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EDITOR'S PREFACE

In his article, "Mystical Experience as Situated in Rulla's Three Dimensions of Self-Transcendent Consistency Theory," Michael C. Porcia, S.J. explores mystical experience as a mediated phenomenon influenced by the nature and context of the human person. He emphasizes God's respect for human freedom and the role of psychological constitution in spiritual transcendence. Rulla's self-consistency theory introduces three dimensions of freedom for self-transcendence. First, the disposition of the human person to either virtue or sin, second, the disposition of the human person to the disposition of the human person to either the real good or the apparent good and third, the disposition of the human person to either normality or pathology.

The Ignatian discernment of spirits is proposed as a framework for evaluating mystical experiences. Porcia aims to merge psychology with spirituality to explore mystical experience as an indirect and mediated phenomenon, emphasizing the consciousness of God's presence and the compromise of interior human freedom by self-gratifying needs. He acknowledges unconscious limitations in the human psyche that hinder transcendence and highlights the mediation of mystical experience through human freedom to receive God's grace to varying degrees.

Fang Hua's study "All-Under-Heaven" examines the concept of "all-under-Heaven" as a framework for introducing Christ in Chinese culture. It utilizes the Pastoral Cycle method from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences and emphasizes the integration of historical-theological analysis. The research highlights the importance

of incorporating the Gospel into the Chinese notion of "all-under-Heaven" to address the societal influences of Marxism, Leninism, and Mao-Zedong-Thought. By exploring the Chinese ideal of Great Unity (Da Tong) and the Judeo-Christian tradition of a heavenly God, the study suggests that "all-under-Heaven" can establish a theological basis for harmony and the unity of humanity under divine principles. The ultimate goal is to present "all-under-Heaven" as a vision for merging Christian theology with Chinese cultural and spiritual traditions.

In his article, "Maryam's Immaculate Conception," Renato Taib Oliveros explores the theological similarities between Catholic and Muslim beliefs concerning Mary, with a focus on the Immaculate Conception doctrine. He highlights the significance of Mary in both religions and emphasizes the potential for enhancing Muslim-Catholic relations in Southeast Asia. The text also discusses the spiritual practices of Catholics and Muslims, drawing parallels between the Rosary and Islamic daily remembering. Additionally, it delves into the significance of Mary's role in both religions and her submission to God's will. In both Islam and Catholicism, reciting the Rosary and daily remembrance serve as spiritual exercises, offering guidance for those unable to read religious texts. This practice in Islam can be traced back to the Sufi mystic Ibn Arabi, who meditated on the lives of Biblical figures mentioned in the Qur'an. Similarly, praying the Rosary for Catholics is a way to recall the life of Jesus, with Mary playing a central role. Both traditions emphasize the importance of remembering the teachings and deeds of these religious figures.

Vince Henry M. Salles' "The Biblical Foundations of the Marian Title Solace of Migrants" discusses the Biblical basis of the new title of the Blessed Virgin Mary, "Solace of Migrants," introduced by Pope Francis in 2020. This title, Salles argues, is rooted in two New Testament stories: the Holy Family's journey to Bethlehem and their Flight to Egypt, portraying Mary as a migrant experiencing the challenges of journeying and settling in a foreign land. Francis emphasizes the Church's duty to care for migrants and refugees, drawing inspiration from Mary as a symbol of charity. He entrusts them to Mary's

intercession and highlights her as their Solace, reflecting the Church's role as a Solace for Migrants. By emulating Mary's charitable actions, the Church fulfills Christ's commandment of love for all. Through love, the Church can be a compelling example and draw people to Christ's teachings, offering migrants a haven of peace and hospitality.

Ryan Janelle A. Salvacion's article, "A New Look at the Marian Dogmas in Sacred Scripture Through the Lens of the Fathers of the Church," explores the teachings of the Church Fathers on the Marian dogmas: Divine Maternity, Perpetual Virginity, Immaculate Conception, and Bodily Assumption into Heaven. It highlights the Fathers' interpretations of Mary in the Bible and their exegetical perspectives. His aim is to demonstrate how historical-critical exegesis can interpret Scripture correctly from patristic-medieval exegesis. The study argues that the Church's Marian beliefs are rooted in Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church Fathers. It analyses the historical-critical method in terms of creating doubt about the Mary of faith and advocates for interpreting the Bible with faith as the starting point. Salvacion believes that embracing faith, not doubt or suspicion, is crucial for Biblical exegesis and hermeneutics.

In "Safeguarding and Homosexuality", James McTavish, F.M.V.D. focuses on promoting a culture of safeguarding, particularly for those vulnerable to abuse, including individuals with same-sex attraction (SSA). He stresses the importance of considering sexual orientation in safeguarding, as homosexual individuals are at specific risk of abuse. The article provides sensitive and respectful insights into the correlation between homosexuality and abuse, offering specific details to aid in formulating a safeguarding vision that addresses the reality of people with SSA. The United States bishops acknowledge the challenges of contemporary culture in accepting Catholic teaching on homosexuality, but groups like Courage and Encourage are making a positive impact. Despite the struggles and self-mastery involved, the Church encourages persons with a homosexual inclination to pursue holiness. This individual journey inevitably involves following the way of the Cross.

Archbishop Antonio J. Ledesma S.J.'s catechesis, "*Amoris Laetitia* on Natural Family Planning," explains that *Amoris Laetitia* envisions Responsible Parenthood and Natural Family Planning as integral to the calling of families. Couples are encouraged to exercise responsible parenthood by using their freedom wisely and considering social and personal circumstances. This requires the formation of conscience, as decisions about parenthood depend on it. Recently, Francis and the Bishops highlighted the benefits of natural family planning methods, citing their promotion of tenderness between spouses and the encouragement of authentic freedom. The RP-ANFP program has been successful in providing information on modern natural family planning methods, with over 28,000 couples in the Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro adopting these methods over the past 17 years. The Standard Days Method has been particularly popular among couples, with over 40% choosing this simplified approach. Ledesma concludes that today, our society is diverse in terms of religious beliefs and daily living circumstances. Families, schools, and churches are urged to promote the development of an informed conscience. Archbishop Ledesma's program, All-NFP, encompasses all modern NFP methods and aims to involve all families in our communities. It advocates NFP without combining it with contraceptives and seeks to collaborate with family-oriented government agencies at national and local levels to promote natural family planning.

Dr. theol. Markus Locker, Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief

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MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AS SITUATED IN RULLA'S THREE DIMENSIONS OF SELF-TRANSCENDENT CONSISTENCY THEORY

Michael C. Porcia, S.J.

Abstract. Mystical experience does not happen in a vacuum. It is a mediated experience taking into consideration the nature and context of the human person. This is God's respect for human freedom. However, spiritual transcendence is premised by the psychological constitution of the person, conscious and unconscious. Hence, there are degrees of freedom. L. Rulla's self-consistency theory situates freedom for self-transcendence according to three dimensions within a continuum. With this framework, mystical experience is evaluated according to the dialectical dynamic between needs and values in each dimension. And the Ignatian discernment of spirits becomes the lens by which to sift through the experience either as anomalously mystical or pathological.

Keywords. mystical experience; dimensions; self-consistency; transcendence

This article attempts to investigate anomalous mystical experience in the context of faith. Its premise is that a mystical experience is always indirect and respects the human faculties and *Sitz im Leben* of the one who experiences it. Moreover, as this paper is written with a specific group in mind for its readership, mystical experience is considered within the dynamics of a religious experience as situated

in each of the three dimensions of Luigi Rulla's Self-Transcendent Consistency Theory.

Rabeyron and Loose classify mystical experiences as anomalous experiences which they consider as belonging to the "encounter category [that relates] to an intense and global feeling of having become one with God or the universe."[1] Daniels makes a distinction between mystical and religious experience:

> Religious experience includes many phenomena that are not direct personal experiences of a relationship to a fundamental Reality. Most obvious is that fact that much, perhaps most, [of] religious experience reflects an *indirect* relationship to the Real (which is approached through intermediary representatives or representations such as priests, scriptures, moral precepts, rites and rituals, symbols, or works of art). Also religious experience often expresses relative personal needs (e.g., for forgiveness or a sense of control) or relative social demands and expectations (e.g., feelings of duty or obligation) rather than representing any fundamental, self-evident Reality. In the same way that religious experiences are not always mystical, so mystical experiences are not always religious, at least in the generally accepted sense of this word.[2]

Daniels seems to have seen the limitation of his own effort to make such a scission as he is caught in his own tautology in his claim that since "religious experiences are not always mystical, so mystical experiences are not always religious."[3] His explicit denial of any relative degree of relationship between mystical and religious experiences by splitting them off from each other is an implicit affirmation that the dual distinction can be a singular experience.

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[1] T. Rabeyron & T. Loose, "Anomalous Experiences, Trauma, and Symbolization Processes at the Frontiers Between Psychoanalysis and Cognitive Neurosciences," *Frontiers in Psychology* 6:1926 (2015): 2.

[2] M. Daniels, "Making Sense of Mysticism," *Transpersonal Psychology Review* 7:1 (2003): 3–4 (preprint version). Available at http://www.psychicscience.org/Papers/daniels03.pdf.

[3] Daniels, "Making Sense of Mysticism," 4.

Moreover, Daniels also distinguishes mystical from transpersonal experience. He elaborates on the distinction as follows:

> Mystical experience is also not precisely coterminous with transpersonal experience although there is much experiential overlap between them.… More importantly, while many mystical experiences are indeed transpersonal because they involve an extension of the sense of identity or self beyond the individual or personal, some mystical experiences are not. For example, the direct experience of God's overpowering presence is sometimes associated with the feeling of personal insignificance, weakness[,] or sin, i.e., [with] an emphasis or fixation on the boundaries of individual or personal identity rather than their extension. Such an experience is *mystical* in the sense defined above (i.e., it is a direct experience of relationship to a fundamental Reality), but is not *transpersonal* since it does not expansively transform the sense of self.[4]

However, Daniels still falls into the same limitation in his attempt to make the necessary nuance of that which remains implicit in the explicit difference. Perhaps his problematic distinctions between mystical, religious, and transpersonal experience could be inferred from his own definition of mystical experience as the "*individual's direct experience of a relationship to a fundamental Reality*."[5] He seems to highlight the premise of "direct experience" which is "distinguishable from particular subjective states, such as pleasure, since these are temporary and relative (i.e., pleasure is not understood as existing *in itself*, separate from our experience of it)."[6] He stresses further that the "direct experience of a relationship to a fundamental Reality allows different types of relationships to be acknowledged and investigated … [which] leaves open the question of exactly how this Reality is to be experienced and conceived.…"[7] Daniels seems to have provided a neutral conception of mystical experiences rather than reinforcing a

[4] Daniels, "Making Sense of Mysticism," 4.

[5] Daniels, "Making Sense of Mysticism," 1.

[6] Daniels, "Making Sense of Mysticism," 3.

[7] Daniels, "Making Sense of Mysticism," 3.

religious faith-based concept. Such an inference could be supported by Daniels's specifications of 1) "direct" (over indirect) experiences of a 2) "fundamental Reality" (over God or a Transcendental Being). He seems to view mystical experience phenomenologically by purifying it of potential religious bias to be inclusive toward non-believers.

Can mystical experience really take place in a vacuum without taking into consideration the context of the one who experiences it? Does one have a mystical experience without situating it in one's psycho-socio-emotional, cultural, and faith structures?

Qualifying a Mystical Experience

Steven Katz

> recognizes that the mystic's experience is conditioned by the complex preexperiential pattern of beliefs, attitudes, and expectations which [she/he] brings to it [such that] … the structuring of an experience according to the particular tradition is done quite explicitly and self-consciously.[8]

Mystical experience does not happen in its most pristine and unbiased state; instead, it is a contextualized experience or phenomenon according to its nature. Although mystical experience is an in-breaking of the monotony of life, it does not invade that which constitutes the human person. It can only heighten the experiencer's consciousness of herself or himself through a heightened experience of a Transcendental Being or God. This occurs over a protracted period of time as manifold meanings and insights are revealed to and discovered by the experiencer. Proudfoot, espousing the thoughts of Katz, justifies:

> [There is] … "a clear causal connection" between the antecedent beliefs and commitments one brings to an experience and the resultant experience. [Katz] seems to think he can show causal influence by demonstrating temporal priority. In fact, the connection between the mystic's antecedent beliefs and [her or his] experience is not a causal one

[8] W. Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 122.

> but a conceptual one.… The logic that governs the concepts by which people interpret their experiences in different traditions shapes those experiences. Any attempt to differentiate a core from its interpretations, then, results in the loss of the very experience one is trying to analyze. The interpretations are themselves constitutive of the experiences.[9]

William James identifies four indicators of a mystical experience, namely, ineffability, noetic quality, transience, and passivity.[10] Ineffability and noetic quality "[defy] verbal expression, and [they seem] to the mystic to [characterize] … state[s] of knowledge or insight, revelation or illumination."[11] Although James puts limits to ineffability as being solely emotional, W. Stace sees it to be logical as well through the notion of paradoxicality in mysticism.[12] Proudfoot further explains the reasoning of Stace:

> Mystical paradoxes are flat logical contradictions, and the difficulty of finding language adequate to the mystical experience is a logical one rather than a case of the incommunicability of a feeling or sensation.… Paradox, like contradiction, is a predicate applied to sentences or propositions. By definition, a paradox entails a logical or grammatical structure. Such a term could properly be applied to the mystic's experience only if that experience were constituted by certain thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes.[13]

The noetic quality pertains to the mystical experience as a "source of knowledge and insight" such that "mystics judge their experiences to be revelatory, productive of insight into the true nature of reality, and not artifacts or projections of their own subjective mental states."[14] Moreover, the relevance of the mystical experience for the human

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[9] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 123.

[10] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 120.

[11] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 120.

[12] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 134.

[13] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 134–135.

[14] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 136)

person depends on it being anomalous such that it does not fall within the category of the cause-effect relationship of natural law.[15]

Transience and passivity are "related to the noetic quality of the experience" which is grounded on the premise that mystical experience is beyond any form of deliberate control on the part of the experiencer.[16] However, one could have the necessary dispositions of openness and receptivity to the mystical realm. As Proudfoot conveys,

> Passivity conveys the sense of being grasped and of being subject to some power beyond oneself. Both passivity and transience reflect the perception that the experience is not under the subject's voluntary control. It cannot be manipulated or guaranteed by the subject's decision or by causes that [she or he] might set in motion. [She or he] can prepare [themselves] for it, but the experience is finally not subject to [her or his] control. The rules for the identification of an experience as mystical include the condition that [she or he] judge it to be something other than an artifact of [her or his] own thought and actions.[17]

Mystical experience seems to violate the causal law of nature and can thereby put one's reasoning into a crisis of logic when trying to grasp its intelligibility. The experiencer, however, can render it meaningful for herself or himself; indeed, meaning-making of the supposed mystical experience makes it intelligible. And this meaning-making process is not separate from the experiencer's context of life with its faith dimension. Hence, mystical experience is a religious experience in the context of faith in God.

Mystical Experience as Situated in a Continuum

Mystical experience can be viewed within a continuum. On the one end, it could be "seen as a pathological or semi-pathological breakdown

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[15] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 145.

[16] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 147.

[17] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 147–148.

of psychological boundaries plus delusions of identification with something bigger than [oneself]."[18] On the other end, it

> involves transcendence of the biological self … [and] an altered state or states of consciousness as well as these possible parapsychological dimensions.… So perhaps at least some mystical experiences are teaching … something about reality; it is not just some release of endorphins within the brain producing comforting illusions.[19]

Tart quotes William Braud regarding the spiritual dimension of mystical experience instead of dismissing it outrightly as something pathological:

> "Parapsychological findings can be useful to those on a spiritual path as they can provide a certain degree of confidence and trust that at least some of the processes and concepts encountered are 'real' in a more traditional sense and are not delusions, projections, or misinterpretations. They also can serve to remind us that we are not alone in having exceptional experiences; such experiences are normal, natural, and remarkably widespread." [Braud] is concerned not just with the scientific aspects of psi, though, but with the growth aspects. "But these scientific reassurances, though of value, are only partial: A great deal of what is encountered along the spiritual path is quite beyond the reach of current science. Here, one must be armed with trust, faith, hope, love, discernment, and a tolerance for ambiguity and for contraries, rather than with the feelings of safety, certainty, familiarity, and understanding that science can provide."[20]

And between the two ends of the continuum of a single experience is a spectrum of nuances that move closer to or farther away from any one of the two directions, namely, pathological or mystical. Braud recognizes that this spectrum is characterized by "ambiguity" and "contrariness" which calls for "tolerance" and "discernment." He elaborates further:

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[18] C. Tart, "On the Scientific Foundations of Transpersonal Psychology: Contributions from Parapsychology," *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 36:1 (2004): 72.

[19] Tart, "On the Scientific Foundations of Transpersonal Psychology," 81.

[20] Tart, "On the Scientific Foundations of Transpersonal Psychology," 86.

> Perhaps most importantly of all, we can begin to explore, deeply and intensively, the *meanings* of psychic and other exceptional human experiences [for] those who have these experiences. We can study the impacts of such experiences upon the lives of the experiencers. We can interest ourselves not only in the fact that such experiences exist, but also in why they happen to particular persons at particular times and in particular ways. What are their outcomes, their consequences, their fruits? How are they and how are they not assimilated into the experiencer's life, self-concept, growth, being and becoming?[21]

Furthermore, the paradigm of a continuum in assessing the authenticity of a mystical experience and its impact on the life of the experiencer would be the framework of reference in situating the experience according to the three dimensions of Luigi Rulla's Self-Transcendent Consistency Theory.

Self-Transcendent Consistency Theory of Theocentric Love

Rulla affirms the action of God's grace that is infused into the nature of the human person so the latter may respond in theocentric love as a decision of transcending oneself in freedom. Rulla describes the central message of his theory:

> Respecting and maintaining the primacy and the antecedence of the action of divine grace, for which there is no possible substitute, the dynamisms or psycho-social forces in the person, *both conscious and unconscious*, influence the person's freedom for the self-transcendence of love, and so also affect the vocational process in different ways and different degrees.[22]

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[21] W. Braud, "Parapsychology and Spirituality: Implications and Intimations" (originally published in *ReVision: A Journal of Consciousness and Transformations* 18:1 [1995]: 36–43), 18. Available at https://www.inclusivepsychology.com/uploads/ParapsychologyAndSpirituality.pdf.

[22] L. Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation* Vol. I: *Interdisciplinary Bases* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2004; originally published in 1986), 309.

Moreover, freedom from unconscious needs in the human person allows one to have freedom for the conscious values that are essential for one's authentic living of the Christian life and vocation. The interaction between the consciousness and unconsciousness of the personality structure results in "three dispositions" which Rulla termed "dimensions."[23] These dimensions can either dispose or impede the human person to or from self-transcendence on the basis of consistency or inconsistency, respectively.

According to Rulla, the First Dimension disposes the human person to either virtue or sin. It is derived "from the action of *conscious* structures; more precisely, from the harmony or agreement which, to a greater or lesser extent, exists between the ideal self (which is conscious) and the level of the actual self which is *prevalently* conscious.…"[24] It is premised in this dimension that the human person's dialectical structure of self between values (ideal self) and needs (actual self) is conscious, thereby disposing one freely and responsibly to either transcendence by virtue or resistance by sin.[25]

The Second Dimension disposes the human person to either the real good or the apparent good.[26]

> More precisely, it involves both the harmony or agreement existing to a greater or lesser degree between the ideal self and the actual self (both prevalently conscious) and also the opposition existing to a greater or lesser degree between the ideal self and the *unconscious* actual self.[27]

The unconscious puts some restraints on the freedom of the human person for self-transcendence. Unconscious needs are inconsistent with conscious values that could express in some degrees of ambiguities

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[23] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 173.

[24] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 179.

[25] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 179.

[26] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 180.

[27] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 180.

and ambivalences in the motivational system of the human person toward the transcendence of love.

The Third Dimension disposes the human person to either normality or pathology.[28] It "develops primarily in relation to the motivating force of natural values" or needs.[29]

> Natural values involve the will of the self only as nature, while transcendent values involve the will of the *whole* self, the *whole* person, and so engage the *exercise of freedom* not only of [the human person's] nature, but [also] the person's freedom for the self-transcendence of theocentric love.[30]

The human person in the Third Dimension is "mainly open to natural values, and less so to self-transcendent values."[31]

The three dimensions as dispositions to self-transcendence run through a single continuum as made palpable to the degree of maturity or immaturity of the personality structure specifically in the dynamics between the consciousness and unconsciousness. Rulla writes:

> It is clear, however, that both in the first and in the second dimension one finds a continuum, ranging from persons who are more mature to those who are less mature, from cases where the contradiction between the actual self and the ideal self is minimal to cases in which it is very great. Lack of maturity in the first dimension is by nature conscious and so may involve deliberate sin; this does not hold for the second dimension where the lack of maturity is by nature unconscious.… In any case, for the third dimension as for the second, any lack of maturity is unconscious.[32]

Moreover, the second dimension lies on the spectrum of the interplay between the two ends of the continuum, namely, the predominance

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[28] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 181.

[29] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 181.

[30] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 185–186.

[31] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 186.

[32] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 181.

of the consciousness in the first dimension and the potency of the non-pathological unconsciousness in the third dimension. The second dimension could be the area of the continuum where discernment is most needed for sifting through the internal movements roused in a person during a mystical experience.

Rulla's theoretical framework of the three dimensions could be applied, therefore, to the authentication of a mystical experience as either a spiritual or a religious experience in the first dimension, a pathological manifestation of psychotic processes in the third dimension, or to further investigations to decipher between the spiritual and the pathological through the qualifications of real or apparent mystical or religious experience in the second dimension. Mystical experience would be used analogously with religious experience through the lenses of the Christian vocations.

Mystical Experience in the First Dimension

Godin claims that the "experience of God is never immediate."[33] He elaborates further:

> Experience of the inner God or recognition of the Spirit is always indirect, mediated by signs which in the end are interpreted in faith. It is a synthesis, actively established and maintained in its integrity, in other words, the highest and most complete form of experience accessible to [the human person], whether in religion or in love.[34]

Meissner conceives of mystical experience as "characterized developmentally by a number of significant achievements, which include the integration and structuring of drive derivatives with relatively autonomous functions of the ego."[35]

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[33] A. Godin, *The Psychological Dynamics of Religious Experience* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1985), 63.

[34] Godin, *The Psychological Dynamics of Religious Experience*, 65–66.

[35] W. Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 157.

> Thus anxiety is reduced to a manageable level and is expressed exclusively in terms of more structured signal functions that mobilize rather than overwhelm ego resources.… [It] permits these tensions to be embraced, affirmed, and somehow resolved and integrated into a more balanced faith-orientation and faith existence.[36]

It reverberates Rulla's presupposition of the consistency between values and needs on the conscious level of the human person. The coherent and non-contradictory structures of the self provide fertile ground for an experience of God that disposes one to transcendence. It is a self that is receptive and open to the divine infusion of grace into one's nature. Meissner writes:

> Consequently, the religious belief system and its tradition are seen in increasingly realistic terms that affirm their inherent tensions and ambiguities and accept the relativity, partiality, and particularity of the beliefs, symbols, rituals, and ceremonials of the religious community.… Faith at this level becomes a lived and integrated source of support and strength.… Such individuals reflect an inner life of lucidity, simplicity, and inner harmony that escapes the great majority of humans, yet somehow seems more fully and more profoundly human. The love of God in these souls seems wholly unselfconscious, stripped of the residues of infantile narcissism, and yet capable of integration into a life of activity, responsibility, and generative fulfillment. They often seem capable of profoundly meaningful object relations that are characterized by selfless love and acceptance of others.[37]

Mystical Experience in the Second Dimension

Meissner explicates a mode of mystical experience "around the formation and consolidation of the superego" which is conscious of and equivalent to the moral values that eventually open up toward the horizon of the religious.[38] "The internalization of ideals and values

[36] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 157.

[37] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 157.

[38] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 156.

means the organization of conscience."[39] However, the "central developmental achievement brings about critical changes that include the formation of the barrier of repression."[40] It is most likely that the perceived mystical experience could have been only a projection of the human person's unconscious need for an omnipotent God to assuage the internal pangs of moral anxiety. Meissner explains:

> Consequently, danger is henceforth experienced mainly as moral anxiety, or as a sense of failure to attain and satisfy the demands of the ego ideal and the internalized value system—whereas previously the child responded to extrinsic threats and to primitive expectations of retaliation.… Conflicts between sources of authority in various spheres of experience are resolved by tactics of hierarchical subordination and/or compartmentalization. Reliance on authority to buttress uncertain judgement persists and is extended during this period, but there is increasing reliance on one's own sense of judgment in selecting and evaluating authoritative positions.[41]

Henceforth, the explicitly articulated experience would have to see through the implicit contents by means of continuous inquiry into the nature and quality of that which is labeled as mystical. Inquiry renders the mystical intelligible on the basis of logical constructs, thereby arriving at a judgment on the veracity of the experience as either real or apparent. Judgement eventually leads one to decide to either assent in faith on the premise of its authenticity or dismiss it as a figment of one's projected imaginations. Meissner clarifies:

> Cognitively, the constructs that allow for a distinction of forms of valuation and factual knowing begin to emerge and serve as a foundation for clarifying aspects of subjectivity and objectivity. In general, the capacity to evaluate the multiple levels of meaning and connotation in symbols now emerges, although it remains relatively vague. Discrimination is increasingly made between the realms of the spiritual, concerning both the existence of God and the spiritual aspect of human beings, and of the nonspiritual. Awareness of the faith orientation of

[39] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 156.

[40] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 156.

[41] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 155–156.

> other individuals or groups remains relatively undifferentiated and tends to be expressed in prejudicial or assimilative terms. The organization of institutional authority and/or sacramental community tends to sustain this level of synthesis and provides a powerful motivation for institutional adherence; the breakdown of institutional structures or sacramental forms may undermine this organization and result in regressive tendencies.… Decisive achievements of internalization and differentiation of reality lead increasingly to acceptance of responsibility for one's view of the world and one's synthesis of beliefs.[42]

Mystical Experience in the Third Dimension

Meissner sees a pathological process related to mystical experience which he attributes to a "primitive and/or deeply regressive state [which] is dominated by the conditions of primary narcissism." He explains:

> Developmentally, the individual has not yet reached the level of self- and object-differentiation, so that the conditions of symbiosis obtain. The narcissistic experience is one of unconditional omnipotence and absolute dependence. Faith cognition at this level is entirely undifferentiated, functioning in terms of a preconceptual and prelinguistic disposition to accept the conditions of life. This relates to the conditions of basic trust that characterize the symbiotic union of mother and child. The religious experience at this level would presumably involve merging the boundaries between self-representation and God-representation. The sense of self is without cohesion, in a state of extreme regression, which may take a psychotic form, issuing in delusions of total omnipotence and Godlike grandiosity. It may also express itself as profound and ecstatic mystical experiences involving loss of boundaries, diffusion of the sense of self, and absorption into the divine. While the mechanisms and the level of organization may be similar, it seems reasonable to maintain a distinction between such mystical experiences and regressive psychosis.[43]

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[42] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 156.

[43] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 150.

