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LA VIRGEN DEL PILAR:
Defamiliarizing Mary and the Challenge of Interreligious Dialogue

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The Shrine of *La Virgen del Pilar* in Zamboanga City, southern Philippines, attracts thousands of people, particularly on the feast of Our Lady of the Pillar celebrated every October 12. It is the one instance in this country of a Marian shrine that is visited by both Christians and Muslims. In the seemingly never-ending conflict and violence in Mindanao this becomes an important topic of discussion.

In this context and on a personal note, allow me a few introductory, background remarks. I was born in Jolo, Sulu and spent the first sixteen years of my life living among Muslims; my family migrated to Zamboanga in the 1980s. Although I myself did not have devotion to Mary under her title as Our Lady of the Pillar, my personal status as one born and growing up in the "deep south" does, in fact, make me an interested party. Because of this, I have however taken the liberty of precisely situating my consideration of devotion to Mary as *Virgen del Pilar* within the concern to promote interreligious dialogue in Zamboanga, particularly between the Catholic and Muslim communities.

This presentation is divided into three parts: **(I)** Devotion to *Nuestra Señora, La Virgen del Pilar;* **(II)** Defamiliarizing Mary; and,

(III) Marian Devotion and the Challenge of Interreligious Dialogue. In addition, it is really a work in progress, both in terms of history and of theology. Much more remains to be done, for example, in the matter of conducting interviews among the Christian and Muslim devotees of *La Virgen del Pilar.*

There are several presuppositions underlying this piece: first, *anthropological presuppositions*, because the reality is a profoundly human reality; second, *ecclesiological presuppositions*, because the reality has to do with what it means to be Church today in Mindanao and Zamboanga; and third, *mariological presuppositions*, because, after all, the reality is all about Mary and what she means for people.

First, the subject has profound anthropological significance. It concerns devotion to a particular person who is considered holy and therefore iconic of the divine presence and dispenser of divine favors; this mystery-filled and symbol-laden person is identified as Mary.

The discussion speaks of a holy place, a place identified as sacred from which emanates a certain power that has its source beyond the earthly and the temporal, the power, for example, of healing and mercy, the power of protecting and safeguarding the population from all sorts of calamities, both natural and man-made; this holy place is identified as the Shrine to Our Lady of the Pillar. The Taosug Muslims have a term for it: the piece of land where the Shrine stands is *tampat.*

The Shrine also serves a community-making purpose; every October 12, the feast of *Nuestra Señora, La Virgen del Pilar* draws participants from everywhere in order to celebrate, even if only for a period, the fact that they are one people, one humanity out of diverse ethnic groups and social classes, with different religious creeds. All are swept as it were within the mantle of *La Virgen del Pilar*, on a piece of land that abuts the sea. Set against a long history of violence in the region, it is nothing short of remarkable to find a feast that draws and unites all sorts of people; it is nothing short of a miracle to find a devotion shared by adherents of different religions, the Christians and Muslims of Zamboanga City. Yet, this community-creating event is today under

threat from several sources. Shrines, after all, can degenerate as well into socially divisive and violence-inducive places.

Secondly, this presentation emerges from some ecclesiological presuppositions; it flows from an understanding of what it means to be Church today, particularly in a place like Mindanao. The experience of what it means to be Church in Mindanao has shapes and colors that cannot be found in other parts of the Philippines. In an essay on the mission of the Church to minorities,[1] Bishop Tagle isolates three priorities that he thinks should characterize this aspect of the Church's mission. Bishop Tagle probably did not have Muslim communities particularly in mind when he wrote this article. Nevertheless, what he says applies not only to the Church's relations with indigenous cultural communities but, *mutatis mutandis*, also with Muslim communities themselves.

Solidarity and Communion. This priority has both a negative and a positive aspect. Negatively, being Church today means

> breaking the prevailing hermeneutic of defining ourselves by withdrawing from "the others" or in the words of [the German theologian J. B.] Metz, defining "ourselves exclusively with our backs to such faces." Among the manifestations of this prevailing hermeneutic are the tendencies toward mental isolationism, tactical provincialism, existential distance, privatization of lives and the voyeuristic approach of onlookers—all contributory to the suffering of many in the world.[2]

Positively, being Church today requires a calm and joyful recognition and integration of other systems of meaning or cultures, allowing them to build up the whole. In the concrete, Tagle thinks that solidarity and communion are served when the Church realizes that she

> cannot fall back on the inadequate responses of institutionalized *diakonia* performed by social action centers and diocesan offices that somehow

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[1]Luis Antonio Tagle, "The Church's Mission Towards Minorities," *Landas* 14 (2000), 129-139.

[2]Tagle, "The Church's Mission Towards Minorities," 133.

> absolves Christians from effective *koinonia* [communion] with the real men and women who inhabit the minority world.... Solidarity demands of the Church vulnerability and sensitivity to the transforming influence of the world of the minorities.[3]

Mutuality and Complementarity. To be Church today, Bishop Tagle thinks that a relationship of mutuality and complementarity between Christian and cultural communities must be forged. Founded on respect for human dignity and presupposing a fundamental sense of equality among peoples, mutuality affirms that

> we are and become what we are, not in spite of, but because of "the others." Other-ness is rooted in a deeper communion of equals from which differences or manifestations of otherness spring. This communion is not lessened or threatened by otherness because it is precisely other-ness that makes the whole what it is. Other-ness is assumed within a more fundamental unity by making that unity depend on the mutuality of those who are "other." Mission towards minorities attempts to make mutuality a pillar on which human relationships in the world and in the Church should stand.[4]

Mutuality and complementarity therefore highlight the mutual gift that different communities can and must be for each other. Here Tagle quotes the 1991 Second Plenary Council of the Philippines: " 'In the Church, nobody is so poor as to have nothing to give, and nobody is so rich as to have nothing to receive' (PCP-II, 98)."[5] This rings true as well for communities and not just for individuals.

Prophetic Witness to Eschatological Hope. To be Church today, all are called to be "bearers of hope." This "hope" is not, in Tagle's words,

> a false optimism that denies the cries of sorrow and mourning arising from the bowels of history and the earth. Hope rather assumes the ambiguities of human situations, the pains of victims, the degradation

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[3]Tagle, "The Church's Mission Towards Minorities," 134.

[4]Tagle, "The Church's Mission Towards Minorities," 135.

[5]Tagle, "The Church's Mission Towards Minorities," 135.

of "the others" and from within them continues to believe in a future firmly held out to us.[6]

In brief, Christians must hope that a different, God-filled future lies ahead, not just for the community of Christian believers, but for all those who belong to the one family of humanity under God.

Solidarity and communion, mutuality and complementarity, and prophetic witness to eschatological hope: these are the signs of what it means to be a Church alive to its concrete situation in a place like Mindanao; these are the pillars on which stand a Church conscious of the multi-religious context in which she finds herself, a Church, therefore, that takes to heart the call to engage in interreligious dialogue and cooperation.[7]

Finally, there are some mariological presuppositions. Given Catholics' devotion to Mary, one may inquire how they approach Mary and relate to this woman. In some ways, it is disconcerting that Mary appears all too often as a waxen figure, like those found in Madame Tussaud's museum, frozen beyond time and space, or fixed

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[6]Tagle, "The Church's Mission Towards Minorities," 136.

