, if they cannot obtain anything that way, they should provide it themselves within two months, because, as far as I am concerned, it is important that the thing be decided while the Chamber of Commerce is in session, and while the deputies are here to lend me their support with the ministry while I am here. So please, my dear friend, continuing what you have started so well, confer on this with Monsieur Dugas....

Now I would like to tell you about something else, something less selfish than all of the above. But what can I say? Between my canvassing and my studies, time escapes me so quickly and does not allow me to see the world around me. Here is all I know, in a few very short words: the return to religious ideas continues rapidly and the men who seem to be creating this admirable movement have withdrawn their hand to see only the one of God ...

A.-F. Ozanam

Translator: Natalie Franz

6 This notation is in the original text.

148, TO HIS MOTHER, *Paris, 27 April 1837*

My Dear Mother,

... (Monsieur Prunelle) does not think that it is possible to obtain a regular allocation from the government for a completely local institution, he thinks that the minister could grant at most some discretionary funds. The Chamber of Commerce should in all cases take care of the main expense; and then the University would gladly take the institution under its patronage and make the appointment....

Some of my oldest friends from Lyon, Henri, Balloffet, and Falconnet are here and do not neglect me. We spend our Sunday evenings taking a walk or by the fireside with Lallier. Merciful Providence does not leave my troubles without lightening them somewhat. These troubles are because I have at least three thoughts in my mind: to be able to work only in the library or in the reading room because the weather is cold and wood is costly; to be interrupted by intertwining occupations; but above all not to see those I love the best, to come back in the evening to this empty room, to fall asleep without a familiar voice saying goodnight to me, in a word not to be with one's own, not to be *at home*. Home is something valued more as one gets old, as the wandering temptations of youth pass. Now I am getting old, for your little boy, my dear mother, turned twenty-four years old this past Sunday.

Your devoted son,

A.-F. Ozanam

Translators: Joseph Lesus, Julia Ray

149, TO ALEXANDRE DUFIEUX, *Paris, Ascension Day, 4 May 1837*

My Dear Friend,

... Unfortunately, my father has more serious reasons for bringing me back closer to him. You know the health of my poor mother has worried me for some time. The nervous unrest that affected her last year, has now led to complete collapse. This whole winter I saw her falter ...

The time has come for me to finish, I pray for you to give me the charity of a quick response and to give my affectionate regards to all of my old friends who remember me. Speak of me to Him who is all powerful and loves your prayers. I am tenderly connected for life.

A.-F. Ozanam

Translators: Anthony Bevevino, Elle Heinzen, Spencer Weis



Emmanuel Bailly (1794–1861).

Bailly was especially devoted to Vincent de Paul as his father was entrusted with some of the saint's letters and papers during the French Revolution. Being older, he mentored the young men. Bailly was elected as the first president of the Society and served as a spiritual advisor.

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151, TO HENRI PESSONNEAUX, *Lyon*, 22 May 1837

My Dear Friend,

You will have been told of my departure and what was the cause. You know that from now on I am your equal in misfortune. I write to you therefore as to my oldest and most dear friend, and the one who can best understand the pain of my position. I am writing to ask you for the only real consolation that is in your power: many prayers.

Pray for the soul of my poor father whose faithfulness in fulfilling his duties, whose piety—more lively of late, whose good dispositions in receiving religious help give us much hope. Pray for my mother who is sick and in whom are now concentrated all my earthly affections. Pray for my brothers, both of whom are deep in sorrow. Pray for me, disoriented in life by the loss of the one upon whom so many of my thoughts and actions had been modelled, who was the visible presence and the image of God in the family. Here you will find a few lines for your father.

Farewell! Your saddened cousin,
A.-F Ozanam

Translators: Joseph Lesus, Julia Ray

152, TO EMMANUEL BAILLY, *Lyon*, 30 May 1837

Sir,

Since the freedom to weep together was replaced by the necessity of taking care of business, and after having judged our present situation, we needed to look to the future. We have convinced ourselves, my elder brother and I, of the seriousness of the duties that

Providence imposed on us. Our beloved father was not allowed to complete the laborious task he had undertaken, to provide all his children with the benefit of an excellent education, and to ensure for our mother's old age a life free of material worries. So we find ourselves, my elder brother and I, in a way substituted for the one who was the visible Providence of the family, obliged to be self-sufficient and to provide not only for the needs of our mother and our younger brother, but for everything that goes beyond need. In the humble, but honorable rank that my elder brother occupies, he finds just enough resources to fulfill his part of this obligation. I will find some resources in the place that I have requested, for I hope my steps are not without success. But in the meantime, Sir, I must work regularly and to support myself and that is why I have offered my services to *L'Univers Religieux*. I was going to continue my articles on the property of the Church, when on the subject of the report and the discussion in the Chambre des Pairs, I saw the issue dealt with in the newspaper. I feared that you would no longer need my pen and I am writing to you to enlighten me on this point. Answer me, then, please, or answer only briefly these questions: can I continue the series of my articles on ecclesiastical property? If you do not want to continue it, would you give me another series of articles to do, whatever the subject? In order to spare your time that I know is so precious, if within a week I have no answer, I will view your silence as an authorization to continue the series I had started. You know, Sir, that I have more reason than ever to resort to your generosity. You devoted it to me when I was with you; absent for such a painful cause, I hope to have no less qualifications and I offer myself with a respectful and filial attachment.

Your devoted servant,
A.-F. Ozanam

Translator: Jasmine Lewis

The Ecological Meaning of the Presence of God in Elizabeth Ann Seton's Reflections and Translations Based on *Elizabeth Bayley Seton: Collected Writings Volumes 3a & 3b*

SISTER SUNG-HAE KIM, S.C.

BIO

SISTER SUNG-HAE KIM, S.C., is a professor emeritus in the Department of Religious Studies, Sogang University in Seoul, Korea. After entering the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill in 1965, Sister made her final vows in 1972. She earned an M.A. in theology from Marquette University and went on to earn her Th.D. in the history of religions from Harvard University in 1981. Kim has had numerous articles published, including “Elizabeth Ann Seton’s Vision of Ecological Community. Based on *Elizabeth Bayley Seton: Collected Writings*, Volume Two” in *Vincentian Heritage* 35:2, and has authored the books *Understanding the History of Religion; Primitive Confucianism: A Hermeneutical Approach to the Analects, Mencius, Hsun Tzu*; and *The Gourd and the Cross: Daoism and Christianity in Dialogue* (Three Pines Press, 2014). She also served as co-editor for *Monasticism, Buddhist and Christian: The Korean Experience* (2008).

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Introduction

I have written two articles, “The Ecological Spirituality of Elizabeth Ann Seton,” and “Elizabeth Ann Seton’s Vision of Ecological Community,” based on the first two volumes of her *Collected Writings*.¹ This is my third interpretation of Elizabeth Ann Seton’s (1774–1821) spirituality from the perspective of contemporary ecological philosophy or theology. While both volumes one and two of her *Collected Writings* include her correspondence and journals divided by her early life as a wife and widow in New York and Italy and her later life as a religious in Baltimore and Emmitsburg, volume three (comprised of two volumes, 3a and 3b) contains her reflections, meditations, copied materials from various spiritual writers, and her selected translations, such as *Life of St. Vincent de Paul* and *Life of Louise de Marillac*. Since volume 3a begins with her notes at age seventeen and continues until her “Dear Remembrances,” (contained in volume 3b) which she wrote not long before her death, these volumes cover practically her entire life.

Elizabeth’s letters and journals in volumes one and two clearly reflect her original thoughts. However, in volumes 3a and 3b, it is often difficult to distinguish which parts are Elizabeth’s own words and which parts are selections from other spiritual authors. I concur with the editors of the *Collected Writings*: “Internal evidence suggests that the material was probably copied from spiritual writers of the period ...”² After some conversations with the editors on this issue of copied materials in the midst of her reflections, I agreed with their conclusion: “Even if Elizabeth copied the content into her own papers, she thought the material was important and wanted to reflect further on it. Therefore even if it is not her original writing, the content reflects her values and thinking.”³ The same standard will apply when we approach her selection of translations, which occupies twenty-two percent of the material contained in the volume. Through her selection as well as her emphasis by underlining some words or phrases, Elizabeth expressed what she valued most in these spiritual writings for herself and her religious community, for whom she translated from French to English.

I propose to focus on the “presence of God” (a central theme that runs through these last volumes) in the life of Elizabeth as the mystery that not only sustained her throughout

1 See Sung Hae Kim, S.C., “The Ecological Spirituality of Elizabeth Ann Seton,” *Vincentian Heritage* 32:2 (2015) at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol32/iss2/2/>; and “Elizabeth Ann Seton’s Vision of Ecological Community,” *Vincentian Heritage* 35:2 (2020) at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol35/iss2/4/>.

2 Document 8.26, “Pyamingo Reflections,” which Elizabeth wrote on the boat *Pyamingo* during her return journey from Leghorn (Livorno), Italy, to New York in 1804 in *Elizabeth Bayley Seton: Collected Writings*, ed. Regina Bechtle, S.C. and Judith Metz, S.C., vols. 1–3b (New York: New City Press, 2006), 3a:172–73, nn. 1 and 5. Hereafter abbreviated as *CW*. Available online at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentian_ebooks/12/.

3 The emailed response of Judy Metz, S.C., on 29 December 2015, to my question on the above footnotes. I began to realize that Elizabeth Seton’s use of copied materials was like our contemporary use of quotations when we write academic articles; the only difference is that we specify the detailed source of the quotations while Elizabeth did not bother to do that, for they were either for her personal use or for the private use of her family members and religious sisters.

her life but also united her vision of the entire universe of natural creation and humanity into one. Elizabeth was convinced that the divine presence is the very source of life, vitality, beauty, and harmony of all living material beings. Moreover, Elizabeth was in one accord with Vincent de Paul that the presence of God sustains life not only in its flourishing but also in its suffering and death. It is evident from Elizabeth's meditations during the retreats that she felt close to Vincent. She repeatedly called him "our dear father Saint Vincent" or "our blessed father Saint Vincent," and sometimes "O second father Saint Vincent most precious to every heart here," following the first father, Saint Joseph. Elizabeth gave Vincent the title of chief patron and founder in the beginning of the Constitutions of her congregation.⁴ It seems significant that Elizabeth chose to translate the part of Saint Vincent's biography in which Vincent emphasized the transforming effect of the divine presence:

Well convinced by a long experience of the multiplied graces to be acquired by this practice of recollection Mr. Vincent taught it in every manner he could ... in many parts of the House of St. Lazare he had written in large letters *GOD SEES YOU* so that going and coming the Presence of God might be remembered ... he had a particular turn in using natural and sensible objects for this purpose, not stopping on the outside shell or exterior appearance, nor even on their excellence, yet always referring them to the praise of their creator he would say what is the most beautiful compared with him, who is the source of all beauty and perfection, is it not from him the flowers, birds, stars, moon and sun draw their beauty and luster ... he said once to his community that having often to visit a sick person who suffered continual pain in the head, and bore it with great Patience, that he saw on the countenance of the person some inexpressible lustre [*sic*] which evidenced the residence of God in her soul—and he could not help exclaiming "O the happiness of suffering for the love of God!"⁵

Just as Vincent recognized the power of the divine presence in both the beauty and suffering of life, Elizabeth also embraced the Presence of God at times of wonder and happiness, and at times of anguish, suffering, and death. For Elizabeth the sense of the divine presence was the connecting cord and thread in her heart that initiated the music of grateful praise, the strength of enduring patience, and the hope for blessed eternity.

4 Document 9.15, "[Retreat Meditations]," St. Vincent's Day, *CW*, 3a:329–31. On the feast of Vincent de Paul the first group of Sisters of Charity made their vows. Elizabeth wrote on that day: "Look down and favour us, also O holy Joseph our beloved Father ... O second father O St. Vincent most precious to every heart here—take among us thy blessed day and permit us thy latest daughters and the least of all ah! Permit us to be thine also forever." Also refer to Document A-12.4, "Constitutions, Chapter 1, Article 1": "The Sisters of Charity in the United States of America... are daughters of St. Vincent of Paul, whom they acknowledge as their chief patron and founder" *CW*, 3b:541.

5 Document 13.2, "Life of St. Vincent de Paul," n.d., *CW*, 3b:309.

In order to assure and enhance the ecological character of Elizabeth's insights on the Presence of God, I will compare her visions of creation, of humanity, and of suffering and death with three theologians. I will begin with Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), a German Benedictine nun of the twelfth century who was named a doctor of the Church in 2012 by Pope Benedict XVI. She is well known for her unique image of *viriditas*, the Latin word for “greenness,” which denotes all life-giving qualities of God's spirit in matter, both human and non-human.⁶ Hildegard of Bingen explained through her writings how the Presence of God is not only the source of life and vitality but also enhances the beauty and harmony of all things no matter how different.

Next, I will focus on Sallie McFague and Elizabeth A. Johnson, two important contemporary theologians of ecology. A member of the Anglican Church of Canada, Sallie McFague (b. 1933) uses contemporary science as a resource for theology and has identified the whole universe as the body of God still in process. She views human beings as partners in creation as self-conscious beings, shaping a new humanity in a Christian paradigm, which is characterized by God's liberating, healing, and inclusive love. A member of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Brentwood, Elizabeth A. Johnson (b. 1941) clarifies the Presence of God in death and suffering and explains how the natural world and human beings are closely linked in the experience of death. Elizabeth Johnson's insistence that contemporary ecological theology works on two fronts at once, the Spirit and the natural world, interestingly coincides with Elizabeth Seton's understanding of suffering and death in her encompassing experience of the Presence of God.

