

Franciscan Spiritual Traditions and Asian Societies

Memory, Institutionalization, & Pragmatic Agency

30 Sept 2026 to 2 Oct 2026

7.45pm to 10.30pm SGT

International Online Conference



Co-Organized by the Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholics and the GL Louis Religious Pluralism Research Cluster, FASS, NUS.

IMPORTANT NOTES

- Personal recording of the panels in any form is strictly not allowed.
- Audience members are to adhere to the decorum afforded to speakers present at an academic conference and remain muted until called upon by chairs and moderators.
- All timings indicated in the schedule refer to Singapore Standard Time.

Join the Conference via Zoom:

Meeting ID : 840 0187 5544

Password : Franciscan

Link : <https://nus-sg.zoom.us/j/84001875544?pwd=CwWDLjvUzTBgZNwsBb4cLH9TZsnCtd.1>

The Zoom Meeting Room will open 10 minutes prior to the start of the program.



Synopsis

Eight centuries since the establishment of the Franciscan movement anchored in the charism and values of fraternity, radical humility and poverty, care for creation and reconciliation, the Franciscans have instituted not only a global presence of religious culture and networks but also produced values and ideas as resource of counterculture and imagining and rebuilding alternative societies that have contributed to global history and social change. The proclamation of the Franciscan Jubilee Year in 2026 serves as a critical juncture for scholars to examine how religious traditions translate into functional societal frameworks. Moving beyond traditional theological discourses, this conference investigates Franciscan charisms as a form of life that are (in)advertently woven into various dimensions of social life in Asia and actively engages with ecological challenges, modern governance, public memory, and social infrastructure within the distinct context of Asian Catholicism.

Historically and contemporarily, Catholicism in Asia has been profoundly shaped by complex transnational networks and rapid socio-cultural development. In these deeply pluralistic landscapes, Catholic communities often navigate their faith as a minority population except in East Timor and the Philippines. Here, Franciscan traditions operate as both a historical archive and a pragmatic toolkit for addressing distinctive regional realities and challenges, ranging from interreligious dialogue in multi-faith societies to climate change and communal wellbeing. Catholic communities in Asia are not only passive recipients of a longstanding religious tradition with all its historical, theological, institutional complexity and possibility but also the strategic site to interrogate, con(test), deepen and transform the Franciscan movement.

This conference features papers that consider the following three pillars of Franciscan spirituality as sociological and historical categories specifically situated within Asia:

- **Minoritas (Alternative Power):** The subversion of social hierarchy and the negotiation of agency from the periphery, particularly relevant to the lived experience of Catholic minority communities across Asian states.
- **Fraternitas (Social Capital):** The construction of non-kinship-based networks of solidarity and their crucial role in Asian civil society, diplomacy, and inter-communal mediation.
- **Paupertas (Critique of Ownership):** Practical responses to consumption, resource management, and the *Economy of Francesco* amid Asia's rapid economic growth and pressing ecological shifts.

We address the following questions:

- How do specific Franciscan charisms operate as mechanisms for negotiating agency from the periphery/centre within distinct Asian socio-cultural developments?
- In what ways do transnational Catholic networks of solidarity contribute to civil society and interreligious relations in Asia's diverse and pluralistic landscapes?
- How does the Franciscan critique of ownership manifest in practical responses to Asia's rapid urbanisation and contemporary ecological challenges?
- In what ways do Franciscan spiritual traditions in localised social contexts contribute to or complicate the reimagining, maintenance, and persistence of global Catholicism?
- What are the methodological opportunities and limitations in analysing Franciscan spirituality as a localised, sociological, and historical category within Global Asian Catholicism?

Conference Convenors:

Dr. Bryan Goh, National University of Singapore

Dr. Bubbles Asor, De La Salle University

30 SEPTEMBER 2026 • Wednesday

19:45 – 20:00	WELCOME REMARKS
	BRYAN GOH , National University of Singapore
20:00 – 20:55	KEYNOTE LECTURE
<i>Chairperson</i>	BRYAN GOH , National University of Singapore
	<i>Sicut Mater</i> , Setting Free like a Mother
	Friar Derrick Yap , Custody of St Anthony (Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei)
20:40	Questions & Answers
21:00 – 22:30	PANEL 1 • PAUPERTAS AND SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE
<i>Chairperson</i>	BUBBLES BEVERLY ASOR , De La Salle University Manila
	Radical Stewardship: Reimagining the Franciscan Approach to Poverty and the Common Good
	JAMES LAXA , De La Salle University
	Indigenous Catholic Organic Intellectuals and the Safeguarding of Sacred Ecology in Thailand: Perspectives from the Economy of Francesco
	MICHAEL BISTIS , Saengtham College
	Caring for the Earth, Restoring Fraternity, Franciscan Spirituality in Parish-Based Waste Management in Yogyakarta
	MARTINUS JOKO LELONO , Sanata Dharma University
	Nurturing Fraternitas Beyond Charity: A Case Study of the Anjappam Initiative as an Alternative Socio-Economic Model in Kerala
	JOSEPH M.K. , Sacred Heart College, Thevara
<i>Discussant</i>	KRIJN PANSTERS , Tilburg University
22:10	Questions & Answers