[7]The role of the local Church in this task of interreligious dialogue and cooperation is highlighted in William LaRousse, *Walking Together Seeking Peace: The Local Church of Mindanao-Sulu Journeying in Dialogue with the Muslim Community (1965-2000)* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2001). In the Introduction, LaRousse summarizes the aim of his book: "Dialogue with Muslims and Christian Filipinos might be considered as a matter of life and death. The present situation in Mindanao calls for an end to violence, and for reconciliation and peace through dialogue and understanding. While the situation may provide an impetus for dialogue, the foundation of interreligious dialogue is not found in the temporary scene. The theological roots of dialogue are found in the nature of the Church as icon of the Trinity who has begun the dialogue of salvation with all humanity. This inquiry is about the local Church's commitment to interreligious dialogue with Muslims and an evaluation of the development of its identity as Church in a situation of living with Muslims, a situation that has been and is marred by violence." For a briefer account, see also William LaRousse, "Is Dialogue Possible? Muslims and Christians in Mindanao," *Landas* 16 (2002), 273-296.

within certain all too conventional boundaries. She becomes someone quite different from the dramatic character that she is in scripture, a theological person engaged in a dramatic encounter with the God of Israel and a dramatic relationship with her Son and his mission.[8]

Within God's salvific intentions, Mary is a woman endowed with graced freedom, who appears as she sees fit to whomever she chooses, whether it is at Tepeyac or Lourdes or Fatima. Within the Spirit-scripted role and liberating mission given her by God through Jesus Christ, there lies a divinely guaranteed freedom to gather the nations, to accompany them in their earthly pilgrimage, and to mark out the ways that lead to God. It is this that the author wishes to accentuate: Mary's graced freedom in her present state before God and before the world. The question remains: Is Mary allowed this freedom, to move and to act in the Church and in the world? Do Christians continue to set her on a pedestal according to what they narrowly determine to be her proper place? If she is granted her freedom which is hers from the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit, then all should be set on that path of solidarity and communion, mutuality and complementarity, and prophetic witness to eschatological hope. The Church needs to traverse these paths which, in fact, are elements found in the life of Mary herself: Mary in solidarity and communion with God and humanity, Mary in mutuality and complementarity with

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[8]Hans Urs von Balthasar notes: "Mary is a dramatic character because her existence lies between the various states of human nature. Not only does she belong to the Old Covenant, to the time of Christ and to the time of the Church; her horizon is even wider: she is located between a paradisal (supralapsarian) existence and human life in its fallen state; eschatologically, she exists between the latter state [of fallenness] and the final fulfillment. Nowhere does she seem to be really at home; except in her Son, who endures and overcomes the same tensions; or, ultimately, in a Church that *should* endure them but for the most part is reluctant. Understandably enough, this synthesis of all the various *status* in Mary has created huge difficulties for theology; and even the binding formulations laboriously arrived at do not give us a final glimpse of how this synthesis is achieved in her." Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Vol. III: The Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 318-319.

God and humans, Mary as embodiment of this prophetic witness to the eschatological hope that all shall be reconciled and brought to perfection in God and through God.[9]

It is within this schema framed by these anthropological, ecclesiological and mariological presuppositions that this presentation addresses the matter at hand: *La Virgen del Pilar* of Zamboanga.

I. Devotion to *Nuestra Señora, La Virgen del Pilar*

Historical Background. In considering the historical background of the devotion to Our Lady, the Virgin of the Pillar, three points need attention: first, the origin of this devotion in Spain; second, Fort Pilar in Zamboanga; and third, the shrine that is dedicated to Our Lady of the Pillar and located within the premises of the fort that bears the same name.

Zaragoza, Spain.[10] How is it that Christians in Zamboanga City have a devotion to Mary under her title *La Virgen del Pilar?* And, how is it that today there is a shrine that is precisely dedicated to *Nuestra Señora del Pilar?* A hint is already given by the *bas-relief* that is found on the façade of the wall of the Shrine itself.

The *basso-rilievo*, which in old pictures of the Shrine was a painting,

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[9]The 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops expressed the ecclesiology of communion as the central and basic idea of the Second Vatican Council's documents. The summary formula for the conciliar vision of the Church is mystery-communion-mission." Breandán Leahy, *The Marian Principle in the Church according to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Frankfurt am Main, et al.: Peter Lang, 1996), 269. Following von Balthasar, Leahy summarizes Mary's theodramatic role in terms of virginal openness, bridal responsiveness, and maternal fruitfulness (cf. 27, 222-224).

[10]For data and bibliography on the devotion to *Nuestra Señora La Virgen del Pilar de Zaragoza* and her shrine, cf. *Diccionario de Historia Eclesiástica de España, Tomo IV*, dirs. Q. Aldea Vaquero, T. Marín Martínez and J. Vives Gatell (Madrid: Instituto Enrique Florez [CSIC], 1975), 2316-2317. For data on the Diocese of Zaragoza, see 2806-2809.

shows Saint James with a staff gazing at Our Lady; she is standing on a pillar. This image recalls Zaragoza, Spain.[11]

The story is told by Father Max Rodriguez, a Spanish Claretian missionary who worked in Zamboanga for many years and who has produced a book on Our Lady of the Pillar. The story concerns

> the apostle James the Elder, one of Jesus' selected Twelve, who went to Spain to spread the good news after the Resurrection of our Lord. One day he was praying on the bank of Ebro River, rather depressed at the scarce success of his missionary activity among the people of Spain. To his great surprise and wonderment, he saw the angels transporting the Virgin from Palestine and reverently placing her on a pillar. Upon looking up, he saw Mary, the Mother of Jesus, in mortal flesh standing on that pillar. Hence the name of Our Lady of the Pillar (*Nuestra Señora del Pilar*). Mary comforted and encouraged James the Elder to continue his work of evangelization and requested that a church be built in her honor in that very place. Today there stands a magnificent church, built to her memory and in fulfillment of her request, at the very site of her personal appearance in Zaragoza.[12]

There are several things to be noted about this tradition.[13] First, it concerns an apparition or, better, a visitation of Our Lady when she was still living in the flesh. The story as told is about Mary being

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[11]The word "Zaragoza" was derived from the old Latin name of the Roman colony inhabiting the place: "*Caesaraugusta.*" A Christian community existed in Zaragoza as early as the third century. During the time of Mozarabic rule in Spain, the place was known as *"Saraqusta."* On December 18, 1118, King Alfonso I of Aragón succeeded in liberating Zaragoza from the Moors; it became the capital of the Kingdom of Aragón. The Church of Zaragoza, which was a suffragan of the Metropolitan Church of Tarragona, was raised to the dignity of an archdiocese in 1318.

[12]Max Rodriguez, *Our Lady of Pilar: Heritage of Zamboanga* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1995), 14. See also Emigdio Alvarez Enriquez, "Of Fiestas and Their Wherefores," in *Zamboanga Hermosa: Memories of the Old Town,* ed. Antonio Orendain II (Makati City: Filipinas Foundation, Inc., 1984), 189-201.

[13]This presentation does not enter into the question of the historicity of the story as told. The important point to consider is that the story is what gives the devotion to Our Lady of the Pillar its foundational meaning and significance.

bodily transported from Palestine in order to encourage one of Jesus' original twelve apostles. Second, the chapel or shrine constructed by Saint James would, in effect, be the first such building constructed in honor of Our Lady. And third, there is a strict link between the shrine at Zaragoza and that other major Spanish shrine: *Santiago de Compostela.* These three points mark the peculiarity of this Marian devotion.

Secure historical documentation for the existence of a church dedicated to Mary is to be had however only in the ninth century. Aimon, a monk of Saint Germain de Paris, wrote in the year 855 that *"la iglesia de la Virgen Maria de Zaragoza es la Madre de todas las iglesias de la ciudad."* The designation of the church as *Santa Maria del Pilar* arises only however from the thirteenth century. And, it is toward the end of this same century that one finds the first secure historical documentation of the story about Our Lady and Saint James.

Devotion to Our Lady of the Pillar became quite diffused in Spain through the centuries. Kings like Juan II de Aragón y Navarra (mid-fifteenth century) and Fernando el Catolico (late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries) took her as their personal guardian and named her protectress of the kingdom. Popes of the sixteenth century like Clement VII (1529), Paul IV (1558) and Sixtus V (1588) approved the devotion to *Nuestra Señora, La Virgen del Pilar de Zaragoza.*

It was however in the seventeenth century that a new impetus was given to its development. On March 29, 1640, the Virgin of the Pillar was declared responsible for *"uno de los milagros más grandes de la hagiografía moderna,"* the restoration of the leg of Juan Pellicer. This miracle-working character of the shrine would explain the great popularity of this particular devotion throughout Spain.

In 1678, the Spanish Cortes or parliament chose *Nuestra Señora, La Virgen del Pilar de Zaragoza* as patroness of the entire kingdom and its overseas possessions. Note that October 12, feast of Our Lady of the Pillar, was the day in 1492 when Cristobal Colon first set foot in those lands which would later be named America; this established the historical and psychological link between devotion to *La Virgen del Pilar* and *el día de la hispanidad.* October 12 is celebrated in Spain today as a

religious and secular feast to honor Our Lady and to commemorate the diffusion of the Spanish spirit abroad.