I. The Presence of God in Creation as the Source of Life and Vitality

In 1798, after the death of William's father who safeguarded the prosperity of their family, Elizabeth and William Magee moved their young family to 61 Stone Street in New York in order to take responsibility for William's younger half-sisters and half-brothers. On 31 December 1799, realizing that a dark cloud was approaching upon the family's future, Elizabeth wrote a prayer that her inner peace would be maintained in the Presence of God:

Sitting on a little Bench before the fire—the head resting on the hand, the Body perfectly easy, the Eyes closed, the mind serene contemplating, and tracing boundless Mercy and the source of all Excellence and Perfection ... to find the Soul at Liberty—Heavenly Mercy—in thy presence and would it not tremble ... preserve me but this Heavenly Peace, continue to me this privilege [sic] beyond all mortal computation of resting in Thee, and adoring Thee my

6 Anne H. King-Lenzmeier, *Hildegard of Bingen: An Integrated Vision* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 6.



After bankruptcy forced them to give up their family home on Stone Street, Elizabeth and William moved to 8 State Street (at center) where they resided until their 1803 departure for Italy. The building is pictured here in 1891.

New York Historical Society, Public Domain

Father—Friend— and never failing Support.—for this alone I implore, let all other concerns with their consequences be intirely [sic] and wholly [sic] submitted to *Thee*—⁷

Elizabeth trusted that if God, who was her Father, Friend, and Supporter, would stay with her, she would be able to endure whatever trials may come and enjoy liberty of the soul. Elizabeth’s constant desire was that she would be fit to dwell in the Presence of God:

Almighty Giver of all Mercies, Father of all, who knows my Heart and pities its weakness and errors, thou knowest the desire of my soul is to do thy will, it struggles to wing its flight to the creator ...
... cleanse me and fit me for thy presence.⁸

What is noteworthy is that as much as Elizabeth desired the Presence of God in her heart, she perceived the same divine presence in all of God’s creation.

A. The Presence of God in Creation: Elizabeth’s Reflections and Meditations

On a beautiful evening in October 1800, at her father Dr. Richard Bayley’s home in the quarantine station on Staten Island, Elizabeth described in detail the wonders of nature:

The most beautiful mild Evening my eyes ever beheld, the moon perfectly unclouded—a large cloud like a Bank of pure snow arises behind the fort and

⁷ Document 8.4. “Sitting on a little bench...,” 31 December 1799, *CW*, 3a:18.

⁸ Document 8.22. “Almighty Giver of all Mercies...,” n.d., *CW*, 3a:36 –37.

gradually spreads toward New York retaining its whiteness from its centre [sic] but very dark beneath now and then lit up with lightning while the Sky over our Establishment and Long Island is clearest blue spangled with the bright stars—this continued about a quarter of an hour the most perfect scene imagination could form a light wind rises, the thunder is heard—the clouds ap[p]roach and by degrees cover the bright Moon, pass to Long Island and the fort is covered with as blue and spangled a sky as before this while the rain is beat[ing] over *us*.⁹

Elizabeth watched and marveled at the ever-changing beauty of creation, believing that the natural world contains the excellence of the Divine Law set forth in the most impressive and endearing manner,¹⁰ and was comforted by the thought that “all nature is bright, every blessing below is perfect.”¹¹

It was in the “Pyamingo Reflection” where Elizabeth elaborated most clearly her vision of the Presence of God in the entire universe:

Of all the exercises in a Christian Life there are none more strongly recommended or more carefully practiced by the Saints of God, than that of a constant sense of his presence—Our obligation for this practice is founded on two principles of faith—God is every where [sic], and sees every thing [sic]—... The Majesty of his presence consecrates every part of the universe, and wherever I am, I may say with Jacob “This place is holy” and I knew it not, or rather I do not consider—thus the recollection of God’s presence is the lawful homage and faith I owe to his immensity—St. Augustin [sic] figured it himself a vast Ocean wherein all creatures are inundated and penetrated with the <p>essence of God without ever being able to escape or detach themselves from him because they are present with him by the necessity of their nature.¹²

The basic idea of the above quotation is from Saint Francis de Sales, but instead of introducing the four chief considerations of practicing the Presence of God as the preparation for meditation, Elizabeth focused on the first point, namely that God is in all things and all

9 Document 8.6, “The most beautiful mild Evening...,” 2 October 1800, *CW*, 3a:19–20.

10 Document 8.14, “Do we wish to view religion...,” 26 September 1803, *CW*, 3a:28. The editors explain that this reflection is possibly from notes Elizabeth took from a sermon of Rev. John Henry Hobart, given the initials that appear at the bottom of the page (n. 1).

11 Document 8:18, “Father Almighty I know not what I would ask...,” n.d., *CW*, 3a:34.

12 Document 8.26, “Pyamingo Reflections [Living in the Presence of God],” n.d., *CW*, 3a:189. The editors state that this section “indicates the influence of Saint Francis de Sales on Elizabeth. She received a copy of his *Introduction to the Devout Life* from Filippo Filicchi while she was in Italy (n. 40).” Refer to *Introduction to the Devout Life*, translated by John Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 84, and in particular “The Second Part, section 2: A Short Method of Meditation, and First of the Presence of God,” which is the First Point of the Preparation.

places. Therefore, Elizabeth did not follow the conclusion in this part of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* that “God is indeed here.” Rather, enlarging the scope of the vision to the entire universe, Elizabeth said that the Majesty of God’s presence consecrates every part of it. Elizabeth’s conviction that God is everywhere throughout the whole universe is restated in her reflection on the “Exercise of the Presence of God”:

God is every where [sic]—on the throne of his glory among the blessed indeed, but also throughout the whole universe which he fills governs and preserves, ruling it by his wisdom and power

... as birds in changing their places find the air wherever they fly, and fish who live in the water are surrounded by their element wherever they swim, so wherever we go we must find God every where [sic], he is more within us, than we are in ourselves.¹³

The examples of the birds of the air and the fish of the sea enjoying the immensity of the sky and the ocean, yet never reaching their limit and boundary are used again in Elizabeth’s later reflections. God’s immensity and the finiteness of creatures including human beings are illustrated: “So we plunging in the Ocean of the Divinity, or winging our flight to its infinity will yet find we can never reach its full enjoyment which will still remain infinitely above our highest capacities.”¹⁴ In a similar reflection entitled “Our Sister departed,” Elizabeth manifested her ability to see God in nature:

all nature speaks to us of heaven—the delights of the morning—a flower of the field.

... We are to sanctify ourselves in our happy position, to remove all obstacles to grace when he calls—our life should be pure as the clear running stream.¹⁵

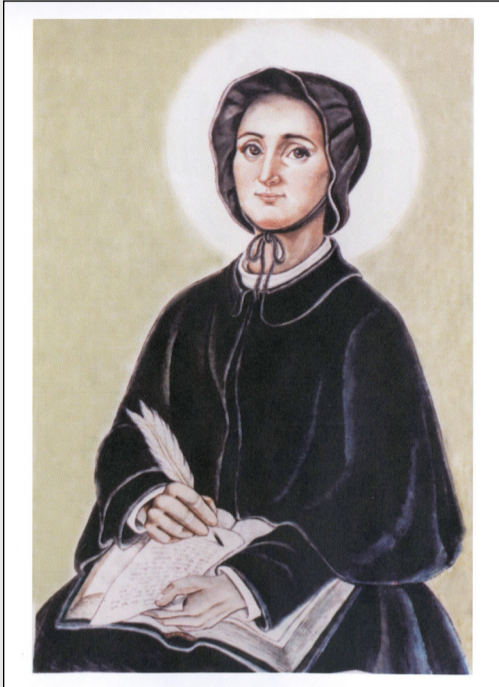
Because the life of the natural world and that of human beings is so closely interconnected and harmonized, Elizabeth was not hesitant to see nature as the metaphor for our life. For instance, Elizabeth loved to use the sun as the symbol of God’s constant presence and integrity: “Can we wonder enough at our singular blindness of heart, in preferring the thought of created things to our God, who is as a sun which shines night and day on us and in us.”¹⁶ Second, in her advice to her daughter Catherine, Elizabeth used the righteous sun as a metaphor for integrity: “*I would be kind to every body* [sic] but admit a

13 Document 9.20, “*Exercise of the Presence of God*,” n.d. *CW*, 3a:392. The editors add that a similar treatment of this theme is found in Saint Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Part Second, chap. 2.

14 Document 11.9, “departed St. Teresa’s day,” Saint Teresa’s Day, *CW*, 3b:11. The editors write that “this is probably a funeral sermon” for Sister Maria Murphy (who died 15 October 1812) “given by Bruté, followed by other reflections” (n. 1).

15 Document 9.7, “Our Sister departed.....,” n.d., *CW*, 3a:250.

16 Document 9.20, “*Exercise of the Presence of God*,” n.d., *CW*, 3a:401.



***Portrait of Elizabeth Seton by Sister Sung-he Choi,
Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill, Korean province.***

Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online

few *within* my heart, and I would have the *pride* to do what I knew to be right as quietly and calmly as the sun rides on the heavens and let the world go on at its pleasure.”¹⁷ Elizabeth explained to her daughter that this inner strength to do what we know to be right comes from the divine look that enkindles the fire of love in us.

Elizabeth perceived that the Spirit of God is present everywhere in creation not only in the glorious sun, but also in a little flower: “The very immensity of God is most admirable, that at the same time it is greater than the whole universe it is as small as the least object of the creation, and we find it whole and intire [sic] in a little flower, and as perfect as in the emperial [sic] heaven.”¹⁸ The very fact that everything in the universe, small and great, is animated by the divine presence offers the theological basis for the ecological community of all living beings.

B. The Presence of God in Creation: Elizabeth’s Translated Works

When Elizabeth was translating the French original of *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul* by Louis Abelly, she did not translate it in its entirety; rather, with a clear purpose, she selected what she thought worth translating. Among the three volumes Elizabeth did not translate is the first volume of Abelly’s biography of Vincent, which deals with historical materials. From the second and third volumes she chose only the parts dealing with Vincent’s virtues such as humility, obedience, simplicity, prudence,

17 Document 10.3, “Catherine Seton’s Little Red Book,” n.d., *CW*, 3a:491.

18 Document 9.20, “Exercise of the *Presence of God*,” n.d., *CW*, 3a:409.

meekness, mortification, patience, love of God and charity toward the poor.¹⁹ Elizabeth's selection for translation makes her intention very clear; she wanted to provide spiritual reading for the spiritual formation of the early Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg for which she was responsible.

Exploring Vincent's submission to all authority, both spiritual and secular, Elizabeth chose one interesting episode that happened in the Congregation's motherhouse between Vincent and a brother, who caught birds in a cage to present as a gift to the superior general. Elizabeth translated all the details Abelly described, signifying that in the end obedience means submission to God who loves and supports all forms of life:

One of the Brothers of the house of St. Lazare having found a pa[r]tridge [pheasant] nest in its enclosures and set the eggs under a hen that he might have the pleasure of presenting the little pa[r]tridges to Mr. Vincent, received no other answer when he brought them to him in triumph but "Well my brother let us see if they can run yet" and setting out quietly with the Brother to reach a field of plowed ground, he bade him open the door of the cage, and enjoyed the pleasure of seeing them all escape ... then turning kindly to the Brother who had expected quite another kind of pleasure he said "You know his Majesty has forbid us taking pa[r]tridges, so of course he did not mean that we should take their eggs, and the least disobedience to our King in temporal matters is always more or less displeasing to God."²⁰

When she was living in New York, Elizabeth also coaxed a girl named Nelly to release a young robin from a cage to make the robin family happy,²¹ so she must have found Vincent's action letting the brother release the birds very significant. For both of them, care for birds as well as for the poor is an act of obedience to the Creator, who wants all life to flourish.

Elizabeth agreed with Vincent that the Holy Spirit animates all of creation, as seen in her translation of Abelly's account of Vincent's retreat work at Saint-Lazare, where no less than 700 persons were received, lodged, and fed without charge every year. When his companions asked Vincent to lessen the number of the retreatants, Vincent answered: "Let us thank God a thousand times that he has hitherto made our house a theatre of his mercies, on which the holy Spirit is continually descending ... Yes our house becomes the place of Rest for the King of Kings, the throne of his Justifications."²²

19 Document 13.1, "Life of St. Vincent de Paul," n.d. and document 13.2, "Life of St. Vincent de Paul," n.d., *CW*, 3b:217–354. The editors note that the Seton translation of Abelly comprises two copybooks, each of which is a distinct document: *Seton Writings* 3:13.1 and 13.2. It is unknown how or why the early archivists differentiated between the two copybooks in the assignment of archival numbers since document 13.2 covers material earlier in Abelly than document 13.1. I agree with them and found the beginning of 13.1 follows the end of 13.2. In a word, archival numberings should be reversed. The translation of the biography of Vincent occupies 143 pages in the *CW*, while that of Louise occupies thirty-nine pages.

20 Document 13.1, "Life of St. Vincent de Paul," n.d., *CW*, 3b:221.

21 Document 1.123, "To Rebecca Seton," [1801], *CW*, 1:164.

22 Document 13.1, "Life of St. Vincent de Paul," *CW*, 3b:277. Also see "we really are animated with the divine presence," document

Elizabeth would have delighted in translating the description of how Vincent tried to walk in the footsteps of his divine Master: “he might mould and form himself to this divine original and might truly say with the Prophet ‘thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a guide to my paths.’ ... - but in all guided so well by the Spirit of God that it was evident it influenced whatever he did –”²³ Truly, Jesus, who was guided in all by the Spirit of God, was an example who inspired both Vincent and Elizabeth.