1 OCTOBER 2026 • Thursday

19:45 – 20:00	ISAC ANNIVERSARY AND UPDATE
	MICHEL CHAMBON , Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholics
20:00 – 21:10	PANEL 2 • MINORITAS AND NEGOTIATING AGENCY IN THE MARGINS
Chairperson	BRYAN GOH , National University of Singapore
	<i>Princesa das Virtudes: Sor Martha de San Bernardo's Pursuit of Religious Life in the Spanish Empire in the Philippines and Beyond</i>
	DANIELLE IRIS V. GARCIA , University of the Philippines Diliman
	Margins within the Margin: Devotion to St. Anthony and the Question of Franciscan Minoritas at Uvari, Tamil Nadu
	EDUARDO GONZALEZ , College of the Holy Cross
	The Mission Reversed: Minoritas and the Franciscan Apostolic Sisters in the Philippines (1953-2003)
	MARIO VALORI , University of Pisa
Discussant	BERNARDO E BROWN , International Christian University
20:55	Questions & Answers
21:20 – 22:30	PANEL 3 • FRATERNITAS, SOCIAL CAPITAL & TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS
Chairperson	BUBBLES BEVERLY ASOR , De La Salle University Manila
	Minoritas, Fraternitas, Paupertas in Action: Blessed Gabriele Allegra and the Institutionalization of Franciscan Charisms in Chinese-Speaking and Southeast Asian Catholicism
	RACHEL LIE , St. Anthony Franciscan Archives, Singapore
	Holy Cross Sisters in Darjeeling: Expansion of Franciscan Charism in the Himalayas and Taiwan Mountains
	GEORGE THADATHIL , Salesian University Institutions, Rome
	Bridging Faith and Pluralism: Franciscan Solidarity and Transnational Catholic Networks in Strengthening Civil Society and Interreligious Relations across Asia
	SATTAR MASIH , Life Savers Ministry Church of Pakistan
Discussant	JOSHUA TAN , Nanyang Technological University
22:15	Questions & Answers

2 OCTOBER 2026 • Friday

19:45 – 21:10	PANEL 4 • MEMORY AND HERITAGE
Chairperson	MICHEL CHAMBON , Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholics
	Franciscans in Vietnam: Past, Present and Beyond
	LINH HOANG , Siena University
	Remembering the Franciscans: Community Narratives and Collective Memory of Mission in Selected Philippine Parishes
	RONEL DELA CRUZ , Ateneo de Manila University
	St. Francis of Assisi: The Timeless Relevant Relic of the Past
	BIEN JUSTINE D. PATRIARCA , Order of Friars Minor - Province of San Pedro Bautista
	Devotion and Conviction amidst Diversity: How Franciscan Spirituality is Understood in Modern Asian Societies
	LUCAS JOHN CHIN , St. Anthony Franciscan Archives, Singapore
Discussant	BRYAN GOH , National University of Singapore
20:55	Questions & Answers
21:10 – 21:20	CLOSING REMARKS
	BUBBLES BEVERLY ASOR , De La Salle University Manila

Radical Stewardship: Reimagining the Franciscan Approach to Poverty and the Common Good

JAMES LAXA

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Poverty in the Philippines remains a persistent, systemic challenge that intersects deeply with the nation's religious identity. Since Christianization by the Spanish in 1521, a significant portion of the population has endured substandard living conditions. This paper argues that a fundamental cause of this ongoing struggle is a romanticized, and ultimately misguided, theological interpretation of the biblical call to embrace poverty. Often, religious discourse suggests that material poverty is a state to be embraced for the sake of piety, inadvertently exalting misery as a Christian virtue. However, a critical re-examination of biblical texts and the social teaching of the Church reveals this to be a hermeneutical error.

The New Testament's warnings against wealth are not condemnations of material goods themselves, but rather exhortations against greed, selfishness, and the prioritization of earthly treasure over God's kingdom. The true Christian invitation is to a life of humility, simplicity, and active generosity, not involuntary destitution. To counteract this, the paper proposes a paradigm shift by integrating the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi. Rather than viewing poverty as a negative state of deprivation to be endured, a Franciscan approach recognizes it as a joyous, radical imitation of Christ. In this light, poverty is not merely a lack of possessions, but a joyous, radical imitation of Christ that freed the soul from earthly attachments to depend entirely on God and live in complete solidarity with all of creation.

Applied to the contemporary Philippine context, this Franciscan witness transforms the "mistaken meekness" of current religious discourse into a call for active engagement with the world. It reframes the struggle against poverty not as a pursuit of individual wealth for its own sake, but as a commitment to communal stewardship where resources are managed responsibly to serve the common good. Drawing on scriptural evidence—from the abundance described in the Old Testament to the call for wise stewardship in the New Testament—the paper challenges the popular notion of Jesus as a destitute figure. Instead, it posits that biblical teachings emphasize the ethical use of resources to build community and combat social injustice. By addressing poverty at the level of religious beliefs, the Church can move beyond passive acceptance of suffering and toward a theology that encourages honest labour, community responsibility, and the development of the quality of life for all, thereby dismantling the self-inflicted fear and ignorance that traps Filipinos in despair.