In late seventeenth century, the Spanish monarch, Carlos II, and his brother, Juan de Austria, both of whom had a deep devotion to *La Virgen del Pilar de Zaragoza*, decided to dismantle the old church and build a new one. The present Basilica and Shrine of *La Virgen del Pilar de Zaragoza* was started in 1681 following the baroque style and was completed only in 1872. It therefore took almost two hundred years to complete the massive structure. Within the church is to be found *la Santa Capilla* where the miraculous statue of Mary is venerated. This small statue, which goes back to the fourteenth century, is made of wood and stands on a silver- and bronze-plated marble pillar.

Today the Basilica and Shrine of *Nuestra Señora, La Virgen del Pilar de Zaragoza* continues to attract pilgrims and devotees from everywhere in the world.

Fort Pilar. The Jesuits were the ones who conceived the idea of building a fort in Zamboanga.[14] After a lot of hesitation on the part of the Spanish authorities, Juan Cerezo de Salamanca, governor-general of the Islands, ordered the fort to be built. He designated Juan de Chaves to head an expedition of 300 Spaniards and 1,000 *indios* from Cebu in order to begin the enterprise, and the first stone was put in place on June 23, 1635 according to plans drawn up by the Jesuit Melchor de Vera.[15] The fort was named *Fuerza de San José.* The aim was to contain the Moros of Mindanao and thereby to preserve the Christian missions in that area. It is probable as well that the fort was meant to secure control of one of the most important trade routes in Southeast Asia, the trade route that connected China, the Philippines

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[14]Maria Lourdes Díaz-Trechuelo Spínola, *Arquitectura Española en Filipinas (1565-1800)* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos de Sevilla, 1959), 362-375.

[15]Horacio de la Costa, *Jesuits in the Philippines 1581-1768* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), 325-327.

and the Moluccas. That trade route passed through the narrow channel separating Zamboanga from the island of Basilan.

In 1662, however, then governor-general Sabiniano Manrique de Lara ordered that the military detachments assigned to the forts in Zamboanga, Iligan, the Calamianes, and the Moluccas be recalled to Manila in order to neutralize the threat posed by Koxinga to Manila and Cavite. In 1666, the Jesuits would petition the *Consejo de Indias* to reopen the fort. No action was taken. And so it happened that the *Fuerza de San José* would remain abandoned for 57 years, falling into disrepair.

In 1672, a royal decree ordered the restoration of the fort in Zamboanga. But it was only on November 24, 1718 however that Fernando Manuel de Bustillo, then governor-general, was able to personally organize an expedition to Mindanao which set out from Cavite. On April 5, 1719, he and his men entered the dilapidated *Fuerza de San José, "arbolando en ella la santa cruz y el estandarte y armas reales."* The governor-general then designated Gregorio de Padilla y Escalante to oversee the restoration of the fort, with the aging Juan de Ciscara as chief engineer of the whole project. In the instructions given to these men by the governor-general, the name of the fort was changed from *Fuerza de San José* to *Fuerza de Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Zaragoza*; this decision was most probably inspired by the choice of *La Virgen del Pilar de Zaragoza* as the patroness of Spain and all her overseas dominions in 1678. Furthermore, three of its four bulwarks or bastions were given the names of *San Felipe, San Fernando, San Luis* in honor of the royal sons, while the fourth bulwark was given the name *San Francisco Javier*, whom common and conventional wisdom then erroneously believed to have been in Mindanao. From this time on, the fort would never be abandoned again.

The fort has undergone various metamorphoses. In the nineteenth century, one finds this report from the Jesuit missionary Pablo Banqué:

> The fort of Zamboanga is a regular square with bastions at the four corners. It is called the Fort of Our Lady of the Pillar because the Blessed Virgin, under this title, is the patroness. According to some

historians, it was erected at the beginning of the eighteenth century. If true it must have undergone various modifications, like, for example, the removal of six bastions and the lookout tower, the disappearance of the church and the hospital which Mr. Sonnerat, Subcommisary of the French Marines, described and painted in 1769 when on his way to New Guinea.[16] Perhaps those who assert it was constructed during the governorship of Folgueras in the first third of this century are correct.[17] If so, the fort of Zamboanga has already been abandoned twice and rebuilt also twice, but not according to the original plan drawn up by our Fr. Melchor de Vera who in his time was much esteemed by experts in construction. Besides, the first one was erected close to the mouth of the river, where the ditch debouches according to the account by Fr. Murillo,[18] who visited it in 1637. The present one is close to the city. I visited it in the company of Fr. Carreras, and with Mr. Caudras, mayor of the plaza, I took a walk along its walls. Inside, the garrison is lodged in respectable rooms of the precinct. The mayor called our attention to the phenomenon of the land elevation towards the northeast, where there used to be a small bay, but is now filled with layers of sand and dirt teeming with mollusks of the genus *oliva, mitr, conus, neritach, strombus, ciperaea, trous haliotis, arca oricata, lucinaa, circe,* but in a bad state, with white coral and pieces of red coral eaten away, like much of the beach and the low land of this district.[19]

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[16]This reference is to Pierre Sonnerat, *Voyage aux Indes orientales et à la Chine..., depuis 1774 jusqu'en 1781: dans lequel on traite de moeurs, de la religion, des sciences & des arts des Indiens ..., les Philippines & les Moluques, & de recherches sur l'histoire naturelle de ces pays,* 2 Vols. (Paris: Chez l'auteur, 1782).

[17]Arcilla says that Mariano Fernandez de Folgueras was interim governor-general of the Philippines from 1806-1810 and 1816-1822. See the letter of Pablo Banqué, SJ, Zamboanga, on April 10, 1994, to Hermenegildo Jacas, SJ, in *Jesuit Missionary Letters from Mindanao, Vol. II: The Zamboanga-Basilan-Jolo Mission,* ed., tr., and an. Jose S. Arcilla (Quezon City: U.P. Press, 2000).

[18]This refers to Pedro Murillo Velarde, SJ, who wrote a history of the Jesuit missions in the Philippines. See the letter of Pablo Banqué, SJ, Zamboanga, on April 10, 1994, to Hermenegildo Jacas, SJ, in *Jesuit Missionary Letters from Mindanao, Vol. II: The Zamboanga-Basilan-Jolo Mission.*

[19]Letter of Pablo Banqué, SJ, Zamboanga, 10 April 1994, to Hermenegildo Jacas, SJ, in *Jesuit Missionary Letters from Mindanao, Vol. II: The Zamboanga-Basilan-Jolo Mission,* 40-41.

All throughout its history, the fort became the scene of various bloody conflicts. Adolfo Navarro has written:

> In 1720, the king of Bulig, Dalasi, together with 3,000 Moros, stormed the fort. In 1798, it was bombarded by the British and became the scene of a mutiny in 1872. Later events saw the fort captured by American expeditionary forces in 1899, surrendered to Japanese forces in 1942, and recaptured by American liberation troops in March, 1945. The historic fort was finally turned over to the government of the Republic of the Philippines on July 4, 1946, upon the withdrawal of American sovereignty from the islands.[20]

All through these years, the community around the fort grew. The Jesuits built a church and a school. There was a hospital as well, and various other buildings. The town expanded toward the west and the north of the fort, and Zamboanga became one of the most important centers of Spanish power and culture.

During the American regime, Fort Pilar was "occupied by the offices and warehouses of the Quartermaster, Finance, Ordnance, Signal and Engineer Department."[21] Though not based on reliable data, some suppose it was during the American period when the northeast gate was sealed off and the area took on its present configuration.

Today, the fort houses a museum. But its most important feature is the outdoor Shrine of *Nuestra Señora, La Virgen del Pilar*, located on the external façade of its northeastern wall.

The Shrine. Initially the image of Our Lady was placed in a chapel within the fort itself. It is not known when the image of Our Lady was put on the space above the northeastern gate leading into the fort. It could be that this took place sometime in January 1734. There are two inscriptions on this façade, the first located at the base of the pillar,[22]

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[20]Adolfo C. Navarro, "Miracle at the Fort," in *Zamboanga Hermosa*, 197.