Meissner turns to the Object Relations Theory as the point of reference in providing the conceptual basis for pathological underpinnings in a perceived mystical experience. He elaborates:

> In these regressive terms, then, such states of fusion represent a reactivation of primitive states of symbiotic fusion with the all-good, all-giving, all-nurturing maternal breast. One of the central difficulties in this approach has been the inability of the analytic conceptual apparatus to articulate a sustained sense of cohesiveness of self and of mature and developed identity in a context in which such mystical states of fusion seem to take place. Within the analytic framework such states involve feeling a loss of ego boundaries and a fusion with the love object.[44]

Following the same thinking, Meissner categorically differentiates between mystical experience and psychosis as regards the experiencer's sense of self-cohesion. He avers:

> Nonetheless, it is clear that the sense of fusion with the object in mystical states is not the same as the regressive fusion to primary narcissistic union that might occur in states of psychotic regression. Rather, authentic mystical experience … not only does not undermine or destroy identity but in fact has a powerful capacity to stabilize, sustain, and enrich identity.[45]

> In regressive states, however, the basic mechanism becomes incorporation … by which the distinguishing qualities of the external object are lost. Incorporation blends what has been internalized into an overriding, global sense of primitive narcissistic grandiosity. In contrast, the *unio mystica* may represent a dissolution of the sense of self and a diffusion of the self-representation so that its elements are absorbed into the transcendent and sublimely loved object. This transcendent absorption of object love stands in opposition to psychotic self-absorption.[46]

Self-coherence is the basic presupposition in the evaluation of the authenticity of the mystical experience. Self-coherence is also premised

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[44] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 151.

[45] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 151.

[46] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 153.

on self-consistency. This is the correspondence between the intra-psychic needs and moral and spiritual values in the consciousness of the person. And in case a need remains unconscious for the person, it resists the pull of infantile regression in the pursuit of the conscious value. Mystical experience brings profound awareness into the self and of God; transcendence is always an act of consciousness. Rulla's "dimensions" attempt to provide a three-pronged framework for understanding the nature of the mystical experience according to the person's degree of freedom from her/his psychological life. Hence, mystical experience is always indirect and mediated with respect to the human faculties and context of the life of the human person.

Human freedom is at its optimum in the first dimension. It is the seedbed of grace, and the person is disposed to a mystical experience with her or his heightened consciousness. On the other hand, freedom is lost in the third dimension due to a high probability of psychopathology, where a seemingly mystical experience is in fact a clinical disturbance of sense perception and cognition muddled by the unconscious. Discernment becomes most challenging in the second dimension due to the subtle dynamic of interaction between the conscious and unconscious. And Ignatius of Loyola's discernment of spirits could be the lens through which a perceived spiritual experience is rendered intelligible and eventually judged as mystical. Consequently, the mystical experience becomes a wellspring from which successive decisions would have their point of reference in the life of the experiencer.

The discernment of spirits would be immanent in all three dimensions of Rulla's Self-Transcendent Consistency Theory. It applies in the first dimension, in the discernment between "virtue" and "sin" whereby the spirit—good or evil—is exposed objectively through the fruits of the human person's lived choices; to quote from Ignatius, "Love is shown more in deeds than in words." Discernment also applies in the third dimension, in deciding whether a perceived mystical experience is anomalously credible based on the criterion of ineffability or pathological from the point of view of psychiatry. However, discernment can be facilitated objectively through diagnostic

criteria culled from extensive scientific research and clinical practice in distinguishing what is anomalously "normal" from "pathological."

Perhaps the greatest challenge of discernment belongs to the second dimension, which calls for a certain degree of intuitive sensibility of heart and sharpness of mind in judging the "real good" from the "apparent good" through the different dynamic movements of the spirits in the experiencer and a third person, such as a spiritual director or Catholic therapist, whom the former can disclose herself or himself to in trust and confidence. Moreover, it is in the second dimension where the Second Week of Ignatius's Rules of Discernment can find their applicability and fecundity in the life of the experiencer. And central to these Rules is Rule 5:

> We must carefully observe the whole course of our thoughts. If the beginning and middle and end of the course of thoughts are wholly good and directed to what is entirely right, it is a sign that they are from the good angel. But the course of thoughts suggested to us may terminate in something evil, or distracting, or less good than [what] the soul had formerly proposed to do. Again, it may end in what weakens the soul, or disquiets it; or by destroying the peace, tranquility, and quiet which it had before, it may cause disturbance to the soul. These things are a clear sign that the thoughts are proceeding from the evil spirit, the enemy of our progress and eternal salvation.[47]

Conclusion

This study was an attempt to integrate psychology with spirituality to understand mystical experience as an indirect and mediated phenomenon. Mystical experience brings into greater consciousness God's presence in one's life. And this places the human person at the turning point to act deliberately according to the values of Christ in the Spirit. However, this does not deny the unconscious underpinnings in the human psyche that limit one's capacity for transcendence. Interior human freedom is compromised by self-gratifying needs,

[47] Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. L. Puhl (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1952), 148.

whether immature or pathological. Unconscious self-serving needs constantly drag down and eventually derail the person in their pursuit of consciously progressive theocentric movements. Mystical experience, therefore, is mediated through the quality of human freedom to receive the gratuity of God's grace in varying degrees as situated in Rulla's "three dimensions."

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ALL-UNDER-HEAVEN

A New Vision for Proclaiming Christ in Chinese Culture

Fang Hua

Abstract. This study explores the concept of "all-under-Heaven" as a framework for proclaiming Christ within Chinese culture. It employs the Pastoral Cycle method from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), integrating historical-theological analysis. The research emphasizes the need for inculturating the Gospel within the Chinese notion of "all-under-Heaven" to address the societal impacts of Marxism, Leninism, and Mao-Zedong-Thought. By examining the Chinese ideal of *Great Unity* (*Da Tong*) and the Judeo-Christian tradition of a heavenly God, the study proposes that "all-under-Heaven" can serve as a theological foundation for harmony and the unity of humanity under divine principles. The research aims to present "all-under-Heaven" as a vision for integrating Christian theology with Chinese cultural and spiritual traditions.

Keywords. all-under-Heaven; contextual theology; Chinese culture; Great Unity; inculturation

This study is about *all-under-Heaven* as a new vision for proclaiming Christ in Chinese culture. More specifically, it is about doing contextual theology in China through the incarnation of the Gospel of Christ in the Chinese concept of *all-under-Heaven* and the introduction of the Chinese concept of *all-under-Heaven* into the life of

the Church. It is very much needed in China where antichrist ideology, broken humanity, fractured society, and fragmented culture in the postmodern world have left many crying and groaning because of the agony of "Marxism, Leninism and Mao-Zedong-Thought."[1] From Chinese culture, the *Great Unity* (*Da Tong*大同) as the ideal model of harmony is "the *holistic* vision of an ideal world in *the ritual and musical culture* of ancient China derived from the sacrificial ceremony of the *belief of the way of Heaven*."[2] In Judeo-Christian tradition, the Heavenly God is the Creator of the universe who "created [humanity] in [God's] image" (Gen. 1:27).

To develop the current study, this author used the "Pastoral Cycle" method of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). The theological approach was the historical-theological analysis and synthesis of the sources and resources of theology in the Asian context. Through the historical analysis of Chinese culture and other materials, the first part presents the reality of Chinese culture and the Chinese concept of *all-under-Heaven* as the resources of theology. Through the theological analysis of the Bible, Church documents, and other materials, the second part reflects on the foundation of the Chinese concept of *all-under-Heaven* from different viewpoints of Christian sources of theology. Through the theological analysis and synthesis of the Bible, Church documents, and other materials set forth in previous parts, the third part seeks to answer the question of how *all-under-Heaven* can be a new vision for proclaiming Christ in Chinese culture.

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[1] FABC-OTC [Office of Theological Concerns for the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences], "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," in F.-J. Eilers, ed., *For All the Peoples of Asia* Vol. 3 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002), nos. 2–2.1.1, hereafter referred to as *FAPA*-3.

[2] F. Hua, *Christian and Confucian Dialogue on Harmony: Towards Asian-Christian Praxis of Communion in Religious Life* (Licentiate Thesis, Manila: University of Santo Tomas, 2018), 28.

A. Chinese Culture: The Context of *All-Under-Heaven* and an Overview of *All-Under-Heaven* in China

This section discusses the general information about the context of the study. It gives overall data about Chinese culture and the concept of *all-under-Heaven*, and sets it in relation to the research problem. The specific situation of Chinese culture that calls for the revival of its theological dimension in the concept of *all-under-Heaven* is briefly highlighted. A short analysis of the challenges, prospects, and demands of Chinese culture is then presented. Finally, the section examines the essence and meaning of the concept of *all-under-Heaven* in the Chinese tradition.

1. The Reality of Chinese Culture That Needs to Recover Its Theological Dimension in the Concept of *All-Under-Heaven*

Culture as a way of life was originally the cultivation of the soul or "*culture animi*." It is shown in the *Yi*,

> a book of wide comprehension and great scope, embracing everything. There are in it the way of heaven, the way of [humanity], and the way of earth. It then takes (the lines representing) those three Powers, and doubles them till they amount to six.[3]

Historically, the specter of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist communism has been the root cause of moral decay, social chaos, and political corruption in postmodern China.[4] Indeed, the inculturation of the

[3] The Survey Part II, Chapter Ten, in *周易 [The Zhou Book of Change]*, trans. Fu Huisheng (Chang Sha City: Hunan People's Publishing House, 2008), 445. The original Chinese is 易之爲書也，廣大悉備，有天道焉，有人道焉，有地道焉．兼三材而兩之. All translations in this article are the author's own unless otherwise stated.

[4] See K. Marx & F. Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Beijing: Compilation and Translation Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, 2005), 25, 44, 58. Also

Chinese thought of *all-under-Heaven* in the Gospel of Christ will be useful for the reconstruction of Chinese millenarian tradition.

a. *The Philosophical Connotation of Chinese Culture in China*. Chinese culture is the etymological expression of the nature of the ornamental figures of heaven (symbolizing God the Creator) and of humanity as the source of human civilization, for

> the trigram Bi/贲卦 indicates that there should be free course in what it denotes: We see the weak line coming and ornamenting the strong lines of the lower trigram, and hence it is said that ornament "should have free course." On the other hand, the strong line above ornaments the weak ones of the upper trigram, and hence it is said that "there will be little advantage, if ornament be allowed to advance and take the lead." This is illustrated in the appearances that ornament the heaven. Elegance and intelligence denoted by the lower trigram regulated by the arrest denoted by the upper suggest the observances that adorn human society. We look at the ornamental figures of the heaven, and thereby ascertain the changes of the seasons. We look at the ornamental observances of society, and understand how the processes of transformation are accomplished all under heaven.[5]

More specifically, i) the ornamental figure of Heaven/天文 as Heaven's creation of *ren* is the way of divine *ren*, for "Heaven gives birth to the human race;"[6] "what Heaven has ordained is called the Nature/性"[7]

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see Chinese Communist Party, "中國共産黨章程 [Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party]," *People's Daily* (October 30, 2017): 03.

[5] Volume One, The Bi Hexagram, the Twenty-second in *周易 [The Zhou Book of Change]*, 133. The original Chinese is (彖傳): 賁/ ， 亨； 柔來而文剛， 故亨. 分剛上而文柔， 故小利有攸往, 天文也； 文明以止， 人文也. 觀乎 天文， 以察時變； 觀乎人文， 以化成天下.

[6] Jang Hao & Qian Zongwu, *今古文尚書全譯•商書•仲虺之誥•虞書•大禹謨 [The Complete Translation of the Book of Documents of Modern Chinese and Ancient Chinese • Shang Shu • Announcement of Zhong Hui • Yu Shu • Counsels of the Great Yu]* (Guiyang City: Qui Zhou People's Publishing House, 1993), 117. The original Chinese is 惟天生民 (有欲).

[7] Zhu Bin, *禮記訓纂 •中庸第三十一 [The Commentary of the Book of Rites • The Doctrine of the Mean Chapter 31]* (Beijing: Chung Hwa Book Company, 1998), 772.

of the *ren* of Heaven as creation,[8] and "the Way of Heaven is calling *yin* and *yang*"[9] as Heaven's *ren* in creation. ii) The ornamental figure of man/人文 is the way of human *ren* as humanity's production of *ren* and "the Dao of inwardly the sage and externally the king."[10] For the sages, the Way of humanity is exhibited "under the names of *humanity* and *righteousness*. Each (trigram) embraced (those) three Powers; and, being repeated (as Heaven and humanity)."[11] "*Humanness/ren* is the character of [the human person's] mind and the principle of love. *Righteousness/yi* means exercising self-restraint in order to do everything properly."[12] Consequently, the essence of Chinese culture is the Heaven-earth-human unity in the principle of inner sageliness and outer kingliness based on the belief of the way of Heaven of ancient China.[13]

b. *The Crisis of Chinese Culture.* The crisis of Chinese culture is the lack of lineage of the Chinese way of the *ren* of Heaven—the soul of China. Historically, the lineage of the Confucian Heaven of

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The original Chinese is 天命之謂性.

[8] See The Survey Part II, Chapter One in *周易 [[The Zhou Book of Change]]*, 409. The original Chinese is 天地之大德曰生.

[9] On the Trigrams, Chapter Two in *周易 [The Zhou Book of Change]*, 455. The original Chinese is (聖人)立天之道曰陰與陽.

[10] Guo Qingfan, *莊子集釋 • 雜篇 • 天下第三十三 [A Collective Interpretation of Zhuang Zi • Miscellaneous Chapters • Under the Heaven 33]* (Beijing: Chung Hwa Book Company, 1961), 1069. The original Chinese is 內聖外王之道.

[11] On the Trigrams, Chapter Two in *周易 [The Zhou Book of Change]*, 455. The original Chinese is (聖人)立人之道曰仁與義, 兼三才而兩之.

[12] Zhu Xi, *四書章句集注 • 孟子集注 • 梁惠王章句上 [Commentaries on the Four Books • Commentaries on The Works of Mencius • Liang Hui Wang I]* (Beijing: Chung Hwa Book Company, 1983), 201. The original Chinese is 仁者, 心之德, 愛 之理. 義者, 心之制, 事之宜.

[13] See Research Design Team of the Chinese Bishops' Conference Secretariat, *建設中國地方教會草案 [Draft Plan for the Establishment of the Chinese Local Church]* (Taipei: The Association for the Promotion of Catholic Affairs, 1976), 23, hereafter referred to as *DPECLC*.

ren has been the orthodox tradition of Chinese culture. It is "a socio-cultural framework [that] underlies Chinese society."[14] For the King Tang, "the way of Heaven is to bless the good, and make the bad miserable."[15] Confucius says, "He who offends against Heaven has none to whom he can pray."[16] Dong Zhongshu says, "Heaven is the root of *humanity/ren* as the human way of life."[17] According to Zhuxi, "Heaven is precisely God."[18] *The Old Heavenly Father/老天爺* is a very popular name of the Supreme Being among the Chinese people today. Unfortunately, the belief of the Heaven of *ren* in Chinese culture was met with the incursions and impacts of the specters of Buddhism and Communism during the invasion and rebellion of the Five Barbarians (304–316) and Marxist-Leninist-Maoist communists (1921–present).[19]

> Since the times of the three sovereigns of Yao, Shun and Yu, the body of transmitted Confucian orthodox teachings [had been] the principle of sages and men of virtue based on Heaven. Soon afterwards heresies [were] daily and monthly increasing after the Han Dynasty, particularly

[14] M. Amaladoss, "Is There An Asian Way of Doing Theology?," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 45:1 (2008): 11. Also see Zhu Bin, *禮記訓纂 •中庸第三十一 [The Commentary of the Book of Rites • The Doctrine of the Mean Chapter 31]*, 775. The original Chinese is 爲政在人, 取人以身, 修身以道, 修道以仁.仁者人也, 親親爲大; 義者宜也, 尊賢爲大.

[15] Jang Hao & Qian Zongwu, *今古文尚書全譯 • 商書 • 湯誥 [The Complete Translation of the Book of Documents of Modern Chinese and Ancient Chinese • Shang Shu • Announcement of Tang]*, 123–125. The original Chinese is 天道福善禍淫.

[16] The Confucian Analects, Chapter 3:13 Ba Yi in *汉英四書 [The Chinese English Four Books]*, trans. J. Legge (Chang Sha: Hunan Publishing House, 1992), 83. The original Chinese is 子曰: 不然, 獲罪於天, 無所禱也.

[17] Su Yu, *春秋繁露義證 • 王道通三第四十四 [The Paraphrase of Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn Annals Volume XI • Kingly Way as Heaven-Earth-Man Chapter 44]* (Beijing: Chung Hwa Book Company, 1992), 329. The original Chinese is 天， 仁也.

[18] Zhu Xi, *四書章句集注 • 論語章句 • 述而第七 [Commentaries on the Four Books • The Confucian Analects • Shu Er VII]*, 101. The original Chinese is 天曰神.

[19] See Qian Mu, *國學大綱 [Outline History Volume 1]* (Taipei: Linking Publishing House, 1998), 128, 277–307, 707, 929.

> [when] pantheistic Taoism and atheistic Buddhism mixed up truth with falsehood in their midst.[20]

Indeed, when benevolence and righteousness as the path of sages are stopped up, beasts will be led on to devour women and men, and women and men will devour one another as in the great calamity of the Cultural Revolution in the era of the communist God-Mao.[21]

c. *The Chinese Culture Calls for the Renewal of Its Theological Dimension in the Concept of* All-Under-Heaven. China has abandoned its religio-cultural tradition in the wake of postmodern relativism and communism. Due to the challenges of secular humanism and antichristian communism in China, the Chinese culture is in dire need of the renewal of its theological dimension. The process of inculturating Christ's Gospel in the Chinese millenarian tradition as *all-under-Heaven*, the moral and humanistic vision of Chinese traditional culture, can be the way to renew the triple genealogy of the way/道-learning/學-governance/政 of Chinese culture. To be specific, i) the Chinese culture needs the new genealogy of the way of the "*ren'ai (仁愛,* meaning *humanity/ren* and *love)*"[22] of the supreme God in *all-under-Heaven* for (the good of) the public, since

> the world fell into decay, and principles (of Yang, Mo as Marx, Lenin and Mao) faded away. Perverse speakings and oppressive deeds waxed

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[20] Zhu Xi, *四書章句集注 • 中庸章句 • 中庸章序 [Commentaries on the Four Books • The Doctrine of the Mean]*, 14–15. The original Chinese is (承先聖之統)異端之說日新月盛，以至於老佛之徒出，則彌近理而大亂真矣.

[21] The Works of Mencius, Chapter 6:9 Teng Wen Gong II in *漢英四書 [The Chinese English Four Books]*, 383. The original Chinese is 邪说诬民，充塞仁義也. 仁義充塞，則率獸食人, 人將相食.

[22] He Ning, *淮南子集釋 (下册) • 卷十九 • 修務訓 [Collected Explanations of the Huainanzi]* (Beijing: Chung Hwa Book Company, 1998), 1312. The original Chinese is [堯立孝慈]仁愛, [使民如子弟].

> rife again. There were instances of ministers who murdered their sovereigns, and of sons who murdered their fathers.[23]

For the Sino-Christian, when the heavenly way of *ren* was "pursued, a public and common spirit ruled all under Heaven.… This was the period of what we call the *Great Unity*."[24] The *Great Unity* as the *holistic* vision of an ideal world must be "founded on truth, built on justice and animated by love; in freedom it should grow every day toward a more humane balance."[25] ii) The Chinese culture needs the new genealogy of the learning of the God-human unity in *all-under-Heaven* with *Great Unity*, since

> after the death of Yao and Shun, the principles (of Yang [and] Mo as secular humanists and communists) that mark sages fell into decay.… When the path of the benevolence and righteousness of sages [is] stopped up, beasts will be led on to devour [women and men], and [women and men] will devour one another.[26]

For the Sino-Christian, "the principles of Yao and Shun, without a *benevolent government/仁政*, could not secure the tranquil order of the *all-under-Heaven* [with *Great Unity*]."[27] Jesus Christ the God-human is the King of the universe as the ruler of the heavenly kingdom

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[23] The Works of Mencius, Chapter 6:9 Teng Wen Gong II in *漢英四書* [*The Chinese English Four Books*], 380–384. The original Chinese is 世衰道微，邪說暴行有作，臣弒其君者有之，子弒其父者有之. Also see the Chinese Communist Party, *Resolution on CPC History (1949–1981)* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1981), 32.

[24] Zhu Bin, *禮記訓纂 • 禮運第九 [The Commentary of the Book of Rites • Li Yun Chapter 9]*, 331–333. The original Chinese is 大道之行也, 天下為公 … 是謂大同.

[25] Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), no. 26.

[26] The Works of Mencius, Chapter 6:9 Teng Wen Gong II in *漢英四書 [The Chinese English Four Books]*, 380–384. The original Chinese is 堯, 舜既沒，聖人之道衰 … 楊墨之道不息，孔子之道不著，是邪說誣民，充塞仁義也. 仁義充塞，則率獸食人，人將相食. Also see R. MacFarquhar & M. Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 3.

[27] The Works of Mencius, Chapter 7:1 Li Lou I in *漢英四書 [The Chinese English Four Books]*, 389. The original Chinese is 堯舜之道, 不以仁政, 不能平治天下.

with *Great Unity*. iii) The Chinese culture needs the new genealogy of the governance of the *ren-yi* of Christ in *all-under-Heaven* as one family, since a specter of pantheistic Taoism-nihilistic Buddhism-atheistic Communism-secular humanism is haunting China—the specter of humanistic lies-violence-hate in "the plan of Satan for the establishment of the New World Order, which is meant to lead to the reign of the Antichrist."[28] For the Sino-Christian, "Jesus Christ is the one who fulfills the ideal of a just [human being], on the cross. For he prefers being killed to losing *ren* and sacrifices His life for *yi*."[29]

2. Challenges, Prospects, and Demands of Chinese Culture

> Since [the] Qin and Han dynasties (221 BCE–220 CE) due to the Great Way [were] obscured in *all-under-Heaven*, the scholar … who handled the humanistic and heavenly subject in a disconnected way [has lost his soul]. It is the root of all heretical thoughts in human life and society based [on selfish human] desire.[30]

The challenges of secular humanism and atheism, as the communist specter of ethical and cultural existential relativism and nihilism, and

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[28] See *Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò,* "Truth Over Fear: Covid-19, the Vaccine, and the Great Reset," *Inside the Vatican*, available at https://insidethevatican.com/news/vigano-the-pandemic-the-suspect-of-a-disturbing-criminal-conspiracy/ (accessed April 11, 2021). See also Pius XI, *Divini Redemptoris* (March 19, 1937), no. 4.

[29] FABC-OTC, "Methodology: Asia Christian Theology," in *FAPA*-3, no. 4.5.5.4. Also see the Confucian Analects, Chapter 15:9 Wei Ling Gong, and the Works of Mencius, Chapter 11:10 Gao Zi I, in *漢英四書 [The Chinese English Four Books]*, 207, 483.

[30] Zhu Xi, *朱子全書 • 晦庵先生朱文公文集第 (24冊) 卷七十九 • 韶州州學濂溪先生祠記 [The Collected Works of Zhu Zi • 79 Volumes] (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Press, 2002), 3768*. The original Chinese is 秦漢以來, 道不明於天下, 而士不知所以爲學. 言天者遺人而無用, 語人者不及天而無本; 專下學者不知上達而滯於形器， 必上達者不務下學而溺於空虛； 優於治己者或不足以及人, 而隨世以就功名者, 又未必自其本而推之也. 夫如是, 是以天理不明而人欲熾, 道學不傳而异端起, 人挾其私智以馳騖於一世者, 不至於老死則不止, 而終亦莫悟其非也.

the plan of Satan for the reign of the Antichrist in the postmodern world have been the principal cause of violence, war, and famine across human history. Etymologically, human culture is the expression of the nature of the ornamental figures of heaven (symbolizing God the Creator) and of the human person.[31] "God speaks to people through their cultures and sows the 'seeds of [God's] Word' (*Ad Gentes*, 11) in every human culture because God wants all people to be saved."[32] "The Gospel of Christ constantly renews the life and culture of the fallen [human being]."[33] More specifically,

a). the challenges of Chinese culture for *all-under-Heaven* are from the overall reality of ethical and cultural existential relativism and nihilism as the specter of postmodernism-communism haunting the whole world.

> With all its talk about the impossibility of truth claims and metanarratives, its emphasis on relativity, and its implicit stoic-nihilistic tendencies, postmodern culture is quite naturally to question at a foundational level the possibility of revelation, faith, evangelization, and faith-based ethics and morals.[34]

Communism as the virus of the Antichrist in the world denies "the existence of both God and the soul."[35] The nature of communism

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[31] See Volume One, The Bi Hexagram, the Twenty-second in *周易 [The Zhou Book of Change]*, 133. The original Chinese is 彖傳*:* 賁，亨；柔來而文剛，故亨. 分剛上而文柔，故小利有攸往*,* 天文也；文明以止，人文也. 觀乎天文，以察時變；觀乎人文，以化成天下.

[32] FABC-OESC [Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences], "Dialogue Between Faith and Cultures in Asia: Towards Integral Human Development," in F.-J. Eilers, ed., *For All the Peoples of Asia* Vol. 2 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997), no. 3.

[33] Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 58.

[34] J. Sivalon, *God's Mission and Postmodern Culture: The Gift of Uncertainty* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2013), 32.

[35] G. Kaitholil, *Consecrated Life: Challenges and Opportunities* (Bandra, Mumbai: St Pauls, 2015), 169. Also see Marx & Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*,

as atheism is against "the Chinese culture and the Church of Christ."[36] As the Catholic Church in China "experienced total death, it arose to a fuller life through the power of the Holy Spirit."[37]

b). The prospects of Chinese culture for *all-under-Heaven* are as follows:

i) A strong Chinese cultural reconstruction movement occurred from intellectuals to the grassroots in these decades. It was initiated originally from the elites' reflection on how to face the challenges of the spiritual vacuum caused by the Cultural Revolution in the Mao era and the recent economic reform in the Deng era.[38]

ii) Social transformation in the context of traditional China is the course of human civilizations from *all-under-Heaven* in chaos to *all-under-Heaven* in *Great Unity* with "a *benevolent government (Ren Zheng 仁政)*."[39] Due to the challenges of Westernization, modernization, and communism, China has been experiencing since modern times a profound historical process from

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25–26, 58.

[36] *DPECLC*, 25–26.

[37] A. Lam, *The Catholic Church in Present-Day China: Through Darkness and Light* (Leuven: Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation, 1997), 45.

[38] See R. Madsen, foreword, in D. MacInnis, *Religion in China Today: Policy and Practice* (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), xv. See also Li Zhen, *人與上帝：普遍人文主義與中國社會的現代化 (卷七) [Human Being and God: All-pervading Humanism and the Modernization of Chinese Society Volume 7]* (Xin Zhuang: Fu Jen Catholic University, 2003), 204–205.

[39] The Works of Mencius, Chapter 7:1 Li Lou I in *漢英四書 [The Chinese English Four Books]*, 389. The original Chinese is (堯舜之道, 不以) 仁政, (不能平治天下). Also see The Confucian Analects, Chapter 16:2 Ji Shi in *漢英四書 [The Chinese English Four Books]*, 219. The original Chinese is 孔子曰：天下有道，則禮樂徵伐自天子出；天下無道，則禮樂徵伐自諸侯出 … 天下有道，則庶人不議.

"a decadent authoritarian system" to "the rapid establishment of a free, democratic, and constitutional country" in the twenty-first century, all after the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took over power in 1949.[40]

iii) Since "Deng Xiaoping's package of economic reforms"[41] after the Cultural Revolution, "Christianity fever and Christian culture fever [had] been emerging in China"[42] from the grassroots to the intellectuals during these decades.

c). The actual demands of Chinese culture in the context of China are an exercise of shared responsibility in the manifestation of God-*ren'ai* for witnessing the heavenly Kingdom with *Great Unity* in the postmodern world. It calls the faithful of Christ to live out the incarnation of God-*ren'ai* in the Chinese concept of *all-under-Heaven* to promote the life and mission of the Church, namely:

i) The Chinese moral and cultural reconstruction in the Gospel of Christ is very urgent for the mission of the evangelization of the Chinese Church. Indeed, due to the influences of the Chinese Rites Controversy and the communist dominance of the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist specter,[43] the lack of inculturated theology has brought forth the crises and challenges of the life and

[40] See also Liu Xiaobo and others, et al., "Charter 08 (10 December 2008)," available at http://www.2008xianzhang.info/english.htm (accessed May 21, 2020).

[41] D. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 187.