Mr. James Laxa serves as the Director of the Office of Student Leadership Involvement, Formation, and Empowerment at De La Salle University, Manila. His administrative experience at DLSU also includes management roles within the Lasallian Pastoral Office, alongside prior work as a Catholic missionary in China and Papua New Guinea. Holding a Master of Arts in Applied Theology, his research focuses primarily on spiritual formation within the contexts of post-secularism and the post-truth era. His scholarly publications and conference presentations address faith formation in Catholic higher education, Lasallian communal discernment, contextualized spirituality, and public health challenges surrounding disinformation.

**Indigenous Catholic Organic Intellectuals and the Safeguarding of Sacred Ecology in Thailand:
Perspectives from the Economy of Francesco**

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Northern Thailand's Indigenous Catholic agrarian communities face escalating ecological pressure from land transformation, cash-crop expansion, and corporate-led development, even as their farmlands, forests and watersheds remain bound to customary sacred-ecology practices. Existing scholarship on Indigenous sacred ecology in mainland Southeast Asia rarely engages Catholic theological frameworks specifically, while studies of the Economy of Francesco initiative remain largely institutional reporting, leaving its application among Indigenous Asian Catholic communities underexamined. In such a context, this paper asks: how do Indigenous Catholic organic intellectuals (OIs) in Northern Thailand mobilise customary sacred-ecology practices and the ethical vocabulary of the Economy of Francesco to safeguard land, forests, and watersheds against extractive economic pressure?

The study pursues two objectives: to identify the practices through which these organic intellectuals safeguard sacred ecology, and to analyse how the Economy of Francesco is locally mobilised in confronting ecological pressure. Employing a qualitative case study design with an ethnographic approach, the research draws on semi-structured interviews with OIs, namely actors such as catechists, village heads and elders, and parish ecological animators, alongside participant observation of ecological rituals and community conservation initiatives, and analysis of literature referencing the Economy of Francesco.

The paper theorises these actors as figures whose authority derives from lived experience in the community rather than institutional rank, positioning them to translate between Indigenous sacred-ecology practices and the Economy of Francesco's critique of extractive economic logic. The paper argues that their structurally peripheral position relative to ecclesial and economic centres is precisely what enables their effectiveness, generating local legitimacy and cosmological fluency unavailable to institutional actors. The paper contributes empirically by documenting the Economy of Francesco's operation beyond institutional and elite economist circles, and theoretically by extending the organic intellectual concept into the Indigenous religious-ecological landscape, offering the Francesco Economy's Paupertas and Social Infrastructure concerns as a grounded case of ecological safeguarding as lived, peripheral practice.

Rev. Michael Bistis is a lecturer in the Faculty of Humanities at Saengtham College, Thailand, and a PhD researcher at Assumption University of Thailand. His research and publications span anthropology of religion and culture, Southeast Asian Indigenous studies, Asian migration, Asian Catholic mission and education, eco-cosmology, and Rice-Merit networks of Northern Thailand. He is involved in ethnographic research and international conference presentations, with particular attention to Indigenous communities in Northern Thailand. As a member of ISAC, he contributes to academic research on Indigenous Catholic communities across Asia.

Caring for the Earth, Restoring Fraternity, Franciscan Spirituality in Parish-Based Waste Management in Yogyakarta

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The increasing waste crisis challenges Christian communities in Yogyakarta to move beyond technical environmental management toward holistic response that integrates ecological responsibility with renewal of communal life. This research investigates how Franciscan spirituality reflected on *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum* inspired parish-based waste management as pastoral practice that nurtures both environmental stewardship and social cohesion.

Using a qualitative method on studying St. Maria Marganingsih Parish, Kalasan and St. Peter and Paul Parish, Pringgolayan in Yogyakarta, this article captures how Franciscan ideals of Fraternity, simplicity, gratitude for creation and care for common home are translated into concrete ecological initiatives. Through Robert Putnam's theory on social capital to analyse the correlation between ecological engagement and community building. Data were collected through participant observation, and semi-structured interviews.

The findings show that activities such as waste segregation, recycling, communal clean-up campaigns, and environmental education extend beyond environmental conservation. These initiatives cultivate trust, strengthen interpersonal networks, and facilitate cooperation. Furthermore, sense of belonging among parishioners are growing. Learning from Franciscan spirituality, caring for creation is not simply an ecological responsibility, but also a pastoral pathway toward strengthening social capital in the parish community.

Fr. Martinus Joko Lelono is a Catholic priest of the Archdiocese of Semarang, Indonesia. He serves as the Chair of the Commission for Interfaith and Belief Relations of the diocese and is a lecturer at the Faculty of Theology, Universitas Sanata Dharma. He completed his doctoral studies at the Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRS), Universitas Gadjah Mada. His research interests include interreligious dialogue, religious movements, ecology and community formation, and contemporary religious issues, particularly the development of religious ideas and practices in plural societies.

