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Seeking God's Will...
Under African Skies

The Spirituality of Stewardship
(GSN) What Does it Mean
to Be Catholic?



O'MEARA,
FERGUSON,
WHELAN,
AND CONWAY

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Seeking God's Will ... Under African Skies

By Patrick O'Meara

I write this article as I am flying over the Sudan on a trip that I never imagined I would take. When Pope Benedict's *Caritas en Veritate* first came out, I was asked to speak on it around the country. I primarily spoke to Legatus Chapters and similar groups. As I spoke to them I stressed the Pope's affirmation of our obligation to assist in the development of our fellow man. For those able to assist those beyond their *Polis*, there exists a similar obligation to utilize the influence that exists *in potencia*. The Holy Father writes "The idea of a world without development indicates a lack of trust in man and in God. It is therefore a serious mistake ... to overlook the fact that man is constitutionally oriented towards 'being more.'" (paragraph #14). Throughout my talks, I prayed to more deeply understand what the Lord was calling me to do and what He was calling O'Meara Ferguson to do.

At O'Meara Ferguson, we are now doing more than we ever have for the Church. The quality of our work and our impact, we believe, only continues to grow. We have been invited in to conduct campaigns, as well as wonderful and exciting projects for parishes and schools involving finance, development, planning, and greater recruitment and training of the laity for a number of diocese and archdiocese. We have been growing at a very brisk pace and we continue to see that growth in the future. This is all what we have hoped for. Yet in my prayer and that of our entire staff, I asked the Lord to lead and asked what He was calling us to do and I had an unfortunate experience of the Lord speaking to me, and with an answer that was not within my comfort zone. I felt certain that these wonderful things that we are currently doing are enough and I was not disposed to stretch beyond my vision for our work.

Yves Congar says that all heresy lies fundamentally in a denial of the incarnation. It is easier and certainly neater if God remains in the Heavens. Fortunately He chose to come down and break the chains of

death and sin. We are challenged today to see if we believe that He still does incarnate himself. This implies a certain openness to action if we believe that we are hearing him speak to us. This past weekend I flew to Africa with Jim Grant, Albert Holder, Fr Dan Mahan, and Bob Chronowski. As we send this newsletter, I have begun a series of meetings with Archbishop Lwanga in Kampala Uganda.

Over the years we have been asked again and again if we could help the Church in Africa and in every instance we could not come up with a response that was convincing to ourselves that the work would bear fruit. So in response to what I was hearing in my prayer times, that we set out into the deep, we set down on paper a short piece on how we would get involved in Africa through investment (as opposed to aid) for the development of the individual. Primarily, this investment will be focused where there is already religious or cultural renewal occurring, where the individual already believes they are the primary agent of change in their life. I sent this paper on to 6-10 people and the response was more than I expected.

I expected to be told that we should let these ideas go, but overwhelmingly I heard loud support, including from several University presidents'. Interestingly the Archbishop of Kampala reached out to me directly because he had received my white paper. When we spoke, he asked that we "come and see." I told the Archbishop that I truly wanted to help but that, in addition to our existing projects, we are engaged in several large campaigns and we are in the early stages of preparing for two others that would be the first and second largest campaigns in the history of the Church – yet he was clear in his request for us to do this work. I told our board that I believed we should get involved in Africa, but that the time and the temporal realities were such that we could not go right now. My Board agreed whole heartedly. Then the Lord began to speak clearer.

I was contacted by Archbishops and Abbots

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who called to say it was on their mind that I should think about going to Africa. Over the course of two weeks, I had two bishops from Africa visit my office and ask me to come. I spoke to my staff and we all agreed that this was not the time, but acknowledged that we needed to be open to the Lord and needed to continue to pray. My scriptural reflections at the time led me to the great commission, and the Isaiah pericope "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?' 'Here I am,' I said; 'send me!'" (Isaiah 6:8-12) A university expressed interest in possibly (after appropriate due diligence) putting \$10 million in such a development fund. The final straw was a call from an Abbot who began his conversation with me by saying, "Pat I have a strange request for you, but have you ever considered going to Africa ..."

This challenge, again and again in my prayer time and in sign after sign that the Lord was calling me to Africa, finally came to a head when I asked two people if I could go. First, I asked my wife (who is pregnant with our eighth child), and after weighing all that had occurred, she agreed we should explore this work. I then called my other boss, Jack Whelan. He is our CEO, the Chairman of the Board of O'Meara Ferguson, and a man of great faith. I told Jack that I truly felt called to go to Africa and that, while I would cede to

his authority, I asked for his endorsement and support. On the Feast of the Birth of the Virgin Mary, he gave me permission and his blessing to move forward. This process was extremely slow and evidences my own shortcomings in listening to the Lord, but also clearly lays out that the Lord is calling us to more. I see this project in Uganda as an opportunity to respond to the needs where the reality for men and women to "be more," as the Pope says, is so visibly present. This is a due diligence trip and we have quite a team looking to see if we can produce fruit in the vineyard, should we be given the vineyard by the Master.

Some of the temporal problems that plagued our decision have been solved, while some remain. But we move forward in faith that the Lord will handle these issues as we "step out of the boat" as we have discerned He beckons us. I ask all of you to pray for us to have the sense of Magnanimity to do what the Lord envisions, not just what we seek to accomplish. The greatest work He seeks to accomplish is in each of our souls as He does wondrous things within us, and He desires so much more. Pray that if it is His will, we will make possible the full development of some of our Brothers, for He thirsts for them, and how wondrous it will be if we can be His hands.