[42] Ying Fuk-tsang, "Mainland China," in P. Phan, ed., *Christianities in Asia* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 162. See also G. Criveller, "Christian Studies in China," *Tripod* 23:132 (Spring 2004): 39–48.

[43] See J. Motte, *History of the Catholic Church in China* Vols. III & IV (Taipei: Kuangchi Cultural Group, 2016), 278–288, 296–314.

mission of the Church in postmodern China as the conflict between the Open Church, the Underground Church, and the specter of communism.[44]

ii) The inculturation of the Chinese concept of *all-under-Heaven* in the Gospel of Christ is a new vision for revitalizing Chinese culture since the soul of China as the lineage of the Chinese way of the *ren* of Heaven has been lost in modern China.[45] "The Gospel of Christ constantly renews the life and culture of the fallen [human being]."[46]

3. A Brief Overview of the Concept of *All-Under-Heaven* in China

The concept of *all-under-Heaven* in the pre-Qin period of China as an image of the soul of China is a holistic vision of the Heaven-earth-human unity in the belief of the way of Heaven of ancient China. The cultural anthropological implications of *all-under-Heaven* in the pre-Qin Chinese classical texts are the holistic paradigm of an ideal life, society, and world in the fundamental teachings of Heaven—the true origin of all creation, the Heaven-human unity, the path of sages, and the *ren-yi* of Heaven—the guideline of the world of *Great Unity*. For the Confucian scholars, the learning of *all-under-Heaven* is the human way of life toward the Heaven-human unity.

a. The Etymology and Concept of All-Under-Heaven *in the Pre-Qin Period (2100 BCE–221 BCE) of Ancient China.* Etymologically, *all-under-Heaven/天下* refers to Heaven the Supreme Being who is the ruler of all in the belief of the way of Heaven of ancient China. Evidently,

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[44] See Lam, *The Catholic Church in Present-Day China: Through Darkness and Light*, 27–182.

[45] See Peng Guoxiang, ed., *中國情懷： 余英時散文集 [Chinese Sentiments: The Essays of Yü Yingshi]* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2012), 13–14.

[46] Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 58.

"the Supreme Being in the Five Classics is ordinarily called *Heaven*."[47] *Heaven* functions as procreator, *the Creator of the whole universe, and* the giver of life, "since Heaven gives birth to [humankind], the things and laws have been combined. The people follow Heaven's laws; for it is the virtue of truth which they adore."[48] "Heaven, for the help of the inferior people, made for them rulers, and made for them instructors, that they might be able to aid God, and secure the tranquility of the four quarters of the kingdom."[49] Heaven, especially, is also the patron of the royal families, for

> Heaven gives birth to the human race with (such) desires … and then Great Heaven regarded you (Yao) with its favour, and bestowed on you its appointment. Suddenly you possessed all within the four seas, and became ruler of all under heaven.[50]

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[47] Zhao Binshi, *天人一家 [One Family of Heaven and Man]* (Taipei: Costantinian Monthly Magazine Press, 1977), 7. Furthermore, the names of the Supreme Being in ancient China are 乾 (*Qian*, meaning Heaven) in the Xia dynasty (2100 BCE–1600 BCE), 帝 (*Di*, meaning Supreme Lord) in the Shang dynasty (1766 BCE–1122 BCE), 天 (*Tian*, meaning God) in the Zhou dynasty (1122 BCE–256 BCE), and 天, 道 (*Dao*, meaning Way), 上帝 (*Shang Di*, meaning Supreme Lord), 大 (*Da*, meaning the Supreme), and 天鬼 (*Tian Gui*, meaning the Supreme) in the Spring and Autumn Period (772 BCE–481 BCE) and Warring States Period (403 BCE–256/221 BCE). See Zhao Binshi, *天人一家 [One Family of Heaven and Man]*, 3–12.

[48] The Book of Poetry, Major Odes: Mankind in *詩經 第2册 [The Book of Poetry Volume II]*, trans. Wang Rongpei (Chang Cha: Hunan People's Publishing House, 2008), 629. The original Chinese is 天生蒸民, 有物有則. 民之秉彝, 好是懿德.

[49] Jang Hao & Qian Zongwu, *今古文尚書全譯 • 周書 • 泰誓上 [The Complete Translation of the Book of Documents of Modern Chinese and Ancient Chinese • Zhou Shu • Great Declaration I]*, 204. The original Chinese is 天佑下民, 作之君, 作之師, 惟其克相上帝, 寵綏四方.

[50] Jang Hao & Qian Zongwu, *今古文尚書全譯•商書•仲虺之誥•虞書•大禹謨 [The Complete Translation of the Book of Documents of Modern Chinese and Ancient Chinese • Shang Shu • Announcement of Zhong Hui • Yu Shu • Counsels of the Great Yu]*, 117, 27. The original Chinese is 惟天生民有欲 … (堯) 皇天眷命, 奄有四海, 為天下君.

Confucius says, "Tai Bo may be said to have reached the highest point of virtuous action. Thrice he declined the kingdom, and the people in ignorance of his motives could not express their approbation of his conduct."[51] For Mencius, the *all-under-Heaven* with *Great Unity* is shown

> in the kingdom [where] there are three things universally acknowledged to be honourable. Nobility is one of them; age is one of them; virtue is one of them. In courts, nobility holds the first place of the three; in villages, age holds the first place; and for helping one's generation and presiding over the people, the other two are not equal to virtue.[52]

b. The Cultural Anthropological Implications of All-Under-Heaven *in the Chinese Classical Texts.* According to the Great Plan chapter in *The Book of Documents*,

> *people in Ancient China* believed that Heaven the Supreme Being is the procreator of His people. The ruler of the country is called the Son of Heaven who takes the place of Heaven as the parent of the people in the family.[53]

More specifically, the cultural anthropological implications of *all-under-Heaven* in the pre-Qin Confucian classical texts consist of the threefold dimension of the Supreme Being in the belief of the way of Heaven of ancient China, namely:

i) Heaven as the Supreme Being is the true origin of all creation. Traditionally, the belief in the supreme God has been the official religious faith in China since the

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[51] The Confucian Analects, Chapter 8:1 Tai Bo in *漢英四書 [The Chinese English Four Books]*, 127. The original Chinese is (子曰): 泰伯，其可谓至德也已矣！三以天下让，民无得而称焉.

[52] The Works of Mencius, Chapter 4:2 Gongsun Chou II in *漢英四書 [The Chinese English Four Books]*, 331. The original Chinese is 天下有達尊三：爵一，齒一，德一. 朝廷莫如爵，鄉黨莫如齒，輔世長民莫如德.

[53] Fu Peirong, "古人的政治理念 [The Political Idea of Chinese Antiquity]," *Constantinian Bimonthly* 589 (June 2015): 11.

Shang dynasty up until the Republic of China today.[54] Heaven/天 as the name of the Supreme Being is classically the Creator of the universe as the Supreme Consummator in the Chinese millenarian tradition.[55] For Heaven gave birth to human beings and all things in full harmony through its *Way (Dao 道)* and *Ether (Qi 气)*. Just as "the way of heaven changes constantly, [it] bestows on all things of creation their own distinctive nature and life and maintains the great harmony of the primordial mixed *yin* and *yang qi* needed to persevere in the right way."[56] "Condensed *yin qi* and *yang qi* of heaven and earth mix together and transform into all things of creation with pure and perfect nature. Males and females have intercourse to give birth to all living creatures."[57]

ii) The Heaven-human unity as the journey of being human is the path of sages through inner sageliness and outer kingliness. Classically, the great learning of being human is "to illustrate illustrious virtue to

[54] See Zhu Bin, *礼记训纂 • 表记第三十二 [The Commentary of the Book of Rites • Biao Ji Chapter 32]*, 792. See also Luo Guang, "中國對帝–天的信仰 [The Belief of Supreme Lord or Heaven in China]," *神學論集 [Collectanea Theologica Universitatis Fujen]* 33 (Autumn 1977): 399.

[55] See the Book of Poetry, Major Odes: Mankind in *詩經 第2册 [The Book of Poetry Volume II]*, 629. Also see Jang Hao & Qian Zongwu, *今古文尚書全譯 •周書 •泰誓上 [The Complete Translation of the Book of Documents of Modern Chinese and Ancient Chinese • Zhou Shu • Great Declaration I]*, 204.

[56] Volume One, The Qian Hexagram, the First in *周易 [The Zhou Book of Change]*, 5. The original Chinese is 乾道變化，各正性命，保合大和，乃利貞.(首出庶物，萬國咸寧.)

[57] The Survey Part II, Chapter Five, in *周易 [The Zhou Book of Change]*, 427. The original Chinese is 天地絪縕, 萬物化醇, 男女構精, 萬物化生. See also The Survey Part II, Chapter Ten in *周易 [The Zhou Book of Change]*, 445.

> renovate the people; and to rest in the highest good/ *bonum supremum*."[58] For

> what Heaven has conferred is called the *Nature*; an accordance with this nature is called the *Dao*; the regulation of this *Dao* is called *Instruction*. The way may not be left for an instant. If it could be left, it would not be the Way.[59]

Indeed,

> the sages exhibited the Way of Heaven, calling *yin* and *yang*; the Way of earth, calling the weak (or soft) and the strong (or hard); and the Way of [humankind], under the names of *humanness* and *righteousness*. Each (trigram) embraced (those) three Powers; and, being repeated (as Heaven and human beings).[60]

The human being is the image of heavenly *ren*.[61] The ideal personality of Chinese culture is the full embodiment of inner sageliness and outer kingliness in the principle of *ren* and *yi* as the noble moral and humanistic spirit of Chinese millenarian tradition since early China.[62]

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[58] Zhu Bin, *禮記訓纂 • 大學第四十二 [The Commentary of the Book of Rites • The Great Learning Chapter42]*, 866. The original Chinese is (大學之道)，在明明德，在親民，在止于至善. See also Zhou Keqin, *神學本位化點滴 [A Tentative Discussion on the Inculturated Theology]* (Tainan: Catholic Window Press, 2002), 304–305.

[59] Zhu Bin, *禮記訓纂 • 中庸第三十一 [The Commentary of the Book of Rites • Zhong Yong Chapter 31]*, 772. The original Chinese is 天命之謂性, 率性之謂道, 修道之謂教. 道也者, 不可須臾离也, 可离, 非道也.

[60] On the Trigrams, Chapter Two in *周易 [The Zhou Book of Change]*, 455. The original Chinese is (聖人) 立天之道曰陰與陽, 立地之道曰柔與剛, 立人之道曰仁與義, 兼三才而两之.

[61] See Zhu Bin, *禮記訓纂 • 中庸第三十一 [The Commentary of the Book of Rites • The Doctrine of the Mean Chapter 31]*, 775. Also see Su Yu, *春秋繁露義証 • 卷第十一 • 王道通三第四十四 [The Paraphrase of Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn Annals Volume XI • Kingly Way as Heaven-Earth-Man Chapter 44]*, 329. The original Chinese is 天，仁也.

[62] See Jang Hao & Qian Zongwu, *今古文尚書全譯 • 虞書 • 尧典 • 舜典 [The Complete Translation of the Book of Documents of Modern Chinese and Ancient Chinese • Yu Shu •*

iii) The *ren* of Heaven as the human way of life is the guideline of the world of *Great Unity*, for "the human way is under the names of *humanity/ren* and *righteousness*"[63] of the Supreme God. The Chinese character 惠/*ren* is a cultural history of Confucianism in the belief of the way of Heaven in Chinese culture. It is the triple teaching of the Heaven-earth-human unity of Confucian moral philosophy, for Confucius's doctrine is "that of an all-pervading unity"[64] as *ren*. Heaven is the root of *ren*, for the government

> must have a fundamental connection with Heaven. This uses a variety of ways in sending down the intimations of its will. As learned from the altars of the land, these are (receptivity and docility) imparted to the earth. As learned from the ancestral temple, they are *benevolence* and *righteousness*.[65]

c. The Chinese Scholars Toward the Learning of All-Under-Heaven. For the Confucian scholars after the pre-Qin period, the learning of *all-under-Heaven* is the human way of life toward the Heaven-human unity in the principle of *ren* and *yi*; namely, for Dong Zhongshu, *all-under-Heaven* with *Great Unity* is

> the full realization of the Heaven-[human] unity in the principles of *humanity/ren* and *righteousness/yi*. Further, the principle of *humanness* is to love one another, not only to love oneself; and the principle

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Canon of Yao • Canon of Shun], 14, 23. Also see the Confucian Analects, Chapter 15:9 Wei Ling Gong, and the Works of Mencius, Chapter 11:10 Gao Zi I, in *漢英四書 [The Chinese English Four Books]*, 207, 483.

[63] On the Trigrams, Chapter Two in *周易 [The Zhou Book of Change]*, 455. The original Chinese is (聖人)立人之道曰仁与義.

[64] The Confucian Analects, Chapter 4:15 Li Ren in *漢英四書 [The Chinese English Four Books]*, 91–93. The original Chinese is 吾道一以貫之.

[65] Zhu Bin, *禮記訓纂 • 禮運第九 [The Commentary of the Book of Rites • Li Yun Chapter 9]*, 342. The original Chinese is 夫政必本於天，殽以降命. 命降于社之谓殽地，降於祖庙之谓仁義.

> of *righteousness* is to amend one's own actions, not only to amend another's action.[66]

Zhu Xi brings forward that *the all-in-one with harmony* is the presence of *all-under-Heaven* with *Great Unity*, which is shown in

> the way of the learning of the great [human person which] is to illustrate illustrious virtue rooted in Heaven, to renew the people, and to rest in the highest good, which are the matters of the illustrated illustrious virtue as the inner sageliness. To those eight steps are below the regulated family, which are the matters of the renovated people as the outer kingliness.[67]

Qian Mu says, "The Heaven-[human] unity is the general goal of the whole [of] *traditional Chinese culture* as the trait of the *humanistic attribute* of Chinese philosophy. *It is also the biggest contribution of Chinese culture to humanity.*"[68]

B. Insights on the Triune God from the Teachings of Scripture, the Magisterium, and Tradition for *All-Under-Heaven*

"This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come" (Mt. 24:14). Indeed, *all-under-Heaven* is signified as

> the age-old belief in the inner unity of the Chinese realm.… For Christian[s], the Gospel is the hermeneutic of the entire historical process; the law of the Cross is the immanently transcendent intelligibility of God's one world in the making. As such[,] it is relevant

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[66] Su Yu, *春秋繁露義証 • 深察名號第三十五 • 仁義法第二十九 [The Paraphrase of Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn Annals • An In-Depth Investigation into Names Chapter 35 • Standards of Humanity and Rightousness Chapter 29]*, 288, 250–251.

[67] Zhu Xi, *四書章句集注 • 大學章句 [Commentaries on the Four Books • The Doctrine of the Mean]*, 3–4.

[68] Qian Mu, *世界局勢與中國文化 [The World Situation and Chinese Culture]* (Taipei: Linking Publishing, 1998), 419–420.

> to everything. This deep-down truth is to be lived out by all who have come to believe.[69]

"The Kingdom of Heaven is the Kingdom of God. The whole universe is its *territory; the human race is its people; and the principle of ren and yi is its charter."*[70] Thus, this section discerns the Biblical, doctrinal, and theological bases of *all-under-Heaven* relative to the life and mission of the Church. It searches for dynamic equivalent concepts for *all-under-Heaven* in Biblical and magisterial teachings and theological reflections.

1. The Notion of the Triune God in the Bible: Its Relevance to *All-Under-Heaven*

Biblically, the Triune God the Creator, as love and justice, is the ruler of all.[71] This can examine the Biblical foundations of the Chinese concept of *all-under-Heaven* as follows:

a) God the Father, as the first origin of everything and transcendent authority and the Divine Being, is the Creator. For

> in the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind sweeping over the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.… God created [humankind] in [God's] image; in the image of God [God] created them; male and female [God] created them … then the Lord God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom [God] had formed. (Gen. 1:1–3, 27; 2:7–8)

b) God the Son as the Word is the Redeemer, the incarnate love of God in Jesus Christ, for

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[69] B. Lovett, *A Dragon not for the Killing: Christian Presence to China* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1998), 115,117.

[70] Cheng Shiguang, *天人之際 [Between Heaven and Man]* (Tainan: Catholic Windom Press, 1991), 203.

[71] See J. Mohler, *Dimensions of Love: East and West* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975), 92–95.

> in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a [human person's] decision but of God. And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth. (Jn. 1:1–14; see 1 Jn. 4:8)

c) God the Holy Spirit as πνεῦμα (*Pneuma*; Jn. 3:8) is the Sanctifier as the source of life. For

> in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind sweeping over the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. (Gen. 1:1–3)

> The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her." … After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened [for him], and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him.… Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.… "Therefore, I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven." (Mt. 1:20; 3:16; 4:1; 12:31).

Furthermore, Jesus Christ the God-human is the King of the whole universe who is the incarnate love and justice of God. This is shown in

> the first man, Adam, [who] became a living being, and the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. But the spiritual was not first; rather the natural and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, earthly; the second man, from heaven. As was the earthly one, so also are the earthly, and as

> is the heavenly one, so also are the heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthly one, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one. (1 Cor. 15:45–49)

2. The Magisterial Teachings on the Triune God and *All-Under-Heaven*

For John Paul II, the pressing need of the local Churches in Asia is "to present the mystery of Christ to their peoples according to their cultural patterns and ways of thinking"[72] as an inculturation of the faith in Asia. Indeed, "God speaks to people through their cultures and sows the 'seeds of [God's] Word' (*Ad Gentes*, 11) in every human culture because God wants all people to be saved."[73] Theologically, the essential connotations of the magisterial teachings on the Triune God and *all-under-Heaven* contain the triple essence of the Divine Being in the Christian faith, which can examine the theological base of the Chinese concept of *all-under-Heaven*, namely:

a) God as the Creator is the Lord of the whole universe, which is shown in the triple gift of the creation-salvation-sanctification of the Triune God.

> In creating man and woman in [God's] own image and likeness, God created them for communion. God the Creator, who revealed [God's self] as Love, as Trinity, as communion, called them to enter into intimate relationship with [God's self] and into interpersonal communion, in the universal fraternity of all men and women.[74]

> The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in [God's self]. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the "hierarchy of the truths of faith." The whole history of salvation is identical with the

[72] John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia* (November 6, 1999), no. 20.

[73] FABC-OESC, "Dialogue Between Faith and Cultures in Asia: Towards Integral Human Development," in no. 3.

[74] Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Fraternal Life in Community* (February 2, 1994), no. 9.

> history of the way and the means by which the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, reveals [God's self] to [human persons] "and reconciles and unites with [God's self] those who turn away from sin." This paragraph expounds briefly [on] how the mystery of the Blessed Trinity was revealed, how the Church has articulated the doctrine of the faith regarding this mystery, and how, by the divine missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit, God the Father fulfills the "plan of his loving goodness" of creation, redemption and sanctification.[75]

b. As the incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ the God-human is the Christian way of life toward holiness in the mission of love. Theologically, the only Son of the Father, the eternal Word—that is, the Word and substantial Image of the Father—became incarnate at the time appointed by God; he assumed human nature without losing his divine nature. Jesus Christ is true God and true human in the unity of his divine person; for this reason, he is the one and only mediator between God and humanity. Jesus Christ possesses two natures, one divine and the other human, not confused but united in the one person of God's Son. Christ, being true God and true human, has a *human intellect and will*, perfectly attuned and subject to his *divine intellect and divine will*, which he has in common with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Incarnation, therefore, is the mystery of the wonderful union of the divine and human natures in the one person of the Word. Christ is Lord of the cosmos and of history. In him, human history and, indeed, all of creation are set forth and transcendently fulfilled. As Lord, Christ is also head of the Church, which is his Body. The kingdom of Christ is already present in mystery on earth, the seed and the beginning of the kingdom. Furthermore, Christ is Lord of eternal life. The full right to pass definitive judgement on the works and hearts of human persons belongs to him as redeemer of the world. Jesus Christ as the light of humanity is the one whom the Father anointed with the Holy Spirit and established as priest, prophet, and king. The whole People of God participates in these three offices of Christ and bears the responsibilities for mission and service that flow from them. Jesus Christ the God-human as the model of chastity is the center of

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[75] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992), nos. 234–235, hereafter referred to as *CCC*.

all Christian life. The bond with him takes precedence over all other bonds, familial or social.[76]

c. The love-justice of Christ as the way of God is the charter of the Heavenly Kingdom. The mediator between God and humankind, the incarnate love and *ren/ren'ai* of God,[77] Jesus Christ is soteriologically the way, the truth, and the life in the past, present, and future (see 1 Tim. 2:5–6; Jn. 1:14, 14:6; Heb. 13:8) as the source of the philosophy of life. He is "the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega, Lord of the new universe, the great hidden key to human history, and the part we play in it."[78] Indeed, the Kingdom of the heavenly God must be "founded on truth, built on justice and animated by love—the justice and love of Christ,"[79] for "the just ordering of the State and society on the one hand, and organized charitable activity on the other"[80] in the life and mission of the Church. More specifically, the human being is by nature and vocation a religious being. Coming from God, going toward God, the human person lives a fully human life only if she or he lives freely by her or his bond with God. Humankind is made to live in communion with God in whom women and men find happiness. When they listen to the message of creation and the voice of conscience, human persons can arrive at certainty about the existence of God, the cause and end of everything. The Church teaches that the one true God, our Creator and Lord, can be known with certainty from God's works, by the natural light of human reason. It is love to the end that confers on Christ's sacrifice its value as redemption and reparation, as atonement and satisfaction. He knew and loved us all

[76] See *CCC,* nos. 479–483, 668–669, 679, 748, 783, 2394.

[77] See the Catholic Doctrinal Committee of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of China (CBCC), *天主教的信仰 [The Catholic Faith]* (Taipei: The Catholic Wisdom Press, 2011), 27–29, 129. See also CCC, no. 480.

[78] Paul VI, "We Proclaim Christ to the Whole World," in *The Liturgy of the Hours III* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Corp., 1975), 419.

[79] Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, nos. 26, 90.

[80] Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (December 25, 2005), no. 29.

when he offered his life. The unique character of Christ's sacrifice is the source of eternal salvation and Christ's most holy Passion on the wood of the cross merited justification for us. Christ is the end of the law (cf. Rom. 10:4); only he teaches and bestows the justice of God. The New Law is the grace of the Holy Spirit received by faith in Christ, operating through charity. The Law of the Gospel fulfills and surpasses the Old Law and brings it to perfection: its promises, through the Beatitudes of the Kingdom of heaven; its commandments, by reforming the heart, the root of human acts. The New Law is a law of love, a law of grace, a law of freedom. The love and justice of God are the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.[81]

3. The Reflections of Theologians on the Triune God and *All-Under-Heaven*

All-under-Heaven with *Great Unity* as the heavenly kingdom is the full embodiment of the love and justice of the Triune God in human life, society, culture, and the world. It is shown in the reflections of theologians on the teachings of sacred tradition, sacred scripture, and the magisterium of the Church, namely:

a) Augustine's consideration of the "Trinitarian love" creatively provides a new understanding of the Gospel of God's love in the postmodern world. For Augustine, the Scripture commands "love of God and love of neighbour … God is love."[82] He says, "In the love of Thy Love am I doing this task;"[83] "O Lord, Thee is the wish of [humankind] who is but a part of Thy creation … for Thou hast made us for Thee and our heart is unquiet till it finds rest in Thee."[84]

[81] *CCC,* nos. 44–47, 616–617, 1977, 1983–1985, 2392.

[82] Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. S. McKenna (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1970), 260–261.

[83] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. V. Bourke (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1966), 327. See also D. Schindler, "Love and Beauty: The 'Forgotten Transcendental' in Thomas Aquinas," *Communio* 44:2 (2017): 335.

[84] Augustine, *Confessions*, 3–4.

Furthermore, Augustine shows the threefold nature of love. We love love (God) and our brother and sister: lover, love, and beloved.[85] For him, the justice and love of Christ are the general guidelines of God's kingdom in human life, society, and the world.[86]

b) Aquinas's idea of "love as the standard for all human actions" in his *Summa Theologiae* is very enlightening for living out the Christian mission in the complex and challenging context of today's world. He considers love to be one of the three theological virtues besides faith and hope. Love means real friendship between the human being and God and is made possible because of God's goodness and its communication to us humans. "To love is to wish good to someone."[87] "The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us (Rom. 5:5)."[88]

> Since what we ought to love in our neighbor is that [she or he] may be in God. Hence it is clear that it is specifically the same act whereby we love God and whereby we love our neighbor. Consequently, the habit of charity extends not only to the love of God but also to the love of our neighbour.[89]

Furthermore, he insists that "the law of divine love is the standard for all human actions."[90] Jesus Christ himself is the way of life as we have access to the Father through him.

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[85] See Augustine, *The Trinity*, 43–57, 76, 272, 274, 277, 432, 495–496, 503–504.

[86] See P. Schaff, ed., *St. Augustin's City of God and Christian Doctrine* (New York: The Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890), 104.

[87] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1948), I-II, Q. 26, Art. 4, p. 706, hereafter referred to as ST. See also Schindler, "Love and Beauty," 337–352.

[88] ST II-II, Q. 24, Art. 2, p. 1270.

[89] ST II-II, Q. 25, Art. 1, p. 1280.

[90] See ST Pt. II-II, Qs. 23–46, pp. 1263–1378. See also ST II-II, Q. 44, Art. 1, p. 1368.

> Since this way is not separate from its end, but joined to it, he adds the true and the life; thus, he himself [is] at once both the way and the goal. In his human nature he is the way, and in his divine nature he is the goal.[91]

c) Cheng Shiguang's consideration of "*ren* and *yi* as the Charter of God's Kingdom" is very inspiring for doing contextual theology in China. For him, "the charter of the Kingdom of God is *humanity/ren* and *righteousness/yi,* and the executable detailed rules and regulations of the Kingdom of God are the proper human relationships and commandments."[92] He affirms that

> *ren* as love is the confluence of cultivation which consists of individual cultivation, family ethics, political morals, etc. *Yi* is exercising self-restraint in order to do everything properly. Indeed, the principle of *ren* is to love one another, not only to love oneself; and the principle of *yi* is to amend one's own actions, not only to amend another's action.[93]

"The Incarnate Christ is the one who fulfills the ideal of a benevolent and just [human being] on the cross."[94] For him, contextual theology in China is "the integration of the way of Heaven with the way of [humankind], of worshipping Heaven with being human"[95] "to lead

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[91] Thomas Aquinas, "The Way to Come to True Life," in *The Liturgy of the Hours III*, 315.

[92] Cheng Shiguang, *天人之際 [Between Heaven and Man]*, 203. See also V. Walsh, *Love and Responsibility: Pope John Paul II—A Simplified Version* (Wynnewood, PA: Key of David Publications, 2001), 23, 111.

[93] Cheng Shiguang, *天人之際 [Between Heaven and Man]*, 32–33, 37–38.

[94] Cheng Shiguang, *鹽齋解讀 [Reading Confucian Classical Texts of Yanzhi]* (Tainan: Catholic Window Press, 1998), 142. Also see Cheng Shiguang, *天人之际 [Between Heaven and Man]*, 34–35.

[95] Cheng Shiguang, *天人之際 [Between Heaven and Man]*, 7.

people to pursue the fullness of human life and perfection of charity"[96] as "Jesus Christ of the unity of *Heaven* and [humankind]."[97]

C. *All-Under-Heaven:* A New Vision for Proclaiming Christ in Chinese Culture

The discussion in this final section responds to the question, "How can *all-under-Heaven* be a new vision for proclaiming Christ in Chinese culture?" This researcher offers an enriched and deepened understanding of the Sino-Christian faith toward a contextual theology in China. It consists of three parts, namely, Jesus the Christ is the way of the Heaven-human unity, Jesus the Christ is the truth of the world of *Great Unity*, and Jesus the Christ is the life of *ren-yi*.