Nurturing Fraternitas Beyond Charity: A Case Study of the Anjappam Initiative as an Alternative Socio-Economic Model in Kerala

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Derived from the biblical concept of the “five loaves of bread,” Anjappam functions as an inclusive dining space designed to ensure that no individual goes hungry. Conceptualized by Fr. Bobby Jose Kattikad—a Catholic priest from the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin (OFM Cap), author, and speaker—alongside a group of socially conscious friends, the movement operates under a registered charitable society. Rooted in Franciscan values of fraternity, care, and solidarity, Anjappam originated in Kerala’s Pathanamthitta district and has since expanded across multiple locations, including Kozhencherry, Ranni, Thiruvalla, Changanassery, Thrissur, and Ernakulam.

At its core, Anjappam prioritizes dignity over charity. To avoid the stigma associated with “free food counters,” the restaurants operate on a “Pay What You Can” framework using an anonymous contribution box. While meals are valued at a nominal rate (approximately ₹25), patrons can pay whatever they afford, eat for free, or contribute extra to sponsor others. Integrating nourishment for both body and mind, the venues serve clean, organic meals by day and transform into community libraries and reading spaces by evening to foster cultural dialogue.

This study poses the primary research question: How does the Anjappam initiative operationalize Franciscan values to create an alternative, dignity-centred socio-economic model within Kerala’s market economy? To address this, a qualitative single-case study design with embedded unit analysis across multiple branch locations is utilized. Sustained through local goodwill, volunteerism, and donations of organic produce and books, Anjappam generates a novel form of social capital (Fraternitas). Ultimately, the movement serves as an emerging model of cooperative communion, offering a compassionate alternative to consumer-driven market structures.

Prof. Joseph M.K. is the Professor and Head of the Department of Social Work at Sacred Heart College, Thevara, Kochi. He holds a Master’s and a PhD (2012) in Social Work from MG University, Kottayam, with doctoral research on Kerala’s village milk cooperatives. An expert in community development, social entrepreneurship, and sustainable livelihoods, Dr. Joseph specializes in bridging civil society, producer organizations, and government systems. Former HOD at Rajagiri College, he has led major ICSSR and Ministry of Science and Technology research projects.

Princesa das Virtudes: Sor Martha de San Bernardo's Pursuit of Religious Life in the Spanish Empire in the Philippines and Beyond

DANIELLE IRIS V. GARCIA

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In 1633, the Poor Clares residing in Manila established a convent in Macao. Among the founding nuns was a Kapampangan native, Sor Martha de San Bernardo. This paper examines her exemplary case of religious pursuit when a strict restriction on the admission of native women in the Real Monasterio de Santa Clara in Manila was implemented.

This paper utilized both existing studies and archival sources in answering the questions: How did her ethnic background possibly influence her religious pursuit as a Poor Clare nun? How did her agency and mobility emerge by examining her journey from Manila to Macao and her stay in Macao? With this, the paper seeks to contribute to the limited existing studies about native women in the seventeenth-century Philippines and beyond the Spanish empire. Importantly, the paper emphasizes her agency by persevering, choosing, and remaining as a Poor Clare nun till the end of her life in Macao.

Ms. Danielle Iris V. Garcia is a Teaching Associate in the Department of History, University of the Philippines Diliman. She obtained her Bachelor of Arts in History at the University of the Philippines Diliman. Currently, she is a graduate student in the MA History program at the Department of History, UP Diliman. Her research interest is about Church history and global history, with a special focus on native and women in the 17th- and 18th-century Philippines.

Margins within the Margin: Devotion to St. Anthony and the Question of Franciscan Minoritas at Uvari, Tamil Nadu

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At the shrine of St. Anthony of Padua in Uvari, Tamil Nadu, Catholic and Hindu devotees participate in a shared ritual tradition known as *asanam*. Its culminating meal requires a vow-maker to feed thirteen poor guests understood as “ritual surrogates” of St. Anthony, kneel before them to beg a portion of food from each, and then eat alongside them. The scene seems readily legible through the Franciscan category of *minoritas*: social precedence is inverted as the giver relinquishes status and becomes dependent upon those ordinarily positioned as recipients of charity. Yet if *minoritas* entails not simply lowliness but agency from the margins, where does it reside in the *asanam* meal?

Through a critical rereading of Selva J. Raj’s ethnography, placed in conversation with scholarship on Tamil Catholicism and its missionary history, this paper argues that Uvari reveals intersecting rather than singular relations of centre and periphery. Raj’s analytical use of Victor Turner shows that the meal’s inversion of status remains ritually contained: the poor become indispensable and honoured participants without clearly acquiring comparable power over the social relations the ritual temporarily reverses, while the realities of caste and economic hierarchy remain resilient. By contrast, Raj’s conception of “dialogue on the ground” discloses a more substantive form of *minoritas* among Catholic and Hindu devotees of St. Anthony who generate a shared ritual world from the ecclesial periphery, often beyond institutional direction.