[21]"Fort Pillar *(Fuerto del Pilar)*," *Archives: Philippine Province, Society of Jesus* (APPSJ) XIV-23-101, a brief account of the Fort and the Shrine written probably in 1935.

[22]The first of two frontispiece inscriptions on the northeastern wall, which is

the second at the top.[23] In any case, given the lacuna in the data about the Shrine, the following points need to be considered.

To be noted is the different image of Our Lady as it appears on the wall, different, that is, from the original and canonical image of Our Lady of the Pillar of Zaragoza. First, note that the original image is a statue; what Zamboanga has is a rather crude *basso-rilievo*. Second, the image of the *basso-rilievo* does not correspond to the image of the original.[24] The artist of the *basso-rilievo* is not known. But it is interesting to note that the embossed image of Our Lady is dressed in what appears to be a *malong* or a *patadyong*. It is perhaps a local version of an inculturated image of Mary, less elegant than Our Lady of Guadalupe to be sure, but clearly native enough to merit attention.

A story, narrated by Emigdio Enriquez, is often told that

> when the Church was constructed, the Lady of the Pillar was chosen as its patroness. An image of the Lady was ordered from Spain. But

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located right below the pillar and in fact is its base, reads: *"Regiendo las Españas la Catholica magestad de Don Phelipe V emperador del nuevo mundo americano y governando estas islas philipinas el muy ilustre señor Mariscal de campo Don Fernando Bustillo y Rueda Governador y Capitan General se establecio y readifico esta real fuerza de Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Zaragoza lo que hizo el ilustre General Don Gregorio Padilla y Escalante Abril del año de 1719."*

[23]The second of two frontispiece inscriptions on the wall of the fort, which today is located directly above the pillar and under the image of Our Lady, reads: *"Governando esta fortaleza el Señor Don Antonio de la Torre Bustamante se hizo este prontispicio por henero de 1734 AÑOS."* It is not absolutely clear to this writer what *prontispicio* refers to; does it refer to the image as well? If so, then the image would date to 1734. If not, then it still is not known when the image of Our Lady was put on the wall.

[24]This author does not agree therefore with Ronaldo Bautista when he wrote that "(i)n 1734, the image of the Virgin of the Pillar was brought over from Zaragoza, Spain, and embossed on the eastern wall of the fortress...." (Ronaldo Bautista, "Zamboanga through Legend and History: Proud Heritage, Glorious Past," in *Zamboanga Hermosa,* 87). How can an existing image (a statue) be embossed on a wall? Apart from the fact that the image stands on a pillar, it is just plain different from the image of Our Lady of the Pillar in Zaragoza. In any case, see the otherwise excellent historical account in Bautista, "Zamboanga through Legend and History: Proud Heritage, Glorious Past," in *Zamboanga Hermosa,* 81-103.

> the image was long in coming and the church authorities, anxious to inaugurate the holy edifice, decided to install an available image of the Immaculate Conception in its place. When the image of the Lady of the Pillar finally arrived, the authorities had to pack it back in its crate and send it away to Dipolog where the church did not yet have a patron saint on the altar. However, when the crate reached Dipolog, the image was gone. It was presumed to have been stolen.[25]

Note that it was a church that was being constructed, not a shrine. But this story surely gives a hint on why the Cathedral church of the city is dedicated to Mary under her title of the Immaculate Conception. It must also be noted that the Jesuits, the primary evangelizers of the region, were promoters of the cult of the Immaculate Conception in the country. However, it must be said that it was around the title of *La Virgen del Pilar* that Marian devotion in Zamboanga primarily revolved. This phenomenon could be explained by the fact that it was *La Virgen del Pilar* who was identified as the miracle-worker; the Immaculate Conception was perhaps just a bit too cerebral a mystery to appeal to the common imagination.

In any case, the image of Our Lady on the wall certainly does not correspond to the original image in Zaragoza. It is not known for sure when her image was put up there, or who the artist was. The sure thing is that people flock to this shrine to pay respect to her image identified as *La Virgen del Pilar*.[26] Though not an exact replica of the original *Nuestra Señora, La Virgen del Pilar de Zaragoza, La Virgen del Pilar de Zamboanga* serves as the city's protectress, guardian, and source of inspiration.

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[25]Emigdio Alvarez Enriquez, "Of Fiestas and Their Wherefores," 189.

[26]The Jesuit missionaries assigned to Zamboanga refer to celebrations of Our Lady's various feasts in their letters. Thus, Juan Carreras, SJ, wrote on November 11, 1880 to the Mission Superior in Manila: "In the important feasts, no less than 150 persons approach to purify their conscience in the holy tribunal of penance, and in the principal feasts of the Blessed Virgin, such as those of Carmel, Pilar, Rosary, Immaculate Conception, attendance goes up to more than 200." *Jesuit Missionary Letters from Mindanao, Vol. II: The Zamboanga-Basilan-Jolo Mission,* 3.

The practice used to be that people would go to the Shrine every Saturday, light candles, and offer prayers of supplication and thanksgiving. It was also common for families to congregate at the Shrine in the late afternoon of the day. During her feast day, Our Lady of the Pillar draws pilgrims from all the surrounding areas, including Taosugs, Yakans, and Samals from as far as the islands of the Sulu archipelago, and Subanons from their villages in the provinces of Zamboanga del Sur and Zamboanga del Norte.

Previously, the area was an open-space shrine. Today, various improvements have been made. The space has been enclosed with a fence on which stand various statues. The stations of the *via crucis* are represented in the niches on the posts and walls of this fence. There are three main kiosks within the enclosed space: the first is a chapel where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved; the second is a place where Shrine personnel hold office; and the third, which is built against the wall, houses several statues and images of Our Lady. The main altar is now under a canopy. On the main wall itself, a niche contains a freestanding crucifix. Around this open-air sanctuary one finds cement benches. To the left of the sanctuary, along the fortress wall, space is provided for candles lit by devotees. In the middle of this space stands a huge white cross. The place is well kept; plants and flowers add color to the environment. On the whole, one gets the impression that the city has done well in making the holy place a site of prayer and devotion.

Contemporary Context: Zamboanga. One cannot prescind from the fact that the Shrine of *Nuestra Señora, La Virgen del Pilar* is located in Zamboanga City.[27] By force of historical circumstance,

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[27]Zamboanga became a chartered city on October 12, 1936, the Feast of Our Lady of the Pillar. It covers a huge territory, second only to Davao City in extension: 142,099.99 hectares or 1,420.99 square kilometers, divided into 61 barangays. The population of the city stands at 596,695 (2000 census: cf. http://zamboanga.net/CityBarangays.htm). There is a move to divide Zamboanga City into two civil districts: the first would be a down-sized Zamboanga City, the other would be a separate province composed of various *barangays* stretching from the east to the west.

the city has always been a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious urban center.[28] In 2002, it counted 600,127 inhabitants, 76% of whom are Catholics (456,096). Non-Catholics therefore make up 24% of the population; one can safely assume that the great majority of this 24% is Muslim.[29] Zamboanga, which became a diocese in 1910 and elevated to an archdiocese in 1958, has been under the pastoral care of Archbishop Carmelo D. F. Morelos (since March 7, 1995). The archdiocese has 72 priests and 72 religious sisters. The city's scattered 61 barangays are divided into 23 parishes.

Presumably, Protestants, Muslims, Buddhists, and others comprise the 24% non-Catholic population of the city, with the Muslims taking the lion's share. But, if one looks at the region as a whole and not just Zamboanga, then the picture radically changes. According to the *2002 Catholic Directory of the Philippines,* the Prelature of Ipil, lying just north of Zamboanga, has a Catholic population that is 68% of the total (384,581 out of 564,730). To the south of Zamboanga, the Prelature of Isabela, which includes the big island of Basilan, the Catholic population accounts for only 27% of the total population (82,258 out of 303,023). And farther to the south, the Apostolic Vicariate of Jolo, which covers the Sulu and Tawi-Tawi provinces, has a Catholic population of only 2.5% of the total (23,300 out of

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[28]Subanons, Taosugs, Yakans, Samals and Badjaus mingle with Visayans of all kinds (Cebuanos, Boholanos, Ilongos, Negrenses, etc.) and with the descendants of Spaniards, Portuguese, Irish, Dutch, Americans, Germans, English, Indians, Chinese, Malaysians and Indonesians.