1) Jesus the Christ is the way of the Heaven-human unity/天人合一 (see Jn. 1:1–14, 14:6), for the sages exhibited the way of humanity as "under the names of *humanity/ren* and *righteousness/yi*."[98]

> Alternation between *yin* and *yang* is called the Way. To spread and carry on it is of goodness and to perfect and persevere in it is of nature. A benevolent [woman or man] who finds similarity between the way and benevolence calls the way benevolence/*ren*, a wise [woman or man] who finds similarity between the way and wisdom calls it wisdom, common people are not aware of [the] existence of the way but make use of it in their daily life, therefore, few understand the way in full as superior [women or men] do.[99]

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[96] Cheng Shiguang, *止於至善 [Pursue the perfection]* (Tainan: Catholic Window Press, 1985), 5.

[97] Cheng Shiguang, *天人之際 [Between Heaven and Man],* 175. See also Cheng Shiguang, *閑居隨筆 [Essays on the Idle Life]* (Tainan: The Catholic Window Press, 1994), 14.

[98] On the Trigrams, Chapter Two in *周易 [The Zhou Book of Change]*, 455. The original Chinese is (聖人)立人之道曰仁與義. Also see Zhu Bin, *禮記訓纂 • 表記第三十二 [The Commentary of the Book of Rites • Biao Ji Chapter 32]*, 792. The original Chinese is 子曰: 夏道尊命，事鬼敬神而遠之 … 殷人尊神，率民以事神 … 周人尊禮尚施,事鬼敬神而遠之

[99] The Survey Part I, Chapter Five in *周易 [The Zhou Book of Change]*, 377. The original Chinese is 一陰一陽之謂道，继之者善也，成之者性也. 仁者見之謂之仁，知者見之謂之知. 百姓日用而不知，故君子之道鮮矣.

Qian Mu says, "The Heaven-[human] unity is the general goal of the whole *traditional Chinese culture* as the trait of the *humanistic attribute* of Chinese philosophy. *It is also the biggest contribution of Chinese culture to humanity.*"[100] Ontologically, God is *ren'ai* itself. In Jesus Christ, the whole of God's *ren'ai* has been made manifest. The Apostle John says,

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.… And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth. (Jn. 1:1–5, 14).[101]

2) Jesus the Christ is the truth of the world of *Great Unity*/世界大同 (see Lk. 23:3; Jn. 1:19, 14:6, 18:37), for "God is Truth itself.… In Jesus Christ, the whole of God's truth has been made manifest,"[102] and the *all-under-Heaven* with *Great Unity* as the Kingdom of Heaven is the direct embodiment of the *humanity*/*ren* and *rigorousness*/*yi* in the supreme God as the *Supreme Ultimate*/*皇極* —the mainstays and guidelines of human life, family, and society in the world.[103] It is the concentrated expression of the way-learning-political holistic system of Chinese traditional orthodoxy from the tripartite path of the sages Yao-Shun, Wen-Wu, and Confucius-Mencius.[104] Jesus the Christ is the

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[100] Qian Mu, *世界局勢與中國文化 [The World Situation and Chinese Culture]*, 419–420.

[101] See *CCC,* nos. 479–483.

[102] *CCC,* nos. 215, 2466.

[103] See Jang Hao & Qian Zongwu, *今古文尚書全譯 • 周書 • 洪範 [The Complete Translation of the Book of Documents of Modern Chinese and Ancient Chinese • Zhou Shu • Great Plan],* 237–238.

[104] See Liang Tao, *郭店竹簡與思孟學派 [The Bamboo-Slips of Guodian Chu Tomb and the School of Thought of Zisi-Mencius]* (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2008), 158–183. See also Mou Zongsan, *牟宗三先生全集第9册道德的理想主義歷史哲*

incarnate *humanity* and *rigorousness* of God.[105] More specifically, the *all-under-Heaven* with *Great Unity* in t*he isomorphism of family and state* is the holistic paradigm of human life, family, society, and the world based on the belief of the way of Heaven in Chinese millenarian culture, which is the full embodiment of the entirety of humankind living together as one global family in humanity and love.[106] For the Sino-Christian, the supreme God the Creator is the procreator of God's people. "The ruler of the country is called the Son of Heaven who takes the place of Heaven as the parent of the people in the family."[107] Hence, "wherever the heavens overshadow and the earth sustains,"[108] and "under the wide Heaven, all is the king's land. Within the sea-boundaries of the land, all are the king's servants."[109] Christ dwells on earth in his Church.

> The kingdom of Christ is already present in mystery, on earth, the seed and the beginning of the kingdom. The whole Church is apostolic. Indeed, we call an apostolate every activity of the Mystical Body that aims to spread the Kingdom of Christ over all the earth.[110]

3) Jesus the Christ is the Life of *ren-yi/仁義* (see Jn. 14:6; 1 Jn. 2:29, 4:8, 16). It affirms that the cosmic Christ's presence in Asian culture is seen when

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學 [The Complete Works of Mou Zongsan • Moral Idealism • The Philosophy of History Volume IX] (Taipei: Linking Publishing Group, 2003), 9.

[105] FABC-OTC, "Methodology: Asia Christian Theology," no. 4.5.5.4.

[106] See Zhu Bin, *禮記訓纂 • 樂記第十九 [The Commentary of the Book of Rites • Yue Ji Chapter19],* 588. The original Chinese is 子夏對曰：君子於是語, 於是道古, 修身及家, 平均天下. Also see Zhu Bin, *禮記訓纂 • 禮運第九 [The Commentary of the Book of Rites • Li Yun Chapter 9]*, 331–333, 342–344.

[107] Fu Peirong, "古人的政治理念 [The Political Idea of Chinese Antiquity]," 11.

[108] Zhu Bin, *禮記訓纂 • 中庸第三十一 [The Commentary of the Book of Rites • The Doctrine of the Mean Chapter 31]*, 780. The original Chinese is 天之所覆, 地之所載.

[109] The Book of Poetry, Minor Odes: The Northern Hill in *詩經第2册 [The Book of Poetry Volume II],* 431. The original Chinese is 溥天之下, 莫非王土; 率土之濱, 莫非王臣.

[110] *CCC,* nos. 669, 863.

> the sages [exhibit] the Way of Heaven, calling *yin* and *yang*; the Way of earth, calling the weak (or soft) and the strong (or hard); and the Way of [humankind], under the names of *humanity/ren* and *righteousness/yi*. Each (trigram) embraced (those) three Powers; and, being repeated (as Heaven and human beings).[111]

The principle of being a saint is to collect the human way within as *humanity* and manifest it without as *righteousness*.[112] "In the ultimate analysis the Gospel affirms also that Jesus is the one who fulfills the ideal of a just [human being], on the cross. For he prefers being killed to losing *ren* and sacrifices His life for *yi*."[113] Evidently, the God revealed by Jesus Christ is the God of *humanity*, love, and *righteousness*. "For God so loved the world" (Jn. 3:16, see 15:13; Rom. 3:21–26) that God

> was reconciling the world to [God's self] in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.… For our sake [God] made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him. (2 Cor. 5:19, 21)

Actually,

> charity is the greatest social commandment. It respects others and their rights. It requires the practice of justice, and it alone makes us capable of it. Charity inspires a life of self-giving: "Whoever seeks to gain [their] life will lose it, but whoever loses [their] life will preserve it."[114]

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[111] On the Trigrams, Chapter Two in *周易 [The Zhou Book of Change]*, 455. The original Chinese is (聖人) 立天之道曰陰與陽, 立地之道曰柔與剛, 立人之道曰仁與義, 兼三才而两之.

[112] See Volume One, The Qian Hexagram, the First: Supplement; On the Trigrams, Chapter Two in *周易 [The Zhou Book of Change]*, 5–7, 455. Also see the Confucian Analects, Chapter 2:24 Wei Zheng, Chapter 14:4 Xian Wen, in *漢英四書 [The Chinese English Four Books]*, 77, 189.

[113] FABC-OTC, "Methodology: Asia Christian Theology," no. 4.5.5.4. Also see the Confucian Analects, Chapter 15:9 Wei Ling Gong, and the Works of Mencius, Chapter 11:10 Gao Zi I, in *漢英四書 [The Chinese English Four Books]*, 207, 483.

[114] *CCC,* no. 1889.

All the faithful of Christ are called to "the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity."[115]

Summing-up

This research discusses a contextualized way of doing theology in China through the *all-under-Heaven* as a new vision for proclaiming Christ in Chinese culture. From these insights regarding this dimension, we draw the following conclusions.

Primary is Chinese culture being the expression of the nature of the ornamental figures of heaven and humankind. Due to the challenges of humanism and communism in China, the Chinese culture is in dire need of the renewal of its theological dimension as the inculturation of Christ's Gospel in the Chinese concept of *all-under-Heaven*. *All-under-Heaven* refers to Heaven the Supreme Being who is the ruler of all in the belief of the way of Heaven. For the Confucian scholars, the learning of *all-under-Heaven* is the human way of life toward the Heaven-human unity. Moreover, the Triune God the Creator as love and justice is Biblically the ruler of all, and the magisterial teachings on the Triune God and *all-under-Heaven* contain the essence of the Divine Being in the Christian faith, which can examine the Biblical-magisterial foundation of the Chinese concept of *all-under-Heaven*. From the reflections of the theologians, *all-under-Heaven* with *Great Unity* as the heavenly kingdom is the full embodiment of the love and justice of the Triune God in human life and the world. Finally, the *all-under-Heaven* is a new vision for proclaiming Chinese culture, namely, that Jesus the Christ is the way of the Heaven-human unity, the truth of the world of *Great Unity*, and the life of *ren-yi*.

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[115] Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), no. 40.

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CATHOLIC[1]-MUSLIM MARIOLOGY II[2]

Maryam's Immaculate Conception

Renato Taib طيب *Oliveros*

Abstract.[2] This article explores the theological convergence between Catholic and Muslim beliefs regarding Mary, focusing on the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. It examines how early Christian prayers and Islamic scriptures highlight Mary's purity and her role as a bridge in interfaith dialogues. The study underscores the significance of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception in the Catholic tradition and its potential to enhance Muslim-Catholic relations in Southeast Asia. By analyzing theological texts, the article reveals shared spiritual themes and the mutual reverence for Maryam (Mary) in both religions, promoting deeper interreligious understanding and respect.

Keywords. Immaculate Conception; Catholic-Muslim relations; Maryam (Mary); theological convergence; interfaith dialogue; Southeast Asia

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[1] "Catholic" instead of "Christian" because the Virgin Mary (Maryam), who is the bridge to Muslim-Catholic relations, is deeply respected by Muslims but, sadly, not by mainline Protestants.

[2] The first part in this series is "A Catholic-Muslim Mariology," *LANDAS* 34:2 (2020): 143–165.

As early as the fourth century CE, three centuries before the Qur'ān, the Virgin Mary's immaculate conception is cited in the prayer *Tota pulchra es* (You are Totally Beautiful):

Tota pulchra es, Maria.	You are totally beautiful, Mary,
Et macula originalis non est in Te.	and the stain of *original sin* is not in you.

Mary is *totally beautiful* because she is without blemish. Sin uglies the human soul; in Mary's case, the blemish here refers to original sin, from which her soul was preserved from the moment of her conception. Of the four Catholic dogmas on Mary, only through the Immaculate Conception do Muslims and Catholics share a spiritual and theological affinity with each other. Only in the Qur'ān and the Gospels are the names *Eisā al-Masịḥ* (Jesus the Christ) and *Maryam* (Mary) both found. One cannot find their story in the Torah and in other sacred scriptures.

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception is celebrated just before Christmas, the Solemnity of the Nativity of Jesus. On September 12, 1942, Pope Pius XII declared Mary, under the title of the Immaculate Conception, as the Patroness of the Philippines.[3] Although Filipino Catholics have a strong devotion to Mary, teaching them about the Immaculate Conception remains a challenge. Nevertheless, a better understanding of Mary's Immaculate Conception in both traditions can help enrich Muslim-Catholic relations in Southeast Asia.

Muslims and Catholics can relate to Maryam's relationship with the immanent and transcendent Allāh. In that relationship, believers can relate with and experience for themselves the Most-Loving (*ar-Rahman*) and Most-Forgiving (*ar-Rahim*) God, like the Father as portrayed by Jesus in his prayer the "Our Father." The Second Vatican Council encourages Muslim-Catholic relations by affirming that Muslims and Catholics worship the one and the same God. Muslims "also honor *Mary*, His [Jesus's] virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion."[4] The Qur'ān says, "The nearest in affection to Muslims are those who say 'We are Christians'" (Q 5:82).

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[3] In the Apostolic Letter *Impositi Nobis*.

[4] Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate* (1965), no. 3.

The Dogma

In 1708, Pope Clement XI declared the feast of the Immaculate Conception a holy day of obligation through the *papal bull Commissi Nobis Divinitus*. A century later, on December 8, 1854, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was defined by Pope Pius IX in the apostolic constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*. Pius IX states that Mary was preserved from original sin "by a singular grace and privilege of the Omnipotent God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ."

> Ancient indeed is that devotion of the faithful based on the belief *that her soul, in the first instant of its creation and in the first instant of the soul's infusion into the body,* was, by a special grace and privilege of God, *in view of the merits of Jesus Christ*, her Son and the Redeemer of the human race, *preserved free from all stain of original sin.*… Roman Pontiffs, our predecessors, especially Sixtus IV, Paul V, and Gregory XV, [issued Constitutions and Decrees] in favor of the doctrine asserting that the soul of the Blessed Virgin, in its creation and infusion into the body, was endowed with the grace of the Holy Spirit and preserved from original sin.[5]

The dogma relates that the soul of Mary, "in the first instant of its creation and in the first instant of the *soul's infusion into the body*, was … preserved free from all stain of original sin" *in view of the merits of Christ*. In early Arabic literature, *nafs* refers to the self or person. In Islamic theology, *nafs* is the word for *soul*. Its etymology is from the Arabic word *nafas*, which means "breathing." In Islamic theology, *nafs* is sometimes confused with *ruh* (Hebrew *ruah*) which means "breath," "wind," or "Spirit." The Maliki Madhhab holds that the fetus is ensouled at the moment of conception. Likewise, the Immaculate Conception iterates the Catholic teaching that God creates each individual soul at the moment of conception. The soul is the source of life, immortal life, as portrayed in Genesis when God at creation ensouled by breathing into the *nostrils of Adam* (Gen. 2:7b).

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[5] Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* (December 8, 1854), emphasis added.

The Virgin Birth[6]: A Harmony of the Gospels and the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān, as an extra-Biblical source, affirms and adds to the knowledge of what has been revealed in the Gospels. Even though there may be differences, close readings of specific Qur'ānic passages can still be interpreted in the light of Judeo-Christian tradition. The Annunciation of Gabriel (*Jibril*) to Mary in Luke 1:28–30 and in Qur'ān 3:42–47 are essentially identical. If merged into a single narrative, the details are explicit and add to what we know of from Luke 1 and John 1. It begins with Luke 1 and Qur'ān 3, and segues to Qur'ān 19 where Maryam submits to Allāh's will, the Spirit consequently blows (Surahs 21 and 66) into her generative part, and the "Word" named the Messiah is conceived.

> When a woman[7] of Imran said: "My Lord, I vow to You what is in my womb, to be devoted (to Your service), so accept (it) from me; surely You, only You, are the Hearing, the Knowing." (Q 3:35)
>
> So when she gave birth to it, she said: "My Lord, I have given birth to a female—and Allah knew best what she had given birth to—and the male is not like the female, and I have named her Mary, and I commend her and her offspring into Your protection from the accursed devil." (Q 3:36)
>
> The angels[8] said, "O Mary, surely *Allāh* has chosen you and you are *Immaculate*,[9] and truly chosen you above all women of the world" (Q 3:42a). The angel Gabriel greeted her: "Hail, *Kecharitomene* (full of grace)"

[6] For Muslims, "Virgin Birth" is inclusive of what would be the Annunciation, Visitation, and Nativity in Christianity.

[7] Hannah, the mother of Mary.

[8] Though Gabriel is not mentioned, "angels" announced the Good News to Mary. The article of the Incarnation is discussed in "Towards a Muslim-Catholic Pneumatology" (2024). Renato T. Oliveros PhD, Thomas O'Shaughnessy, SJ & Fazlur Rahman: The Incarnation in the Qur'ān, Asia Pacific Mission Studies, p. 70, 01/2022. https://archium.ateneo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1027&context=apms.

[9] Made pure.

(Lk. 1:28)! (Allāh) has truly chosen you above all women of the world (Q 3:42b); blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, (Jesus) (Lk. 1:42)!

Maryam was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. The angel assured her: "You have nothing to fear, for you have found favor with God. You will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus." (Lk. 1:29–31)

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel replied, "*The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.*" (Lk. 1:34–35)

He (*the Spirit*) said, "I am only a messenger[10] of your Lord (*Rasuulu Rabbiki*) that I *may give you* a faultless son" (Q 19:19). And Mary submits: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done unto me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38).

And Mary … whose body was "*pure*" guarded well her generative organ[11] (*farjaha*), and thus We breathed *into it* of *our Spirit* (*ah-sanat farjahaa fanafakhna fihi mir-ruhinaa*) (Q 66:12, Medina[12]) / into her (*fiha mir-Ruhinaa*) (Q 21:91, Mecca) … what is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 1:20b).

Chosen Above All Women

Mary is chosen by God *above all women in the world* (Q 3:42) or most blest is she among women (Lk. 1:42). Integral to God's act of *choosing* Maryam is her having been made *immaculate* early on at her conception in the womb of Hannah.

[10] The Spirit is on a mission to blow into Maryam.

[11] Ibn Kathir's interpretation of *farjaha*, meaning being chaste or pure.

[12] Actually Meccan, based on style and similarity (T. O'Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran* [Rome: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1953], 25).

She has been Chosen. Qurtubī's[13] exegesis (*tafsir*) explains that in Q 3:42, God repeated the election (*choosing*) of Mary—"the first being for her devotion and the second for giving birth to Jesus."[14] This was seconded by Zamakhsharī[15] who interprets Mary's election as thus:

> God chose you first when He accepted you from your mother (Hannah), nurtured you, and bestowed upon you great favors.… (Secondly,) God chose you finally in that He granted you Jesus without a father. This favor was not attained by any other woman.[16]

Like Zamakhsharī, Razi[17] interprets the second election as God granting "her Jesus without a father."[18]

Tabarsi begins with a general interpretation of Mary's chosenness as being related to the earlier vow of Hannah to dedicate the child in her womb to the service of God. Maryam's purity was there from the very moment of her conception in the womb of her mother Hannah, who prayed, "Lord, I have dedicated what is growing in my womb entirely to You; so accept this from me. You are the One who hears and knows all." However, when she gave birth, she said, "My Lord! I have given birth to a girl." God knew best what she had given birth to: the male is not like the female. "I name her Mary and I commend her and her offspring to Your protection from the rejected Satan." "Her Lord graciously accepted her and made her grow in goodness"

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[13] Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Ansari al-Qurtubi, *A-Jami' li-Ahkam al_Qur'an*, 20 vols. (Cairo: Al-Matba'ah al-Bahiyah, 1967).

[14] M. Ayoub, *Qur'an and Its Interpreters* Vol. II: *The House of Imran* (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), 124.

[15] Abu al-Qasim Jar Allah Mahmud ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhshari, *Al Kashaf 'an Haqa'iq al-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuhb al-Tawil*, 4 vols. (Cairo: 1966).

[16] al-Zamakhshari, *Al Kashaf 'an Haqa'iq al-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuhb al-Tawil* Vol. I, 361–362.

[17] Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, 32 vols. (Cairo).

[18] Ayoub, *Qur'an and Its Interpreters* Vol. II: *The House of Imran*, 126.

(Q 3:35–37a) by protecting her from stain and keeping her inviolable without sin.

Although Muslims do not believe in original sin, this does not deter the relevance of the Immaculate Conception for the Muslim-Catholic shared devotion to Mary (Maryam). Maryam (Mary) is respected deeply by Muslims for she is the only woman mentioned by name in the Qur'ān and for her status as being chosen by Allāh above all women of the world (Q 3:42). Six centuries after the Annunciation is revealed in Luke, it is revealed again to the Arabs in Qur'ān 3:42:

> And the angels said, "*Yaa-Maryamu 'innal Allāh astafaakimu wa tahharaki wastafaaki 'alaa nisaaa-'il-'aalameen.*" (O Mary, surely Allāh has chosen you and made you *immaculate* [pure], and truly chosen you above all women of the world.)

وَإِذْ قَالَتِ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ يَٰمَرْيَمُ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱصْطَفَىٰكِ وَطَهَّرَكِ وَٱصْطَفَىٰكِ

عَلَىٰ نِسَآءِ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ عَلَىٰ

Qur'ān 3:42–45 reveals that Mary is chosen by Allāh and conceived pure (immaculate) to be the mother of Jesus. Maryam shall give birth to *Eisa* (*Jesus* عیسی), and this is the reason why Allāh made Maryam immaculate from the time of her conception. Her being immaculate sets the stage for her calling to be the mother of *Eisa* (Maryam umm-Eisa). Maryam must be sinless (Latin prefix *im-*, not or without; *macula*, stain or sin) so that her womb may be a fitting vessel for the infant *Eisa al-Masih* (Jesus the Christ) who is the "Word" that the Qur'ān names as *Kalimat-ullah*—"a *Word (kalima) from Allāh*" (Q 3:45).[19] This is consistent with the Annunciation narrative in the Gospel according to Luke (Lk. 1:26–38), and the Spirit in the Qur'ān announced that Mary shall be the Mother of *Eisa* who is the Word and the Messiah (Q 3:45, 19:19).

This Qur'ānic revelation says that Allāh makes Maryam *immaculate* and *chooses* her above all women from all generations. This encapsulates the Catholic dogma that Maryam was immaculately conceived—*tahara*, meaning pure, immaculate, chaste, unblemished, blameless, and *tāhirah*,

[19] H. Gibb & J. Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 173.

meaning "She who was made immaculate." What is radical about this Qur'ānic revelation is that it states unequivocally and with certitude that Maryam is immaculate. The Qur'ān addresses her directly as *Immaculate* while *Kecharitōmĕnē* (full of grace) still needs to be interpreted as or translated into immaculate. The angel Gabriel in Luke 1:28 greets Mary as *Kecharitōmĕnē*;[20] *the angels in the Qur'ān greet Mary as one made pure (tahharaki) or as Mutahhar(a)*, the immaculate one. The simplicity and directness by which Allāh made Maryam immaculate (*mutahhar*), without sin, advances the teaching of the Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception. It captures the Catholic dogma that Maryam was immaculately conceived and chosen amongst all women to be the mother of *Eisa* (*Jesus* عیسی), the Word and Messiah (Q 3:45, 19:19).

Immaculate to be the Mother of Christ

When it comes to God's unique intervention in human history, the question one might ask is why God chose Mary and for what purpose. She was not just chosen by Allāh for something bigger than herself. Mary's being immaculate is not to *draw attention to herself*. It is for Jesus the Christ (*Eisa al-Masih*). Perhaps a more important question, then, that Muslims may ask is thus: What is it about Jesus that made God have to go through all the trouble of intervening in human history?

A Muslim-Catholic Mariology must not draw attention to Mary herself. Her purity is not for purity's sake because her immaculateness is for a purpose and that is to give birth to Jesus. The Qur'ān uses *Eisa ibn Mariam* (Jesus the son of Mary) or *Maryam umm Eisa* (Mary the mother of Jesus) to define the identity of Mary which is in relation to her son. If Catholicism emphasizes Jesus as the son of God, Islam stresses Jesus as the son of Mary. The Hail Mary prayer expresses this clearly with the line "*And blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.*" In the

[20] The name *Kecharitōmĕnē (Lk. 1:28)* is a title conferred on Mary for she is "full of grace" at the moment of her conception. Maryam the *Mutahhara* (Immaculate) is similar to *Eisa al-Masih* (Jesus the Christ) where *Mutahhara* is a title like "Christ" is a title.

greeting of Elizabeth, the name "Jesus" is added to specify who is meant by the phrase "the fruit of your womb." The first part of the Hail Mary is a concise Muslim Mariology seconded by Qur'ān 3:42–45. Muslim commentators explain the reason why Allāh chose Mary and made her immaculate. It is because she will give birth to *Eisa al Masih* (Jesus the Christ).

> When the angels said, "O Mary, Allāh announces good tidings to you of *a Word* (*Bi-kalimat-in*) from Him (*min-hu*' [Allāh]) whose name is *the Messiah* (*ismu-hul Masihu*), Jesus son of Mary (*'Eisā-ibnu-Maryama*)."[21] (Q 3:45a; see Lk. 1:31)

Maryam the *Mutahhara* (Immaculate)

Integral to God's act of *choosing* Maryam is the act of making her immaculate. *Muṣtafā* means "she who was chosen," and *Tahirah* means "she who was made immaculate." Maryam's chosenness is exemplified in her immaculateness as she was conceived by her mother, Anna (Hannah). The early Muslim commentators were consistent in their interpretation that the miracle of the "Virgin Birth" rests in Maryam being chosen to be the mother of *Eisa*—a privilege granted unto her, raising her above all women of all nations of the world. Tabarsi[22] argues that God chose her for the honor of giving birth to Christ[23] as she was chosen by Allāh to be the mother of *Eisa* (Jesus).

This was seconded by Zamakhsharī[24] who interprets Mary's election as thus: "God chose you first when He accepted you from your mother (*Hannah*), nurtured you, and bestowed upon you great favors. ... (secondly,) God chose you finally in that He granted you Jesus

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[21] The Qur'ān, trans. 'Ali Quli Qara'i (New York: 2006).

[22] Abu 'Ali al-Fadl b. al-Hasan al-Tabarsi, *Majma' al Bayan fir Tafsir al-Qur'ān*, 6 vols. (Beirut: 1961).

[23] Ayoub, *Qur'an and Its Interpreters* Vol. II: *The House of Imran*, 128.

[24] al-Zamakhshari, *Al Kashaf 'an Haqa'iq al-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuhh al-Tawil.*

without a father. This favor was not attained by any other woman". [25] Like Zamakhsharī, Razi[26] interprets the second election "… is that God granted her Jesus without a father."[27]

Maryam's chosenness is exemplified in her immaculateness as she was conceived by her mother, Anna (Hannah). Tabarsi begins with a general interpretation that Mary's chosenness relates to the earlier vow of Hannah to dedicate the child in her womb to the service of God. Maryam's purity was there from the very moment of her conception in the womb of her mother Hannah who prayed, "Lord, I have dedicated what is growing in my womb entirely to You; so accept this from me. You are the One who hears and knows all," but when she gave birth, she said, "My Lord! I have given birth to a girl." God knew best what she had given birth to: the male is not like the female. "I name her Mary and I commend her and her offspring to Your protection from the rejected Satan." Her Lord graciously accepted her and made her grow in goodness…" (Q. 3: 35-37a) by protecting her from stain and keeping her inviolable without sin.

Mary's Obedience/Submission

The Arabic word for "Muslim" (مُسْلِم) literally means "someone who submits," as the Qur'ān ascertains that the ideal Muslim is someone who submits totally to God. Integral to God's act of making her immaculate is the command "O Mary, be *obedient* to your Lord" (Q 3:43a)—*Ya Maryamu uq-nutii li-Rabbiki* (يٰمَرْيَمُ اقْنُتِيْ لِرَبِّكِ). For Muslims, Maryam's obedience is the result of her being immaculate. It emphasizes not just purity but also, more importantly, her submission to Allāh's will despite the risk of being judged as an adulteress which is punishable by stoning.

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[25] al-Zamakhshari, *Al Kashaf 'an Haqa'iq al-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuhh al-Tawil* Vol. I, 361–362.

[26] al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir*.

[27] Ayoub, *Qur'an and Its Interpreters* Vol. II: *The House of Imran*, 126.