This contrast also exposes a margin within the margin: those who exercise agency from an ecclesial periphery may occupy positions of relative power along social and economic axes. Placed against a longer Tamil Catholic history in which religious transformation could coexist with the preservation of caste hierarchy, *asanam* raises questions about why ritual inversion need not become social transformation. I suggest that *fraternitas* and *paupertas* sharpen this problem: inclusion without shared determination may leave solidarity incomplete, while ritualized giving without a deeper “unowning” of control may leave possession fundamentally undisturbed. Uvari thus complicates the identification of Franciscan charisms with their ritual appearance and invites reflection on how a theology from the margins can remain accountable to margins within the margin.

Dr. Eduardo Gonzalez is assistant professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the College of the Holy Cross. His research in global Catholicism, liberation theology, and decolonial spiritualities explores how ruptured histories shape and are reshaped by transculturated religious imaginations. Gonzalez is especially drawn to how communities can creatively transform inherited religious traditions as part of a wider practice of remaking worlds in the face of shared suffering. He holds a PhD in systematic theology from Boston College.

**The Mission Reversed: Minoritas and the Franciscan Apostolic Sisters in the Philippines
(1953–2003)**

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This paper takes the Franciscan Apostolic Sisters (FAS), founded in 1953 in Sta. Ana, Cagayan, at the initiative of the Italian Franciscan missionary Gerardo Z. Filippetto, OFM, as a case through which to consider ‘minoritas’ not simply as a Franciscan ideal but as a historical and sociological condition: the negotiation of religious agency from a double periphery, geographic and ecclesial – the rural frontier, described as ‘deprived of priests,’ and the female community, initially conceived as an auxiliary to male missionary work.

The decisive history, however, is not that of the founder but of the institution Filipino women gradually made their own. What begins as an instrument of European missionary expansion becomes an autonomous religious body through a sequence of recognitions: diocesan approval in 1964, erection as a congregation of diocesan right in 1996, pontifical right in 2003; and, from 1992, the sending of Filipino sisters as missionaries to dioceses in the United States. The circle closes with an inversion: women who had been the objects of an Italian missionary initiative become the subjects of a ‘reverse mission’ directed toward the West. Here the larger transformation of global Catholicism appears in concrete form. Asian Catholic communities do not merely receive Catholic institutions; they remake them.

This institutional ascent is also a social history. For rural women of the Cagayan Valley, the congregation provides education, formation, professional roles in schools and healthcare, and positions of authority otherwise difficult to attain; at the same time, these possibilities remain embedded in structures of obedience and gendered service. Empowerment and discipline are therefore not rival interpretations, one of which must displace the other. Their conjunction is constitutive of female religious life in postcolonial Asia.

Methodologically, the paper brings institutional and diocesan records into relation with the congregation’s own self-narration, treating foundational hagiography not as documentary residue but as evidence of an ‘architecture of memory’ through which the FAS authorise and legitimise their autonomy. In this way, the study addresses the conference’s questions about peripheral agency, transnational networks of solidarity, and the localisation of Franciscan charisms within Asian societies.

Dr. Mario Valori holds an MA in Cultural History (2021), followed by a double specialisation in Digital Humanities and Visual Studies (2024). His work primarily explores gender, Asian culture, and the transnational circulation of tropes, with a focus on the construction of girlhood in Eastern culture.

Minoritas, Fraternitas, Paupertas in Action: Blessed Gabriele Allegra and the Institutionalization of Franciscan Charisms in Chinese-Speaking and Southeast Asian Catholicism

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This paper studies the life and work of Blessed Gabriele Maria Allegra OFM (1907–1976) as a case study for understanding how Franciscan charisms are translated into concrete sociological and institutional forms within Asian Catholicism. The paper traces Allegra’s trajectory across three sites of Franciscan institutional formation: China (1931–48), Hong Kong (1948–63), and Singapore (1957–63), addressing the three conceptual pillars of Paupertas, Fraternitas, and Minoritas.

First, how did Allegra’s actions of a multi-decade project of translating the Bible into Chinese, and his associations with the proletariat and sick, embody the Franciscan charism of “paupertas” as a radical gift of knowledge to the margins, constituting an enduring act of cultural and linguistic vernacularisation?

Second, analysing the ways that transnational “fraternitas” assembled around the *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum*, bringing together friars of differing races. How does this function as a model of non-kinship solidarity that produced a third way of understanding society during the Cold War period, creating lasting social infrastructure for Chinese Catholic communities lasting till this day?

Third, how was Allegra’s establishment of the *Studium Sociologicum* in Singapore in 1957 conceived, as archival and biographical sources suggest, as a Catholic social-teaching response to the ideological contests of a decolonising city-state, illustrating the Franciscan logic of “minoritas,” operating from the ecclesial periphery to contest dominant political imaginaries in a newly decolonising, multi-faith city-state?

Methodologically, the paper employs a historical-sociological framework that reads Allegra’s activities across memory, heritage, and social infrastructure as mutually constitutive. His legacy is analysed both as an individual saintly biography and as an institutional genealogy that seeded the Franciscan Custody of St Anthony, brought forth by the empirical foundation of the *Studium Biblicum* and Allegra’s activity in East Asia. The paper contributes to scholarship on Global Asian Catholicism by demonstrating how a single Franciscan actor embodied all three Franciscan pillars simultaneously, and how that embodiment became the founding grammar of a distinctly Asian Franciscan institutional presence.