Finally, Elizabeth wrote in her “Meditation on Heaven” that we can call for the praise of all creatures because Jesus took on himself our humanity thereby uniting all material creation to the spiritual:

God himself becomes our praise from our lower material World ...
... endless love and HARMONY the SONG of MARY...
... is it possible this Atom being I possess shall be eternally blessed without
end and limitation.²⁴

Here Elizabeth calls herself “Atom being” among the lower material world, which was lifted up to the world of the spiritual, so that the eternal praise of endless love and harmony can be achieved. On the feast day of Vincent de Paul when the first group of Sisters of Charity made their first vows, Elizabeth described herself as a “wretched atom” whose unwilling heart must be bound by the grace of God, and she prayed to Vincent: “Blessed father St. Vincent assist by thy love and powerful intercession thy poor daughters here.”²⁵

Elizabeth looked forward to the day when the whole of creation would be glorified because the complete transformation of the earth would include not only the salvation of human beings but also the glory of the natural world: “yes I will look forward to the Arch-angels Voice to the transformation of the heavens, the renovation of the earth, the liberty of the elements Universal natures change, then Shall I behold my A[nnina] and R[ebecca] no longer shrouded in the tomb.”²⁶

C. The Ecological Meaning of the Presence of God in Creation

In order to perceive more clearly the ecological meaning of the Presence of God in creation in Elizabeth’s writings, we will now look into what the divine presence meant in the ecological theology of Hildegard of Bingen. For Hildegard, all life is living in the constant presence of the Living Light of God. She noted that in this life we experience the shadow of

13.1 “Life of St. Vincent de Paul,” *CW*, 3b:310.

23 Document 13.1. “Life of St. Vincent de Paul,” *CW*, 3b:252.

24 Document 9.14, “Meditation on Heaven,” n.d., *CW*, 3a:314.

25 Document 9.15, “Retreat Meditations,” St. Vincent’s Day, *CW*, 3a:330.

26 Document 10.3. “Catherine Seton’s Little Red Book,” *CW*, 3a:494.



***Saint Hildegard von Bingen, Sibyl of the Rhine
(1098–1179).***

Hildegard was canonized 10 May 2012.

Courtesy of Encyclopedia Britannica

the Living Light, but when we complete our journey, we shall be bathed in the Light itself. Her constant awareness of the Presence of God in creation was very much influenced by the rich natural environment of Disibodenberg, where she spent twenty-four years of her early life. Her first Benedictine monastery was located on a site between two rivers filled with vitality and sheer greenness, which inspired her imagery of the life-giving power of God in the natural world, *viriditas* (Latin: greenness, vitality), with its lush trees, ivy, grass, moist soil, and rocks.²⁷

Hildegard wrote that eternity is the essential quality of the Father, for God lives in eternity as the source of life. Life proceeds not from mortality, but life is in life. Every living thing has its own life force because all things are born from God the Father: “The clouds have their course, and the moon and stars burn with fire. The tree brings forth the flowers through invigorating sap, and water, in its rarer essence, has the ability both to make the wind moist and to bring forth rivulets. Even the earth exhales moisture.”²⁸

In a letter to Abbot Manegold, who was elected abbot of Hirsau and experienced the general unrest in the monastery, Hildegard recommended the virtue of patience to him so that he might realize his full potential:

In your works and morals I see you as a tree that has great viridity in its leaves. One branch, however, is drying up ... This is Patience, which produces

27 King-Lenzmeier, *Hildegard of Bingen*, xv–xviii and chapter 1, 6–9.

28 *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, translated by Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman, 3 vols. (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1994-2004), 1:98. 31r Hildegard to Eberharild, Bishop of Bamberg, 1163–64. Four hundred letters are available to us, and they are considered as prophetic witness, for Hildegard was not hesitant to say what she received from the Divine Light in her correspondence with the popes, bishops, priests, religious, and laity including the king of England.

humidity and viridity in all good works. Patience's house is harsh and bitter, but it gives great rewards and opens the gate of the heavenly kingdom.... That monastery in which you live is pleasing to God. Therefore, embrace and kiss Patience, and do not put her aside, for you have the potential to wash clean the wounds of men, and thereby to set up a ladder to heaven. And you will live forever.²⁹

Hildegard's emphasis on patience can be compared to Elizabeth's continual comments on patience as her lifelong companion, for "Patience will at last bring all right."³⁰ Moreover, Hildegard adds that viewing patience as an ecological virtue will enable us to wait for the right time and help to bring everything into fruition. One of Hildegard's songs praises the Holy Spirit as the Life of the life of all creatures, summarizing what the Presence of God means in creation:

O You, fire of the Spirit, Paraclete,
 Life of the life of every creature,
 Holy are you for giving life to the forms,
 Holy are you for anointing ...
 From You, the clouds flow, the ether flies,
 From You, the rocks have their moisture,
 From You, the waters bring forth their rills,
 From You, the earth exudes its viridity
 And so all creatures,
 Which have life from You praise You,
 Because You are the ointment beyond price
 For open, festering wounds,
 And You transform them into rarest gems.³¹

The most important virtues that Hildegard saw in creation were moderation and

29 Letter 135, Hildegard to Abbot Manegold(?) 1156–65, *Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, 2:76. For historical information of Manegold, see p. 67.

30 Letter 6.32, "To Sister Maria Murphy Burke," [April 1810], *CW*, 2:119. For the comment "my companion the remainder of my fine life," see letter 7.144, "To William Seton," [1818], *CW*, 2:532. Also refer to letter 6.4, "To Archbishop John Carroll," [August 6, 1809], *CW*, 2:79; letter 6.30 "To Julia Scott," March 26, 1810, *CW*, 2:116; letter 6.53 "To Matthias O'Conway," July 30, [1810], *CW*, 2:152; letter 6.61, "To Matthias O'Conway," October 9, 1810, *CW*, 2:161; letter 6.68, "To Julia Scott," February 1, 1811, *CW*, 2:169; letter 6.69, "To George Weis," [February 1811], *CW*, 2:171; letter 6.73, "To Archbishop John Carroll," March 16, 1811, *CW*, 2:179; letter 6.74, "To George Weis," [April 27, 1811], *CW*, 2:180; letter 6.129, "Copy to George Weis," March 26, 1813, *CW*, 2:243; letter 6.206, "To Rebecca Seton," September 25, [1815], *CW*, 2:344; letter 7.16, "To William Seton," April 9, 1816, *CW*, 2:386; letter 7.18, "Copy to William Seton," April 21, 1816, *CW*, 2:388; letter 7.39, "To Catherine Seton," [July 1816], *CW*, 2:412; letter 7.69, "To William Seton," [early 1817], *CW*, 2:460; letter 7.77, "To Rev. Simon Bruté, S.S.," [February 1817], *CW*, 2:467; letter 7.112, "To Eliza Sadler," August 24, 1817, 2:504; letter 7.165, "To William Seton," [June 1818], *CW*, 2:561; letter 7.215, "To Rev. John Hickey, S.S.," [June 1819], *CW*, 2:615; and letter 7.253, "Copy to Catherine Seton," [July 4, 1820], *CW*, 2:660.

31 "Songs and Meditations before 1173," *Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, 3:202–204.

harmony. In one of her sermons, Hildegard states that God is a living fountain as well as a blazing fire, and so the waters and the sun complement each other to maintain life on the earth:

The waters, however, steep the whole earth with the heat of the sun, which as a kind of image below the circuit of its orbit and which is humidified by the watery air, and so with the two together mingling with one another, they bring forth all living plants. And the waters, which are the mirror of the sun, refrain the sun lest it burn up the earth with its excessive heat. In turn, the sun curbs the waters so that they will not submerge the earth with overabundant rains.³²

Just as the water and the sun complement each other, so that life on earth may flourish, human beings have to cultivate moderation and harmony.³³ If we look at Elizabeth Seton's vision of the life of creation as sustained by moderation and harmony from the perspective of Hildegard of Bingen, it is clear that Elizabeth's insight is ecological, and at the end it is the Majesty of the Divine Presence that consecrates every part of the universe.³⁴

II. The Presence of God in the Midst of Humanity

Even though Elizabeth's vision of creation is filled with the divine presence which resides in every atom of the natural world, she was convinced that human beings are especially destined to be brightened by the splendor of the divine presence through preserving integrity and simplicity in our words and actions.³⁵ Elizabeth confessed repeatedly that "Divine presence is the most precious treasure to me"³⁶ and also proclaimed that "in [God's] presence is the fulness [*sic*] of Joy."³⁷

A. The Presence of God in the Midst of Humanity: Elizabeth's Reflections

For Elizabeth, creatures are God's image and mirror, representing God's perfection in their diversity. Reflecting her religious life in the quiet valley of the small village of Emmitsburg, Elizabeth found the ecological meaning and mission of human life in her intimate connection with its natural environment:

32 "A Sermon on the Perverse Doctrine of the Heretics," (1171), *Letters of Hildegard Bingen*, 3:170–71. She gave this sermon at the age of seventy-three and began the sermon with the confession that she saw this vision in her spirit, being fully awake, having been compelled by the Living Light.

33 115. "Concerning the punishments of the Immoderate" Hildegard of Bingen, *The Book of the Rewards of Life*, translated by Bruce W. Hozeski (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1994).

34 Document 8.26. "Pyamingo Reflections," [Living in the Presence of God], *CW*, 3a:189.

35 Document 13.1, "Life of St. Vincent de Paul," *CW*, 3b:223.

36 Document 8.26, "Pyamingo Reflections," *CW*, 3a:191, and document 9.20, "Exercise of the *Presence of God*," *CW*, 3a:396.

37 Document 8.24, "Extracts from George Glasse's *Contemplation on the Sacred History*," *CW*, 3a:94.



Mosaic depicting canonization banner of Elizabeth Seton, located in the Queen of Heaven Mausoleum, Hillside, Illinois.

Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online

Silence, and retirement, regular hours of communion with God and separation from the tumult of the world. Order in action ... doing nothing but in the spirit of obedience to God and the accomplishment of his good will and pleasure seeking God in things the most indifferent, <and> considering the creature *only* his image and mirrors to represent to us his perfections—the heavens as the throne of his glory, the earth as his footstool, mankind as the ministers of his providence, prosperities as the effects of his liberality, and adversities as the chastisement of his justice.— this is the secret of finding God in all things and every where [*sic*].³⁸

In Elizabeth’s reflection above, humanity forms the triad of material creation with heaven and earth, and human beings are regarded as “the ministers of God’s providence.” While recognizing that all other creatures are also the images of God reflecting divine perfection, she admitted that humans have a special mission to fulfill. In order to realize this mission, we must know God’s mandate for each of us through the cultivation of our sense of the divine presence.

We find the concrete way of cultivating this sense of the divine presence in Elizabeth’s dialogue with Sister Mary Vincent Langley, who was admitted to the novitiate on 21 January 1819, two years before Elizabeth’s death. As the superior of the community Elizabeth advised Mary Vincent to practice five things³⁹ which demonstrate Elizabeth’s mature teaching of how

38 Document 8.26, “Pyamingo Reflections,” *CW*, 3a:191.

39 Document 9.9, “Mother Seton’s Last Writings,” n.d., *CW*, 3a:254. The editors add that this document is not in Elizabeth’s handwriting. Probably one of the sisters in Emmitsburg who was present there with Mother Seton and Sister Mary Vincent wrote the dialogue between them.

humans can become “the ministers of God’s providence.” First, she advises us to constantly guard our senses in order to nurture our Savior’s life in us; second, to preserve moderation and harmony in life reflecting our dear savior’s life; third, to cultivate the Presence of God as our focus in the spiritual life; fourth, to secure and renew pure intention and work with a lively, cheerful heart, even when the things we are to do displease our poor nature; and fifth, to persevere in daily trials with the pure eyes of faith and to fight cheerfully.⁴⁰

Here I will focus on the third point, the unique Presence of God in every human person. Unlike other creatures who reflect God’s perfection through their natural existence, human beings can ignore and resist the grace of the divine presence because we are endowed with self-consciousness and freedom. Elizabeth described this human phenomenon to Sister Mary Vincent in a personal way:

See your dear Saviour sitting alone in the midst of your soul, like a shepherd he calls for all the powers of your soul, all the affections of your heart to come round him like his own little flock—but how they are scattered about—See, he holds a paper in his dear hand—what is written on it? “*Speak little, my child; pray much; cherish no attachment; keep close to me; let everything that passes, pass; mind nothing but what is eternal*—I never take my eyes off of you night or day, how can you forget me so often.” See my daughter, our dear Lord speaks plainly—and on the other side of you know your *enemy* never rests, trying to stifle your good resolutions, to strengthen you[r] bad inclinations, and awaken your passions—how many secret wounds, he will give you, if you do not keep close to our God.— ... the sweet peace and joy, which will recompense your fidelity in keeping close to God, will a thousand times redouble your happiness here in our land of trial.⁴¹

Elizabeth gave the same advice to other sisters of her congregation: “Your first step in this heavenly way is to contract a habit of God’s presence and the spirit of recollection—and let Divine Love cast out Fear, *fear nothing so much as not to love enough*.”⁴²

In her “Dear Remembrances” Elizabeth recalled different times when she vividly experienced the Presence of God: at age six when she learned Psalm 22, “I will fear no evil for thou are with me”; at age eight when she tried to bring bird eggs to life; at age fourteen in New Rochelle during spring finding joy in God while gazing at the stars and walking among cedars surrounded by lambs and sheep; and at age twenty-nine how she delighted

40 Document 9.9, “Mother Seton’s Last Writings,” *CW*, 3a:254–64. I summarized the talk into these five points.

41 “Mother Seton’s last writings,” 3a:256. The editors comment that this type of practical spiritual advice is reminiscent of words attributed to Saint Teresa of Avila, whose spiritual writings Elizabeth Seton read widely (n. 9).