[29]These figures are taken from *The 2002 Catholic Directory of the Philippines* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002), 263-266. The Catholic percentage share of Zamboanga's population has been steadily declining, not because the Catholic population is declining but because Muslim migration into the City has been rising, probably due to the armed conflict in predominantly Muslim provinces like Basilan and Sulu, and in Zamboanga del Sur, which has a sizable Muslim minority. In 1995, Catholics accounted for 86% (427,236) of the total population of 496,786. In 1999, they accounted for 84% (448,937) of the total population of 535,074. Today, this share has precipitously fallen to 76%. All these figures are taken from the annual directories issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.

913,750). Given these figures, the Catholic population in the region composed of the Prelature of Ipil, the Archdiocese of Zamboanga, the Prelature of Isabela and the Apostolic Vicariate of Jolo would account for 40% of the total population (946,235 Catholics out of 2,381,630). This leaves 1,435,395 non-Catholics, which is 60% of the total population of the region. It should be safe to assume that the Muslim population accounts for the majority of this 60%. Roughly, therefore, there is a near parity in Catholic and Muslim populations in the region. This writer would estimate: 50-55% Muslim, 40% Catholic, and 5-10% Protestant, Buddhist, Animist, and others. What these figures reveal is that, in the region which includes half the province of Zamboanga del Sur, Sibuguey, Zamboanga City, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, interreligious dialogue and cooperation are not options; rather, they are imperatives.

Devotion to *Nuestra Señora, La Virgen del Pilar.* Particular interest in this devotion is determined by the multi-religious context of its location and its followers. This is a rather rare phenomenon in the world. Examples usually given are the following.[30]

At Algiers, capital of Algeria in North Africa, there is a shrine to *Notre Dame d'Afrique* that is under the care of the White Fathers.[31] This shrine is visited by both Christian and Muslim sailors who venerate an image of Our Lady there. It seems that she is held to be primarily the protectress of sailors who are exposed to possible distress at sea.

There is a shrine in Turkey which is called "the house of the Virgin Mary" or "Maryam Ana."[32] The shrine recalls the story of how Mary

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[30]Material drawn from the lecture notes of Sr. Lillian Curaming, FMM, which carry the title "Mary in Islam." She has graciously provided a mimeographed copy of these notes. Her notes will be used again in detailing the presence of Mary in the *Qur'an* and in Islamic tradition.

[31]For greater detail on the Basilica and the Shrine of *Notre Dame d'Afrique*, which is found in the capital city of Algiers, Algeria, visit the site: http://perso.wanadoo.fr/bernard.venis/Alger/notre_dame_afrique/notre_dame_afrique.htm

[32]Material accessed at: http://www.ephesusguide.com/ephesusmap.html

lived her final years in the city of Ephesus under the care of Saint John the Evangelist. Again, this shrine is visited by both Christian and Muslim pilgrims.

Finally, Jesuits from India note that several Marian shrines in the Asian sub-continent are visited not just by Catholics but also by Muslims and Hindus.[33] At least four of them can be named: Our Lady of Good Health Shrine at Vailankanni, Chennai,[34] Our Lady, Mother of Divine Grace at Mokameh,[35] the Holy Rosary Shrine at Bandel, Kolkata,[36] and Our Lady of the Mount Shrine at Bandra.[37]

The Shrine of Our Lady of the Pillar in Zamboanga belongs to this group of Marian shrines. But, what makes it even more peculiar is the fact that it leans against the wall of a military fort! Father Max Rodriguez expresses the peculiarity of this shrine in an excellent manner.

> The shrine has been carved into the wall of a "fortress," a contradictory symbol in itself. A fortress normally evokes memories of invasions, wars, hatred, divisions. It was so with Fort Pilar. The history of Southern Philippines, and of Zamboanga in particular, has been a rather violent one and in some ways, still is. So much blood was spilled on the very wall where Our Lady stands now as the patron saint of Zamboanga. Undoubtedly, in the minds of the rude Spanish soldiers that guarded the garrison of the Fort in the past, the Virgin of Pilar was "on their side," a shield against their "enemies." But the Virgin of the Pillar

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[33]A good general internet resource on Mary is to be found on the website managed by Johan Roten of the University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio. Though far from complete, the site provides addresses of several shrines. Please see: http://www.udayton.edu/mary/main.html

[34]See: http://www.chennaionline.com/toursntravel/placesofworship/vailankanni.asp

[35]See: http://www.petersnet.net/research/retrieve.cfm?RecNum=3175

[36]See: http://www.logincalcutta.com/tours/hooghlyOthers1.html#top

[37]See: http://theory.tifr.res.in/bombay/physical/geo/bandra.html

> patiently changed it all. With the passage of time, she has transformed "her Fort" from a bastion of war into a symbol of peace, reconciliation and dialogue. It is the greatest miracle performed by Our Lady of Pilar in this city. The very location of the Fort speaks for itself. It stands at the frontier of Muslim and Christian communities. In a sense, she belongs to both communities, for she is respected by all and praised in the sacred books of both great religions, the Qur'an and the Bible.
>
> At a time where dialogue between the different religions of the earth is of paramount importance for peace, the Shrine of Fort Pilar is a place where religious dialogue between Muslims and Christians becomes daily routine, a fact of everyday life.[38]

Many stories have been told by both Christians and Muslims about the solicitude that Our Lady, or *Sayyida* in Arabic, has always exercised over Zamboanga and her people. Two particular occurrences of a natural calamity serve as the backdrop to Marian miracles. On September 21, 1897, a massive earthquake shook the land and unleashed a tsunami.[39] Our Lady was then seen "standing in mid-air over the Basilan Strait," and those who witnessed the apparition testified that Mary "had her right hand raised to signal the onrushing waves to stop." The city was spared death and destruction. Again, at midnight, August 16, 1976, there was another tsunami-creating earthquake, and Mary was once again seen over the sea, protecting the city from disaster. This second earthquake killed over 8,000 people and laid the coastal communities of the Moro Gulf to waste. For communities, both Christian and Muslim, Mary is seen as protectress of the city, as one

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[38]Cited in the yearbook *Archdiocese of Zamboanga: 90th Anniversary 1910-2000* (Zamboanga City, 2000); cf. Rodriguez, *Our Lady of Pilar*, 17.

[39]Extreme damage would have been reported to the Jesuit Mission Superior in Manila. Instead, what one has is a rather laconic account of a meeting held on October 10, 1897: *"Preguntó el R. P. Vice Superior si convendría hacer algo con ocasión de los terremotos de Zamboanga. Pareció a todos que habiendo tomado la iniciativa el coronel Real nosotros no debíamos hacer cosa alguna oficialmente. En cuanto a los N.N. que se aguardara á que expusieran sus necesidades."* "463: Consulta del 10 Octubre 1897," *APPSJ* IV (1884).

therefore who has power to prevent death and destruction and to preserve life and community.

Finally, one should not forget the many stories told about assistance of one kind or the other extended by Our Lady to people. This is one area where a wider and deeper kind of research can be done. Although this writer has not been able to personally document cases of miraculous cures attributed to Our Lady of the Pillar, he would like nevertheless to focus attention on one such cure. Though not through the mediation of Our Lady of the Pillar, nevertheless the important point to consider is that it was through Our Lady of Carmel that a Muslim woman claimed she was miraculously cured of her cancer in 1997. The Muslim woman's name is Karatul A. Silbin, probably 60 years old now, married and mother of five children. The last bit of news of her is that she continues to reside with her family in Jolo, Sulu.[40]

II. Defamiliarizing Mary

In this section of the presentation "defamiliarizing Mary" is used in two senses: an objective sense and a subjective sense.

Objective Sense: Recuperating Mary's Otherness. If there is anything that characterizes Marian devotion, it is that quality of the familiar that comes to mind. She is familiar not just in the vague sense of somebody who seems to be an acquaintance from the past; she is familiar in the sense of belonging to the family. She is familiar because everything about her is familial. She is also familiar in the sense of someone who is present; Mary is there, always there. And because she is there, one can always turn to her in moments of need and distress.