Ms. Rachel Lie is currently a final year Global Studies undergraduate at National University of Singapore. She has had a long-term interest in local heritage and the intersection between religion and globalisation. She is currently a part-time intern at the Franciscan Library for the Order of Friars Minor, Singapore.

Holy Cross Sisters in Darjeeling: Expansion of Franciscan Charism in the Himalayas and Taiwan Mountains

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The Sisters of the Mercy of the Holy Cross (HCHC), popularly known as Holy Cross Sisters, have worked for over 70 years in the region through their ministry in the schools, social work centres, medical care and community development. The choice of their ministry, the choice of their location, and the resultant empowerment of the communities they have served over the past decades deserve scholarly attention, given the impact of the values of the Catholic Church in Asia. They are present in Asia in two locations: India and Taiwan. They moved to Taiwan after having worked earlier in Manchuria, when the mission there had to be closed down.

The paper intends to focus more specifically on India, which has 5 provincial administrations - Mid India, Central India, South India, North East India, and East India - and has the largest number of members. The study focuses on their writings in Theodosia, the local province newsletters, and is mostly substantiated by the personal first-hand experience of having worked with them and observed their work for over 40 years. The paper intends to explore their ministry and its impact in specified locations, as deserving of scholarly attention for having spread the Franciscan charism and vision of ecologically integral humanism.

The study will examine the locations where they work, framing the Transnational Catholic networks of solidarity that contribute to civil society and interreligious relations in Asia's (India and Taiwan) diverse and pluralistic landscapes. It will also argue that Franciscan spiritual tradition, as lived out by the nuns and their close collaborators in localised social contexts, does contribute to the reimagining, maintenance, and persistence of global Catholicism. To give the paper an Asian, rather than only Indian, perspective, it will draw some attention to how they came to operate in Taiwan from Manchuria as an example of their negotiating agency from the periphery/centre within distinct Asian socio-cultural developments.

Fr. Prof. George Thadathil SDB served as the principal of Salesian College, Sonada, Darjeeling (2000-2023) & Siliguri Campus (2009-2023), the President of All India Association for Christian Higher Education, AIACHE (2018-2021) and as the Global Coordinator for Salesian Higher Education, IUS (2024-2026). He has promoted Catholic Values in these networks. He has been engaged in teaching, research, and administration. His latest publication is *Christian Education and Democracy in India* (Penprints, 2024).

Bridging Faith and Pluralism: Franciscan Solidarity and Transnational Catholic Networks in Strengthening Civil Society and Interreligious Relations across Asia

SATTAR MASIH

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Asia's religious diversity and cultural pluralism present both opportunities and challenges for building peaceful and resilient societies. While existing scholarship has examined Catholic institutions as providers of education, healthcare, and humanitarian assistance, limited attention has been given to how transnational Catholic networks function as relational infrastructures that cultivate interreligious trust, civic participation, and social resilience across diverse Asian contexts. Addressing this gap, this paper investigates how Franciscan-inspired transnational Catholic networks contribute to civil society by translating the charisms of *Fraternitas*, *Minoritas*, and *Paupertas* into practical mechanisms of peacebuilding, ecological responsibility, and inclusive social engagement.

Drawing on Franciscan Social Thought and Social Capital Theory, the study conceptualizes Catholic solidarity not merely as institutional cooperation but as a form of ethical and relational capital that strengthens connections across religious, cultural, and national boundaries. Employing a qualitative interdisciplinary methodology, the research integrates comparative case studies, documentary analysis, and contemporary scholarship on Asian Catholicism, faith-based organizations, and interreligious collaboration. The analysis focuses on initiatives addressing poverty, humanitarian response, migration, environmental sustainability, community health, and dialogue among Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, and Christian communities in selected Asian settings.

The paper argues that Franciscan spirituality offers a practical model of public engagement in which humility replaces domination, fraternity generates social trust, and responsible stewardship promotes ecological justice. Rather than competing for religious influence, Franciscan-inspired networks create collaborative spaces where shared human dignity becomes the foundation for civic cooperation and peaceful coexistence. These practices contribute directly to contemporary global priorities, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. By positioning Franciscan values within the realities of Global Asian Catholicism, this paper advances a new analytical framework for understanding religion as a constructive public resource rather than a marker of social division.

Rev. Sattar Masih is the Founder and Chairman of Jeevan Welfare Foundation Pakistan and the Founder of Life Savers Ministry Church of Pakistan. With over 28 years of leadership in Christian ministry, humanitarian service, and interfaith engagement, he has dedicated his work to promoting peace, social justice, education, and community development. He actively collaborates with United Nations initiatives and international partners in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), fostering interfaith dialogue, and strengthening civil society.