42 Document 10.5, “Gospel of Matthew Notebook,” n.d., *CW*, 3a:525. The editors comment that Elizabeth copied selected excerpts from the Gospel of Matthew, chaps. 3 to 15, and the rest of the notebook contains excerpts copied by Elizabeth from various spiritual writers and readings from the Divine Office (nn. 4 and 5).

in packing up all her valuables to be sold, enjoying the *adieu* to each article. She knew God's presence in the freedom of her Soul even in painful times; when seeing a Eucharistic procession, she felt anguish at the thought she might be the only one *he* did not bless. Back in New York, she described her "Supreme happiness" on receiving her God in communion for the first time as a Catholic.⁴³

Elizabeth's remembrances continue in Emmitsburg with her intimate feelings of connection with woods, rocks, the bright moonlight walks to the church, and the people meeting each other and departing: "Cecilias [*sic*] [Seton] gentle death the 29th April 1810—her burial—the children gathering wild flowers—... Evening before Nina's [Anna Maria] Death ... this world passes away—*Eternity!*"⁴⁴ Her "Dear Remembrances" ends with a reflection on eternity, for Elizabeth understood that eternity is the completion of humanity's mission to become "the ministers of God's providence."⁴⁵

Even though Elizabeth agreed that our soul is God's palace and our free will is the noblest gift of God, she took seriously our body, the instrument of our loss or our glory: "this body to last but a moment—a mass of matter to be destroyed in the distruction [*sic*] of all nature which is all to disappear—to be dissolved—and tho' by Faith we know that our body shall be restored yet it will be as by a new creation—this body the envelopment of a pure spirit destined to share its bliss of eternity."⁴⁶ Therefore, Elizabeth advised her Sisters of Charity that our bodies should be consumed in promoting all the interests of God's Kingdom. Actually, great esteem for the present moment when the grace of the moment flows from eternal love is closely connected with this constant sense of the Presence of God.⁴⁷

B. The Presence of God in the Midst of Humanity: Elizabeth's Translations

Elizabeth spent much of her time in Emmitsburg translating French spiritual books that Father Bruté provided to her religious community, which was in need of spiritual nourishment.⁴⁸ Probably because of the lack of time, instead of translating entire books,

43 Document 10.4, "Dear Remembrances," n.d., *CW*, 3a:519. I summarized Elizabeth remarks concerning the divine presence from 510 to 523.

44 Document 10.4, "Dear Remembrances," *CW*, 3a:523.

45 Document 10.4, "Dear Remembrances," *CW*, 3a:523. For this exact wording, see also Document 8.26, "Pyamingo Reflections," *CW*, 3a:191; and Document 9.15, "[Retreat Meditations]," *CW*, 319.

46 Document 10.1, "St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi Notebook," "My God and My All," n.d., *CW*, 3a:450–51.

47 Document 9.1, "Instruction on Religious Life," n.d., *CW*, 3a:235. The editors note that this material "was copied from a treatise on the proper living of religious life" in the handwriting of Sister Margaret George, Maxims from St. Paul (n. 1). Footnote 28 illustrates the grace of moment as a recurring theme in Elizabeth's spirituality.

48 Elizabeth wrote 17 September 1818 as the date she finished her translation of the *Life of Louise de Marillac*, (*CW*, 3b:385) and the date she finished the translation of the "Life of Sister Francoise Bony" as 29 September 1818 (*CW*, 3b:412).

she selected what she judged most helpful for the sisters. Here from her translated material we will focus on what the Presence of God means for human beings and ecological virtues as the fruit of its practice.

After she finished her translation of *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul*, Elizabeth began to translate *The Life of Mademoiselle Le Gras* by Nicolas Gobillon. Just as she did with the “Life of St. Vincent,” Elizabeth selected the parts that she felt beneficial to the Sisters’ spiritual and communal life. After a short introduction to Louise’s life and ministry to the poor, which led to the formation of her little company in 1633, Elizabeth translated Saint Vincent’s advice to Saint Louise to be moderate in all things: “Be not afraid to do the present good in your power, but fear your desires to do more than you can, and more than God means you to do ... I tremble at the thought of going *beyond the means he gives*, because it seems to me a crime in the children of his Providence.”⁴⁹ Moderation is an ecological value, and recognizing its importance, Elizabeth chose to translate this advice so that her companions would also learn this virtue.

Elizabeth continued translating Louise’s teachings about the great art of serving the poor well. For example, she introduced the following advice of Louise to the sisters: “How can you support yourselves but the closest union with God and the union with him cannot be preserved but through recollection and meditation.”⁵⁰ She recommended preserving the sense of the divine presence through recollection and prayer as the strongest means to persevere in their religious life and commitment to the poor. The two ruling maxims practiced by Louise throughout her life reinforced complementary aspects of the charism of charity: first, the love of truth which detached her from creatures and united her to her creator; the second, the duty of charity for the relief of human misery.

To foster the bond of charity among the sisters, Louise especially recommended the virtue of meekness to them: “Remember how necessary the practice of *meekness* is also, Peace and harmony cannot subsist without it in your company nor can it preserve the Spirit of God, or his *presence*. This virtue of meekness is the distinctive character of a Christian and renders them worthy to bear the name of their divine master who communicates his divine qualities of Infancy to those who love and keep Peace.”⁵¹ The submission of Jesus to the will of His Father was the model for the Sisters to surrender their way of thinking to follow that of another.

Elizabeth chose to translate the parts from Gobillon’s work on vocation and vows, including Louise’s advice to her sisters regarding honoring the life of Jesus on earth by “giving your very *self*, employing every moment of life, and exposing yourself to all kinds of

49 Document 13.3, “Life of Louise de Marillac,” *CW*, 3b:363.

50 Document 13.3, “Life of Louise de Marillac,” n.d., *CW*, 3b:366.

51 Document 13.3, “Life of Louise de Marillac,” *CW*, 3b:377.



Engraved portrait of Louise de Marillac, Mother of the Poor.

*DePaul University Special Collections and Archives.
Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online*

danger for the love of God in serving the poor.”⁵² With regard to the vow of chastity, Louise introduced both exterior modesty and interior modesty and emphasized the importance of living in the divine presence: “Interior Modesty which consists in keeping the interior in the presence of God, the memory and *understanding* directed to him, and the *will* in a constant endeavor to love and please him ... exterior modesty can never be preserved without the interior.”⁵³ For both Louise and Elizabeth the Presence of God was the animating force for human life as well as the ennobling inspiration that transforms humans into the noblest embodied beings.

It is well known that Elizabeth had a special devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, which evolved into her appreciation of the Body of Christ as the Presence of God in the universe. We can find the best example of it in her quotation from an homily of Saint Augustine in the Octave of Corpus Christi: “O *Sacrament of GOODNESS*, O *SIGN* of UNITY, O *bond* of Charity, whereby whoever desires to live may find life, and become incorporated as a member of the divine body of Christ—but be not a withered member worthy of flames, or a deformed one to dishonor it, but be united and joined with it by beauty and proportion living in God, and of God—united now on earth to reign with him in heaven.”⁵⁴ The Body of Christ present in the Holy Eucharist is not only the holy of holies on this earth, but the focus

52 Document 13.4, “Life of Louise de Marillac (continued) [Book five. Chapter 4] Thoughts of Made. Le Gras, on Vocation of Sisters of Charity [1 On the esteem of this vocation.],” *CW*, 3b:387.

53 Document 13.4, “Life of Louise de Marillac (continued) [Book five. Chapter 4] Thoughts of Made. Le Gras, on Vocation of Sisters of Charity [1 On the esteem of this vocation.],” *CW*, 3b:390.

54 Document 10.5, “Gospel of Matthew Notebook. St. Chrysostom,” *CW*, 3a:541. Footnote 50 notes that this is from Monday in the Octave of Corpus Christi, from a Homily of Augustine, Treatise 26 on John.

of the divine presence in the midst of human community. Jesus' indwelling in us moderates our passions, "heals our maladies, closes our wounds," and renews in us the "royal image which God imprinted on us."⁵⁵

C. *The Ecological Meaning of the Presence of God for Humanity*

To enhance the ecological meaning of Elizabeth's vision of the divine presence in the midst of humanity, I will introduce contemporary theologian Sallie McFague. Her book *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* deals with all things from one lens, i.e., the model of the universe/world as God's Body and with her attempts to interpret the relationship between God and the world from a Christian viewpoint of contemporary science.⁵⁶

According to McFague, God is the breath and spirit that gives life to the billions of different bodies that make up God's body. In a word, God is the source, power, and goal of everything that is. McFague is searching for a new shape for humanity, a way of being in the world in keeping with who we are in the ecological, theological and Christian circle. Since all living beings have bodies that occupy and need space, space is a leveling, democratic notion that places human beings on par with all other life-forms, united with one another through complex networks of interrelationship and interdependence.⁵⁷ Therefore, space highlights the relationship between ecological and justice issues; in a theology of embodiment, space is the central category, for all beings require space, their habitat. McFague comments that Christian theologies and works of spirituality have not encouraged meditation on the beauty, preciousness, and vulnerability of the earth and its many creatures. However, as we have seen in the writings of Elizabeth Ann Seton, there are many examples of the close connections between humanity and the natural environment including her sensitive appreciation of its beauty.⁵⁸

McFague emphasizes that the earth is the body of God, which is not separate from God but the visible reality of the invisible God.⁵⁹ Therefore, we have a mandate to love Earth. We have seen how Elizabeth repeatedly stated that all creatures are the image and mirror of God, and we are the ministers of God's providence in restoring the beauty and harmony of all creatures. McFague argues that we humans have a peculiar role in this unfinished dynamic

55 Document 10.5, "Gospel of Matthew Notebook. St. Chrysostom," *CW*, 3a:541–42.

56 Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), vi–ix.

57 McFague, *The Body of God*, 99–100.

58 The integral ecology presented by Pope Francis supports these connections. Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* of the Holy Father Francis *On Care for Our Common Home*, 24 May 2015, #139.

59 Quoting Exodus 33:20–23, McFague describes that God allowed Moses a glimpse of the divine body, not the face, but the back (*The Body of God*, 131). All bodies are the backside of divine glory and reflections of God. The creation is not identified or confused with God, yet it is the place where God is present to us (134).



Sallie McFague (1933–2019).

Vanderbilt University publicity photo taken in 1975.

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universe, as both partners in creation and self-conscious reflexive parts of creation.⁶⁰ In the end, we are not the center of things, but responsible for the universe's well-being. However, at the same time we are vulnerable citizens of this planet Earth because we cannot subsist without plants and animals:

The common creation story is more than a scientific affair; it is, implicitly, deeply moral, for it calls for a kind of praxis in which we see ourselves in proportion, in harmony, and in a fitting manner relating to all others that live and all the systems that support life.⁶¹

Therefore, our ecological sin is that we do not feel we belong to earth or accept our proper place within it.⁶² Our unwillingness to stay in our place, to accept our proper limits so that other individuals of our species as well as other species can also have needed space, is the main cause of the ecological destruction of our planet. We humans need humility, recognizing our proper, realistic place in the scheme of things. We need to change ourselves by cultivating wonder, finding awe and amazement in the life of diverse creatures. In the same way and with wonder, Elizabeth observed the sun, the moon, the flowers of the spring, and the mystery of mountains.

McFague asks: “What does Christian faith, especially the story of Jesus, have to offer in terms of a distinctive perspective of embodiment? The distinctive character of Christian embodiment is its focus on oppressed, vulnerable, suffering bodies, those who are in pain

60 McFague, *The Body of God*, 102–105.

61 McFague, *The Body of God*, 111.

62 McFague, *The Body of God*, 112–20.

due to the indifference or greed of the more powerful. In an ecological age, this ought to include oppressed nonhuman animals and the earth itself.”⁶³ Our natural world is now poor; thus it is our mandate to recover the intrinsic values of natural bodies and to promote healing by reconciliation between human beings and the natural world. Similarly, we will see how Elizabeth Ann Seton has developed this solidarity between nature and humanity.

III. The Presence of God in Death and Suffering

Elizabeth knew that death and suffering are essential parts of life. She regarded death as the time of harvest when the divine presence is most vividly experienced.⁶⁴ Perceiving suffering and death as the common lot connecting all living bodies in the material world, Elizabeth described this reality as a blessed one that strips us from the self by linking us to the “blessed chain of suffering”:

Hasten, Hasten happy moment time I bid thee
 fly awake me to Eternity and bid this body Die
 Jesus infinite goodness
 Link by link the blessed chain
 One *Body* in Christ – he the head, we the members
 One *Spirit* diffused thro[sic] the holy ghost in us all ...
 Who can resist, all self must be killed and destroyed by this artillery of love

 ... O my Soul be fastened link by link strong as *death*
 he wills us to enter in the way of suffering, and we desire to enter
 in action—We desire to give rather than to receive—
 and do not purely seek *his* WILL.⁶⁵

Elizabeth was convinced that we learn to seek God’s will only through the way of suffering and receptivity, which overcomes our resistance to the grace or the Presence of God. She had to learn this truth through her own experience of loss, sorrow, and patient waiting.