Integral to God's act of making her pure (made pure) is the command "*O Mary, be devoutly obedient to your Lord*" (Q 3:43a), *Ya Maryamu uq-nutii li-Rabbiki* (يٰمَرْيَمُ اقْنُتِيْ لِرَبِّكِ). Mary is called *Qānitah* which means "devoutly obedient" (Q 66:12). This Arabic term implies not only constant submission to God but also absorption in prayer. This is consistent with the Islamic tradition that Maryam spent her childhood in the temple as she grew up in contemplative prayer life. It coincides perfectly with the announcement of Gabriel at the Annunciation and Maryam's obedience in declaring, "Let it be done unto me according to His word" (Lk. 1:38).

In Islam, Maryam's obedience is one with her immaculateness. She is called *Qānitah* which means "devoutly obedient" (Q 66:12). This Arabic term implies not only constant submission to God but also absorption in prayer and invocation, meanings that are consistent with the Islamic tradition that Maryam spent her childhood in the temple as she grew up in a contemplative prayer life. In this way, Mary personifies prayer and contemplation in Islam. The birth is later referred to in Qur'ān 66:12, which states that Mary remained "pure" while God allowed a life to shape itself in her womb. This coincides perfectly with Gabriel's announcement at the Annunciation and the command "Maryam, be *devoutly obedient* to your Lord" (Q 3:43a). The appropriate response of Maryam in Christianity is revealed in Luke: "Let it be done unto me according to His word" (Lk. 1:38).[28] This exemplifies her total submission to God's will.

On the Issue of No Original Sin in Islam

Muslims believe that what one does on earth depends on the quality of one's relationship with Allah. If God is a just God, God has empowered every believer to choose rightfully and with the moral ability to act on it. In James, the good works are from God's grace,

[28] *Word* in Islamic interpretation means God's command and will. *The Word* (al-Kalam) refers to the Qur'ān; for Christians, *the Word* becoming flesh refers to Jesus (Jn. 1:14).

and for a person to deny God's grace as the source of one's good works (*zakat*) is arrogance. Perhaps Augustine is extreme—according to him, credit for all virtue and good works is due to God alone, and to say otherwise causes arrogance, which is the main cause of sin. Augustine calls humanity's inclination to sin and go against God's will concupiscence.

We can also apply the analogy of the authorship of the Scriptures. God is the author and source of revelation, and the human person is God's instrument for writing to and communicating with humankind. If we see the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, this can apply to all persons. Like Mary, our attitude must always be thus: "I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done unto me in accordance with God's word (command)." It is not passive surrender but rather active submission to enact the good planned by God.

In the Catholic Church, relying solely on one's sheer strength to attain salvation without the aid of God's grace is the heresy of Pelagianism, a theological position that holds that original sin did not taint the human soul and that and by divine grace have that moral will capable of choosing good and evil, there is potential to live a sinless life without special divine aid from the Church. In God's perfect love, God does not force us to follow God's will. It is when we say "yes" to God's will that God's Spirit is graced in us to strengthen and guide us. God will not leave it to us to rely solely on our strength, for God knows we will falter. For Catholics, the fullness of the Spirit is graced through the Sacraments. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, the sacrament of Baptism erases original sin and turns the life of a child or an adult into one constantly graced by God. However, the inclination toward sin persists, making the sacraments necessary for overcoming temptations to sin.[29]

Maryam's soul being made immaculate at her conception is attributed uniquely and solely to Allah Himself. Yet Islam has no

[29] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), no. 2520.

concept of original sin. If there is no original sin, then, does this imply that all persons are conceived immaculate? Indeed, Muslim interpreters argue that Muslims like Mary are also born without sin. If every person born in the world is sinless nor has a tendency or predilection to sin, what then is Allāh's purpose in choosing Maryam and making her immaculate? To generalize this as granted to all women goes contrary to the Qur'ānic revelation that "(Allāh) has truly chosen [Maryam] above all women of the world" (3:42b). This condescends Allāh's plan of making her immaculate and chosen for a purpose which is to be the mother of *Eisa* (Jesus). Unless the unique intervention of Allāh is clearly not about Maryam but about Eisa, in what way is Eisa as a Prophet of Islam distinct from the other prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān?

Muslim commentators note that Maryam was chosen for a divine plan. However, they did not specify what this divine plan was. The tendency of classical Muslim exegetes was to "praise" Maryam and stop there while remaining silent about the mission of Eisa that would explain Allāh's divine plan. After all, Allāh's plan was dramatically inaugurated at the virgin birth and subsequent entry of Eisa into human history. Yet there is not much in the Qur'ān that elaborates what happened to the child who became an adult and realized Allāh's divine plan. Who was this child and what would eventually be the mission of the son according to the divine plan? The Gospels answer this in revealing Jesus as the incarnate Son of God born of the Virgin Mary. **For humanity's sake, he was crucified, died, and was buried, and on the third day rose from the dead. However, most Muslims reject the crucifixion of Jesus, although this author's late professor, Dr. Ayoub, believed in the historicity of a Jesus from Nazareth who was crucified and died on the cross.**[30]

[30] This is elaborated in "A Muslim-Catholic Christology: The Crucifixion," Renato Taib Oliveros, 2024, unpublished.

"And We Breathed Our Spirit into Her Womb" (Q 66:12, 21:91)

> And Mary … who guarded well her generative organ (*farjaha*), and thus We breathed into it of our Spirit (*ah-sanat farjahaa fanafakhna fihi mir-Ruhinaa*). (Q 66:12-Medina) / into her (*fiha mir-Ruhinaa*). (Q 21:91-Mecca)

The *ruh* (*Ruh al-Qudus*), *Qudus* (Holy) combined with *Ruh* (Spirit) as *Ruh al-Qudus* (Holy Spirit), is found four times in the Qur'ān, three of which (2:87, 2:253, and 5:110) describe Allāh as strengthening Jesus Christ through the Spirit and once (16:102) in strengthening the faithful Muslims.[31] The Spirit as *ruah* blows into Mary's generative part (*ahsanat farjahaa fanafakhna fihi min ruhinaa* [21:91]). This Qur'ānic verse is parallel to the event when God at creation breathed into the *nostrils of Adam* (Gen. 2:7b). In the Qur'ān, the Spirit breathes into the *womb of Mary.* Her obedience to the will of God is exemplified in her *fiat*—"Let it be done unto me according to Your word" (Lk. 1:38)—and instantaneously inaugurated God's divine plan of salvation when she conceived the Word, Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:17). A Preface of the Holy Mass says, "By the power of the Holy Spirit he took flesh and was born of the Virgin Mary." This is confirmed in the Qur'ān: "We (Allāh) breathed into her (Mary) from (of) Our Spirit."

On the contrary, mainstream Muslims believe that the identity of the Spirit and that of the angel Gabriel are one and the same. Muslim commentators, with the intent of avoiding downright anthropomorphism, replaced the Spirit of God with Gabriel. The Spirit, who is part of Allāh, is the one to breathe into Mary (Q 21:91, 66:12). The true teaching of the Qur'ān is that the creative inbreathing came directly from Allāh.[32] "We breathed Our Spirit (*min Ruhina*)" (Q 21:91) and, in Q 66:12, "into whose womb we breathed of Our Spirit (*min ruhi-na*)." To breathe implies that the Spirit being breathed-out

[31] O'Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*, 44; Fazlur F. Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* (Minneapolis, MN: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 96.

[32] O'Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*, 63.

is part of Allāh or is Allāh Himself. It is mentioned that "We sent to her 'Our Spirit' (*ruuhanaa*)," implying that the Spirit is part of God as God's self. Therefore, to be consistent with their stance that the Spirit is Gabriel, the commentators ended up assigning Gabriel the authority to give Maryam a "pure boy" (19:19).[33]

Angels, however, are created beings, and the Spirit proceeds directly from Allāh, is the breath of Allāh, and is eternal and inseparable from Allāh. In both the Gospels and the Qur'ān, it is God, not an angel, who manifests God's power directly in the conception and birth of Christ. Allāh intervenes directly in the conception of the Word as Christ. It is Allāh as Spirit blowing directly into Mary's generative organ.

Here are verses revealed in Mecca during the early period of Muhammad's preaching that show that the Spirit has a distinct personality from angels. Four Qur'ānic verses dispel the Spirit = Gabriel claim directly. These clearly distinguish the Spirit as different in category from angels, including Gabriel: 1) 70:4 (angels and the Spirit, 1st Meccan period), 2) 78:38 (angels and the Spirit, 1st Meccan period), 3) 97:4 (angels and the Spirit, 1st Meccan period), and 4) 16:2 (angels with the Spirit, 3rd Meccan period). In five verses (16:2, 97:4, 7:85-Mecca, 40:5-Mecca, and 42:52-Mecca), the Spirit is mentioned as descending or bringing something down. In verses 16:2 and 97:4, the Spirit with the angels is described as ascending and descending. In these verses, "the Spirit is a definite person and plays, with the angels, an active part, 'standing,' 'descending,' and 'ascending.'"[34] The six *ruh* verses revealed in Medina make it impossible to substitute Gabriel for the Spirit like in this revelation: "We breathed into them [generative parts] some of our Spirit (66:12, 21:91)."[35] Furthermore, the notion that Gabriel is the Spirit would mean that Gabriel "impregnated"[36] Maryam, making things awkward and problematic.

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[33] O'Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*, 64.

[34] O'Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*, 17.

[35] O'Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*, 53.

[36] Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān*, 66–67.

In the Qur'ān, the Holy Spirit is described as a Person who visited Mary. If Gabriel is not the Spirit, who, then, is the Spirit? For Muslims, it is a dilemma to recognize the Spirit as the Spirit of God and not as an angel since doing so would compromise the Tawhid, the Unity and Oneness of God. In the use of the "We" form, the Qur'ān manifests that God in God's self breathed God's Spirit into Mary (21:91 and 66:12); the role of angels is to announce (3:42, 45–46) the conception of the Word by the Spirit of Holiness.[37] It is solely God who acts, without intermediaries, as it was ordained that the Holy Spirit shall grant the pure son when the Spirit said, "I am only a messenger of your Lord (*Rasuulu Rabbika*) that I may give you (Maryam) a pure son" (Q 19:19). For Catholics, God is the Holy Spirit who came down from heaven after Gabriel announced to Mary the good news: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Lk. 1:35).

The Magnificat

Neither the Qur'ān nor the Hadith mentions Maryam's visit to her cousin *Ilisabat* (Elizabeth). It is in al-Tabarsi's tafsir that it is written—"The wife of Imran said, O Maryam! Truly I feel that what is in my womb is stirring before what is in thy womb" (Tafsir III, p. 157).[38] Similarly, Ibn Kathir reported on the authority of Ibn Abbas that

> John's (*Yahyah*) mother (*Ilisabat*) greeted Maryam, "I feel the child in my womb bowing down in reverence to the child in your womb." This was the manner in which *Yahyah* (John the Baptist) confirmed to Jesus, while still in the womb.[39]

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[37] O'Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*, 54.

[38] V. Courtois, *Notes on Islam* (Calcutta: Oriental Institute, St. Xavier's College, 1952), 62.

[39] Ibn Kathir II, 34, in Ayoub, *Qur'an and Its Interpreters* Vol. II: *The House of Imran*, 108.

Mary was greeted by Gabriel in the Annunciation—"*Hail Mary, full of grace*" (Lk. 1:28)—and Elizabeth in the Visitation with "*Blessed are you among women*" (Lk. 1:42).[40] Mary responds to Gabriel's greeting with her *fiat*—"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done unto me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38)—and to Elizabeth's greeting with her Magnificat:

> And Mary said, "My *soul* magnifies the Lord; and my *Spirit* rejoices in God my Savior.… For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed." (Lk. 1:46–48b)

The short pericope above is a glimpse of the state of Mary's soul. When she felt the Christ child in her womb, she was so overwhelmed with great *joy* and spontaneously sang her *praises* (*nagagalak at nagpupuri*) to God. One cannot find a Qur'ānic verse equivalent to Luke's Magnificat save for her total submission to Allah's will which portrays her as the suffering servant. Yet this does not diminish Mary's joy also in Islam for it sustained her despite the rejections she experienced. Given that Maryam is close to the consciousness of many Muslims, may they, too, experience the *joy* of Maryam as Muslims.

Further to Mary's inner joy is the intimacy with God given her unique circumstance of the Holy Spirit being fully infused in her soul. The soul and Spirit are used interchangeably when the Holy Spirit overshadowed the soul of Mary. All that is in her response, "Let it be done unto me according to Your word" (Lk. 1:38), is always aligned with the will and plan of God. Mary's Magnificat exemplifies the perfect fusion of Mary's immaculate *soul* with the *Holy Spirit* that overshadowed her whole person. "Full Grace" is God in God's self, the Holy Spirit. The angel Gabriel's announcement that the "Holy Spirit will come upon [Mary] and the power of the Most High will overshadow [her]" (Lk. 1:35) led to that perfect union that happened instantaneously after Mary said to the Father, "Let it be done unto me according to Your word."

Mary, like any human being, has a soul, yet hers is distinctly graced with the fullness of the Holy Spirit. It is by this gift that Mary

[40] NRSV (1991). Ancient authorities add this.

discerned perfectly the will of the Father. There is no blurredness in her purity and fullness of grace, making her will perfectly aligned with the will of God. Yet it was not passive submission but an act of faith to cooperate actively in God's plan. This does not mean, however, that she did not suffer by her submission to the will of the Father that led to the crucifixion of her son. No wonder Muslims see her as the suffering servant.

One must take into account the courage of the young Mary who valued her chastity yet submitted to Allāh's will despite the risk of being judged as an adulteress, which is punishable by stoning. She asked Allāh's messenger Gabriel, "How can I have a son when no man has ever touched me? I have not been unchaste" (Q 19:21). Her total submission to God's will is exemplified in the Gospel of Luke when she said, "Let it be done unto me according to [God's] word" (Lk. 1:38). Mary complied single-heartedly as Pius IX defined in *Ineffabilis Deus,* his 1854 declaration on the Immaculate Conception.

Conclusion—The Holy Rosary: A Catholic *Tasbīḥ*[41]

Tradition says that the Holy Rosary was given to St. Dominic in a Marian apparition in 1214. The genius of the Rosary is the integration of meditation on the mysteries in the life of Jesus while reciting a decade of the Hail Mary for every mystery. This contributed to the Hail Mary ending up as the most recited prayer second only to the Our Father, The Lord's Prayer (Mt. 6:9–13; Lk. 11:2–4). The earliest traditional form of the Hail Mary is known to have existed as early as the ninth century.[42] It did not include the intercessory "Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners …" which appeared only in the mid-16th century at the Council of Trent, attributed to the Jesuit Peter

[41] The use of beads similar to the Japamala in Hinduism and Buddhism and the Rosary in Catholicism.

[42] According to Herbert Charles Thurston, SJ (November 15, 1856–November 3, 1939), "Hail Mary", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hail_Mary.

Canisius's 1555 Catechism adapted from the Dominican Girolamo Savonarola's 1495 *Exposition of the Hail Mary*.

Meditating on the mysteries while reciting decades of the phrase "Hail Mary, full of grace," the Catholic hears Mary as the immaculate virgin mother of Jesus. Incidentally, the Rosary acts as the Gospel to illiterates and those without access to the Bible. Similar for Muslims are the daily remembering (*dhkr*) and glorifying of the names of Allāh or stories from the Qur'ān. This spiritual exercise of meditation in Islam can be traced back to the Sufi mystic Ibn Arabi (1165–1240) who meditated on the life of Moses, *Eisa* (Jesus), Maryam, and other Biblical characters also named in the Qur'ān. For Catholics, praying the Rosary is a way to remember the life story of Jesus. Like any mother, one of Mary's greatest joys is that we remember what Jesus has done for us.

From the moment Mary responded to God—"Let it be done unto me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38), the Holy Spirit overshadowed her and she conceived Jesus the Word who is the Christ (Jn. 1:7). Mary's *fiat*, "Let It Be," is her maternal reminder to each one of us to discern God's will and, with courage, submit. In our time (*nostra aetate*), let Paul McCartney's[43] song be our serenade:

When I find myself in times of trouble,
Mother Mary comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be.

And in my hour of darkness she is standing right in front of me
Whisper words of wisdom, let it be.

[Bob Dylan[44] adds:] Suddenly I turned around and
she was standin' there
With silver bracelets on her wrists and flowers in her hair
She walked up to me so gracefully and took my crown of thorns
Come in, she said
I'll give ya shelter from the storm.

[43] P. McCartney, "Let it Be," in The Beatles, *Let It Be* [music album] (1970).

[44] B. Dylan, "Shelter from the Storm," in *Blood on the Tracks* [music album] (1975).

This author was taught that an event in the Gospel where and when the Trinity was present was the baptism of Jesus at the Jordan. As he studied the Immaculate Conception, this author discovered with amazement that the Trinity was present during the Annunciation and even before Jesus's baptism. When the angel greeted Mary in the Annunciation, she submitted to the will of the Father with her *fiat*, the Holy Spirit overshadowed her, and she conceived in her womb the Word who is Jesus the Christ (*Eisa al-Masih*). At the Annunciation, Mary became the Temple of the Trinity.

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THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE MARIAN TITLE *SOLACE OF MIGRANTS* AND ITS POTENTIAL FOR PASTORAL ENCOUNTER WITH MIGRANTS, REFUGEES, AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

Vince Henry M. Salles

Abstract. This article surveys the Biblical bases of one of the new titles of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Litany of Loreto, "Solace of Migrants," nominated by Pope Francis in 2020. Two New Testament pericopes appear as obvious foundations of the new Marian title—the Holy Family's journey to Bethlehem (Lk. 2:1–7) and their Flight to Egypt (Mt. 2:13–15). Mary is presented, together with her spouse and Son, as a migrant who experiences the difficulties of journeying and the instability of settling down in another land. She is in solidarity with those who escape violence from their native lands and flee to foreign countries or those forced to leave their homes while remaining within their country's borders. By creating this new title of Mary, Francis calls for the Church to intensify her care for migrants, for one of his main pastoral priorities is refugeeism and migration. The Church is invited to look to Mary as Mother and exemplar of charity. Just as Mary became a solace to Jesus and Joseph, so too is the Church called upon to *solace* migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons. The Virgin Mary and the Church can console (*consolari,* from *solacium*) migrants for God has solaced them and they themselves are migrants, too. The Church's devotion to Mary as Solace of Migrants leads her to perform concrete acts of charity and become a haven for the needy.

Keywords. Solace of Migrants; Blessed Virgin Mary; migration; refugeeism; Pope Francis

Introduction

On June 20, 2020, the Memorial of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments wrote the Presidents of the Conferences of Bishops around the world on three new invocations to be inserted in the Litany of Loreto. These are *Mater misericordiae* (Mother of Mercy), *Mater spei* (Mother of Hope), and *Solacium migrantium* (Solace of Migrants). The said letter mentioned that it was the wish of Pope Francis himself to add these invocations to the current Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This came in a meaningful way in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, explicitly pointed out by the letter: "in this present moment which is marked by feelings of uncertainty and trepidation, devout recourse to her (Mary), which is full of affection and trust, is deeply felt by the People of God."[1]

Of the three new Marian titles, *Solace of Migrants* is the most unfamiliar and novel[2] since "Mother of Mercy" and "Mother of Hope" are already invoked in the *Salve Regina*—"Hail Holy Queen, *Mother of*

[1] R. Sarah, "Letter to the Presidents of Conferences of Bishops on the Invocations 'Mater misericordiæ', 'Mater spei', and 'Solacium migrantium' to Be Inserted into the Litany of Loreto" (June 20, 2020), available at https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/06/20/200620c.html.

[2] The new Marian title *Solace of Migrants* is both similar and different to the traditional invocations "Our Lady of Consolation" and "Comforter of the Afflicted" which are both Augustinian in origin. Augustinians have long invoked Mary as "Our Lady of Consolation." Devotion to this Marian title began in the 15th century with the foundation of a confraternity of the Virgin's Cincture. According to a pious legend, Mary appeared to St. Monica to console her in her trials due to the waywardness of her son Augustine. Mary gave her a black leather belt as a sign of her maternal consolation. The abovementioned titles show Mary's maternal care for her children; however, *Solace of Migrants* specifically refers to a certain group of people who need Mary's comfort.

Mercy, our life, our sweetness, and *our hope*"—and already have their own iconographies and formularies in the Common of the Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In an interview,[3] Archbishop Arthur Roche said that many people worldwide are invoking Our Lady because they are afflicted in many ways, not only by the pandemic but also by poverty, conflict, and other reasons, and are thus forced to flee their homes. The Archbishop added that the new invocations are responsive to the world's real needs today.

In this article, this author will present the biblical foundations of the invocation *Solacium migrantium* and venture into its potential for a pastoral encounter with migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons who are part of Francis's pastoral priorities. "Migrant" will be used as an umbrella term for the subjects of this study, namely, those individuals who abandon their usual place of residence, either within their own country or overseas, permanently or temporarily, voluntarily or involuntarily, for a variety of reasons.[4] Migrants may be any of the following: refugees (persons who migrate to escape from war, violence, and persecution in their country and seek refuge in another nation), economic migrants (those who seek better opportunities abroad), or internally displaced persons or IDPs (those who do not cross international borders but only relocate from one local city to another because of natural or human-made disasters, wars, or violence). The Pope may have considered using *Solace of Migrants* so the language would be more inclusive.

The International Organization for Migration of the United Nations estimated that there were around 281 million international

[3] "Pope adds three new invocations to the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary," *Vatican News* (June 20, 2020), available at https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-06/pope-francis-loreto-litany-new-invocations.html.

[4] The definition comes from the International Organization for Migration of the United Nations. See "Migrant," in *International Migration Law* 34 (2019): 132–133, available at https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf.

migrants in 2020, which equates to 3.6% of the global population.[5] This latest data on migration took into account the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on human mobility—there was a noticeable drop in the number of people migrating abroad. The report acknowledged that it was not only COVID-19 that hindered the mobility of people in 2020 but also political instability, economic recession, and disasters such as typhoons. Europe had the highest number of international migrants arriving (87 million), followed by Asia (86 million), Northern America (59 million), and Africa (25 million). The United States of America is, by far, the primary go-to destination of international migrants, with over 51 million of them arriving. Germany is the second most popular destination for international migrants (16 million), followed by Saudi Arabia in third place (13 million).[6]

In the case of migrants' country of origin, India recorded the highest number (18 million), followed by Mexico in second place (11 million) and, finally, the Russian Federation (10.8 million) and China (10 million). The same organization also records migrants who perish due to various causes. They call this effort the "Missing Migrants Project," and started collecting data in 2014 after the tragic incident of a migrant boat capsizing at Lampedusa. The Mediterranean currently has the highest number of migrants who have died at 28,000, followed by Africa at 13,000, the Americas at 8,000, Asia at 5,000, Western Asia at 2,000, and Europe at 1,000.[7] Some of these people died while making clandestine crossings either by sea or through remote areas on land. The World Migration Report of 2022 also counted a total of 26.4 million refugees globally by the end of 2020. The report also included 4.1 million asylum seekers seeking international protection and awaiting their refugee status. These refugees' top countries of origin were the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar,

[5] M. McAuliffe & A. Triandafyllidou, eds., *World Migration Report 2022* (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2021), 2.

[6] McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, eds., *World Migration Report 2022*, 24–25.

[7] Since 2014 to 2021; see Missing Migrants project data at https://missingmigrants.iom.int/data.

the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Sudan, the Central African Republic, Eritrea, and Burundi.[8]

Finally, the World Migration Report also showed data on internally displaced persons (IDPs). The statistics presented two types of IDPs—those who moved because of violence and conflict and those who changed residence due to disasters. The Syrian Arab Republic had the highest number of people displaced due to conflict (6.6 million), followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (5.3 million). Colombia had the third largest number (4.9 million), followed by Yemen (3.6 million) and Afghanistan (3.5 million). The number of persons displaced from disasters reached up to 7 million across 104 countries and territories.[9]

Francis has been actively advocating for the rights of migrants. Four months after he was elected Pontiff, he went to Lampedusa as an act of solidarity with migrants dying as they crossed the sea. The Pope criticized the "globalization of indifference" on this first trip outside Rome. According to him, the migrants and refugees who escaped difficult situations found death instead of greener pastures. He blamed this on the loss of the sense of responsibility for others and on people who live off of the misery of others.[10]

In his messages for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, the Pope has been comparing the situations of the refugees and migrants to the experiences of the Holy Family. They "experienced initial rejection" when Mary gave birth to Jesus "and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn" (Lk. 2:7). According to the Pope, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph also became migrants themselves, for they were

[8] By the end of 2020. See McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, eds., *World Migration Report* 2022, 45–46.

[9] This was just in the year 2020. See McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, eds., *World Migration Report 2022*, 50–51.

[10] Francis, homily during the visit to Lampedusa (July 8, 2013), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa.html.

forced to flee to Egypt because of "Herod's lust for power."[11] The Pope first hinted at Mary as the "Mother of migrants and refugees" in his 2016 message—he wrote that Mary and her husband Joseph "experienced the bitterness of emigration to Egypt."[12]

In 2017, Francis wrote that Mary accompanies migrants and refugees just as she accompanied her Son on the way to Calvary.[13] He first used the new title explicitly in a homily during the Mass marking the seventh anniversary of his papal visit to Lampedusa. "May the Virgin Mary, *Solacium migrantium*, 'Solace of Migrants,' help us discover the face of her Son in all our brothers and sisters forced to flee their homeland because of the many injustices that continue to afflict our world."[14]

The Flight Into Egypt

> [An] angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there

[11] Francis, "Migrants and Refugees: Towards a Better World" [message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2014)] (August 5, 2013), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20130805_world-migrants-day.html.

[12] Francis, "Migrants and Refugees Challenge Us. The Response of the Gospel of Mercy" [message His Holiness Pope Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2016] (September 12, 2015), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20150912_world-migrants-day-2016.html.

[13] Francis, "Welcoming, Protecting, Promoting and Integrating Migrants and Refugees" [message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2018] (August 15, 2017), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20170815_world-migrants-day-2018.html.

[14] Francis, homily on the anniversary of the visit to Lampedusa (July 8, 2020), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200708_omelia-anniversariovisita-lampedusa.html.

> until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son." (Mt. 2:13–15)

One of the Scriptural bases of the Marian title *Solacium migrantium* is the Matthean story of the Holy Family's flight into Egypt. This pericope is not found in the other two Synoptics and the Gospel of John. The Gospel passage is filled with Mosaic overtones: Pharaoh tried to kill the baby Moses by slaughtering the Hebrew children; Herod wanted to take the life of the baby Jesus by killing the innocent boys of Bethlehem. Moses escapes from Pharaoh, and Jesus runs from Herod.[15] The journey of Joseph the Dreamer to Egypt parallels the journey of St. Joseph's flight to Egypt together with Jesus and Mary.[16]

Egypt was a traditional place of refuge for those escaping dangers (1 Kgs. 11:40; Jer. 26:21). "Out of Egypt, I called my son" is a quotation from Hosea 11:1, and the "son" here refers to the Israelites who were slaves in Egypt. The experience of the Israelites is like the experience of Jesus, who represents the restoration of all Israel.[17] Most Biblical scholars agree that the Holy Family's flight into Egypt is a haggadic narrative, that it is unhistorical, that it is but a story interpretation of another story in history.[18] Legends often use historical data and embellish the narration to highlight some spiritual lessons. Although the episodes are not historically impossible, and even if actual events were narrated, the concern of the evangelist is a theological reflection

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[15] R. Brown, *Christ in the Gospels of the Liturgical Year* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), chapter 12, 133–134.

[16] M. Davies, *Matthew*, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary Series, 2nd ed. (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 35.

[17] C. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 56–57.

[18] U. Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary*, ed. H. Koester, trans. J. Crouch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 120.

rather than historical exactitude.[19] Because the story is brief, the narrator's interest is clearly seen: God guides the destiny of the Son and saves him through his earthly parents.[20] God is always on the side of the oppressed. The Israelites also became migrants themselves when the famine forced them to go to Egypt, yet God was with them and delivered them from their oppressive Egyptian masters. The Exodus story parallels the story of Jesus in his infancy.