Franciscans in Vietnam: Past, Present and Beyond

LINH HOANG

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The Spanish and Portuguese Franciscan missionaries arrived in Vietnam at different times during the Middle Ages. They were not able to maintain their presence in Vietnam due to resistance from the imperial government and suspicion from the local population. It was not until the arrival of French colonizers and missionaries that Catholicism established a firm foundation. The French Franciscans followed close behind during this French colonial establishment. The Catholic Church in Vietnam flourished and it established religious and priestly vocations among the local Vietnamese population. With these renewed efforts, the Franciscans were able to create a province that still has a visible presence today in Vietnam.

Through this historical examination, it provides a foundation of how the Franciscans, especially the OFM, have continued to maintain a strong presence with their spirituality and care of creation. Their work among the local population has moved from direct work in agricultural labour to assisting people to understand the devastation of climate change in Asia. The latest work on Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* is an example of how the spirit of Francis still remains vital. That is, Francis' spirit of rebuilding God's Church is now understood as rebuilding the Church by caring for all of God's creation.

Rev. Dr. Linh Hoang OFM is a Professor of Religious Studies at Siena University and a Franciscan friar of The Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe. He has published widely in the areas of Asian American Catholics and Christianity, Historical Theology, and Religious Studies as well as a religion textbook published in 2020. He is currently the president of the International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology (INSeCT). He is a consultant for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Office of Cultural Diversity. He is an elected commissioner for the Middle States Commission on Higher Education for accreditation.

Remembering the Franciscans: Community Narratives and Collective Memory of Mission in Selected Philippine Parishes

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The history of Franciscan evangelization in the Philippines has traditionally been reconstructed through ecclesiastical archives, missionary chronicles, and institutional records. While these sources provide invaluable historical documentation, they often privilege official perspectives and offer limited insight into how local communities have remembered, interpreted, and sustained the Franciscan legacy across generations. Consequently, the lived experiences and collective memories of ordinary Catholics remain an underexplored dimension of Philippine Franciscan history.

This study examines the collective memory of Franciscan mission through the narratives of parish elders, lay leaders, members of the Secular Franciscan Order, and other community members in selected Philippine parishes with a long-standing Franciscan presence. Grounded in Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective memory and Jan Assmann's concept of cultural memory, the research employs oral history and narrative inquiry to explore how communities recall and transmit memories of Franciscan pastoral ministry, education, social outreach, popular devotions, and community formation. The study asks: How have local communities remembered the Franciscan presence in their parishes? Through what cultural, religious, and communal practices are these memories preserved and transmitted?

Rather than treating memory as a passive recollection of the past, this study understands it as an active and dynamic process through which communities continually reinterpret their historical experience in light of present realities. It argues that the Franciscan mission is preserved not only in written archives but also in lived faith, communal rituals, oral traditions, devotional practices, and intergenerational storytelling. These forms of remembrance reveal how Franciscan values such as fraternity, humility, service, peace, and care for creation have been appropriated, adapted, and embodied within diverse Filipino contexts.

Dr. Ronel P. Dela Cruz is a professor, researcher, and anthropologist specializing in theology, anthropology, and sustainable development. He served as the Director of Research at St. Paul University Quezon City for ten years, where he led research capability-building initiatives, scholarly publication programs, and institutional research projects. He holds a Ph.D. in Applied Anthropology and a master's degree in Pastoral Ministry. He currently teaches at Miriam College, Ateneo de Manila University, and Our Lady of the Angels Franciscan Seminary.

St. Francis of Assisi: The Timeless Relevant Relic of the Past

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This year marks the 800th anniversary of the Transitus of Our Seraphic Father, St. Francis of Assisi, a figure whose charism continues to resonate across cultures and centuries. This paper explores the enduring relevance of Franciscan spirituality within the shifting paradigms of human thought, from ancient cosmocentrism to modern anthropocentrism, postmodern relativism, and the technocratic paradigm of the 21st century. The central question is whether Francis remains merely a romantic relic of medieval piety or whether his ideals offer a prophetic counternarrative to contemporary crises of meaning, justice, and ecological care.

Anchored in the Gospel, Francis' radical embrace of poverty, fraternity, and solidarity with the marginalized challenged the social hierarchies of his time. His vision of *minoritas* and *fraternitas* continues to inspire diverse communities. This study situates Francis not as a nostalgic figure but as a "living relic" whose charism transcends historical boundaries.

The experience of Franciscans in the Philippines based on available archival documents serves as a case study of this relevance. Since their arrival in 1578, the Franciscans have integrated Franciscan ideals into healthcare, education, economic empowerment, and interreligious dialogue. Institutions such as the San Juan de Dios Hospital and San Lazaro Hospital exemplify Franciscan solidarity with the poor and sick. Economic initiatives in mission areas highlight their commitment to grassroots empowerment. Their refusal to own haciendas which later became the controversial "friar lands" reflects fidelity to Francis' critique of wealth, while the establishment of Monte de Piedad demonstrates creative responses to social injustice. In modern times, Franciscan engagement in Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), as well as dialogue with Muslims in Mindanao and Indigenous Peoples in Luzon and Palawan, embodies Francis' universal fraternity.