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[40]Data was taken from photocopied notes of Karatul A. Silbin, with medical records attached. I wish to thank Vicente Marasigan, SJ, for making these notes available to me. They are one more testimony to the multi-religious appeal of Mary such that, where the common *tao* (person) is concerned, it does not matter whether she is to be located in a Christian place or not.

This explains why her most familiar title therefore is that of Mother. This is the reason why she appeals to everyone; Filipinos have even taken to calling her in a familiar way: "Mama Mary."

In what sense then does one speak of the need to defamiliarize Mary in an objective way? It is in no other sense but to break whatever restrictions the familiar imposes on her person and her role. One cannot attempt an extended and detailed discussion of this point here. Suffice it to say that what the author has in mind is to recuperate a healthy sense of the analogical language that is used in order to make sense of Christian commitments and beliefs, in this case, of devotion to "Our Lady." Mary is virgin, but she is more than a virgin as this term is usually understood. Mary is bride, but she is more than a bride as one usually understands this word. Mary is mother, but she is more than a mother as people usually understand this familiar word. The objective sense therefore of defamiliarizing Mary points to this more, and nothing else.

How does one go about recuperating that otherness of Mary that is more than what is familiar? This writer proposes that one look at her as Muslims understand her.

Mary in Islam. A caveat needs to be mentioned right at the beginning of this treatment of Mary in Islam. There is a sense to saying that, in Islam, as compared to Christianity, Mary is in fact "less"; Islamic Mariology is a "low Mariology." Here, a divide separates Christians from their Muslim brothers and sisters; a Christian understanding of Mary is tied to an understanding of Jesus Christ and the Trinitarian doctrine of God, and Jesus Christ holds a surplus of meaning that he does not have for Muslims. Nevertheless, although Mary seems "less" in Islam than in Christianity, Christians from their vantage point must say that Mary is the *Mother of all Muslims* as well, the Mother of all those who surrender their lives to the will of God, the Mother of all who submit to Allah. And because Christians believe this to be true, they are invited to listen to what Muslims have to say about Mary.

Mary in the Qur'an. It might surprise many to find out that Mary is mentioned 34 times in the *Qur'an*, certainly much more than in the

New Testament of the Bible.[41] A whole chapter, *Surah 19*, is named after her. Another chapter, *Surah 3*, carries the title "The House of *'Imran*," "*'Imran*" being the Arabic word for Joaquim, the father of Mary. Note that, for Muslims, the Holy *Qur'an* is the highest religious authority they have. In functional terms, the Holy *Qur'an* is for the Muslim what Jesus Christ is for the Christian. In doctrinal terms, the *Holy Qur'an* is the *Word of God made Script*, just as for Christians Jesus Christ is the *Word of God made Human.* What data about Mary, then, is found in these *Qur'anic* chapters?

> First, one finds narratives of Mary's birth, life, and election as the mother of the prophet Isa, or Jesus, all episodes demonstrating that she is the most exalted woman in Islam.[42] Like her son, "she was showered with God's blessings." "In her mother's womb she was already consecrated to God, in order to dedicate her life especially to God's service."[43] She was "the chosen one among all women."[44] According to Islamic experts, the name "Mary" signifies "servant-adorer." The *Qur'an*, with a certain abandon that contrasts markedly with the reticence of the Bible, revels in stories of Mary's childhood and her infancy years. As a child, she grew up in the temple precincts under the care of Zakariya:

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[41]This text is taken from a videoconference by Father Stuart Bate, OMI, on "Mariology from Vatican Council II until Today," organized by the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy and disseminated by the Catholic news agency Zenit.org on June 1, 2002.

[42]"O Mary! God has chosen you and purified you—chosen you above the women of all nations" (3:42).

[43]"Behold! A woman of *'Imran* said: 'O my Lord! I do dedicate unto you what is in my womb for your special service'" (3:35).

[44]"When she was delivered, she said: 'O my Lord! Behold! I am delivered of a female child!' And God knew best what she brought forth. And no wise is the male like the female. I have named her Mary. And I commend her and her offspring to your protection, from the Evil one, the Rejected" (3:36).

Right graciously did her Lord accept her.
He made her grow in purity and beauty.
To the care of Zakariya was she assigned.
Every time he entered her chamber to see her,
he found her supplied with sustenance.
He said, "O Mary! Whence comes this to you?"
She said: "From God: for God provides sustenance
to whom he pleases, without measure." (3:37)[45]

According to Sister Lillian Curaming, Muslim mystics love to "meditate on this life of Mary as one enclosed in the Temple, praying and receiving her (spiritual) food from God." In this way, Mary herself has become an exemplar of the mystical life.

Mary of course figures in the *Qur'an* in the narratives of the annunciation. "Mary was chosen among all women to be the mother of a holy son ... [a message] announced to her through God's messenger who is identified by commentators as the angel Gabriel."[46] In the *Qur'anic* account of this episode in Mary's life, she is "frightened," whereas Lk. 1:29 portrays Mary as "deeply troubled by his words, and wondered what his greeting meant." And though Islam does not accept Jesus to be of divine paternity, nevertheless the *Qur'an* testifies to the miraculous nature of his virgin birth.[47] Muslims accept that Jesus had no human father, although they draw a different theological conclusion from this than Christians do. Mary also experienced ostracism because of the circumstances of her birth; her relatives "were angered" because

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[45]The apocryphal writing, *Pseudo-Matthew*, in chapters 4-6, contains related material on the life of Mary.

[46]"Then we sent to her an angel, and he appeared before her as a man in all respects" (19:17).

[47]"So she conceived him. And retired with him to a remote place" (19:22).

she had brought disgrace to her family.[48] "To this calumny and slander of her relatives, Mary's response was silence. She left Jesus to defend her. And her son was kind to her" (19:29-34).

Mary's Privileges and Virtues. In summary fashion, one can enumerate Mary's privileges and virtues in the *Qur'an* under various headings. First, *Mary is the elected and purified one.* In this one hears echoes of the Catholic doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception, although Islam has quite a different understanding of sin. In any case, Islam counts her in many instances as first in rank among several holy women (Khadijah, the Prophet Muhammad's wife; Aisha, wife of Pharaoh and foster mother of Moses; and Fatima, Muhammad's daughter).[49]

Second, *Mary is the Virgin par excellence.* The *Qur'an* states: *"And remember her who guarded her chastity: We breathed into her of Our Spirit, and We made her and her Son a sign for all people"* (21:91).

Third, *Mary is a faithful believer.* Mary is therefore a model of faith in *Allah.* She is, in other words, an exemplar of what it means to be a Muslim in the first place: the one who surrenders his or her will to God. She is also portrayed in the *Qur'an* as testifying to that faith; this corresponds to the Gospel's account of her *fiat: "And Mary the daughter*

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[48]"At length she brought the babe to her people, carrying him in her arms. They said: 'O Mary! Truly an amazing thing have you brought'"! (19:27); "O sister of Aaron! Your father was not a man of evil, nor your mother a woman unchaste"! (19:28).

[49]"Ath-Tha'labî relates a tradition that the four best women in the history of the world are Mary, the mother of Jesus, Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh, Khadîja, the first wife of Muhammad, and Fâima, his daughter. Bukhârî, author of the foremost collection of tradition *(adîth),* explains that Mary was the best woman in her time, while Khadîja was the best woman of her own time. No comparisons are made except when speaking of Fâima, who is called 'the first lady (*sayyida*) of the women of Paradise.' Ibn-Athîr, Amad ibn-anbal and Abû-Ja'far a-abarî, other collectors of *adîth,* add the qualification: Fâima is the 'first lady of the women of Paradise, after Mary daughter of 'Imrân.' Yet other *adîth* give the preponderance of honour to Fâima." Joseph Kenny, *Jesus and Mary in Islam* (Lagos: Dominican Publications, 2002). This data was retrieved from Dominican Publications Website, Lagos.

of 'Imran, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into her body of our Spirit; and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of his Revelations and was one of the devout servants" (66:12).