God took care of God's Son Jesus through the protecting hand of Mary and Joseph. The three of them fled at night, and the angel who appeared in a dream to Joseph used three command verbs in quick succession to illustrate the situation's urgency: *Get up*, *take*, *flee*.[21] This flight was rather inconvenient and difficult because the parents were with a little baby and were asked to travel long distances. Matthew showed the true humanity of Jesus Christ. Although it was prophesied that his life mission is to be the one who will "save his people from their sins" (1:21) and that he is *Emmanuel*, "God with us" (1:23), he still needed to be saved, for he was also a human child. Jesus was too young to act, yet here he was, always acted upon.[22] Matthew wanted to illustrate Jesus's vulnerability as a migrant child. He indeed identifies himself with those who suffer because of migration.

In his work *The Homeless Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew*, Robert Myles wrote that the most significant pericope within the Infancy Narratives from the perspective of homelessness and displacement is the Flight to Egypt. According to him, Bible scholars have overlooked and

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[19] D. Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 84.

[20] Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary*, 120.

[21] H. Basser & M. Cohen, *The Gospel of Matthew and Judaic Traditions: A Relevance-based Commentary* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2015), 63.

[22] F. Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, Vol. 1: *The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 150.

neglected this kind of reading.[23] Jesus, Mary, and Joseph are one with displaced persons who flee as an act of self-preservation—escaping from hostile situations and political figures. Herod's decision to kill the male infants of Bethlehem to eliminate Jesus is what drove the Holy Family to flee to a strange land seeking refuge.[24] If we analyze the journey of the Holy Family from Palestine to Egypt, which were both under the Roman Empire during the first century, the journey would not fall under refugeeism but would only be considered internal displacement, i.e., moving within the same local territory.[25]

Migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons often endure dangerous journeys and are exposed to unstable situations in a land outside their original residence. It is like they are being uprooted from their homes and replanted elsewhere. Although the Holy Family survived the wrath of Herod, they would have to start a new livelihood in Egypt and learn the province's culture, language, and mores. Large settlements of Jews were found in Egypt, a Roman province during that time.[26] Keener[27] says that perhaps one-third of Alexandria was Jewish, which accounted for an estimated population of one million. Keener adds that Egypt was one of the Roman Empire's largest cities, home to Jews schooled in Greek thought but also poor peasants. Joseph and his family would have mingled with the Israelites there.

Even before the pontificate of Francis, the Church had been giving special attention to the plight of migrants and refugees. Pope Pius XII,

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[23] R. Myles, *The Homeless Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* (University of Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), 52.

[24] A. Martinez, "Jesus, the Immigrant Child: A Diasporic Reading of Matthew 2:1–23," *Apuntes: Reflexiones Teológicas desde el Contexto Hispano-Latino* 26:3 (2006): 90.

[25] B. Levick, *The Government of the Roman Empire: A Source Book*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2000), 7.

[26] "Matthew 2," *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, BibleHub, available at https://biblehub.com/commentaries/cambridge/matthew/2.htm.

[27] Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 56.

for example, penned an Apostolic Constitution entitled *Exsul Familia Nazarethana*,[28] giving a general overview of the Church's numerous efforts for the pastoral care of migrants and refugees worldwide. The Apostolic Constitution begins by placing the Holy Family at the center and calling them "émigré" and "archetype of every refugee family."

> Jesus, Mary and Joseph … are, for all times and all places, the models and protectors of every migrant, alien and refugee of whatever kind who, whether compelled by fear of persecution or by want, is forced to leave [their] native land, [their] beloved parents and relatives, [their] close friends, and to seek a foreign soil.[29]

Just as Mary and Joseph cared for the Child Jesus, the Church is also invited to aid refugees and migrants. In his 1998 message for World Migration Day, Pope John Paul II invoked the Virgin Mary's motherly accompaniment for all those who dedicate themselves to the care of migrants and refugees and prayed that She may "dry the tears [of] and console all who have had to leave their land and loved ones."[30]

Benedict XVI ended his message for the 96th World Day of Migrants and Refugees with a supplication to the Blessed Virgin Mary: that she may watch over all people and help them understand the difficult situations faced by those far from their homeland.[31]

Mary, the Solace of Migrants, not only consoles those who are forced to leave their homes to find better opportunities within and

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[28] Pius XII, *Exsul Familia Nazarethana* (August 1, 1952), available at http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ENG2011/_INDEX.HTM.

[29] Pius XII, *Exsul Familia Nazarethana,* introduction.

[30] John Paul II, message for World Migration Day (November 9, 1997), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/migration/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_09111997_world-migration-day-1998.html.

[31] Benedict XVI, message for the 96th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2010 (October 16, 2009), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/migration/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091016_world-migrants-day.html.

outside their countries and those seeking freedom from strife, but also inspires those who are tasked to minister to migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons, as well as countries and peoples who welcome them.

Lumen Gentium calls the Blessed Virgin Mary the "solace to the wandering people of God."[32] Her maternal role covers all those who are on a journey of sorts. Part of the prayer of the consecration of Ukraine and Russia to Mary's Immaculate Heart asks her to "soothe those who suffer and flee from the rain of bombs" and "comfort those forced to leave their homes and their native land."[33] This is a direct reference to the experience of people compelled to take refuge in foreign lands because of war.

The Birth of Christ

> In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. (Lk. 2:1–7)

Another Biblical foundation of the new Marian title *Solacium migrantium* is the Holy Family's journey and rejection in Bethlehem when

[32] Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), section V, available at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

[33] Francis, act of consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary (March 25, 2022), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/prayers/documents/20220325-atto-consacrazione-cuoredimaria.html.

Jesus was born. This is part of the Lukan Infancy Narrative, whereas the Biblical pericope previously cited forms part of Matthew's Infancy Narrative that directly relates to the Marian title "Solace of Migrants." Although these two infancy narratives contain differing details on the birth of the Messiah, they still provide us with rich theological implications. The evangelist Matthew, for example, wrote for a Jewish audience, so he was always citing passages from the Old Testament and connecting these with Jesus, presenting Jesus as the fulfillment of these prophecies. On the other hand, Luke wrote for a Gentile audience and presented Jesus as the Savior of all, born in poor conditions and within the reach of people of goodwill. The two infancy narratives complement each other. They each have a holy agenda.

We now go back to the passage at hand. The Holy Family set off from Nazareth to Bethlehem in obedience to the decree of Caesar Augustus. The emperor was entirely unaware of the arduous journey that ordinary people made on his account.[34] The poignant verse from Luke—"there was no place for them in the inn" (2:7)—illustrates the inhospitality shown to the Holy Family and the lowly conditions of Christ's nativity. Benedict XVI pointed out the correlation of Luke 2:7 with a passage from John—"He came to his own home, and his own people received him not" (1:11)—and a passage from Matthew—"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (8:20).[35]

Annan creatively explains the Son of God's incarnation as a kind of immigration—the Savior crossed the "borders of divinity and time and space, to walk among humanity."[36] Jesus's mystical migration is his act of communion with humanity. Indeed, throughout the earthly

[34] Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, trans. P. Whitmore (New York: Image, 2012), 58.

[35] Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, 66.

[36] K. Annan, *You Welcomed Me: Loving Refugees and Immigrants Because God First Loved Us* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 116.

life of Jesus Christ, he was constantly migrating because he was an itinerant preacher.

In four homilies during the Masses of Christmas Midnight across different years, Francis reflected on the similitude between the plight of the Holy Family and the difficulties faced by migrants who are rejected and set aside. The Pope said that Christmas contains both the mysteries of hope and sadness: sadness because "love is not accepted and life [is] discarded" and hope because God's light continues to shine amidst the darkness.[37] He drew a contrast between the Child Jesus in the manger and children in "squalid mangers that devour dignity" who suffer because of bombardment and war, abandonment, and migration.[38]

In his 2017 Christmas midnight homily, Francis reflected on the uncomfortable journey undertaken by Mary and Joseph to be registered in the census. He said that uncertainties and dangers weighed down the steps of this young couple, similar to migrants who have to leave their homes behind. The Pope continued that even after the couple's difficult journey, they struggled with the pain of rejection in Bethlehem. Parallel to the footsteps of Mary and Joseph are the footsteps of families who unwillingly leave their homeland to hope and to survive. Jesus, who had no place to be born in, is revealed to those with no place in society—the shepherds who represent those who live in the margins. The birth of the Lord challenges Christians to proclaim Him to the discarded, to the unwelcome visitors, to foreigners, pagans, and sinners.[39] Christians are called to be watchmen for many who despair

[37] Francis, homily for the Midnight Mass on the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (December 24, 2016), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20161224_omelia-natale.html.

[38] Francis, homily for the Midnight Mass on the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (December 24, 2016).

[39] Francis, homily for the Midnight Mass on the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (December 24, 2017), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20171224_omelia-natale.html.

because of many encounters with closed doors. The Child Jesus makes us agents of hospitality for all and awakens in us the sensitivity to recognize God in those who arrive in our lives, cities, and histories.[40]

In his 2020 Christmas midnight homily, Francis asked, "Why was he born at night, without decent accommodation, in poverty and rejection, when he deserved to be born as the greatest of kings in the finest of palaces?" It was to manifest fully his love for our human condition and touch our poverty. Jesus became an outcast to tell every outcast person that they are a child of God.[41] The Pope emphasized that Jesus was born close to people who were forgotten and in the peripheries. He ennobles the excluded and comes to reveal himself to them.[42]

Migrant Mary

The Virgin Mary was always with Jesus during his birth, infancy, and childhood (with some appearances during his public ministry[43] and later on during his crucifixion and death). The various exegeses and reflections on the Nativity of the Messiah and his eventual Flight into Egypt focus on Jesus. Christ's Mother played only a supporting role, although it was admittedly a significant one. Jesus became a young migrant and depended on his Mother for protection. Mary became "solace" first and foremost to her Migrant-Son. Although not in the

[40] Francis, homily for the Midnight Mass on the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (December 24, 2017).

[41] Francis, homily for the Midnight Mass on the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (December 24, 2020), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20201224_omelia-natale.html.

[42] Francis, homily for the Midnight Mass on the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (December 24, 2021), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2021/documents/20211224-omelia-natale.html.

[43] See Jn. 2:1–12; Mt. 12:46–47; Mk. 3:31–32; Lk. 8:19–20; Lk. 11:27–28.

Sacred Scriptures, we can imagine that the Virgin Mother, during the journey to Egypt, had to breastfeed her Son, sing him lullabies to sleep, embrace him in the cold night of the desert, and play games with him while they were perhaps taking a break. The aforementioned form part of the pious imagination of Christians, but looking fair and square at the Sacred Scriptures, we can see that Mary is both a subject and object of God's redemptive, liberating power.[44] God redeemed her and liberated her. In turn, she "redeemed" and "liberated" her son from the claws of Herod, the oppressor. In her *Magnificat*, Mary "embodies and personifies"[45] the oppressed who are being liberated: the hungry who are fed, the lowly who are lifted, the helpless who are helped; we can add the migrants who are shown hospitality. Gray calls the *Magnificat* Mary's protest and struggle against injustice.[46] She speaks for the little people and gives voice to the pain of those who cannot articulate.[47] Mary, the poor woman, is juxtaposed with the proud, the mighty, and the rich—Caesar Augustus and Herod—in the two infancy narratives discussed earlier. Fiorenza noted that the infancy narratives tell us about "women, slaves, shepherds, the hungry, the homeless who experience the good tidings of salvation" and are not "fairy tales of rich and glamorous people."[48]

Mary has always joined in her Son's migration since the start of his earthly life. She journeys to physical places, as in the case of the

[44] E. Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 189.

[45] Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*, 189.

[46] M. Gray, "Reclaiming Mary: A Task for Feminist Theology," *The Way* 29:4 (1989): 339.

[47] Gray, "Reclaiming Mary," 339–340.

[48] Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*, 203–204.

itineraries Nazareth-Bethlehem,[49] Bethlehem-Egypt,[50] Egypt-Israel,[51] Israel-Nazareth,[52] their pilgrimages to the temple of Jerusalem when she presented the infant Jesus 40 days after his birth,[53] and when they lost and found him when he was 12 years old.[54] Mary also travels abstract distances, such as from the pedestal of honor with the Angel Gabriel's salutation "Hail full of grace!"[55] to the humble domestic service to Elizabeth.[56]

In the second place, Mary was "solace" to her spouse Joseph. She was a woman of "strength, independence, of integrity."[57] In paintings[58] depicting the Flight into Egypt, Joseph is the one pulling the beast of burden on which his wife and child are riding. He must have felt exhausted, but the tiredness seemed to wear off when he looked at his wife. This author imagines the Virgin Mary offering her husband words of encouragement and gestures of concern like giving him water or asking that they pull off for a short time to let him (and the animal) rest. Joseph, in turn, consoled his wife by his heroic outlook and strength of character.

However, deeper reflection directs our focus to Jesus Christ, the Solace of all those who give solace. Mary and Joseph were both

[49] Lk. 2:4.

[50] Mt. 2:13.

[51] Mt. 2:19–20.

[52] Mt. 2:22–23.

[53] Lk. 2:22.

[54] Lk. 2:41–42.

[55] Lk. 1:26.

[56] Lk. 1:39.

[57] Gray, "Reclaiming Mary," 337.

[58] From masters like Gentile da Fabriano (1423), Vittore Carpaccio (1515), El Greco (1570), and Bartolome Esteban Murillo (1647–1650), among others.

consoled by the tender face of their Son, God-made-man. Jesus is the source of rest for people who are weary and carrying heavy burdens.[59] Mary is able to give consolation to migrants for two reasons: one, she has been solaced by God her Savior; two, she was a migrant herself so she knows and feels what it is like to be one.

Mary, Model of the Church

The journeys of Mary were occasions of receiving divine solace and giving it away to others. Just as Mary journeyed as a migrant and was divinely solaced, so too is the Church journeying as a "migrant," so to speak, in this world and receiving consolation from the Lord. Not only Mary but also the Church should be the "solace of migrants."

Every time the Church invokes Mary as the *Solacium migrantium*, she is called upon and challenged to aid migrants, refugees, and internally displaced individuals following the evangelical command of charity. The Parable of the Sheep and Goats[60] is brought to mind concerning these persons. One of the "least" of Christ's brethren are the "strangers," and those who hope to inherit his kingdom should be hospitable to these people. The Lord identifies himself with them: "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least [brothers and sisters] of mine, you did for me."[61] The various efforts of the Church toward migrants and refugees are a powerful missionary witnessing of the charity of Christ, which is all-encompassing.

As a worldwide institution, the Catholic Church intervenes in upholding the rights of migrants and refugees through public discourses of the Pope and ecclesiastical leaders, as well as papal journeys in which the destination itself is a message and a witness of life. Francis wanted a personalist approach to ministering to refugees,

[59] Cf. Mt. 11:28.

[60] Cf. Mt. 25:31–46.

[61] Mt. 25:40.

seeing them as human beings and not as statistics; they should be considered a part of society that brings opportunities, not threats.[62]

The Holy Father is concerned about *making headlines* so that there will be public awareness of the plight of refugees and migrants—with the ultimate goal of charting a just and stable solution for them worldwide.[63] Some of the Pope's efforts toward migrants and refugees that made it to the news were his first papal trip in Lampedusa to express his closeness to the people, his trip to Lesbos where he let a Muslim family ride a papal plane to the Vatican, his apostolic journey to Myanmar to communicate his concern over the Rohingya who are a minority group in the country, his creating a special Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development with a particular emphasis on migrants and refugees, his inserting of the new Marian title *Solace of Migrants* into the litany, and his condemnation of the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia, pointing to the suffering of families forced to flee.

It may be noticed that the Pope conflates the terms "refugee" and "migrant." For him, those who look for jobs abroad and those who escape war do so out of a desire for a better life; they want to leave behind hopelessness because they cannot build their future due to political unrest in their home society or lack of employment opportunities therein.[64] Both the refugees and the migrants are poor because some suffer from inequality, discrimination, and marginalization from their host nations/cities. Indeed, human mobility is one of the Pope's main priorities and the most fundamental features of his pontificate. He

[62] Francis, "Migrants and Refugees: Men and Women in Search of Peace" [message for the celebration of the 51st World Day of Peace - January 1, 2018] (November 13, 2017), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20171113_messaggio-51giornatamondiale-pace2018.html.

[63] P. Guzik, "Communicating Migration – Pope Francis' Strategy of Reframing Refugee Issues," *Church, Communication and Culture* 3:2 (2018): 131.

[64] Francis, "Migrants and Refugees: Men and Women in Search of Peace."

calls Christians to respond with generosity, promptness, wisdom, and foresight to the plight of these people.[65]

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church dedicates a specific section to immigration. It teaches that "immigration can be a resource for development rather than an obstacle to it."[66] It also made special mention of the material and pastoral solicitude that the Church must extend to refugees who are war victims and her defense of their human dignity.[67]

In 2004, the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People published the instruction *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* (On the Love of Christ towards Migrants).[68] This instruction renews the charitable commitment of the Church toward migrants from previous documents such as *Exsul Familia*, *De pastorali migratorum cura*, and *Gaudium et Spes*. The presentation portion of the aforementioned pastoral Instruction penned by Stephen Fumio Cardinal Hamao intends to transform the migrants' migration experience into "an opportunity to grow in Christian life" and "an occasion of new evangelization and mission."[69] The Church wants the migrants to be not just recipients of pastoral solicitude but also active agents and participants in the Church's

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[65] Francis, "Welcoming, Protecting, Promoting and Integrating Migrants and Refugees."

[66] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), no. 297, available at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html.

[67] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 505.

[68] Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* (Vatican City, 2004), available at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/documents/rc_pc_migrants_doc_20040514_erga-migrantes-caritas-christi_en.html.

[69] Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*, presentation part.

mission. In the Instruction, focus is placed on the centrality of the person of the migrant and his/her rights, the contribution of ordained and lay faithful, the importance of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, and some specificities on the pastoral care of migrants to foster a culture of welcome and solidarity. The Instruction upholds Christ as the Archetypal Stranger and Mary as the living symbol of the emigrant. The two Gospel stories mentioned earlier (Journey to Bethlehem and Flight to Egypt) are also discussed in this Instruction as the basis for showing Jesus and Mary as migrants. Other particular instructions from *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* are as follows: entrust migrants to a chaplain who speaks the same language as them or at least close to their linguistic and cultural point of view; oppose baseless suspicions and prejudices against foreigners; promote an authentic culture of welcome; engage in long-term projects for migrants and truly integrate them into the host society; celebrate liturgies that are culturally, historically, and anthropologically sensitive to migrants; and encourage popular piety and devotion among migrants. Moreover, the local Church of the migrant from his/her home country must collaborate intensely with the host Church, Catholic universities must study various aspects of migration for the concrete pastoral service of migrants, seminaries should take into account the phenomenon of migration in the formation of young seminarians, and religious men and women should assist in the various pastoral ministries for migrants. There are also instructions to celebrate the World Day of Migrants and Refugees; establish a personal, intercultural/interethnic, or inter-ritual parish; and, finally, consider today's migrations as a call from God to the Kingdom of God and an instrument of Divine Providence to further peace and the unity of the human family.[70]

In 1992, the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum" released a document entitled "Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity."[71] Here they emphasized

[70] Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*, nos. 2, 7, 15, 21, 23–24, 26–27, 33, 38–50, 53–56, 58, 69–72, 75–85, 86–89, and 99.

[71] Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, "Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity" (Vatican City, 1992), no. 26, available

that care for refugees depends on the local Church. The document enumerated some of the ways that the local Church can aid refugees, such as through personal contact, defense of their rights, denunciation of injustices, action for the adoption of laws that will guarantee their effective protection, education against xenophobia, the creation of groups of volunteers and emergency funds, and pastoral care, among others. The document adds that parishes have to welcome refugees and integrate them effectively into the community while avoiding fear and suspicion. Those who live in refugee camps, however, also benefit from the Church's pastoral, moral, and spiritual care. Volunteers who work among refugees have to be encouraged by the Church, and cooperation among local Churches must be fostered so assistance to refugees might be more effective. Others, like episcopal conferences, educational institutions, religious institutes, and Catholic organizations, have their role to play in assisting refugees and migrants. Indeed, one undertaking common among the Catholic Church, other Christians, and even non-Christians is to aid refugees. Doing so fosters unity within and among the members of the human family.[72]

Conclusion and Recommendations

This article has laid down two Biblical foundations for the new Marian title *Solacium migrantium*: Jesus's Nativity and the Holy Family's Flight into Egypt. The first Scriptural pericope demonstrates the migration experience of Mary (with Jesus and Joseph) and her encountering difficulties during the sojourn, with the eventual rejection at her destination. The Flight into Egypt narrates the Holy Family's forced journey to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath. These Biblical stories ground Mary's title of *Solace of Migrants* by presenting her as a model and intercessor of migrants and those who care for them. Migrants

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at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/corunum/documents/rc_pc_corunum_doc_25061992_refugees_en.html.

[72] Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, "Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity," 27–34.

and refugees are close to Francis's heart and are obviously one of his top pastoral priorities. His words and actions show this strongly. Thus, he has entrusted them to the maternal intercession of Mary and pointed to her as their Solace. Mary typifies the Church. Whatever or whoever Mary is, the Church is. Therefore, in calling Mary the Solace of Migrants, the Church also becomes a Solace of Migrants. In her charitable actions for migrants, she fulfills Christ's commandment of love for everyone. The Church can be a convincing witness through love and attract people to Christ's fold. Migrants having a hard time and on the verge of giving up their faith may be inflamed once again. Following the example of Mary, the Church can be a haven of peace and hospitality for them.

To inculcate devotion to Mary under her new title *Solace of Migrants*, the Church of Rome may institute a feast for her. The old liturgical calendar has a feast dedicated to the Flight into Egypt, explicitly mentioning the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Collect of this old feast goes like this:

> O God, protector of those who put their trust in thee, by whose will thy only-begotten Son, our Redeemer, escaped the sword of Herod by his flight into Egypt, grant that we, thy servants, through the prayers of his blessed and ever-virgin mother Mary, may be delivered from all dangers to soul and body, and be counted worthy to reach our heavenly fatherland.[73]

The old feast was suppressed due perhaps to the historical doubts cast on this Biblical narrative. Instead of the Flight into Egypt, a new feast in honor of Our Lady Solace of Migrants may be created, and the presidential prayers may revolve around the Church's solicitude to migrants and refugees. The Church may also commission artists to conceptualize an appropriate iconography for the Marian title. She can also be proclaimed as the patron of migrants and refugees.

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[73] J. O'Connell & H. Finberg, eds., *The Missal in Latin and English*, trans. R. Knox (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1952), 878.

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A NEW LOOK AT THE MARIAN DOGMAS IN SACRED SCRIPTURE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

Ryan Janelle A. Salvacion

Abstract. This article will examine the writings of the Fathers of the Church on the four Marian dogmas: the Divine Maternity of Mary, her Perpetual Virginity, her Immaculate Conception, and her Bodily Assumption into Heaven. As will be shown later, the Fathers' teachings on the Church's Marian beliefs are found in their commentaries on the Sacred Scriptures. The purpose of this article is to show how the Church Fathers saw the figure of Mary in the pages of the Bible, what kind of exegetical perspective they had in their Biblical interpretation, and, lastly, how historical-critical exegesis can learn to interpret the Scripture as *God's word* correctly and properly from patristic-medieval exegesis.

Keywords. Marian dogmas; Fathers of the Church; patristic-medieval exegesis; historical-critical exegesis

Introduction

The Fathers of the Church are the earliest commentators of Sacred Scripture. "To understand how the Fathers approached the Scripture is probably the most indispensable means to

understanding them in general."[1] They were a group of men from the East and West during the first eight hundred years of Christianity whose writings comprise a major part of what is called today "Ancient Christian Literature."[2] Today, their writings continue to be authoritative interpretations of the sacred text despite having gained harsh criticism from historical-critical exegetes as being archaic and unscientific or too mystical or spiritual.[3] Indeed, despite these criticisms, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is replete with quotations from the Church Fathers in its explanations of Church dogmas and doctrines.[4] In other words, the Church continues to give a high value to the teachings and commentaries of these ancient writers.

The dogmas of the Church regarding the Blessed Virgin Mary are teachings often criticized by exegetes of the historical-critical method. To cite an example, the Catholic Biblical scholar of the 20th century, John McKenzie, criticized Mariology and Marian devotion in this way:

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[1] B. Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 22.

[2] "Ancient Christian Literature is that of the early centuries of Christianity or of Christian antiquity. Authors generally fix the limit at the death of St. John of Damascus (c. 749) for the Greek Church, and at the death of St. Gregory the Great (604) or, better, of St. Isidore of Seville (636) for the Latin Church" (J. Tixeront, *A Handbook of Patrology*, trans. S. Raemers [London: B. Herder Book Co., 1947], 1).

[3] "Although twentieth-century scholars have tended to express themselves more modestly, their judgment of the value of classical biblical exegesis has been, in general, equally negative. The main focus of modern criticism has been that patristic and medieval exegesis relied so heavily on figural, or allegorical, interpretation—on taking texts, especially Old Testament texts, not simply [in] their 'plain sense' but as pointing to Christ, to Christian salvation, and to the growth of Christian believers—that the authentic meaning of the Bible was swallowed up in arbitrarily pious or pedantic fantasy" (B. Daley, "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable? Some Reflections on Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms," in E. Davis & R. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* [Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003], 70–71).

[4] See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Citta del Vaticano: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1997) [hereafter cited as *CCC*].

> We have noticed that the meagre historical knowledge about the real Mary was no obstacle to the development of Mariology and Marian devotion; what Christians did not find they created. No doubt historical and biblical criticism has an iconoclastic effect upon Mariology.[5]
>
> The real or the historical Mary is [at] least as elusive as the real or the historical Jesus and not quite for the same reasons. The genuine historical evidence about Mary is so slight as to impose upon the historian, were anyone else concerned, an embarrassed silence. We know [as] little about her as we know about the mother of Abraham Lincoln, about whom Lincoln is credited with a remark that all he had he owed to his angel mother. Jesus did not even say for the record that much about Mary. But this has left the imagination of Christian devotion entirely unrestrained by information.
>
> The Mary of Christian legend, art, poetry, hymnody and even theology is a fictitious character. I am not sure that we can say of her that the Mary of faith is as important as the Mary of history. *Faith in the Mary of traditional Christian devotion is faith in something which is not true*.[6]

This statement of McKenzie's is a clear denial of the truthfulness of the Marian dogmas of the Church from the perspective of historical criticism. The Mary of faith is nothing else but a fictitious character, a figure based not really on history but on the creative faith and imagination of believers throughout the ages. This is by all means a clear attack on the faith of the Catholic Church regarding the person and role of Mary in salvation history. As a response to this, one can borrow an indispensable hermeneutic principle from Joseph Ratzinger and apply it also to Mary, that is, that the Christ of faith is the Jesus of history and vice versa.[7] As such, *the Mary of faith is also the Mary of history and vice versa.* The kind of interpretation advocated by McKenzie is evidently based on a highly critical and historical reading of Scripture that is devoid of the Church's faith and tradition. What one gets is

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[5] J. McKenzie, "The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament," in H. Küng & J. Moltmann, eds., *Mary in the Churches* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), 10.

[6] McKenzie, "The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament," 9.

[7] See J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Vol. 1: *From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. A. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), xxi–xxii.

a very secular reading of a text that is supposed to be sacred and an expression of the faith of the ecclesial community. When the Bible is read like other secular books, it ends up simply being one of them.

The purpose of the present article is to show the truthfulness of the Marian dogmas of the Church—how they are deeply rooted in Sacred Scripture, and the writings of the Church Fathers are the aid to seeing this truth. Before the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was officially defined by Bl. Pius IX as a dogma of the Church in 1854 through the apostolic constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*,[8] and the doctrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin in 1950 by Pius XII through the apostolic constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*,[9] both doctrines had already been taught by the Church Fathers. Their explanations of these doctrines were simply based on their careful reading and interpretation of the Bible. This also applies to the dogmas of Mary's Divine Maternity and Perpetual Virginity which were very dear and favorite doctrines explained and defended by the patristic writers against the attacks of pagans and heretics.