Fray Bien Justine De Chavez Patriarca, OFM is a solemnly professed lay friar of the OFM Province of San Pedro Bautista – Philippines. He made his first profession of vows on July 8, 2023, in Liliw, Laguna, and professed his perpetual vows on May 30, 2026, at the Basilica Minore de San Pedro Bautista in San Francisco del Monte, Quezon City. He is currently assigned to the friary of Our Lady of the Angels Seminary in Bagbag, Novaliches, Quezon City. At the same time, he serves as the Provincial Archivist and Museum Curator of the Province of San Pedro Bautista.

Devotion and Conviction amidst Diversity: How Franciscan Spirituality is Understood in Modern Asian Societies

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This paper examines how Franciscan spirituality has been institutionalised and reinterpreted within contemporary Asian societies, focusing on the enduring relevance of the Franciscan charisms of *minoritas* (lowliness), *fraternitas* (fraternity), and *paupertas* (poverty) beyond their traditional theological formulations. While these concepts originated as spiritual ideals within the medieval Franciscan movement, they continue to shape educational institutions, artistic expression, ecological initiatives, and social outreach across Asia. My central research question aims to uncover how Franciscan spiritualities and charisms have been translated into contemporary institutional and cultural practices in Asian societies, focusing on how Franciscan influence continues to persist within an increasingly pluralistic and pragmatic Southeast Asia.

By utilising a qualitative, interdisciplinary methodology, this study combines documentary analysis of Franciscan texts, Church publications, and institutional archives with secondary literature from sociology, anthropology, and religious studies. Particular emphasis will be placed on the idea of lay-Catholicism, where greater focus is aimed at how laypersons within and outside of the Catholic church are able to live out their vocations as disciples of God.

Some aspects of society that can elucidate these Franciscan spiritualities include education systems, the multiplicity of art forms and expressions, as well as the idea of integral ecology, an incredibly salient tenet of St. Francis of Assisi's devotion to God. Moreover, more attention is given to Singapore, where schools such as Hai Sing Catholic School and its founding organisation, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, demonstrate how *minoritas* has been enacted through inclusive education and service to marginalised communities. The paper also considers ecological initiatives inspired by Franciscan spirituality, alongside examples from the Philippines, where Franciscan communities have institutionalised fraternity and poverty through disaster relief and humanitarian aid.

The paper argues that Franciscan spirituality should be understood as a dynamic social ethic that continues to inform institutional life in pluralistic Asian societies. Diverting from the view that *minoritas*, *fraternitas*, and *paupertas* are static theological virtues, I propose that they have been rearticulated as ethical frameworks for servant leadership, social cohesion, ecological responsibility, and solidarity with marginalised communities.

Mr. Lucas Chin is a recent graduate from the National University of Singapore, with a Bachelor's Degree in English Language and Linguistics, with a Minor in Anthropology. He specialises in linguistic anthropology, studying the effects and purposes language can play in pluralistic societies. He is also employed by the Order of Friars Minor (Singapore) as an Administrative and Archival Intern to aid in the conservation and preservation of artifacts and documents by various Franciscan organisations, particularly in St. Anthony's Friary, St Mary of the Angels.

About the Organisers and Chairpersons

Dr. Bubbles Beverly Asor is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Behavioural Sciences at De La Salle University Manila. Her research interests include labour migration, religious and migrant organizations, migrant integration, urban diversity, international migration to South Korea, and Philippine international migration.

Dr. Bryan Goh is a Senior Tutor in the Department of History at the National University of Singapore. He is a historian of Catholicism in insular Southeast Asia, with a specialization in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement.

Dr. Michel Chambon is a cultural anthropologist, theologian, and sinologist whose research focuses on Christianity in Chinese societies and Catholicism in contemporary Asia.

The ***Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholics (ISAC)*** is an international collaboration fostering social scientific research on Asian Catholics in contemporary societies. With the aim of generating new research projects, and contributing to already existing research in the Philippines, Hong Kong, India, and other places, this platform intends to expand and deepen conversations investigating the lived realities, the socio-cultural contributions, and challenges faced by Asian Catholics at the local, national, regional, and global levels. While ISAC takes a multidisciplinary approach, it particularly encourages research on contemporary Asian Catholics from the perspectives of anthropology, art, environmental studies, economy, gender studies, political sciences, and sociology. Since 2025, ISAC has entered a state of dormition.

The **GL Louis Religious Pluralism Research Cluster**, funded by an endowment established via a generous gift to honour Mr. Gnanapragasam Louis' memory, aims to foster the academic study of religious pluralism and diverse religious traditions. This research cluster seeks to explore the multifaceted landscape of religious diversity in Asia and beyond, providing a platform for interdisciplinary research and collaboration within the field of Religious Studies at FASS. With the growing complexity of religious identities and interactions in contemporary society, there is an urgent need to examine the dynamics of conflict, coexistence, and cooperation among various religious communities. Therefore, this cluster seeks to provide a scholarly platform to host events that can facilitate conversations among academics, practitioners, as well as the general public. We explore religious pluralism in the context of cultural, historical, and socio-political dimensions, aiming to deepen our understanding of its implications for contemporary society.