Fourth, *Mary is devout and prayerful.* In her young life, she grew up within the temple precincts. The *Qur'an* exhorts her: "O Mary! Worship your Lord devoutly. Prostrate yourself, and bow down in prayer with those who bow down" (3:43).

Finally, *Mary is the Mother of Jesus.* "*Ibn Maryam*" ("Son of Mary") is the oldest name of Jesus in the *Qur'an.* This title of Jesus appears 24 times in Islam's holy book. Compare this to the one instance this is true in the Gospels (Mk. 6:3). The important point to consider however is that Jesus and Mary are together considered to be "a single sign to the nations" (23:50 and also 21:91).

Mary in Islamic Tradition. The *Hadith* is the second highest religious authority in Islam. The *Hadith* is for the Muslim what the Bible is for the Christian. The *Hadith* is Islam's collection of traditions that came to be written down. Although they do not have the same authority as the *Qur'an*, nevertheless they derive inspiration from it and seek to explicate it. As Lilian Curaming notes, "A *hadith* says 'that no child is born without being touched by Satan.' The newborn baby cries because of this touch. But Mary and her son were the only ones preserved from this evil touch of Satan." Another *hadith* goes further by saying that "Mary and Jesus have not sinned like the rest of mankind. So Islam believes that Mary and Jesus never sinned."[50]

Other *hadith* narrate stories of Mary as *fianceé* of Joseph the carpenter, who is acknowledged to be her cousin and becomes her *"quasi epoux,"* "quasi husband." These stories tell of the flight to Egypt, and Egyptians love to point to the spot on the banks of the Nile River where *Maryam* bathed her child. Still other stories tell of the coming of the Magi, the massacre of the Innocents, and the miracle at Cana. They also tell of how Jesus appeared to his mother after he was "lifted

[50]Lilian Curaming, "Mary in Islam" (Unpublished lecture notes), 5.

up to heaven," clearly a reference to Jesus' resurrection/ascension; here one finds an Islamic account of the *Salubong* [Encounter] between Mary and the Resurrected Jesus that Filipinos celebrate on Easter morning. Finally, Muslims believe that, "6 to 8 years after her son's apparition, Mary died at the age of 51 years old."

Mary in Islamic Devotional Practice. It has already been pointed out that, in several places, Muslims do not feel any embarrassment in frequenting Marian shrines. Perhaps this could be explained by a story told about Muhammad:

> Islam is generally opposed to any human images, particularly in connection with worship. Yet, according to al-Azraqî, who wrote a biography of Muhammad around 830, when Muhammad conquered Mecca, "he ordered that all the idols which were around the Ka'ba should be collected, smashed and burned. The Meccans had put pictures in the Ka'ba, including two of Jesus, son of Mary, and Mary. A Ghassân woman joined the pilgrimage of the Arabs and when she saw the picture of Mary in the Ka'ba said, 'My father and my mother be your ransom! You are surely an Arab woman!' The Messenger of God [i.e., Muhammad] ordered all the pictures to be erased except those of Jesus and Mary."[51]

This story corresponds it seems to the experience of many overseas Filipino workers in Saudi Arabia. Bibles and statues and rosaries are confiscated by Saudi Customs officials; but, pictures or *estampitas* of Our Lady and the child Jesus are allowed.

Another story establishes a link between one of Our Lady's titles, Our Lady of Fatima, and the Muslim world. Fatima was the name of the daughter of the last Muslim ruler of Portugal. She chose to remain behind when the Muslims were constrained to leave Portugal. Her husband, who was Catholic, decided to change the name of their town to Fatima. Fatima of course was the name of Muhammad's favorite daughter. Sister Lilian Curaming quotes Bishop Fulton Sheen:

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[51]Kenny, *Jesus and Mary in Islam.* Retrieved from Dominican Publications Website, Lagos.

"I believe that the Blessed Virgin chose to be known as 'Our Lady of Fatima' as a pledge and sign of hope to the Muslim people."[52]

Subjective Sense: Mary Defamiliarizes Us. Every Christian Marian devotee must surely hold that Mary partakes of the mystery of God and her son Jesus Christ and of the world of humanity. Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar recognized the difficulty of arriving at a final synthesis of who Mary is. In constructing a Mariology, he acknowledged that

> Mary is a dramatic character because her existence lies between the various states of human nature. Not only does she belong to the Old Covenant, to the time of Christ and to the time of the Church; her horizon is even wider: she is located between a paradisal (supralapsarian) existence and human life in its fallen state; eschatologically, she exists between the latter state [of fallenness] and the final fulfillment. Nowhere does she seem to be really at home; except in her Son, who endures and overcomes the same tensions; or, ultimately, in a Church that should endure them but for the most part is reluctant. Understandably enough, this synthesis of all the various states in Mary has created huge difficulties for theology; and even the binding formulations laboriously arrived at do not give us a final glimpse of how this synthesis is achieved in her.[53]

"Nowhere does she seem to be really at home; except in her Son...." If this is the case, then everyone's task is to allow Mary to orient them about herself and her son. This means that the final measure of devotion to Mary is no other than Mary herself. Mary is the best critic of all Marian devotions and Marian practices. And this means that Mary is not there to be owned; rather, she defamiliarizes all about herself and her son; she challenges and leads, beyond the usual comfort zones, to, in Saint Paul's words, those "things which

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[52]Curaming, *Mary in Islam,* 6, cited in James Kroeger, *Living Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 124.

[53]Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Vol. III: The Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 318-319.

eye has not seen, which ear has not heard and which have not entered into the human heart, all these God has prepared for those that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9).

It is in the context of interreligious dialogue that the force of John Paul II's writings on Mary are manifested. If Marian spirituality is the spirituality of spiritualities, then every Christian must attend in the Spirit to Mary in prayer and contemplation, so that, following John Paul II in his apostolic letter on the Rosary, with Mary they may remember Christ, from Mary they may learn about Christ, and with Mary they may be conformed to Christ.[54] How this relates to the imperative of interreligious dialogue is the concern of the next section.

III. Marian Devotion and Interreligious Dialogue

Marian Matrix of Interreligious Dialogue. There are two references to Mary in *Nostra Aetate* (NA), Vatican II's Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions. One refers to the Jewishness of Mary. The other refers to the fact that Muslims "also honor Mary, his virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion" (NA 3).

On December 8, 1995, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, the American Muslim Council awarded Cardinal William Keeler of Baltimore its "Mahmoud Abu Saud Excellence Award." In his address that dealt with Muslim-Christian dialogue and Mary, the Cardinal of Baltimore said:

> What a propitious moment it is, therefore, that finds Christians and Muslims together on a major feast of the Virgin Mary to celebrate the mutual esteem for one another which befits men and women in the faith tradition of Abraham, "God's friend" (Is. 41:8; Jas. 2:23; "Women" IV: 125). It is certainly true that in her very person there is a meeting point, or at least a stepping stone, between Christianity and Islam. Indeed, as the Qur'an itself says: "To those who believe, God has set an example

[54]John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae,* 13-17.

(*mathalan*) ... in Mary, who preserved her chastity ... who put her trust in the words of her Lord and his scriptures and was one of the truly devout" ("Prohibition" LXVI:12).[55]

The Cardinal then went on to say:

> It is true, of course, that for all of the esteem and honor which Muslims and Christians have for Mary, the mother of Jesus, in her role in our separate ways of prayer, she is also the symbol of what radically divides us and what challenges us to dialogue. For Christians she is the all-holy *Theotokos,* the mother of God, the mother of Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate. For Muslims she is the mother of Jesus, the Messiah, "who was no more than God's apostle and his Word, which he cast to Mary: a spirit from him" ("Women" IV:171). While this radical difference in faith forever separates us, it paradoxically also holds us forever in conversation with one another. And this conversation can, and should be, as the Second Vatican Council taught Catholics, a *jihad,* a "striving for mutual understanding." And the council fathers went on to say of the Christians and Muslims together, "On behalf of all peoples, let them make common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace and freedom" (*Nostra Aetate,* 3).[56]

Reading this testimony from an American Cardinal, one cannot help but notice how strange it is therefore not to find any reference to Mary at all in another important Vatican document on interreligious dialogue: "Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ."[57] For, in the Cardinal's words, it is indeed Mary who holds Christians and Muslims "forever in conversation with one another."