1. Mary, Mother of God

During the early part of the fifth century, Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, taught that to call Mary the *Theotokos* (God-bearer) or Mother of God is theologically inappropriate and preposterous.[10] He claims that the sacred text taught that Mary is *Christotokos* (Christ-bearer), never *Theotokos*. He even accused those who were believers

[8] See R. Laurentin, "The Role of the Papal Magisterium in the Development of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception," in E. O'Connor, ed., *The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception: History and Significance* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), 314–318.

[9] See H. Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion,* Vol. II: *From the Reformation to the Present Day* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 146–150.

[10] See H. Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion,* Vol. I: *From the Beginnings to the Eve of the Reformation* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 104.

and who were teaching that Mary is *Theotokos* to be heretics.[11] His theological reasoning is rooted in the proposition that God as divine and eternal could not have been born. Jesus is of two persons; he is a Divine Person and a human person. Mary is the mother of Christ, the human person, and never of the Divine Person.[12] Here one can immediately see where the heresy of Nestorius is rooted—in the denial of the *hypostatic union* of the Word with his humanity. For Nestorius, there is no such thing as the union of the divinity and the humanity in the Divine Person of Christ. Instead, what he taught was the moral union between the humanity and divinity of Christ, "the indwelling of the Word in man as in a temple."[13]

St. Cyril, the Patriarch of Alexandria, was quick to make a response to the heretical views of the Patriarch of Constantinople. Among his many letters to Nestorius, it is his *Second Letter* that has the most profound theological significance. "This letter gets to the theological heart of the matter and shows it to be clearly Christological."[14] Here St. Cyril immediately understood that the controversy around the *Theotokos* is not simply an issue regarding Mary, that it has something to do, above all else, with the correct understanding of the Person of Christ. The right formulation regarding the identity of Mary as the Mother of God is a consequence of a correct understanding of the mystery of the hypostatic union. Three paragraphs from his second letter to Nestorius are worth quoting here to show the essential connection between the doctrine of the hypostatic union and the doctrine of the *Theotokos*:

> We do not say that the nature of the Word was transformed into flesh, nor [that] it was transformed into a [human person] composed of soul and body; we do assert that the Word, being hypostatically united to a

[11] See N. Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria* (London: Routledge, 2000), 34.

[12] See Graef, *Mary,* Vol. I, 104.

[13] G. Alastruey, *The Blessed Virgin Mary*, Vol. I (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1964), 48.

[14] J. Bastero, *Mary, Mother of the Redeemer: A Mariology Textbook,* trans. M. Adams & P. Griffin (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), 159.

> body informed by a rational soul, in an ineffable and incomprehensible way, became [a human person] and was called "Son of Man," not by his mere will and pleasure, nor by the assumption of a person; and we say that the natures are distinct, though they are joined in a true unity; yet both constitute a single Christ, a single Son; not in the sense that the diversity of the natures was taken away by the union, but in the sense that divinity and humanity, through their indescribable and hidden concourse, constitute a single Lord and Son, Jesus Christ.
>
> Thus it can be affirmed that even though he subsisted before all ages and was generated by the Father, he was also generated by a woman according to the flesh. But that does not mean that his divine nature took its origin from the holy Virgin or that this nature needed a second birth after his birth from the Father (indeed, it would clearly be unreasonable and foolish to say that he who existed before all ages and who is coeternal with the Father had need of a second generation in order to exist). Rather, it means that, for our sake and for our salvation, he assumed his human nature into the unity of his Person and was born of a woman; this is why it is said that he was born according to the flesh. Therefore, we must not think that the holy Virgin gave birth to some unspecified man, into whom the Word descended later; no, we must believe that there was one single reality from the first moment in his Mother's womb and that he was born according to the flesh, accepting the birth of his own body.…
>
> This is what the orthodox faith affirms everywhere; this is what we find in the works of the holy Fathers. That is why they do not hesitate to call the holy Virgin *Theotokos*, not in the sense that the divine nature of the Word took its origin from the holy Virgin, but in the sense that he took his holy body, gifted with a rational soul, from her. Yet, because the Word is hypostatically united to this body, one can say that he was truly born according to the flesh.[15]

There is no better explanation regarding the hypostatic union and the divine maternity of Mary found in the patristic era than this explanation of St. Cyril. Here Nestorius's erroneous concept regarding

[15] St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Letter II to Nestorius*, in J. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca* (Paris: 1857–1866), 77, 44–49 [hereafter cited as PG]; L. Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought*, trans. T. Buffer (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 238–239 [hereafter cited as *MFC*].

Christ as both a Divine Person and a human person is overcome by explaining that what was conceived in, and later came out of, the womb of the blessed Virgin was not simply a human nature but a Divine Person wherein human nature and divine nature are perfectly united. Mary gave birth to the Incarnate Second Person of the Trinity; that is why it is correct to call and honor her as the Mother of God. She is the origin of Christ's humanity but never of his divinity.

A further objection to the doctrine of the *Theotokos* resides in the fact that Mary was never explicitly called "Mother of God" in the New Testament. "Nowhere does the Holy Scripture formally and explicitly say that Mary is the Mother of God, *Theotokos*, or *Deigenetrix*."[16] This term is apparently not rooted in the sacred text. But if one carefully examines Luke 1:35, one will immediately recognize the identity of the child Mary is about to carry in her womb:

> The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called *Son of God* [emphasis added]."

In this Lucan passage, Jesus is identified as the *Son of God*. Here one will understand the theological position of St. Cyril regarding Mary as the *Theotokos*. Mary is the *Mother of God* due to the obvious reason that her Son is the *Son of God*. In other words, it was clear enough for St. Cyril that the identity and role of Mary can never be separated from that of her Son. Mariology always exists from and follows Christology. The explanation of the Patriarch of Alexandria is rooted in a careful and prayerful theological reflection on the sacred text. Nevertheless, despite this eloquent explanation of St. Cyril regarding this matter, Nestorius refused to recant his erroneous theological position.

> Finally convinced that he [would be] unable to resolve the controversy with Nestorius directly, Cyril appealed to the authority of the pope, Celestine I.… Nestorius then appealed to Emperor Theodosius II, who decided to call an ecumenical council to be held at Ephesus, beginning on Pentecost 431.[17]

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[16] Bastero, *Mary, Mother of the Redeemer*, 155.

[17] *MFC,* 236.

It was at this Council of Ephesus that the bishops and patriarchs headed by St. Cyril formally condemned Nestorius's heretical views on Christ and his Mother. Nestorius was excommunicated and deposed from the see of Constantinople. Truly, the Council of Ephesus was one of the most significant ecumenical councils during the early Church, and Luigi Gambero was right enough to describe the council in this way:

> If we consider it [the council] from the perspective of the Church's faith, we need to recognize that clear and precise decisions were made from the beginning. Mary was solemnly declared *Theotokos*, as a consequence of the fact that the two natures of Christ are inseparably united in a single Divine Person. Thus the Council, which had been called to resolve an essentially christological problem, had an important mariological outcome.[18]

Aside from St. Cyril's defense of Mary's divine maternity during the Nestorian controversy, it is also good to explore and examine some of the writings of the Church Fathers from before the Council of Ephesus. These writings will show that many of the arguments of St. Cyril as quoted above were borrowed from or inspired by the Biblical interpretation of earlier Fathers. For the sake of brevity, only the writings of two Fathers from the East (Sts. Athanasius of Alexandria and Ephrem the Syrian) and two from the West (Sts. Ambrose of Milan and Augustine of Hippo) will be presented in this section.

First is St. Athanasius, the famous Patriarch of Alexandria and a great defender of the Nicene faith. His defense of Mary's divine maternity is rooted in his faith in the divinity of Jesus. Christ is God; therefore, it is right to call and honor his Mother Mary as the *Theotokos*. His understanding of the doctrine of the *Theotokos* is obviously tied to the doctrine of the *homoousios*—that of Jesus being consubstantial with the Father:

> Christ, being God, became man for our sake and was born of Mary, Mother of God [*Theotokos*], to free us from the devil's power.[19]

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[18] *MFC,* 238.

[19] St. Athanasius, *On Virginity* 3, PG 28, 256, MFC, 101.

In his commentary on Luke's account of Mary's visitation to Elizabeth (1:39–56), St. Athanasius is again applying the title *Mother of God* to Mary:

> The Mother of the King greets the mother of the soldier; the *Mother of God* [emphasis added] greets the mother of the man; the Virgin greets the married woman. She greets Elizabeth with an outward greeting, and when the two greet each other in a visible manner, the Holy Spirit, who dwelt in Mary's womb, incites him who is in Elizabeth's womb, as one who urges on his friend, "Hurry, get up!"[20]

In this Athanasian commentary, the attribution of the title *Mother of God* must be read against the background of Elizabeth calling Mary the "mother of my Lord" (1:43). Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth calls her cousin the *Mother of the Lord*. This is quite significant since she did not speak of this on her own accord but through the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Bastero explains the importance of this title in this way:

> As has been shown in the exegesis of this passage, the word "Lord" (*Kyrios*) is applied to God and not just to the Messiah. All one need do [sic] is examine the immediate context to see that the term *Kyrios* has truly a divine sense.[21]

It is in this sense that St. Athanasius understood the title in Lk. 1:43, and he will not have another interpretation of it because, as seen above in his commentary, he considers Elizabeth calling Mary the "mother of my Lord" equivalent to calling Mary *Theotokos*, Mother of God. This point is further confirmed by Pitre:

> Perhaps even more striking, the Jewish scholar Amy-Jill Levine suggests that Elizabeth's reference to my "Lord" (Greek *kyrios*) is in fact a "divine title." If this is right, then for Luke, Mary is not just the mother of the messianic king; she is also the *mother of the divine Lord*.[22]

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[20] St. Athanasius, *Homily of the Papyrus of Turin, MFC,* 105.

[21] Bastero, *Mary, Mother of the Redeemer*, 156.

[22] B. Pitre, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary: Unveiling the Mother of the Messiah* (New York: Image, 2018), 85.

Therefore, one can confidently conclude that the title *Lord* in Lk. 1:43 is referring to both the *Messiah* and *Yahweh*, the God of Israel, as the same Person.

The second Father is St. Ephrem, the deacon from Syria. "The Marian doctrine of the Syrian Church reaches its most sublime expression in the poetry of Ephrem. He is rightly called 'the harp of the Holy Spirit' and deserves the additional title of 'Marian Doctor.'"[23] In one of his hymns on the Nativity of the Lord, Ephrem describes the mystery of Mary's divine maternity in this poetic manner:

> A wonder is Your mother: the Lord entered her
> and became a servant; He entered able to speak
> and He became silent in her; He entered her thundering
> and His voice grew silent; He entered Shepherd of all;
> a Lamb He became in her; He emerged bleating.[24]

The writings of St. Ephrem are good examples of sublime Christology and Mariology expressed in a highly poetic language. This kind of writing facilitated the dissemination of the Church's teaching in a more effective manner, especially among ordinary believers since hymns or poems are easier to remember than prose.

Another important point highlighted by the writings of St. Ephrem is the essential connection between the identity and role of Mary and that of her Son, as already seen above in the writings of St. Cyril. The person of Mary can only be properly understood when considered within the perspective of her Son. The greatness of Mary resides first and foremost in the reality of being the Mother of Jesus, of being the Mother of God. "The mystery of Mary's divine motherhood constitutes her *raison d'etre*, the deepest explanation of her life and of the place she occupies in God's plan of salvation."[25] This truth is expressed poetically in one of the Nativity hymns of St. Ephrem:

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[23] *MFC,* 108.

[24] St. Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity* 11, 6, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns,* trans. K. McVey (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 132.

[25] Bastero, *Mary, Mother of the Redeemer*, 154.

> Blessed are you also, Mary, whose name is great and exalted because of your Child. Indeed you were able to say how much and how and where the Great One, Who became small, dwelt in you.[26]

The third Father is St. Ambrose, the famous Bishop of Milan and baptizer of St. Augustine. "In the writings of St. Ambrose, we find the first important Marian doctrine within Western Christianity, in terms not only of quantity but also of quality, as we encounter rare heights of illuminating reflection."[27] St. Ambrose's interpretation of Prov. 8:22, "The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago," as referring to the Incarnation is theologically significant especially if one remembers how this text was used by the Arians to justify their denial of the preexistence and divinity of the Son.[28] A Biblical passage that was supposed to be used to justify the heretics' denial of Jesus's divinity ends up being a solid Biblical reference to the Incarnation—to Christ's self-emptying love or *kenosis*, to Mary's divine maternity, and to the purpose of Christ's salvific act:

> We understand what was written about the Incarnation of the Lord: "The Lord created me" (Prov 8:22) to mean that the Lord Jesus was created from the Virgin to redeem the Father's works. And truly, one cannot doubt that this was said in reference to the mystery of the Incarnation, when the Lord assumed flesh to free his works from slavery to corruption and to destroy, by the suffering of his body, the one who held the power of death.[29]

St. Ambrose is emphasizing in this passage that the purpose of Mary's election is for the Incarnation of the Word to happen. It became possible for the Word to assume human nature through the *fiat* of Mary to the divine plan of God (Lk. 1:38). Another important point that one can learn from this passage is St. Ambrose's profound

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[26] St. Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity* 25, 14, *Ephrem the Syrian*, 203.

[27] *MFC,* 189.

[28] See K. Anatolios, *Athanasius* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 110–111.

[29] St. Ambrose, *De fide* 3, 46, in J. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina* (Paris: 1841–1864) 16, 623–624 (hereafter cited as *PL*); *MFC,* 195.

understanding of the essential connection between the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery of Christ. The *telos* of the Incarnation is the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus—his redeeming act "once and for all" (Heb. 9:12) that saved humanity from sin and death, that made men and women children of God. This divine plan of God was fulfilled because of the cooperation of a young woman from Nazareth.

In his work *The Sacrament of the Incarnation of the Lord*, St. Ambrose, like St. Cyril and St. Athanasius, explains that Mary is truly *Theotokos* because of the reality of the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in the one Divine Person of Jesus. Here one can see, again, a favorite theme from the Church Fathers—Mariology proceeds from Christology. Any Marian doctrine (or Mariological heresy) will always come from a correct (or erroneous) understanding of the Person of Christ. The divinity (i.e., his being the eternal Word, the Son of the Father) and the humanity (i.e., his being the biological Son of Mary) of Jesus are inseparable mysteries:

> Though he remains the eternal God, he undergoes the mysteries of the Incarnation while remaining one and undivided; for the One is both and is present in both, that is, in his divinity and in his body. For there is no difference between the One who proceeds from the Father and the One who is born of the Virgin; no, he is the same who comes from the Father in one way and comes from the Virgin in another way.[30]

The last Father is St. Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, the greatest of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. In one of his sermons, the Doctor of Grace explicitly explained that Jesus is both Mary's Creator and her Son, thus affirming both his divinity and humanity. Furthermore, the perpetual virginity of Mary is also emphasized and seen as an important prerequisite for the Incarnation. This teaching of St. Augustine will be used by the Church later on to defend the dogma of Mary's perpetual virginity. The Mother of the Messiah must be a virgin to signal that the child to be born from her is of divine origin. The virginal conception is a miraculous sign pointing toward the divinity of the Word Incarnate:

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[30] St. Ambrose, *De Incarnationis dominicae sacramento* 35, PL 16, 862; *MFC,* 193.

> It was not the visible sun that made this day holy for us, but the sun's invisible Creator, when the Virgin Mother brought to light, out of her fruitful womb and virginal body, the Creator made visible for us, the same invisible God who had also created the Virgin. Virgin in conceiving, virgin in giving birth, virgin with child, virgin mother, virgin forever. Why do you marvel at this, O man? God had to be born in this way when he deigned to become [human]. *Thus, did he make her, who was made by her* [emphasis added].[31]

Another important contribution of St. Augustine to the field of Mariology is to see Mary as a *type* of the Church, and to explain that the maternity of the Church is already seen in the divine maternity of Mary. As Mary gave birth to Christ, so did the Church give birth to Christians. The Church can only understand herself well if she looks and follows closely in the footsteps of the Mother of God. In Mary, the Church is perfectly personified as virgin and mother. The Marian profile of the Church will always be an indispensable aspect of her identity.

> Nevertheless, it is true, the Church is the mother of Christ. Mary preceded the Church as its *type* [emphasis added].[32]

> How is it that you do not belong to the Virgin's birth, if you are members of Christ? Mary gave birth to our Head; the Church gave birth to you. Indeed, the Church also is both virgin and mother, mother because of her womb of charity, virgin because of the integrity of her faith and piety.[33]

This teaching of St. Augustine is so important and influential that it even influenced the Council Fathers of Vatican II to incorporate the teachings about Mary in *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Instead of producing a separate Marian document, the Council Fathers deemed it right that the Council's teaching on Mary should never be separated from its teachings on the Church.

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[31] St. Augustine, *Sermo* 186, 1, *PL* 38, 999; *MFC,* 220.

[32] St. Augustine, *Sermo Denis* 25, 8, in G. Morin, ed., *Miscellanea Agostiniana: Testi e Studi publicati a cura dell' Ordine Eremitano di S. Agostino nel XV centenario dalla morte del Santo Dottore* (Romae: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1930), 164; *MFC,* 223.

[33] St. Augustine, *Sermo* 192, 2, *PL* 38, 1012–1013; *MFC,* 223.

It is for this reason that the last chapter of *Lumen Gentium* (Ch. 8) is about the Blessed Virgin Mary.[34] In the theology of Augustine, one can see the unity of Christology, Mariology, and ecclesiology. And this is quite significant because, in a world of expertise and compartmentalization even in the field of Catholic theology, to see the essential interconnection of the different branches of theology with each other is indispensable for a holistic and correct understanding of the Catholic faith.

2. Perpetual Virginity of Mary

Recent years have witnessed how the historical-critical method has put into question the historical reliability of many of the foundational doctrines of the Church. In his book *The Real Jesus*, the Catholic Biblical scholar Luke Timothy Johnson has a chapter dedicated to discussing the recent attacks by scholars of the historical-critical method on the foundational teachings of Christianity like the resurrection of Jesus and his virginal conception.[35] One of the six authors whose ideas and literary works he discussed in his book is worth mentioning here due to the fact that it has something to do with the virginity of Mary. In his book *Born of a Woman: A Bishop Rethinks the Birth of Jesus*, John Spong, an Episcopal bishop, argues that the virginal conception did not really happen; rather, "Mary was 'really' a teenaged girl who was raped and became pregnant with an illegitimate child. She was then taken under the protection of Joseph."[36] The infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke are simply ways of hiding the truth of what really happened.

[34] See *Lumen Gentium*, available at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (accessed June 19, 2023), nos. 52–69.

[35] See L. Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 29–56.

[36] Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, 33.

According to him, the infancy narratives are "late in composition and yield little significant historical information."[37]

John P. Meier, a famous Catholic Biblical scholar of the historical-critical method, wrote an article entitled "The Brothers and Sisters of Jesus in Ecumenical Perspective."[38] The argument of this article is summarized in one of the lines of its conclusion:

> A historian prescinding from what is held by faith and later church teaching and working solely with the historical and philological data available would most likely come to the conclusion that the brothers and sisters of Jesus were his true physical brothers and sisters.[39]

The point Meier is presenting here is that the historical-critical method cannot give enough evidence for the perpetual virginity of Mary; rather, it will prove the contrary. The philological study of the word *adelphos* in the New Testament indicates that it does refer solely to physical brothers and not to cousins, nephews, and kinsmen:[40]

> With "full brother" and "half-brother" we exhaust the literal meaning of *adelphos* found in the NT.[41]

These interpretations of Spong and Meier run contrary to what the Church has believed throughout the ages. If the Church Fathers read the writings of these scholars today, they would surely disagree with their findings. How come they have different interpretations and conclusions when both the Church Fathers and modern scholars like Meier have read the same sacred text? The reason lies in the fact that the Church Fathers read the Bible within the context of the Church's faith and Tradition. By simply reading and interpreting the Bible as a secular

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[37] Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, 32–33.

[38] See John P. Meier, "The Brothers and Sisters of Jesus in Ecumenical Perspective," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 54:1 (1992): 1-–28.

[39] Meier, "The Brothers and Sisters of Jesus," 27.

[40] See Meier, "The Brothers and Sisters of Jesus," 16–17.

[41] Meier, "The Brothers and Sisters of Jesus," 20.

book, many of its important aspects are being neglected and ignored by historical-critical scholars. When a writing is read and interpreted outside its natural habitat or the community that formed it, e.g., the Bible being read and interpreted outside the faith community of the Church, it will surely be misunderstood or erroneously interpreted. A botanist will not better understand the life cycle of a plant by uprooting it and studying it in a laboratory; rather, he will understand its life cycle better by studying and examining it in its natural habitat. In other words, a "non-biased" reading of the sacred text advocated by historical-critical scholars is not "non-biased" at all. It has its own bias, and that is to read the Bible outside the faith community that formed it.

If modern scholars like Meier and Spong would deny the truthfulness of the perpetual virginity of Mary, the Church Fathers would rather affirm it with their whole hearts. As Meier pointed out in his article, St. Jerome was the first Church Father to interpret the Greek word *adelphos* as not simply referring to physical brothers but also to cousins, relatives, and kinsmen.[42] Jerome explains that the brothers and sisters of Jesus in the Gospels are not actually his biological siblings but his cousins and relatives. This explanation is in consonance with the Church's belief in the perpetual virginity of Mary.

Meier accepts St. Jerome's argument, though with some reservations, that the word *adelphos* can be understood in the context of the Hebrew word *ach* which means "brother, cousin, or nephew." This is seen in the Greek Old Testament when the word *ach* is translated as *adelphos*. But, still, Meier does not agree that it can be applied in the New Testament since hagiographers like St. Paul knew Greek well and if they meant "cousins" instead of "brothers," they would have used *anepsios* instead of *adelphos*. His justification is Col. 4:10, where Paul used *anepsios* in describing Mark as the cousin of Barnabas. If *adelphos* can be used for "cousin," Paul would have used it for Mark, instead of *anepsios*.[43] But this kind of argument pursued by Meier was already debunked by Jerome in his work *On the Perpetual Virginity of Blessed*

[42] See Meier, "The Brothers and Sisters of Jesus," 16–17.

[43] See Meier, "The Brothers and Sisters of Jesus," 16–17.

Mary Against Helvidius. The saint from Illyria argues that Jesus called his disciples "brothers" even though they were not his biological siblings: "Go to my *brothers* [emphasis added] and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God"[44] (Jn. 20:17).[45] The next verse illumines what Jesus meant to Mary Magdalene with the word "brothers": "Mary Magdalene went and said to the *disciples* [emphasis added], 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her" (Jn. 20:18). By carefully examining the context of these passages, one can see that Jesus was referring to his disciples when he used the word "brothers" and Mary Magdalene understood it that way. If she understood it in another way, she would have gone to Jesus's physical brothers (if they really existed) instead of going to the disciples of the Lord. Here one can see how flawed Meier's argument is that the word *adelphos* in the New Testament is used only for physical brothers. Jerome further argues that St. Paul used the word *adelphos* in referring not to a physical brother but to a member of the community, although in the context of 1 Corinthians, a community member who is not living a morally upright life:

> But rather I write to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of *brother* [emphasis added] if he is guilty of immorality. Or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber—not even to eat with such a one.[46] (1 Cor. 5:11)[47]

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[44] Legei autē Iēsous, mē mou haptou, oupō gar anabebēka pros ton Patera poreuou de pros tous *adelphous* mou kai eipe autois Anabainō pros ton Patera mou kai Patera hymōn kai Theon mou kai Theon hymōn (author's transliteration of the original Greek text of Jn. 20:17).

[45] See St. Jerome, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary Against Helvidius*, 15, in *St. Jerome: Dogmatic and Polemical Works*, trans. J. Hritzu (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, Inc., 1965), 33 (hereafter cited as *SJDPW*).

[46] Nyn de egrapsa hymin mē synanamignysthai ean tis *adelphos* onomazomenos ē pornos ē pleonektēs ē eidōlolatrēs ē loidoros, ē methysos, ē harpax tō toioutō mēde synesthiein (author's transliteration of the original Greek text of 1 Cor. 5:11).

[47] St. Jerome, *Against Helvidius*, 15, *SJDPW,* 33.

In Acts 9:17, Ananias called Saul brother even though Saul is not a biological brother of Ananias:

> *Brother Saul* [emphasis added], the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.[48]

Another important point emphasized by Jerome in his polemic against Helvidius is the fact that one can never find a passage in the New Testament that refers to the alleged "brothers of the Lord" as "sons of Mary" or the "sons of Joseph":

> Now I ask you: for what reason do you think are the individuals in the Gospel called brothers of the Lord? Is it birth? But Scripture does not say this; for it calls them neither the sons of Mary nor sons of Joseph.[49]

Unlike many scholars of the historical-critical method, Jerome takes the words of the Scripture very seriously. He based his arguments on what is in the Biblical texts and not on what is not there. Unlike Spong or Meier, he did not read the Bible based on a notion or preconceived idea that the proper way to read the Bible is to disregard what is supernatural and insist simply on explanations based only on natural causes. Jerome will surely reject Spong's theory that Mary was no virgin but rather a rape victim by arguing that the Gospels never spoke about it. It is more of a wild conjecture than an established fact stated in the Bible. The argument that the individuals mentioned in the Gospels as "brothers and sisters of the Lord" are really his physical siblings is the strongest argument against the dogma of the perpetual virginity of Mary. But, as seen above, Jerome refuted this argument through a careful reading and examination of the sacred text.

Other arguments of Helvidius against the perpetual virginity of Mary that were refuted by Jerome are on the meaning of the word "until" in Mt. 1:25 and the word "firstborn" in Lk. 2:7. Helvidius argues

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[48] *Saoul adelphe* ho Kyrios apestalken me Iēsous ho ophtheis soi en tē hodō hē ērchou hopōs anablepsēs kai plēsthēs Pneumatos Hagiou (author's transliteration of the original Greek text of Acts 9:17).

[49] St. Jerome, *Against Helvidius*, 15; *SJDPW,* 33.

that Mt. 1:25 proves that Mary did not remain a virgin after the birth of Jesus because of the word "until" in Matthew's infancy narrative:

> But [Joseph] knew her not *until* [emphasis added] she had borne a son and he called his name Jesus.

Helvidius argues that the word "until" denotes that Mary already had sexual relations with Joseph after the birth of Jesus:

> She was known after she brought forth her child, and that the birth of her child merely delayed sexual relations.[50]

This argument was refuted by Jerome who explained that the word "until" has a double meaning. "Until" indicates both definite time and indefinite time. Jerome pointed out that the word "until" is used several times in the Bible to refer to an indefinite period. "It is not intended to say anything about the future beyond that point."[51]

> Now it must be pointed out that just as he accepted the custom of Scripture in the one instance, so also he should yield to the authority of the same Scripture as far as the conjunction "until" is concerned, which is often used to indicate a definite time (as he himself asserted), and often an indefinite time, as in the following passage where God addresses some individuals in the Prophets: "I am, I am, and I am till you grow old" (cf. Isa. 46:4). Will God cease to be after they grow old? And in the Gospel, the Savior says to His apostles: "Behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world" (Mt. 28:20). Will the Lord, therefore, leave His disciples after the consummation of the world and, when they shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel on twelve thrones, will they be deprived of the company of the Lord?[52]

What is being pointed out here is the insufficiency of the argument using Mt. 1:25 as a proof against the perpetual virginity of Mary. Jerome further argues that a just man like St. Joseph would never dare to have

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[50] St. Jerome, *Against Helvidius*, 5, *SJDPW,* 17.