A. The Presence of God in Death and Suffering: Elizabeth’s Reflections

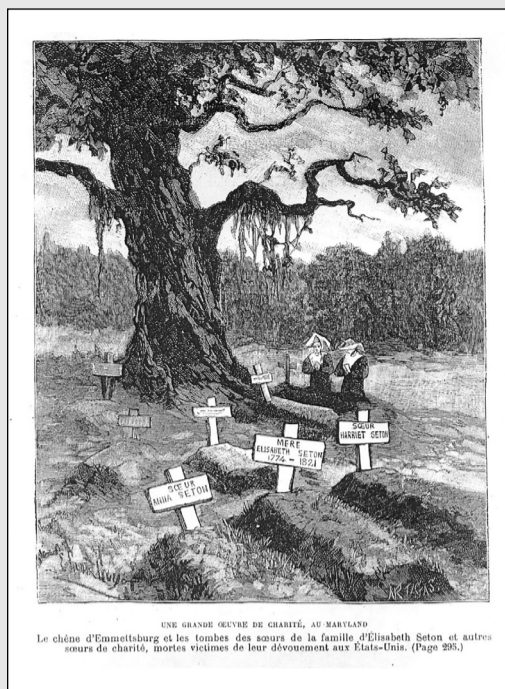
Elizabeth experienced deep desolation on the loss of her beloved ones. Looking at the graves of her daughters and sisters-in-law in the community cemetery on 9 May 1814, Elizabeth expressed the dark reality of death:

My Nina[Anna Maria Seton]—the morning is beautiful, the sky is serene the

63 McFague, *The Body of God*, 163–65.

64 Document 9.20, “Exercise of the *Presence of God*. Considerations—or—Heads of Meditations on Death,” *CW*, 3a:417.

65 Document 11.57, “Prayerbook Inscription,” n.d., *CW*, 3b:108–109.



Engraving, dated 1893, titled “A Great Charity, in Maryland.”

The text reads: “The Emmitsburg oak tree and the graves of the family of Elizabeth Seton and other Sisters of Charity, who died as victims of their devotion to the United States.”

Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online

sun shining, the birds warbling their sweet notes and my Nina lies cold in the *little* solitary woods—she sees no beautiful sky, she sees no sun shine, she hears none of the sweet notes of the little birds around her—no oh no my Nina lies cold and stiff in the silence of the grave—Cecilia—and our dear Maddelene [Harriet Seton] the same all thru cold and stiff their faces pale, their eyes close in the shades, of death ... My Nina hears it not, my Maddelene hears it not my Cecil hears it not, all is silent to them—and shall we see you again?—if you do with Jesus live remember those you loved so well, who shed so many tears for you—oh pray for us, dearest ones, pray for us.⁶⁶

Here Elizabeth confessed loneliness and longing for her deceased loved ones as any of us might. In this honest reflection, Elizabeth’s faith seems quite ordinary. Yet the beauty of her spirituality is that while she felt and dared to express the deepest human feelings, at the same time she knew how to fly above them and transform them by welcoming God’s presence in each moment:

All nature speaks to us of heaven – the delight of the morning – a flower of the field.

...we are ashamed to speak of our sacrifices but our Jesus accepts even the least We are to sanctify ourselves in our happy possession, to remove all obstacles to grace when he calls ...

... O and for heaven where Jesus will be himself our happiness – our praise our all – Dead in Christ –hidden in Him.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Document 9.12, “Miscellaneous Meditations from 1811–12,” 9 May 1814, *CW*, 3a:311–12.

⁶⁷ Document 9.7, “Our Sister departed....,” *CW*, 3a:250.

By capitalizing “Death” in her writings, Elizabeth may have been emphasizing the importance of death in our life. Elizabeth also taught that both life and death are connected, as seen in the prayer which she wrote for the First Communion class at St. Joseph’s Academy in Emmitsburg: “My Saviour, My Jesus, I come at last to my happy days of preparation, to the sweet call so long desired to make ready for my first Communion, to receive *thee my own Saviour*, to begin my dear union here with thee which I hope to carry on so happily through *life, Death, and Eternity*.”⁶⁸ In this prayer to Jesus, life, death, and eternity flow as a natural continuum.

Similarly we read Elizabeth’s reflections on death in her meditations for the Christmas season. The mystery of incarnation contains the crucifixion and the resurrection, and so the joy of Christmas is linked with the death of Jesus: “Sufferings are the ties, the bands which fasten and unite us to our dearest child of the cross! Child of Calvery! [*sic*]”⁶⁹ It is no surprise then that Annina, the first daughter of Elizabeth Seton who died on 12 March 1812, wrote the following poem on her sick bed on Christmas 1811:

Haste O Christians to the Manger
Come Behold your Infant Lord
Angels call you with the Shepherds
-our Sovereign Love is there adored

View his sacred hands and feet
Now an Infants, lovely, sweet,
The Iron nails – so soon will tear
Can you *now* refuse a tear?...

Oh Mother! In whose sweet embrace
Lies our Blessed Lord of Love and grace
Oh! Hear our prayers *our Mother dear* ...
Obtain that in his sweet embrace
We may meet Death with joy and Grace
And when admitted to his sight
Enjoy that day which knows no night.⁷⁰

Annina’s poem reflects her mother’s thoughts combining Christmas and the Cross,

68 Document 9.10, “First Communion,” n.d., *CW*, 3a:264. In 1810, Elizabeth began St. Joseph’s Academy and Free School in Emmitsburg for the girls from the local area as well as boarders from New York and Philadelphia (n. 1).

69 Document 9.12, “Miscellaneous Meditations from 1811–12,” n.d., *CW*, 3a:307.

70 Document 9.12, “Miscellaneous Meditations from 1811–12,” n.d., *CW*, 3a:307–09.

life and death in a continuous progress of life just as Elizabeth's prayers reflect the same tone: "You are my Saviour I will trust you in life and in Death,"⁷¹ "Lord make me Faithful in life and in Death,"⁷² "say with holy Job in full Confidence tho' you should Kill me yet I will trust in you,"⁷³ and "my God leave me not in life or in Death."⁷⁴

From her awareness that life and death are parts of the whole, Elizabeth developed a striking phrase, "bitter peace," to describe something we humans are capable of experiencing on this earth. This phrase appears in Elizabeth's meditation during Advent and Christmastide as Jesus's coming into the world allows us to enjoy peace even in our misery and most bitter moments of life:

O! Adorable Infant my Saviour, for thou camest [*sic*] to save, and to be saved is the only peace of our present bitterness, to wait, for Eternal joys, the blessedness, and the light of thy countenance is enough, the hope and desire of them, make us cherish in peace our *very* bitterness,...all the days of that whole Eternal we begin even now, these first present days of trial in grace, and the glorious future *ones* – oh! Here below we can enjoy our peace "but in bitterness, *most bitter*" the feelings of our misery, and the misery of others, often overpower bitterness; the temporal distresses and renting of hearts tear poor nature incessantly, and relief enough, but thy will and thy peace -...O! Mother of sorrows, ever so, and even that ninth mon[th] through such anticipations, a Mother of sorrow but the Model of our own bitter "peace"-⁷⁵

This description of "bitter peace" is new to us, but since it depicts many experiences of our present life, it offers us comfort and courage to move forward. Because of the happy sense of the divine presence dwelling in each one of us as a consuming fire, we can withdraw from all created things and rest in God, resigning all to adorable providence.⁷⁶ The most powerful weapon is the "joy of our heart in the presence of God, for by this we carry our paradise with us where ever [*sic*] we go, and rise above the clouds and illusions of our passions."⁷⁷ Moreover, Elizabeth gave us wise advice, "To let our faults humble us without being either astonished or troubled at them."⁷⁸ We must persevere "even *unto Death* not

71 Document 9.19, "[Meditations for the days of the Christmas season]," 1817, *CW*, 3a:383.

72 Document 9.19, "[Meditations for the days of the Christmas season]," *CW*, 3a:383.

73 Document 9.19, "[Meditations for the days of the Christmas season]," *CW*, 3a:386.

74 Document 9.19, "[Meditations for the days of the Christmas season]," *CW*, 3a:387.

75 Document 9.18, "Advent and Christmas Meditations," n.d., *CW*, 3a:352–53.

76 Document 9.20, "Exercise of the *Presence of God*," *CW*, 3a:395–99.

77 Document 9.20, "Exercise of the *Presence of God*," *CW*, 3a:401.

78 Document 10.1, "St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi Notebook," n.d., *CW*, 3a:433.

relaxing through temptations and sufferings but pushing on through all trials, like the thirsty *deer*, stop at nothing till it gets to its fountain.”⁷⁹

B. The Presence of God in Death and Suffering: Elizabeth’s Translations

In Elizabeth’s selected translation of *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul*, we encounter a few occasions that manifest Vincent’s acceptance and even welcome of suffering and death as times of grace. First, Vincent knew the value of poverty willingly practiced among religious: “Poverty is the bond of our community—the tie which holds us from the things of the earth and fastens us to God.”⁸⁰ Vincent assured his companions that poverty makes us turn to God, and that a grace is hidden under it, saying, “The company will never be lost by its Poverty, but I much fear if poverty was wanting in it it would soon cease to subsist.”⁸¹ When one priest told Vincent, “You supply the want of others but never look at home,” Vincent replied, “God has given me grace to abandon them [his relatives] to his Providence.”⁸²

The most difficult losses Vincent suffered were the death of his missionaries by disease or martyrdom in foreign countries, but he remarked to a person near him, “They must die, but my heart is at peace—yet sometimes I fear it may be my sins which is the cause, but even in that the good pleasure of God must be acknowledged and I must accept it with my whole heart.”⁸³ Vincent said to his community that “the infirmary [*sic*] is the place of trial for *all*.”⁸⁴ Elizabeth added emphasis on “all,” expressing her agreement that suffering is the common lot for every human being. She fully agreed with Vincent that “affliction and infirmities we know come from God and are all in order of his Providence and in what ever [*sic*] way they happen are always for our good and Salvation ... —yes, suffering is a true happiness and sanctifies the Soul.”⁸⁵

It is noteworthy that Elizabeth chose to translate a few short biographies of the Daughters of Charity as well as two other saints who nursed orphans and the sick. The first biography is the “Life of Sister Françoise Bony” (1684–1759), whom the superior general sent to the royal hospital Saint-Germain-en-Laye and who worked with the poor seniors there for forty years: “The Royal Hospital of this place was in a state of utter neglect and ruin, many zealous persons wished to see it restored to its former state, but no one came forward

79 Document 9.20, “Exercise of the *Presence of God*,” *CW*, 3a:423.

80 Document 13.1, “Life of St. Vincent de Paul,” *CW*, 3b:234.

81 Document 13.1, “Life of St. Vincent de Paul,” *CW*, 3b:235.

82 Document 13.1, “Life of St. Vincent de Paul,” *CW*, 3b:234, 240.

83 Document 13.1, “Life of St. Vincent de Paul,” *CW*, 3b:247.

84 Document 13.1, “Life of St. Vincent de Paul,” *CW*, 3b:250.

85 Document 13.1, “Life of St. Vincent de Paul,” *CW*, 3b:251.

for so difficult a work although many aged persons men and women bent under the weight of years and affliction perished there for want of help.”⁸⁶ Elizabeth saw the hidden energy of this amazing woman in Sister Bony’s practice of the divine presence: “An admirable effect of her Faith also was so intimate a practice of the Presence of God ... - calm and Peace accompanied her greatest pains and labours because *God reigned* in her heart, for we know if the greatest bitterness is poured in a heart that loves God, he will still counterbalance it with ineffable sweetness.”⁸⁷

Another story Elizabeth translated dealt with the dedicated life of three Daughters of Charity at Brienne during the French Revolution. When the city of Brienne was under siege on 29 January 1814, the attack was centered on the hospital where the three sisters were serving wounded soldiers. As the situation of the town grew hopeless, and the superior of the sisters was entreated to retire, she firmly refused: “No, I am at my post, and here let me die God will ask me in my accounting day what I was doing at the Siege of Brienne.” With her, two young sisters also declared their resolution to remain faithful to their charge.⁸⁸ The three sisters died as martyrs of charity along with four hundred sick people.

In addition, Elizabeth translated two more short biographies, one of Saint Jerome Emiliani and the other, Saint Carmillius de Lellus. Born in Venice, Saint Jerome suffered greatly as a prisoner when the Citadel of Castro was taken by the enemy. Later returning to Venice, he devoted himself entirely to poor, orphaned children who wandered through the city in a deplorable condition, and found houses for them in various cities until he was felled by the plagues in 1537.

Saint Camillius de Lellis was born in a little town in the Kingdom of Naples. Although initially he embraced the military, in 1574 he renounced it. Eventually, he went to Rome, where he served the sick in the Hospital of Saint James with such uncommon prudence and regularity that later he became the director of the hospital. He formed a religious congregation, the Regulars for the Service of the Sick and Agonizing, inspiring them to teach the sick “to accept Death in the Spirit of Sacrifice and expiation of sin ... and to put themselves in a right disposition for Death.”⁸⁹ After giving a moving discourse on the love of God and of the Poor, Saint Camillis died in 1614. Clearly Elizabeth translated these biographies because she saw in them individuals in the Presence of God who dedicated themselves to the poor and sick.

86 Document 13.5, “Life of Sister [Françoise] Bonny [Bony],” n.d., *CW*, 3b:402. Elizabeth finished the translation of *Life of Louise de Marillac* on 17 September 1818 and finished “Life of Sister Bony” on September 29. In other words, it took about twelve days for Elizabeth to translate this.

87 Document 13.5, “Life of Sister [Françoise] Bonny [Bony],” *CW*, 3b:408.

88 Document 13.13, “Daughters of Charity at Brienne,” n.d., *CW*, 3b:467. The three sisters were Sister Antoinette Sirot, Sister Suzanne Tournier, and Sister Josephine-Marie Sabatine Lasalle.

89 Document 13.15, “St. Camillius de Lellis,” n.d., *CW*, 3b:471–72.



Marie Guyart, better known as Marie of the Incarnation (1599–1672).

Mère Sainte-Ursule after Enrico Bottoni, 1890.