Indeed, at least where Christian and Muslim interreligious dialogue is concerned, *Mary is already there as someone loved and shared.*

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[55]Cf. http://www.nccbuscc.org/seia/keeler.htm

[56]Cf. http://www.nccbuscc.org/seia/keeler.htm

[57]This document was jointly published on Pentecost 1991 by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. *Bulletin: Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue* 77 (1991), 210-250.

In Zamboanga City, it is Mary, *Nuestra Señora del Pilar*, who brings Christians and Muslims together, for "she already belongs to both communities." In the words of Claretian Max Rodriguez, "At a time where dialogue between the different religions of the earth is of paramount importance for peace, the Shrine of Fort Pilar is a place where religious dialogue between Muslims and Christians becomes daily routine, a fact of everyday life."[58]

In short, Christian and Muslim interreligious dialogue and cooperation already has a Marian matrix as a foundation. The challenge is to bring this to the fore not only in the consciousness of the people of both communities but also in their concrete actions. Yet, here is where one finds certain problematic issues.

Obstacles to Interreligious Dialogue. The Vatican document "Dialogue and Proclamation" lists eleven important obstacles to interreligious dialogue and cooperation. They are:

1. Insufficient grounding in one's own faith.

2. Insufficient knowledge and understanding of the belief and practices of other religions, leading to a lack of appreciation for their significance and even at times to misrepresentation.

3. Cultural differences, arising from different levels of instruction, or from the use of different languages.

4. Socio-political factors or some burdens of the past.

5. Wrong understanding of the meaning of terms such as conversion, baptism, dialogue, etc.

6. Self-sufficiency, lack of openness leading to defensive or aggressive attitudes.

7. A lack of conviction with regard to the value of interreligious dialogue, which some may see as a task reserved to specialists, and others as a sign of weakness or even a betrayal of the faith.

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[58]Rodriguez, *Our Lady of Pilar*, 17.

8. Suspicion about the other's motives in dialogue.

9. A polemical spirit when expressing religious convictions.

10. Intolerance, which is often aggravated by association with political, economic, racial and ethnic factors, a lack of reciprocity in a dialogue that can lead to frustration.

11. Certain features of the present religious climate, e.g., growing materialism, religious indifference, and the multiplication of religious sects, which creates confusion and raises new problems.[59]

In one form or another, these obstacles are also present among the members of the multi-religious communities of Zamboanga City. These obstacles must be overcome, with patience and perseverance, given the particular character of the city and the crying need for peace in the region.

Two challenges are being posed to Christian-Muslim Marian devotion as exemplified in the Shrine of *La Virgen del Pilar.* The first challenge comes, ironically, from the Christian majority. The second comes from a few Muslim fundamentalists. Both challenges have to do with the reported *fall in the number of Muslim visitors* to the Shrine of Our Lady of the Pillar.[60]

Christian Challenge: Overcoming Exclusionary Ignorance. The Christian challenge, given Christian-Muslim devotion to Mary and the imperative of interreligious dialogue, is to overcome a certain insensitivity *vis-a-vis* Muslims, an insensitivity that has its roots in a profound (even if inculpable) ignorance of Islam. This writer would like to think that the Christians of Zamboanga City have been acting

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[59]"Dialogue and Proclamation," 52.

[60]The word "reported" is used because this is obviously an issue that can only be resolved by empirical investigation. To a certain extent, it does not really matter whether this is the case or not; the fact remains that the Shrine has been "over-Christianized" and that poses a lot of questions with regard to the seriousness of the Church in her commitment to interreligious dialogue with Muslims.

in good faith through the years in their efforts to make the Shrine of Our Lady of the Pillar a place of pilgrimage and prayer that is worthy of Mary. Unwittingly however, it is this laudable attempt to honor Mary that has perhaps disastrously transformed the Shrine into a kind of exclusionary space. What meaning do these words carry?

First, the Shrine, beautiful as it is today, unwittingly excludes Muslims through *the proliferation of other Christian symbols within its space.* These symbols are primarily statues, not just of Mary, but also of Christian saints. Islamic prohibition of images in worship makes it difficult for Muslims to connect with Our Lady when the place seems to be staked out as exclusively Christian through the multiplication of statues.

Second, the Shrine unwittingly excludes Muslims through *the insertion of the Stations of the Cross in the niches of the fence posts.* The Cross is a negative symbol for Muslims. They may be able to accept the presence of one Cross, but to multiply them through the insertion of the stations of the *via crucis* along the fence is to Christianize the Shrine in an exclusionary way.

Third, the Shrine unwittingly excludes Muslims through *the building of a Blessed Sacrament chapel in the premises.* Muslims do not understand Christian Eucharistic theology and would be horrified to witness practices such as Eucharistic adoration.

Fourth, the Shrine unwittingly excludes Muslims through *the absolute absence of any Islamic symbol.* Islamic art is principally tied to Arabic texts of the *Qur'an*; no such texts are found embossed anywhere in the premises of the Shrine.

Muslim Challenge: Overcoming Uncritical Arabization. The Muslim challenge, given Christian-Muslim devotion to Mary and the imperative of interreligious dialogue, is to hold fast to their native forms of devotional practice and not to allow an uncritical Arabization of their Islamic faith. It seems that some (though not all) religious *ulama* (singular: *aleem*) and *tablighi* (singular: *tabliq*), i.e., "itinerant Muslim teachers who belong to a worldwide movement for the propagation of the Islamic faith and dedicate their whole lives to convince people

to return to the purity of Islam as found in the Holy *Qur'an*,"[61] have been preaching that any Muslim who enters the Shrine has committed the worst possible sin in Islam: the sin of *apostasy*. Marian devotion as manifested through the lighting of candles is considered un-Islamic. In some ways, the Islam of these *ulama* and *tablighi* is analogous to the Christianity of certain fundamentalist and iconoclastic Protestant/ Evangelical congregations.

It is of course difficult to convince Muslims under the sway of these religious *ulama* and *tablighi* that the Shrine is open to them as well, given what has been observed regarding the pervasive Christianization of the shrine's space itself. And, given the socio-political climate in the region, there is every reason to fear that the good will that is still there may be irreversibly dissipated.

Tentative Proposals. These two challenges to Christian-Muslim devotion to Mary and for the need for interreligious dialogue and cooperation between the two religious communities could be met through various ways. Where the Shrine of Our Lady of the Pillar itself is concerned, this author suggests at least several steps that hopefully are not too naive, too difficult, or too late.

First, progressively decrease the number of statues in the area; the first to go should be the statues of the saints. At the very least, they could perhaps be transferred to a section of the shrine so that they do not form what appears to be an exclusionary ring around the shrine itself.

Second, relegate the stations of the *via crucis* to a more restricted space; perhaps the space to the right of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel could be used for this.

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[61]Gerard Rixhon, "The Changing Face of Islam in Sulu: Reflections from an Anthropological Perspective," (draft of an article currently considered for publication). All await the publication of this article in a book which is supposedly going to be edited by Eric Casiño, a professor of Anthropology at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa.

Third, move the big white Cross into this same general area where another place for the lighting of candles can also be set up.

Fourth, convert the office, which is to the left of the altar, into a small Muslim prayer room, with an orientation to Mecca clearly etched on its wall.

Fifth, convert the space where the big white Cross now stands into a place where *Qur'anic* texts on Mary could be artistically displayed. The place for candles could continue where it is now.

Sixth, set up a group of interreligiously sensitive and responsible Christians and Muslims who can act as a consultative body regarding the organization and use of the shrine's space.

These are some initial thoughts, presented as proposals.[62] They are placed under this question: What would Mary, *La Virgen del Pilar*, Mother of Christians and Muslims, say?

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[62]An alternative proposal has been suggested by Mr. Luis Olivares, who attended a lecture on *La Virgen del Pilar* given by this writer. He suggests that, instead of touching the present Shrine, an interreligious shrine could be set up right next to Fort Pilar; it could incorporate Christian and Muslim symbols. In such a shrine, *Qur'anic* texts about Mary could be artistically displayed. There are several reservations about this idea; shrines have a tradition behind them and are not just built because they are expedient in some way. However, it certainly is an idea worth considering.