Public domain

The most intriguing part of Elizabeth’s translations is the “Historical Letters of Venerable Marie of the Incarnation,” an Ursuline missionary from France to Québec (then known as New France) in the early seventeenth century. Elizabeth selected passages from the introduction and specific letters written during 1639–1672. Interested in the work of early missionaries to Canada, Elizabeth expressed admiration for their zeal and self-sacrifice. The widow Marie Guyart (1599–1672) was born in Tours, France, married a silk manufacturer and bore a son to whom she wrote six letters. After Marie was widowed, she entered the Sisters of Saint Ursula, taking the name Sister Marie of the Incarnation. In 1639 she led the first group of women religious to New France where they established the oldest convent in North America.

In the early days of her arrival, Marie of the Incarnation wrote to a friend, “After all our dangers we are safe arrived in the New Paradise [New France] where the cross is truly the tree of life.”⁹⁰ To her son, who also became a priest, Marie of the Incarnation told many stories of courageous martyrdom of both the missionaries and the Christian natives. Marie of the Incarnation introduced an amazing prayer of one of the converted Iroquois chiefs asking for the constant Presence of God:

This man had been the terror of his nation by his strength and ferocity before his conversion, but after it he had so tender a conscience that he called himself to account for the least impatience and his pleasure in understanding that God is with us wherever we go was inexpressible—if he went out in his canoe for

90 Document 13.6, “From Historical Letters of Venerable Marie of the Incarnation,” n.d., *CW*, 3b:415.

fishing he would as if speaking to someone present “come great *Captain Jesus* bring me success, but do as you please with me if you choose I should work in vain”—or going to the chase [hunting] he would make the same Invocation, “My great Captain Jesus do go with me and when I am faint and weary stay by me, if I meet plenty of deer I will bless you, or if they escape me I will bless you, do as you please with me my great Captain Jesus, only stay with me and keep me from sin” these people speak their mind aloud in this way with a simplicity so sincere that it extends to all occasions.⁹¹

On the feast of the Presentation, 2 February 1819, Elizabeth Ann Seton finished the translation of these letters and wrote her own reflection: “How great then the grace of being called to Instruct such blind souls ... Come and share their cross courageously you will find whole bands of little souls gathered under it, who like thirty plants in a barren ground wait for a hand to cherish and foster them —“⁹² The very fact that Elizabeth chose to translate these letters full of missionary activity and stories of martyrdom in the beginning of the Canadian Church tell us that missionary zeal was burning in her heart. She wanted her sisters to enlarge their vision to the whole world.⁹³

C. The Ecological Meaning of the Presence of God in Death and Suffering

In her *Quest for the Living God*, Elizabeth A. Johnson wrote that the history of life itself is dependent on death, for without it, there would be no evolutionary development from generation to generation.⁹⁴ She also pointed out that the natural world is not only beautiful in its harmonies, but it also presents us with an unrelentingly harsh and bloody picture of predation, filled with suffering and death. The pattern of cross and resurrection is rediscovered on a cosmic scale. As Johnson states:

Now that we realize that the world is becoming, that genuinely new things come into being by evolution and other processes, fresh ideas of divine presence and agency are needed. To date these have centered on the Spirit of God, called the Creator Spirit in the great medieval hymn *Veni, Creator Spiritus*.

91 Document 13.6, “From Historical Letters of Venerable Marie of the Incarnation,” *CW*, 3b:435–36. This is a part of the letter Marie addressed to her son Claude Martin.

92 Document 13.6, “From Historical Letters of Venerable Marie of the Incarnation,” *CW*, 3b:437–38.

93 Elizabeth also translated “Extract from St. Vincent’s Life” which portrays the miserable life of the Christian slaves in the Muslim area of Barbary (North African Mediterranean coastal area where the Turks dominated in the seventeenth century). It also presents a few stories of brave martyrdom.

94 Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York, N.Y.: Continuum, 2007), 189.

As it integrates the revelatory experience of a personal God into an expansive cosmological setting, ecological theology, replete in its fullest measure with social justice and eco-feminist insights, is mapping yet another new frontier.⁹⁵

It seems that our contemporary understanding that the natural world is the dwelling place of the Spirit of God, that everything abides in God and that matter bears the mark of the sacred were also natural insights of Elizabeth Ann Seton. As we have seen in her *Pyamingo Reflections*, Elizabeth confessed that “the Majesty of his presence consecrates every part of the universe and wherever I am, I may say with Jacob ‘This place is Holy’ and I knew it not.”⁹⁶

Johnson also contends understanding of the holy mysteries—namely, as matters that challenge ordinary reason and as plural, provisional and verbal statements of doctrine—is too limited and should be replaced by only one mystery of God. Johnson states:

This one holy mystery is the ineffable God who while remaining eternally a plenitude—infinite, incomprehensible, inexpressible—wishes to self-communicate to the world, and does so in the historically tangible person of Jesus Christ in the grace of the Spirit so as to become the blessedness of every person and of the universe itself.⁹⁷

Transcendence as God’s otherness and immanence as God’s intimate and faithful nearness can be integrated in the intuition of God’s presence and action as God’s preferential option for the poor.⁹⁸ Johnson continues, saying “Precisely in this partiality is the goodness of divine love revealed to be truly universal, because it includes the nonpersons whom the powerful and wealthy thought did not count.... God is a liberating God whose signature deeds set people free.”⁹⁹ In addition Johnson includes the entire natural world as the new poor and asks for a vision in which the entire community of life should be viewed as our neighbor, a community of love.¹⁰⁰

Elizabeth Johnson’s appeal for one holy mystery of God is naturally met in Elizabeth Seton’s vision of creation in her reflection on Isaiah chapter one: “Hear O ye heavens—the whole firmament an immense ear of the creation to receive the voice of its afflicted and

95 Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 187.

96 Document 8.26, “Pyamingo Reflections,” *CW*, 3a:189.

97 Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 43. For this understanding of God as the only true mystery, Elizabeth Johnson quotes Karl Rahner as the contemporary theologian who found the provisional concept of plural mysteries as an astonishingly limited notion of mystery.

98 Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 73–81.

99 Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 74.

100 Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 197–198.



Elizabeth A. Johnson, CSJ.

2014 photo by Macey Foronda, published in “Feminism In Faith: Sister Elizabeth Johnson’s Challenge to the Vatican,” at www.womensordinationcampaign.org.

despised Lord. The ox and ass called to witness for him.”¹⁰¹ Also Elizabeth Seton quoted from Saint Chrysostom that “this holy Sacrament adorns the whole UNIVERSE, the BLOOD of CHRIST contained in it has redeemed and beautifies us.”¹⁰² Both Elizabeth Seton and Elizabeth Johnson conclude that in the life and death of Jesus Christ the whole universe is in the process of transformation.

In the first line of her Good Friday meditation, Elizabeth Seton wrote, “<Tomorrow> the good Friday of Death and Life!” signifying that death and life always walk together not only in Jesus’ life but also in all life of humanity and creation. The death of Jesus is clearly described as a cosmic event where all creation participated:

I stand upon Mount Calvary—my Saviour is there hanging on the cross these three hours of his suspension, between heaven and Earth.—the deepest darkness surrounds ...

... a voice from the height of the Cross! The Voice of my Saviour through this darkness strong—awful—loud. Spoken to the Father in the highest, and to resound to the remotest extremities of time and space, “*All is consummated*” ...

... he breathes his last with a powerful cry—Nature is convulsed – the

101 Document 11.53, “Elizabeth Seton’s Two Bibles. The Vincennes Bible Old Testament,” n.d., *CW*, 3b:105.

102 Document 10.5, “Gospel of Matthew Notebook. St. Chrysostom,” *CW*, 3a:543. The editors add that this is from a sermon of John Chrysostom, Homily 60 on Monday in the Octave of Corpus Christi (n. 49).

horrid crash of rocks and opening monuments resound—JESUS EXPIRES¹⁰³

Just as the death of Jesus was not final, the death of individual human beings as well as the death of all living creatures will be transformed into the life of eternity. Elizabeth Seton wrote the following vision of eternity:

The accidents of life separate us from our dearest friends; but let us not despond. God is like a looking-glass in which souls see each other. The more we are united to Him by love, the nearer we are to those who belong to Him. Jesus Christ encompasses all places and all his members centre [sic] in Him; we need but prostrate at His feet to find them. They may be hidden from the eyes of our body, but not from the eyes of our soul and of Faith. Death which breaks off all human ties, strengthens the union of the children of God. If time separates them, Eternity will unite them.¹⁰⁴

Jesus Christ is the center of all creation uniting all individual creatures into one. We share in His suffering and death and also enjoy His freedom and eternity, deeply experiencing the “joy of our heart in the presence of God.”¹⁰⁵ Finally, we should listen to Elizabeth Seton’s advice to focus on this high mystery of our eternal union instead of focusing upon our suffering itself:

In receiving his Cross we are not to look at what it is made of, that is on the nature of our sufferings, *it* being a mystery[.] we are to look only at the interior virtue not the exterior form, eternal life is hidden under it, and when it comes in the shape of poverty, it conceals eternal treasures, in that of shame or reproach it is the glory of God, under the form of its afflictions carries eternal Consolations ... for Patience would be but a small matter to bring there, our Lord it is true is content with our docility and resignation, but to this high mystery of our eternal union with him. We should bring the burning fire of love and gratitude.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

We have seen how Elizabeth Ann Seton perceived the Presence of God as the animating source of light and beauty of the whole universe in the perspective of Hildegard of Bingen’s *viriditas*, the greening power of God. The Presence of God in human beings

103 Document 11.21, “The good Friday...” n.d., *CW*, 3b:37–38.

104 Document 11.29, “Union in God,” n.d., *CW*, 3b:42.

105 Document 9.20, “Exercise of the Presence of God,” *CW*, 3a:401.

106 Document 9.20, “Exercise of the *Presence of God*. Of the Communion of the *Cross*,” *CW*, 3a:421. The editors point out that “several ideas expressed in this meditation are similar to those found in the *Imitation of Christ*, one of Elizabeth’s most cherished devotional books” (n. 65).

carries a unique dimension because of human consciousness and freedom. Sallie McFague's ecological vision that we should begin with our planetary citizenship and see ourselves in proportion and in harmony to all others that live, helps us to appreciate Elizabeth Seton's respect for nature and her emphasis on moderation. McFague's ecological humility that accepts our proper realistic place is well attested to in Elizabeth Seton's understanding of human beings as the ministers of God's Providence.

Both McFague's and Johnson's emphasis on the distinctive character of a Christian focus on oppressed, vulnerable, and suffering bodies is manifested in Elizabeth Seton's understanding of the Presence of God in death and suffering. God is present in death as much as in life, for death and life are two sides of the continuation of life. Suffering is a mystery that humbles and unites both humans and non-human living beings of the earth. In her selection of translations Elizabeth Seton witnessed God's partiality toward the poor and those who work and die for the oppressed.

In short, the ecological meaning of the Presence of God for Elizabeth Ann Seton is three-fold: first, the Presence of God is the Life of all living beings as the Holy Spirit; second, the Presence of God is the center of all creatures that connects and unites them as the Body of Christ; and third, the Presence of God is the transforming mystery which bestows meaning to death and suffering as an essential part of life, both human and non-human. Only through suffering and death is all life transformed in taking on the character of the Sacrament, the visible symbol of the invisible God.

Catholicism and Organizational Development: A Case Study on the Communication of Catholic Mission and Identity

Kendra Knight, Ph.D., Don Martin, Ph.D., and Scott Kelley, Ph.D.

BIO

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The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities launched the *Catholic Identity Mission Assessment* survey in 2018.¹ The suite of survey instruments carefully outlines institutional principles that warrant significant consideration not only in the communication of organizational mission at Catholic colleges and universities, but also in the reinforcement of that identity across institutions. The survey instruments reflect multiple research trends clearly influenced by the principles and core values of Catholic higher education Pope John Paul II outlined in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*.

This pilot investigation examines the extent to which graduating seniors at DePaul University in Chicago are able to comprehend and articulate principles from the Catholic intellectual tradition and Catholic social teaching, among other domains.² Furthermore, the authors consider the specific curricular and cocurricular areas essential to developing this frame of reference in graduating seniors. The authors also identify how the communication of Catholic identity might be strengthened.

The *Catholic Identity Mission Assessment* makes recommendations for communicating Catholic identity and mission both internally and externally.³ Catholic colleges and universities are required to “... set out clearly in their official documentation their Catholic character and to implement in practical terms their commitment to the essential elements of Catholic identity.”⁴ Sandra M. Estanek, Michael J. James, and Daniel A. Norton argue that the public expression of institutional mission emerged as an essential criterion in the assessment process, not only as a means of publicly articulating principles and values of a Catholic education but also as a way of establishing a set of common goals paralleling the essential themes articulated in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*.⁵ These themes include the Christian inspiration of both individuals and university communities; the impact of the Catholic faith on research and the pursuit of knowledge; fidelity to the Christian message

1 “Catholic Identity & Mission Assessment,” Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2019, <https://www.accunet.org/CIMA>.

2 Located in Chicago, Illinois, DePaul University was founded in 1898 by the Congregation of the Mission (members of which are known as Vincentians). DePaul is the largest Roman Catholic University in the United States with 21,670 students, a majority of whom do not self-identify as Catholic. See <https://www.depaul.edu/about/Pages/default.aspx>.

3 Alicia Cordoba Tait, ed., *Institutional Principles for Catholic Identity and Mission Assessment: A Best Practices Guide* (Washington, DC: Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2018).

4 Msgr. Dennis M. Schnurr, “The Application for *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* for the United States,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000, <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catholic-education/higher-education/the-application-for-ex-corde-ecclesiae-for-the-united-states.cfm>.

5 Sandra M. Estanek, Michael J. James, and Daniel A. Norton, “Assessing Catholic Identity: A Study of Mission Statements of Catholic Colleges and Universities,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 10, no. 2 (December 2006): 199–217, <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol10/iss2/6/>.

coming through the Church; and commitment to the service of the people of God, the family, and life itself.

Scholars have subsequently examined mission statements, vision statements, and websites to assess evidence of those values that communicate Catholic identity. In their qualitative analysis of mission statements representing fifty-five American colleges and universities, Estanek, James, and Norton identified five emergent categories related to Catholic identity. They include the following: service leadership and responsible citizenship, moral development, intellectual development, social justice and social responsibility, and religious and spiritual development.⁶ Robert B. Young did a content analysis of seventy-three mission statements, building on the research initially conducted by the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities in 1996.⁷ Young ranked the frequency with which key values, informed by Catholic teaching, were acknowledged. He paid particular attention to service, spirituality, truth, community, human dignity, equality, tradition, and justice and freedom (listed from most frequently to least frequently referenced). Robert Abelman and Amy Dalessandro noted that more than 80% of all secular institutions have made major revisions in their declarations of institutional vision during the last decade.⁸ Catholic colleges and universities have done the same, embedding historical and cultural understandings of Catholic identity in both mission and vision statements. While Abelman and Dalessandro underscore that such integrations are definitely occurring, they recognize that significant challenges remain in communicating the elements of Catholic identity in ways that resonate with key stakeholders.

John Haughey, S.J., makes some important distinctions between Catholicism, a framework of institutional religious identity, and catholicity, a foundational dimension of the intellectual life of the university. As Haughey states, “There is something engaging about the term catholicity” because “it connotes openness, in contrast to what is incomplete, partial, sectarian, factional, exclusionary, tribal and selective”—common criticisms that he indicates are often used unfairly in criticizing the Church.⁹ Stephen F. Gambescia and Rocco Paolucci measured how US Catholic colleges and universities explicate their Catholic identity by examining the communication of mission across all of their websites.¹⁰ The analysis sought

6 Estanek, James, and Norton, “Assessing Catholic Identity,” 199–217.

7 Robert B. Young, “Colleges on the Cross Roads: A Study of the Mission Statements of Catholic Colleges and Universities,” *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education* 21, no. 2 (2001): 30.

8 Robert Abelman and Amy Dalessandro, “An Assessment of the Institutional Vision of Catholic Colleges and Universities,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 12, no. 2 (December 2008): 221–254, <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol12/iss2/5/>.

9 John Haughey, S.J., *Where is Knowing Going? The Horizons of the Knowing Subject* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 40.

10 Stephen F. Gambescia and Rocco Paolucci, “Nature and Extent of Catholic Identity Communicated through Official Websites of



Celebrating Mass at Saint Vincent de Paul Church, Chicago. The church is located on the campus of DePaul University, the largest Catholic university in the United States.

Courtesy Catholic Campus Ministry, DePaul University

confirmation of Catholic identity through the presence of key markers representing the spirit of the four essential characteristics espoused in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. These markers included the presence of the following: the word “Catholic” on the home page; an affiliation with a sponsoring Catholic entity; and links to a lead academic statement; human resource pages; and pages about Catholic worship, Catholic service, and Catholic heritage. Key results indicated that 90% of the colleges and universities acknowledged their sponsoring religious institution, 76.6% had a link to campus ministry or spiritual life on campus, and 57% displayed symbols of Catholicism. Forty percent expressed their catholicity in academic statements, 40% explicated their catholicity in the goals and objectives of a student’s education, and 28% stated the expectation that faculty and staff should be respectful of the college’s Catholic heritage and mission. When comparing the lens of catholicity that Haughey describes with the public, explicit references to Catholic identity that Gambescia and Paolucci analyze, it is clear that Catholic mission and identity are multidimensional constructs that reach a broad, dynamic cross section of stakeholders across an intellectual community. There is no single formula.

Viewed collectively, these investigations also demonstrate an ongoing interest in communicating Catholic identity through public documents and social media at the institutional level. However, this communication is enmeshed with other priorities. To what extent is public communication constrained by competition with secular colleges and universities for academic rankings, marketing for enrollment growth, and marketing a range

U.S. Catholic Colleges and Universities,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 15, no. 1 (September 2011): 3–27, <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol15/iss1/2/>.

of academic programs to very diverse audiences? For example, Elizabeth Redden notes that in an EAB Enrollment Services survey of 1,800 students and 800 parents, the top three characteristics associated with Roman Catholic colleges were “conservative,” “traditional,” and “expensive.”¹¹ These adjectives may be disconnected from the messaging that Catholic colleges and universities present, and they may reflect the challenges of communicating Catholic identity in the higher education marketplace, especially when compared to other private or public colleges and universities. The challenge of navigating between the religious and the more secular characteristics of the institution becomes clear.

Changing Student Profiles: Spiritual and Religious Orientation

Researchers have explored demographic trends measuring levels of student interest in religion compared to student spirituality, levels of student connection to Catholicism, and the extent to which Catholic graduates have retained values representing the tenets of the Catholic faith. Vincent Bolduc argues that during the past thirty years, interest in institutional religion has declined while interest in nonreligious spirituality has increased.¹² Dawn Overstreet offers a straightforward delineation of this dichotomy: being spiritual is perceived as good, individualistic, liberating, and mature, but being religious is perceived as institutionalized, constraining, and connected to particular practices.¹³

In Bolduc’s examination of catholicity at four colleges, the majority of the students surveyed did not increase their commitment to the Catholic Church, and at two of the schools, twice as many students decreased their commitment to the Catholic Church and religion than increased it.¹⁴ Overstreet noted that participation in religious activities on campus has dropped between 25% and 50% during the past thirty years and that students are clearly moving away from what they think of as organized religion.¹⁵ Furthermore, Melanie M. Morey and John Piderit, S.J., argue that the Catholic components of Catholic colleges and universities are often understated and overlooked—with lay administrators knowing very little about Catholic traditions.¹⁶ In contrast, Jeffrey Dorman validated the Catholic School Graduate Characteristic Inventory offering empirical support for four conceptual clusters, including religious faith and spiritual development; personal

11 Elizabeth Redden, “Conservative. Traditional. Expensive.,” *Inside Higher Ed*, 11 February 2019, <https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2019/02/11/survey-asks-how-prospective-students-and-their-parents-view-catholic#backtotop>.

12 Vincent Bolduc, “Measuring Catholicity on Campus: A Comparative Example at Four Colleges,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 28, no. 2 (2009): 124–145, <https://jche.journals.villanova.edu/article/view/631/552>.

13 Dawn V. Overstreet, “Spiritual vs. Religious: Perspectives from Today’s Undergraduate Catholics,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 14, no. 2 (December 2010): 238–263, <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol14/iss2/6/>.

14 Bolduc, “Measuring Catholicity on Campus,” 139.

15 Overstreet, “Spiritual vs. Religious,” 245.

16 Melanie M. Morey and John Piderit, S.J., *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).



Students, staff, and faculty gather on the DePaul University Quad for the annual Vinny Fest. The annual event features games and prizes that highlight the life of St. Vincent de Paul and the Vincentian mission while celebrating the school's "name above the door."

Courtesy DePaul University/Jamie Moncrief

integration; social responsibility; and lifelong learning.¹⁷ Mark Gray and Melissa Cidade provide additional clarification, arguing that a decline in religiosity is not the same as a decline in commitment. Senior student survey results demonstrate a strong connection to their religious faith but disagreement with church teachings on abortion, same-sex marriage, and affirmative action.¹⁸ These results also provide insight into the considerable challenges facing educators and administrators at Catholic colleges and universities in the communication and reinforcement of a Catholic identity.

Curricular Consequences: What Must Be Done?

Scholars reflected on the religious studies curriculum and appropriate models for studying religion within cultural contexts. They have also been gauging generational levels of interest in religious studies. Daniel Horan and Melissa Cidade point out that millennials came of age and matriculated through higher education in the wake of the 9/11 attacks on the United States, the emergent abuse scandal in the Catholic Church, and serious economic instability.¹⁹ Horan and Cidade borrow the terms “spiritual tinkerers or spiritual bricoleurs”

17 Jeffrey P. Dorman, “Validation and Use of the Catholic School Graduate Characteristics Inventory,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 7, no. 2 (December 2003): 165–180, <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol7/iss2/3/>.

18 Mark M. Gray and Melissa A. Cidade, “Catholicism on Campus: Stability and Change in Catholic Student Faith by College Type,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 14, no. 2 (December 2010): 212–237, <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol14/iss2/5/>.

19 Daniel P. Horan and Melissa A. Cidade, “‘Major’ Changes Toward Philosophy and Theology: Interpreting a Recent Trend for Millennials in Catholic Higher Education,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 30, no. 1 (2011): 133–150, <https://jche.journals.villanova.edu/issue/view/58>.

to describe how millennials choose the dimensions of religion or spirituality to embrace and how they identify what works for them individually.²⁰ However, Horan and Cidade also found that millennials and members of Generation Z are interested in the formal study of religion and philosophy, and that religion is a pivotal topic for public discourse, especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. A 2008 report of the American Academy of Religion discovered a 22% increase in the number of religious studies majors.²¹

With these generational attributes in mind, it is important to consider the scholarly recommendations about pedagogical approaches in the religious studies curriculum. Kathleen Engebretson argues that “an essential task of education for understanding and appreciation of religions is the development of criteria by which the truth and goodness, rightness and wrongness of religions and religious phenomena may be debated.”²² She finds that Hans Kung’s criteria for the public debate of religion is useful for educators, particularly dialogue that encourages reflection on how a religion portrays the divine reality of God and the transformational nature of the religion in advancing, protecting, and dignifying humanity. Kung also argues that how manifestations of fellowship, human solidarity, and service play a transformational role in a given cultural context are meaningful criteria.²³ Engebretson is particularly sensitive to what students are currently interested in studying and advocates a more critical approach to theological and religious studies. Here, too, one can see the great challenge. As Estanek, James, and Norton argue, teaching and learning about the Catholic tradition must somehow be connected to the teaching and learning that already exist at Catholic institutions.²⁴ The Catholic tradition cannot be separate from the teaching and learning that is woven into the fabric of the academic enterprise.

Scholars have examined the communication of Catholic identity at the institutional level as well as the daunting challenge of communicating that identity through curricular channels. Furthermore, researchers have gauged the relationship between unique demographic trends and students’ levels of interest in Catholicism as an area of academic study. Yet more research should be done to assess the extent to which students view the Catholic intellectual tradition as a means to answer questions of meaning, purpose, and values. What are the correlating elements in their lives as undergraduates at a Catholic institution that inform comprehension or articulation of the Catholic intellectual tradition or

20 Ibid., 138.

21 Timothy Renick, et al., “The Religion Major and Liberal Education – A White Paper,” *Religious Studies News* 23 (October 2008): 21, as quoted in Horan and Cidade, “Major Changes,” 144.

22 Kathleen Engebretson, “Foundational Issues in Educating Young People for Understanding and Appreciation of the Religions in Their Communities,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 16, no. 1 (September 2012): 61, <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol16/iss1/4/>.

23 Hans Kung, *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View* (New York: Doubleday, 1988) as cited in Engebretson, “Foundational Issues,” 61.

24 Estanek, James, and Norton, “Assessing Catholic Identity,” 199—217.

Catholic social thought as a means for self-understanding? What must be done to reinforce and strengthen the communication of these elements to students?

Method

The Mission Identity Graduating Senior Survey was sent to 2,673 graduating seniors at DePaul University during the spring quarter of 2018 and was available from 18 April 2018 to 18 May 2018. The survey included questions to assess student experience across ten domains commonly expressed in mission statements: Catholic mission and identity; mission integration; leadership and governance; curriculum and courses; faculty and scholarship; cocurricular student learning and engagement; student access, support and success; service to the Catholic Church and the world; the role and importance of staff; and institutional practices in management and finance. There were 271 students who responded for a 10.1% response rate. Relevant demographic characteristics include the following:

- 217 (80.1%) were between the ages of 21 and 23
- 184 (67.9%) attended a public (non-charter) high school
- 169 (62.4%) enrolled at DePaul in the first quarter of their first year (as traditional freshmen)

The majority of the respondents did not answer the gender, race and ethnicity, and citizenship questions.

Results

The chart below (fig. 1) illustrates students' confidence in their ability to comprehend and articulate principles of Catholic higher education and elements of the Vincentian mission. Relevant findings include the following:

- 76% of respondents were confident they could articulate the Vincentian mission
- 44% of respondents were confident they could articulate the Catholic moral tradition
- 42% of respondents were confident they could articulate Catholic social teaching
- 31% of respondents were confident they could articulate the Catholic intellectual tradition

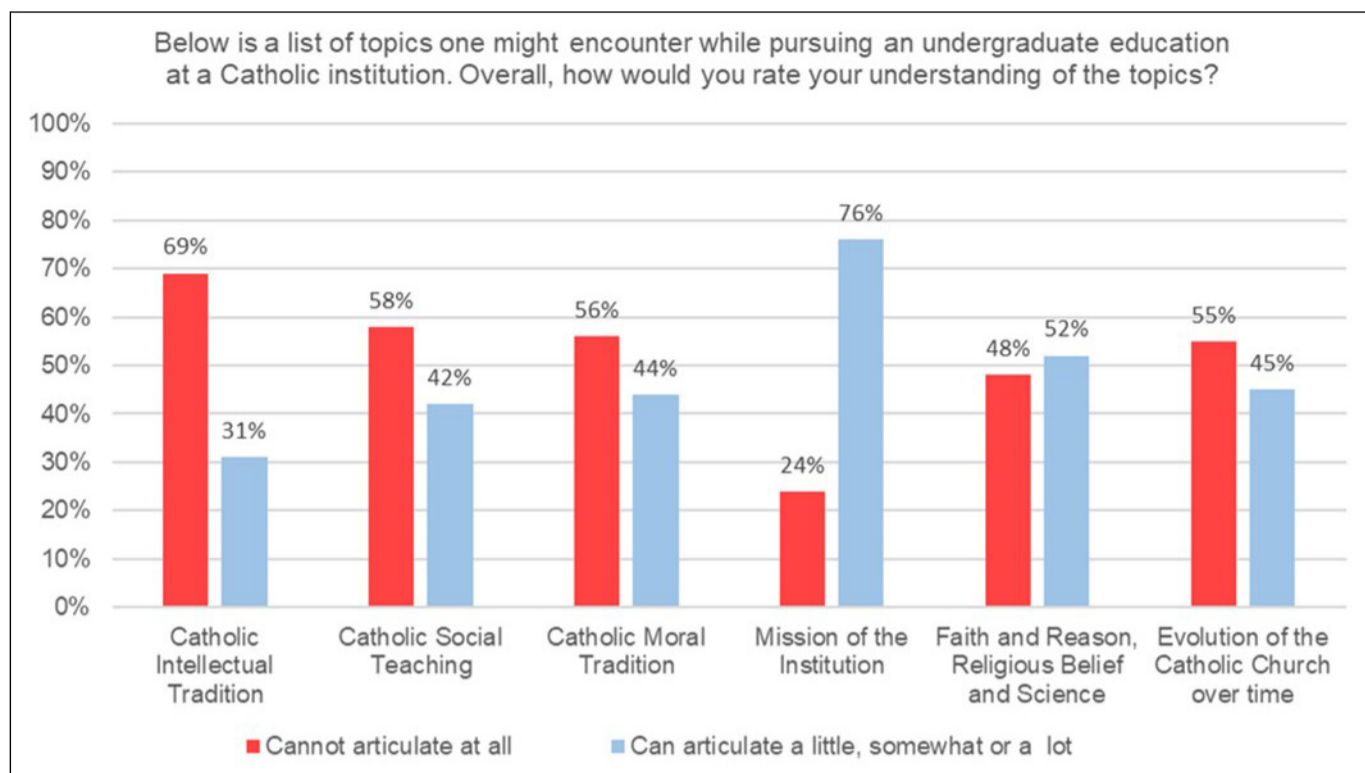


Figure 1. Student capacity to understand and articulate dimensions of Catholic higher education and the mission of DePaul University.

Given the differences in student ability to articulate the mission of the institution compared to dimensions of Catholic higher education, potential sources of student knowledge in these domains must be examined.

To explore this question, the authors examined correlations between student confidence in professing various intellectual traditions (for example, the Vincentian mission) and their reported exposure to elements of Catholic social thought (for example, the preferential option for the poor) within specific dimensions of university life. The table below (fig. 2) reports significant bivariate correlations between students' estimation of the extent to which six domains of university life (for example, major coursework) promoted their thinking about values of Catholic social thought, and their ability to articulate four intellectual traditions (for example, the Catholic intellectual tradition). Exposure to Catholic social thought through extracurricular experiences led to greater reported ability to articulate the Vincentian mission. Modest correlations were also observed between exposure through extracurricular experiences and Catholic social teaching, as well as the exposure in the general institutional environment and ability to articulate the Vincentian mission. Only three small correlations were observed between exposure to Catholic social thought in various domains of university life and confidence in professing the Catholic intellectual tradition.

<i>Bivariate correlations between domains of university life and ability to articulate traditions of Catholic teaching</i>				
<i>Domains of university life</i>	<i>Traditions of Catholic teaching</i>			
	Catholic intellectual tradition	Catholic social teaching	Catholic moral teaching	Vincentian mission
Theology/Religious Studies courses	.21**	.30**	.28**	.29**
Philosophy courses			.27**	.25**
General education courses		.22**	.23**	.25**
Major coursework	.15*		.19*	
Other coursework		.19*	.20*	.27**
Extracurricular experiences	.20**	.37**	.28**	.42**
Institutional environment		.22**	.19*	.37**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Figure 2.

In Conclusion

The results of this investigation suggest a need for organizational development. Students' confidence in their ability to articulate dimensions of the Vincentian mission is greater than their confidence in their ability to communicate dimensions of the Catholic intellectual tradition. Even with sources of influence identified for each domain, this gap challenges those working on the communication of Catholic identity at DePaul University as well as those pursuing a comparable goal at other Catholic colleges and universities.

At DePaul, the next step will be to determine the most effective communication strategies that will reinforce and strengthen catholicity as a dimension of organizational climate and help students understand the intersections between Vincentian values, Catholic social teaching, and the Catholic intellectual tradition. Future research should include conducting focus groups that include students, faculty, staff, and administrators in defining those communication strategies mentioned earlier. It is our hope that we will see students gradually acquire greater confidence in their ability to communicate dimensions of the Catholic intellectual tradition, along with a heightened degree of confidence in their understanding and capacity to articulate the Vincentian mission.

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In Memoriam

The Vincentian Studies Institute is saddened to learn of the passing of two former longtime members of the Institute's Editorial Board. Both Sister Frances Ryan, D.C., and Sister Joan Gibson, D.C., made significant contributions to our publications and to our educational programs over their many years of service. We will certainly miss their passion, their good humor, and their steadfast belief in and support of our mission to promote a living interest in Vincentian studies.

Sister Joan Gibson, D.C., was born in Oak Park, Illinois. She attended St. Vincent School, in Perryville, Missouri, before going on to earn her BA in Social Studies and History from Marillac College, St. Louis, and an MS In Education and Supervision from Mt. St. Mary's College, Los Angeles, California, and an MA in Religious Studies from Immaculate Heart College, also in Los Angeles. Joan returned to St. Louis and entered the Community of the Daughters of Charity in 1954. A true educator, she served as a teacher, vice principal, and principal, and taught in schools run by the Daughters in New Orleans, Dallas, Mayaguez (Puerto Rico), St. Louis, Carson City, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Sister Gibson also



***Sister Joan Gibson, D.C. (at left),
and Sister Frances Ryan, D.C.***

served in the Provincial Council as both Councillor and Assistant Provincial. Sister Joan Gibson, D.C., was called to her eternal reward on August 19, 2022, at Labouré Residence, Los Altos Hills, California. She was 87 years of age, with 68 years of vocation. May she rest in peace.

Sister Frances (Loretta Catherine) Ryan, D.C., died on August 29, 2022, at the Seton Residence in Evansville, Indiana. Sister was born on November 30, 1937, one of five children of Timothy Joseph and Margaret Frances (Healey) Ryan. She graduated from Alvernia High School in Chicago, Illinois, and entered the Daughters of Charity in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1956. After initial formation, Sister Frances served as a social worker at the Guardian Angel Settlement Association in St. Louis, Catholic Charities in Covington, Kentucky, Seton Home Health in London, Kentucky, St. Vincent's Day Care Center in Evansville, Indiana, and St. Vincent de Paul Center in Chicago, Illinois. Sister received a B.A. in Education from Marillac College in St. Louis, Missouri, an MSW in Social Work from Saint Louis University and a Ph.D. in Counseling and Psychology from Loyola University in Chicago. Sister Frances served as a professor at DePaul University in Chicago from 1981 until 2001, and then as moderator of the Ladies of Charity. In 2015, Sister came to Seton Residence to serve in the Ministry of Prayer. A Wake Service was held on Friday, September 2, 2022, in the Seton Residence Chapel followed by the Mass of Christian Burial and interment at St. Joseph Cemetery.

NEWS

Becoming a Church of the Poor: The Vincentian Charism and Reform ***World Catholicism Week, April 13-15, 2023***

The Vincentian Studies Institute, along with the Division of Mission and Ministry, is pleased to cosponsor *Becoming a Church of the Poor: The Vincentian Charism and Reform* with DePaul University's Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology (CWCIT). World Catholicism Week is an annual event, now in its 14th year, that gathers scholars from around the world to explore a single topic. The 2023 global gathering will address how the Vincentian charism can contribute to the process of reform that Pope Francis has inaugurated: What is the Vincentian vision for making the Church more open to God and to the poor? How does the Church need to reform, and what kinds of internal and external resistance does it face? How is a reforming Church simultaneously a Church dedicated to the transformation of the world, addressing pressing concerns of economic, political, and environmental justice? Join speakers from the Philippines, Chile, Haiti, Brazil, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia, Nigeria, Argentina, the U.S., and Europe to discuss the following topics:

- Historical perspectives on reform in the lives of St. Vincent de Paul, St. Louise de Marillac, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, and Vincentian communities worldwide.
- The changing concept of “the poor” and the theme of marginality.
- The internal reform of the Church, including the roles of laity and women.
- Becoming an outward-facing Church dedicated to the transformation of the world.

For more information on this event please visit [Becoming a Church of the Poor: The Vincentian Charism and Reform](#).

Vincentian Studies Institute Revises Additional Texts of “Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, and Documents”

DePaul University continues its support of Vincentian scholarship with a new revision of our four volumes of additional, mainly unpublished texts by and about Saint Vincent de Paul. This revision includes multiple new documents added across all four volumes along with corrections and updates to the existing texts. The translator and editor is John E. Rybolt, C.M. The books supplement the fourteen volumes of *Correspondence, Conferences, and Documents*, published by Pierre Coste, C.M., over a century ago.

These fully searchable, free to download pdf e-Books total more than 4,500 pages of letters, conferences, and documents in their original languages of French, Latin, and

Italian, followed by an English translation. The texts represent an open-ended collection, allowing for additional materials to be added as they come to light, as well as corrections and updates. We welcome suggestions and input from the reading public.

Click below to access each new volume of the collection:

- [Correspondence: CCD Additional Texts](#)
- [Conferences: CCD Additional Texts](#)
- [Documents, part one: CCD Additional Texts](#)
- [Documents, part two: CCD Additional Texts](#)

It is hoped that these new texts will help to further our understanding and appreciation of the great saint of charity, Vincent de Paul.

Vincentian Studies Institute Research Grant Resuming

After having paused new grant applications due to the COVID-19 crisis, the V.S.I. is pleased to announce we have resumed our grant program. Applications for future projects are now being accepted. New proposals are due by October 1st and will be reviewed at our fall board meetings. Although immediate funding may be considered, generally awards will be distributed at the beginning of our next fiscal year in July.

The Vincentian Studies Institute at DePaul University sponsors a program of research grants. One single grant of up to \$20,000 or smaller grants totaling that amount will be awarded annually for projects that further scholarship on the Vincentian tradition, past and present. The grant is open to both individual applicants and institutions / organizations conducting research. For more information on how to apply see [Vincentian Studies Institute Research Grant](#).

Several Noteworthy Additions to Our Vincentian Heritage Collections Online

Over the last year the Vincentian Studies Institute added several notable publications to our Vincentian Digital Books collection on Digital Commons (formerly known as *Via Sapientiae*), the institutional repository of DePaul University. These books are available as pdfs and are free to download.

The first is *Daughters of Charity: Women, Religious Mission, and Hospital Care in Los Angeles, 1856-1927* authored by Kristine Ashton Gunnell. First published in 2013 as a paperback, this captivating story, culled from extensive historical research, documents how ingenuity, determination, and faith enabled mission-driven Daughters of Charity to establish, develop, and provide healthcare in Los Angeles. Gunnell documents multiple examples of their flexibility to overcome barriers of culture, religion, language, and scarce

resources in the context of frontier politics but without comprise of their faith-based mission of service to persons in need. Download your copy here: [Women, Religious Mission, and Hospital Care](#).

The second is a newly scanned edition of *In the Footsteps of Vincent de Paul: A Guide to Vincentian France* by noted historian John E. Rybolt, C.M. The new scan significantly upgrades the visual quality of our original offering, allowing readers to better enjoy the lavishly illustrated, full color classic guidebook to the France of Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, and the members of their religious families. Download your copy at: [A Guide to Vincentian France](#).

Vincentian Heritage is published bi-annually by DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, under the direction of the Division of Mission & Ministry and overseen by a board whose members include the following:

Rev. Guillermo Campuzano, C.M.

Vice President of Mission and Ministry

Division of Mission & Ministry

DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois

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Subscriptions are now provided gratis for all interested parties. Future editions of Vincentian Heritage will be available for download to your iPad, tablet, or computer. From this point forward, to receive the book free of charge, please contact us at nmichaud@depaul.edu and provide your preferred email address. When future editions are published, you will receive an email including links to download the new full color, fully illustrated e-volume.

Vincentian Heritage is the journal of the Vincentian Studies Institute of the United States. Founded in 1979, the Institute is dedicated to promoting a living interest in the historical and spiritual heritage of Saint Vincent de Paul (1581-1660) and Saint Louise de Marillac (1591-1660), the patrons of the wide-ranging Vincentian Family including the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, the Ladies of Charity, the Sisters of Charity, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, and a number of other congregations, communities, and lay movements who share a common dedication to serving those in need.

Vincentian Heritage welcomes manuscripts, poetry, and other expressions of Vincentian themes that meet the publication criteria. All articles should relate directly to topics of Vincentian interest, be researched and documented in a scholarly fashion, and directed toward Vincentian-oriented groups in the reading public and the Vincentian family. Ordinarily, articles should not exceed thirty-five typewritten pages and should be submitted twelve months prior to anticipated publication.

All manuscripts and editorial correspondence should be addressed to:

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Cover image: Bronze sculpture of Elizabeth Seton by Sr. Margaret Baudette, S.C. Mother Seton House & Historic Seminary Chapel, Baltimore, MD. Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive.

Nathaniel Michaud, editor; Miranda Lukatch contributing.

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