[51] T. Staples, "The Case for Mary's Perpetual Virginity," *Catholic Answers* (July 1, 2009), available at https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/the-case-for-marys-perpetual-virginity.

[52] St. Jerome, *Against Helvidius*, 6, *SJDPW,* 18.

sexual relations with a woman whom he knew evidently belonged to God in the first place. Joseph knew his role as husband of Mary and foster father of the Lord, and his great reverence for the person of his wife and adopted Son would surely prevent him from having sexual intercourse with his wife.[53] This argument may sound illogical and silly for many people today especially in the context of life in a highly sensual and pornographic world. Society today is highly sexual, and purity and chastity are considered more as curses rather than as gifts and values to be upheld. Sexual pleasure becomes the priority. Sex is valued not so much because of its procreative purpose but because of its pleasure. But if sex is considered and understood in the context of Mary's and Joseph's time, where its importance is seen primarily in its procreative purpose and not simply for its pleasure, as an instrument to build up the family, one can immediately understand that sexual intercourse will never be the priority of those people who would like to follow the will of God. It becomes secondary, and the continence of Mary and Joseph is seen and understood in a better light.

Finally, Helvidius argues against the perpetual virginity of Mary by pointing out that Jesus is described as "firstborn" in Lk. 2:7. If Jesus is called firstborn then it only means to say that he is the first of many brethren. For Helvidius, it is ridiculous to call a child a firstborn if there is no second, third, or fourth child.[54] But Jerome refutes this argument by explaining the meaning of "firstborn" in the Bible:

> This is our definition: Every only child is a firstborn child; but not every firstborn is an only child. A firstborn child is not only one after whom other children are also born, but also one before whom no other child is born. "All that opened the womb," says the Lord to Aaron, "of all flesh that are offered to the Lord, of men and beasts, shall belong to thee; only the firstborn of men shall be redeemed with a price and the firstborn of beasts that are unclean" (Num. 18:15; cf. also Ex. 34:19). The word of God defined what was meant by a "firstborn." "All," it says, "that opened the womb." Otherwise, if no child is a firstborn child but only one who subsequently has brothers, the firstborn are not due

[53] See St. Jerome, *Against Helvidius*, 8, *SJDPW,* 20–21.

[54] See St. Jerome, *Against Helvidius*, 9, *SJDPW,* 23.

> the priests until others are also born, lest, perchance, a child be an only child and not the firstborn child, in the event that no other child shall be born subsequently.[55]

Here Jerome explains that the word "firstborn" is a technical term given to the first child regardless of whether or not he or she will have siblings later on. In other words, Lk. 2:7 cannot be used as a Biblical passage to disprove the perpetual virginity of Mary. The argument of Helvidius relied deliberately on his misunderstanding of the word "firstborn." That is why it was easy for Jerome to refute such an argument simply by explaining the Biblical meaning of the said term.

Aside from Jerome, it was also St. John Chrysostom who defended the perpetual virginity of Mary by explaining the meaning of the word "until" in Mt. 1:25. During his time, many people were still proposing that Mary lived a normal conjugal life with Joseph in Nazareth after the birth of Jesus, arguing that Mary was a virgin only before and during the conception of Jesus in her womb.[56] After she gave birth to him, she had sexual intercourse with Joseph, which is why there were individuals in the Gospels known as the brothers and sisters of the Lord. Chrysostom's explanation of the word "until" is found in his *Fifth Homily* on the Gospel of Matthew:

> And when he has taken here, "he knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born Son" (Mt. 1:25). He hath here used the word "till," not that thou shouldest suspect that afterwards he did know her, but to inform thee that before the birth the Virgin was wholly untouched by man. But why then, it may be said, hath he used the word, "till"? Because it is usual in Scripture often to do this, and to use this expression without reference to limited times. For so with respect to the ark likewise, it is said, "The raven returned not till the earth was dried up" (Gen. 8:7). And yet it did not return even after that time. And when discoursing also of God, the Scripture saith, "From age until age Thou art" (Ps. 90:2), not as fixing limits in this case. And again when it is preaching the Gospel beforehand, and saying, "In his days shall righteousness flourish, and abundance of peace, till the moon be taken away" (Ps. 72:7), it doth

[55] St. Jerome, *Against Helvidius*, 10, *SJDPW,* 23–24.

[56] See *MFC,* 177.

> not set a limit to this fair part of creation. So then likewise, it uses the word "till," to make certain what was before the birth, but as to what follows, it leaves thee to make the inference. Thus, what was necessary for thee to learn of Him, this He Himself hath said; that the Virgin was untouched by man until the birth; but that which both was seen to be a consequence of the former statement, and was acknowledged, this in its turn he leaves for thee to perceive; namely, that not even after this, she having so become a mother, and having been counted worthy of a new sort of travail, and a child-bearing so strange, could that righteous man ever have endured to know her. For if he had known her, and had kept her in the place of a wife, how is it that our Lord (Jn. 19:27) commits her, as unprotected, and having no one, to His disciple, and command[s] him to take her to his own home?[57]

In this homily, Chrysostom not only explained the meaning of the word "until" but also justified the perpetual virginity of Mary by having recourse to Jn. 19:27, wherein the Lord, dying on the cross, entrusted his Mother to his beloved disciple. Chrysostom argues that if Jesus had biological brothers and sisters, it would be logical to entrust his Mother to them. The fact that Jesus, before his death, entrusted his Mother to one of his followers is a clear indication that Jesus was the only Son of Mary.

St. Augustine, in one of his Christmas sermons, professed the perpetual virginity of Mary in this manner:

> Virgin in conceiving, virgin in giving birth, virgin with child, virgin mother, virgin forever.[58]

This is an essential passage from the writings of the Doctor of Grace because it is one of the most explicit professions of faith of a Church Father in the dogma of Mary's perpetual virginity. The importance of this passage is given even greater emphasis in its use as an authoritative patristic quotation in the *Catechism*'s explanation of the

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[57] St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on Matthew* 5, 5, in P. Schaff, ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Vol. 10: *Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), 33.

[58] St. Augustine, *Sermo* 186, 1, PL 38, 999; *MFC,* 220.

said Marian dogma.[59] The Church's belief in Mary's perpetual virginity is encapsulated in this lapidary Augustinian teaching, a passage that was part of Augustine's commentary on Jesus's Infancy Narratives which he proclaimed before the Christian community of Hippo. Here one can see the essential connection between Scripture, Tradition, and the ecclesial community. A dogma is professed to be true not simply because it is founded in Scripture but also because it is a teaching handed down from one generation to the next. Augustine received this teaching from previous teachers of the faith, and it becomes fully alive and relevant by being proclaimed in an ecclesial community. Dogma as the Church's official exegesis of Sacred Scripture[60] becomes truly alive when it is proclaimed in the liturgy and lived out by believers in their day-to-day life.

The Church's traditional way of stating the dogma of Mary's perpetual virginity (*Aeiparthenos*, "ever-virgin") as *ante partum* (before the birth of Christ), *in partu* (during the birth of Christ), and *post partum* (after the birth of Christ) was borrowed from the writings of a post-Nicene Church Father, the Bishop of Ravenna, St. Peter Chrysologus:

> She conceives as a virgin, she gives birth as a virgin, and she remains a virgin. Therefore, her flesh knows the power of the miracle but does not know the pain. In giving birth, it gains in integrity and knows nothing of physical suffering.[61]

Sts. Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom, and Chrysologus all professed and taught the same thing about Mary's perpetual virginity. Jerome and Chrysostom focused more on words found in the Gospels that heretics were using as counter-arguments to the dogma of the *Aeiparthenos*, like the words "until" and "firstborn," or the alleged siblings of the Lord, while Augustine and Chrysologus emphasized this dogma in their preaching to their respective Christian communities. The common

[59] See *CCC,* no. 510.

[60] See J. Ratzinger, "Crisis in Catechetics," *Canadian Catholic Review* (June 1983): 178.

[61] St. Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 117, 3, *PL* 52, 521; *MFC,* 294.

consensus among these Fathers is the belief that Mary's perpetual virginity is based on the Scripture and Tradition of the Church.

3. The Immaculate Conception

In 1854, through the apostolic constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*, Blessed Pius IX defined the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception as a dogma of faith in this way:

> We declare, pronounce and define that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her Conception was preserved Immaculate from all stain of original sin, by the singular grace and privilege of the Omnipotent God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, and that this doctrine was revealed by God, and therefore must be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful.[62]

What preceded this definition were the proofs and arguments that support that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception can be defined as a dogma, such as the liturgy of the Church,[63] the teachings of previous pontiffs,[64] the teachings of the Council of Trent,[65] its Biblical foundations especially the accounts of the Annunciation and Visitation in the Gospel of Luke[66] and the *Protoevangelium* in the book of Genesis,[67] its types in the Old Testament,[68] and the teachings of the Fathers and Writers of the Church.[69] What is evident in *Ineffabilis Deus* is

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[62] Pius IX, "Ineffabilis Deus" (1954), *Marian Reprints* Paper 21: 13, available at http://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_reprints/21.

[63] See Pius IX, "Ineffabilis Deus," 2–3.

[64] See Pius IX, "Ineffabilis Deus," 3–6.

[65] See Pius IX, "Ineffabilis Deus," 6.

[66] See Pius IX, "Ineffabilis Deus," 8–9.

[67] See Pius IX, "Ineffabilis Deus," 7.

[68] See Pius IX, "Ineffabilis Deus," 7–8.

[69] See Pius IX, "Ineffabilis Deus," 7.

Pius IX's emphasis on the Biblical foundation of this dogma and how it was taught in the writings of the Church Fathers and ecclesiastical authors. He summarized their teaching on the Immaculate Conception in this manner:

> The Fathers and Writers of the Church, thoroughly schooled in the writings of heaven, had most at heart to vie with one another in preaching and teaching in many wonderful ways the Virgin's sublime holiness, dignity, and immunity from all stain of sin and her splendid victory over the most hateful foe of [humankind]. They did this in their books which explain the Scriptures, vindicate the dogmas, and instruct the faithful.[70]

In discussing the Biblical foundations of the Immaculate Conception, Pius IX started with Genesis 3 which narrates the account of the Fall, with an emphasis on Gen. 3:15, the *Protoevangelium* which is a promise regarding the coming Messiah who will destroy the works of the evil serpent:

> I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

Commenting on this passage, Pius IX identified the woman as Mary, and her son who will crush the head of the serpent as the Lord Jesus Christ.[71] Without mentioning a particular Church Father, Pius IX is alluding to an important teaching of a recently declared Doctor of the Church, the *Doctor unitatis*—St. Irenaeus of Lyons,[72] regarding the role of Mary in salvation history. Though it was St. Justin Martyr who first identified the woman of Gen. 3:15 as Mary, the new Eve, in

[70] Pius IX, "Ineffabilis Deus," 7.

[71] See Pius IX, "Ineffabilis Deus," 7.

[72] Francis, "Decree of the Holy Father for the conferral of the title of Doctor of the Church on Saint Irenaeus of Lyon" (January 21, 2022), available at https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2022/01/21/220121b.html.

his work *Dialogue with Trypho*,[73] it was St. Irenaeus who developed this concept well in one of his writings. The Eve-Mary parallel following the Adam-Christ parallel of St. Paul[74] is explained by him in Book III of his monumental work, *Adversus Haereses*:

> In accordance with this design, Mary the Virgin is found obedient, saying, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word" (Lk. 1:38). But Eve was disobedient; for she did not obey when as yet she was a virgin. And even as she, having indeed a husband, Adam, but being nevertheless as yet a virgin (for in Paradise "they were both naked, and were not ashamed" [Gen. 2:25], inasmuch as they, having been created a short time previously, had no understanding of the procreation of children: for it was necessary that they should first come to adult age, and then multiply from that time onward), *having become disobedient, was made the cause of death, both to herself and to the entire human race; so also did Mary, having a man betrothed [to her], and being nevertheless a virgin, by yielding obedience, become the cause of salvation, both to herself and the whole human race* [emphasis added]. And on this account does the law term a woman betrothed to a man, the wife of him who had betrothed her, although she was as yet a virgin; thus indicating the back-reference from Mary to Eve, because what is joined together could not otherwise be put asunder than by inversion of the process by which these bonds of union had arisen; so that the former ties be canceled by the latter, that the latter may set the former again to liberty. And it has, in fact, happened that the first compact looses from the second tie, but that the second tie takes the position of the first which has been canceled. For this reason did the Lord declare that the first should in truth be

[73] "He became man by the Virgin, in order that the disobedience which proceeded from the serpent might receive its destruction in the same manner in which it derived its origin. For Eve, who was a virgin and undefiled, having conceived the word of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy when the angel Gabriel announced the good tidings to her that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her, and the power of the Highest would overshadow her" (St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 100, in A. Roberts & J. Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325* Vol. 1: *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus* [Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994], 249).

[74] "Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living soul;' the last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45).

> last, and the last first (Mt. 19:30; 20:16). And the prophet, too, indicates the same, saying, "Instead of fathers, children have been born unto thee" (Ps. 45:17). *For the Lord, having been born "the First-begotten of the dead" (Rev. 1:5), and receiving into His bosom the ancient fathers, has regenerated them into the life of God, He having been made Himself the beginning of those that live, as Adam became the beginning of those who die* (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20–22 [emphasis added]). Wherefore also Luke, commencing the genealogy with the Lord, carried it back to Adam, indicating that it was He who regenerated them into the Gospel of life, and not they Him. *And thus also it was that the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith* [emphasis added].[75]

In the above passage, there is no explicit mention of Mary being the Immaculate Conception. But to identify Mary as the new Eve who untied the knot of Eve's disobedience is an indispensable starting point for the development of the Church's belief in and understanding of Mary's Immaculate Conception. The grace and privilege of being the Immaculate Conception was given to Mary so that she could perform the task of being the new Eve, the helper of the new Adam, for the complete realization of the salvation of all men and women.

Reading between the lines, St. Irenaeus's teaching on Mary as the new Eve is a strong argument for the Immaculate Conception. Why? Because if Mary is not sinless from the very beginning, then the parallel between her and sinful Eve will not make any sense. The one that can undo the power of sin is the power of grace—the power of being sinless. Mary cannot be considered the new Eve if, in the first place, she is no different from the first Eve. In the words of Irenaeus, Mary loosed the knot of Eve's disobedience through her obedience. Following this argument, one can also confidently say that Mary likewise loosed the knot of Eve's sinfulness through her sinlessness.

St. Epiphanius of Salamis, commenting on Gen. 3:15, follows the same line of thought as St. Irenaeus on the Eve-Mary parallel:

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[75] St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus Haereses* III, 22, 4, in Roberts & Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325* Vol. 1, 455.

> But we must consider another marvelous aspect of the comparison between Eve and Mary. Eve became for [men and women] the cause of death, because through her death entered the world. Mary, however, was the cause of life, because life has come to us through her.… And as in paradise Eve, still a virgin, fell into the sin of disobedience, once more through the Virgin came the obedience of grace, when the joyful announcement was given that eternal life in the flesh was descending from heaven. For God said to the serpent: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and hers" (Gen. 3:15). Woman's seed is found nowhere; and so it is in a figurative sense that this enmity is applied to Eve in relation to her and the serpent and to that which was represented by the serpent, namely the devil and envy.
>
> But all this cannot be perfectly fulfilled in her. Instead, it will be realized truly in the holy, elect, and unique seed, which comes from Mary alone and not from relations with man. This seed came to destroy the power of the dragon, that is, the tortuous and fleeting serpent, who boasted of holding possession of the whole world.[76]

This commentary of St. Epiphanius is an essential patristic foundation for the dogma of the Immaculate Conception especially when he pointed out that Jesus, "the holy, elect and unique seed … comes from Mary alone." This point is further elucidated when read against the background of the teaching found in Mt. 7:17, which says, "So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit." If Jesus is the holy, elect, and unique seed or fruit, then it only follows that the tree from which he came from, the source of his humanity, must also be holy, elect, and unique, because the good fruit can only come from a good tree. It is a contradiction to believe that Jesus is all holy and sinless while at the same time believing that Mary is like the rest of humanity—stained with original sin. It is another way of saying that the source of Jesus's humanity is defiled and sinful.

> If Christ had taken flesh from a Mother tainted with sin, it would be to Christ's dishonor, since the Mother and the Son are in a certain way the same flesh. It was fitting for the Son of God to fashion for Himself a Mother free from all sin.[77]

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[76] St. Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* 78, 17–19, PG 42, 728 B–729 C; *MFC,* 129.

[77] Alastruey, *The Blessed Virgin Mary*, Vol. I, 143.

The writings of Sts. Irenaeus and Epiphanius did not explicitly teach Mary's Immaculate Conception, but, as noted above, their teachings are a good foundation for understanding this Marian dogma in a better way.

St. Ephrem of Syria, in one of his Nisibene Hymns, made mention of Mary being beautiful, unblemished, and free from all stains:

> You alone and your Mother are more beautiful than any others, for there is no blemish in you nor any stains upon your Mother. Who of my children can compare in beauty to these?[78]

The hymn is obviously about Jesus and his Blessed Mother. It highlights the intimate and essential relationship between the Mother and the Son. What is being emphasized here is the fact that Mary's being without stains is due to her role as the Mother of the Savior. Later explanations of Mary's Immaculate Conception would explain that her being preserved from original sin is a privilege given to her so that she will be the worthy habitation of the Word of God. The person of Mary and her privileges can be understood properly only from the perspective of the Person and role of her Son as Lord and Redeemer.

Later in the West, several years after the death of St. Ephrem, the Church Father that would explicitly teach about Mary's perfection and being without sin is, again, the *Doctor gratiae*, St. Augustine. This teaching is found in his work *De natura et gratia:*

> With the exception of the holy Virgin Mary, in whose case, out of respect for the Lord, I do not wish there to be any further question as far as sin is concerned, since how can we know what great abundance of grace was conferred on her to conquer sin in every way, seeing that she merited to conceive and bear him who certainly had no sin at all?[79]

This teaching is based on Lk. 1:28 wherein the Archangel Gabriel addressed Mary as "full of grace." The argument of St. Augustine for Mary's being free from sin lies in her being "full of grace." If Mary is

[78] St. Ephrem, *Nisibene Hymns* 27, 8, available at https://www.catholic.com/tract/mary-full-of-grace.

[79] St. Augustine, *De natura et gratia* 36, 42, PL 44, 267; *MFC,* 226.

endowed with a "great abundance of grace," then it simply follows that sin will have no place in her person. A person who is full of God's grace cannot be corrupted by the power of sin. If Mary is sinful just like the rest of humanity, then the words addressed to her by the Archangel were not true at all. A person cannot be "full of grace" and sinful at the same time. It is an either/or situation.

Lastly, it was St. Andrew of Crete who taught during the 8th century AD that Mary was the first to be liberated from the consequences of the original fall of Adam and Eve:

> This is Mary the *Theotokos*, the common refuge of all Christians, the first to be liberated from the original fall of our first parents.[80]

He "speaks of Mary as the first person to be redeemed, or as the first to be liberated from original sin," but "he does not define the nature of the intervention God wrought in her. Hence, we would not be justified to attribute to him the concept of preservation from original sin as we understand the concept today."[81] Nevertheless, while this may be the case, St. Andrew's teaching was already an important contribution to the development of the Church's understanding of Mary's Immaculate Conception.

The teachings of the Church Fathers on Mary's holiness and freedom from sin, her being paralleled with the first Eve and identified as the New Eve, and as the first one to be redeemed from the Fall of the first parents are far from being comprehensive explanations of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Their teachings can be considered more as seeds that are still in need of growth and development rather than as fully grown plants. The Church must wait for the arrival of Bl. John Duns Scotus for her to have the most compelling argument and explanation for this Marian doctrine.[82]

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[80] St. Andrew of Crete, *Homily 4 on Mary's Nativity*, PG 97, 880 C; *MFC,* 393.

[81] *MFC,* 393.

[82] See Alastruey, *The Blessed Virgin Mary*, Vol. I, 123–127.

4. The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The Catholic theologian and exegete Matthew Levering summarized the Church's belief in Mary's bodily Assumption into heaven in this manner:

> Since the seventh and eighth centuries A.D., when belief in Mary's Assumption took firm root in the Eastern and Western churches, Catholic and Orthodox Christians have borne witness to the reality that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was assumed body and soul into heaven after her death. According to Catholic and Orthodox faith, Mary's body did not corrupt in the grave but was assumed into heaven, which explains why the Church never possessed relics of Mary's body.[83]

This reference to the seventh and eighth centuries is quite significant because this was the period in which St. Germanus of Constantinople and St. John Damascene lived and exercised their respective pastoral ministries. The importance of these patristic writers in the development of the Church's belief in Mary's bodily Assumption is mentioned by Pius XII in *Munificentissimus Deus*, the 1950 apostolic constitution that defined the said Marian doctrine as a dogma of faith.[84]

St. Germanus was the Patriarch of Constantinople during the early part of the 8th century A.D.,[85] and his importance in the field of Mariology lies in the fact that his teaching, like that of St. John Damascene, is a testimony to the antiquity of the Church's belief in Mary's bodily Assumption.[86] His argument is based primarily on the divinity of Jesus. As recalled in the previous discussions, a common argument of the Church Fathers is that Mariology is always based on

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[83] M. Levering, *Mary's Bodily Assumption* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 1.

[84] Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* nos. 21–22, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19501101_munificentissimus-deus.html (accessed July 7, 2023).

[85] See *MFC,* 381.

[86] See *MFC,* 383.

Christology. Since Jesus is divine, it simply follows that the one who contained him in her womb should be greatly affected and transformed by his divinity. Therefore, Mary is freed, like her Son, from the power of the corruption of sin and death:

> [Her body], being human, was adapted and conformed to the supreme life of immortality; however, it remained whole and glorious, gifted with perfect vitality and not subject to the sleep [of death], precisely because it was not possible that the vessel that had contained God, the living Temple of the most holy Divinity of the Only-begotten, should be held by a tomb made for the dead.[87]

What Germanus is saying is that Mary's Assumption is a consequence of Jesus's divinity, Incarnation, and resurrection from the dead. If Christ is truly divine and rose from the dead, then the immediate consequence of this is the bodily preservation from corruption of his Mother, from whom his humanity was taken. Germanus argues that it is impossible for the source of Jesus's human nature to be subjected to the laws of death and corruption.

The Adam-Jesus parallel of St. Paul and the Eve-Mary parallel of Sts. Justin, Irenaeus, and Epiphanius are useful here to elucidate Germanus's explanation even further. If the first Adam and Eve brought sin, death, and corruption to humankind and the last Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, brought life, resurrection, and salvation, then it simply follows that the new Eve, Mary, is a cooperator in reaping the fruits of the last Adam's redeeming act. If the first Adam and Eve were together in leading humanity to damnation, then it also follows that the last Adam and the new Eve are together in leading humanity to salvation and glorification.

The other argument of St. Germanus for Mary's bodily Assumption is the Fourth Commandment of the Decalogue, "Honor your father and your mother" (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). While this commandment apparently is not fit to be a Biblical basis for the Assumption, Germanus

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[87] St. Germanus of Constantinople, *Homily 1 on the Dormition*, PG 98, 345 B; *MFC,* 384.

has a compelling explanation why the commandment to honor one's parents is a plausible basis for Mary's being assumed body and soul into heaven:

> Indeed, as a son looks for and desires his own mother, and the mother delights to live with her son, thus it was right that you also, whose heart was full of motherly love for your Son and God, who for his part had the kind of feelings of love toward you that a son has for a mother, should make you a sharer in his community of life.[88]

For the Patriarch of Constantinople, Mary's sharing in her Son's glorification in heaven is a consequence of their intimate maternal and filial relationship. A good son will never allow his mother to be separated from him. A good mother will do everything not to be separated from her son. Jesus's great love, devotion, and respect for his Mother is clearly seen in the moment of his Crucifixion as narrated by St. John in his Gospel. Before dying on the cross, Jesus made sure that someone would take good care of his Mother (Jn. 19:27). This sublime action is the most perfect expression of a Jew's obedience to the Fourth Commandment. If Christ considered it serious business that someone should look after his Mother in the realm of this earthly life, then it logically follows that it would be more serious business for him to make his Mother share in his heavenly glorification.

The above explanation of St. Germanus also alludes to the relationship of the Davidic King with his Queen-Mother or the *Gebirah* by pointing out that Mary must "share in his [Jesus's] community of life." In the Old Testament, the "community of life" of the Davidic King is his kingdom. Starting from Solomon, the son of David, all the mothers of the Davidic Kings were given the office of the *Gebirah*.[89] At that time, kings were practicing polygamy and the practical thing to do to secure the unity of the kingdom was to choose the mother of

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[88] St. Germanus of Constantinople, *Homily 1 on the Dormition*, PG 98, 348 A, *MFC,* 384.

[89] See S. Hahn, *Hail, Holy Queen: The Mother of God in the Word of God* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 79.

the king as queen instead of one of his wives.[90] In the First Book of Kings, it is evident that Bathsheba, the Queen-Mother, was honored, venerated, and respected by King Solomon (2:19). The King reigns and rules the kingdom with his Queen-Mother. Now, if Christ is the last and the definitive Davidic King, the *everlasting King* of heaven and earth, then it simply follows that Mary, his Mother, must join in his reign as the *everlasting Gebirah*. If Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father as the definitive King of all, then his Mother should also join in his company as the definitive Queen-Mother, for it is disadvantageous and inappropriate for a King not to have or to be separated from his Queen.

The last Church Father whose writing will be considered in this article is St. John Damascene. He is considered to be the last and one of the most outstanding of the Fathers of the Church who lived in the East.[91] His death in 750 A.D. is considered the end of the patristic era. His writings on Mary's Assumption are of the utmost importance because these are the most developed explanations about this Marian dogma found in the writings of the Church Fathers. "The three homilies on the Dormition reveal the exceptional importance of Damascene's teaching for the development of doctrine on the Assumption. John explicitly teaches the truth of Mary's bodily Assumption into heaven."[92]

The first important point clarified by John in his teachings on the Assumption is the death of Mary. Did Mary truly die? If one follows the teaching of St. Paul that the "wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), then one can conclude that Mary did not die since she was free from sin. But John, though in agreement that Mary was free from sin, was not in agreement with the theological opinion that she did not die. For him, Mary truly died as a participation in her Son's death on the Cross. His argument is based on St. Paul's teaching in the Letter to the Romans: "But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall live

[90] See Hahn, *Hail, Holy Queen*, 78–79.

[91] See *MFC,* 400.

[92] *MFC,* 403.

with him" (6:8). In other words, for Mary to participate fully in her Son's glorification, she must first participate fully in his death:

> O how could the Font of life be led to life through death? O how could she, who in giving birth surpassed the limits of nature, now yield to nature's laws, and have her immaculate body undergo death? She had to put aside what was mortal and put on incorruptibility, seeing that even the Lord of nature did not excuse himself from facing death. He truly died in the flesh to destroy death by means of death; in place of corruption he gave incorruptibility; he made death into a font of resurrection.[93]

The second important point of St. John, after clarifying that Mary truly died as a participation in the death of her Son, is the fact that her body did not remain in the grave; rather, it was preserved from corruption:

> Even though your most holy and blessed soul was separated from your most happy and immaculate body, according to the usual course of nature, and even though it was carried to a proper burial place, nevertheless it did not remain under the dominion of death, nor was it destroyed by corruption.
>
> Indeed, just as her virginity remained intact when she gave birth, so her body, even after death, was preserved from decay and transferred to a better and more divine dwelling place. There it is no longer subject to death but abides for all ages.[94]

Mary's freedom from corruption is seen by John as essentially linked to her virginity, maternity, and being immaculate. Here one can see that the theologian from Damascus considered the Assumption to be the conclusion and zenith of the other Marian privileges. The four Marian dogmas are essentially connected to each other. The Assumption can be properly understood only when it is seen against the background of the other Marian privileges.

The third and final point of St. John regarding Mary's bodily Assumption is its suitability in the divine plan of God and how this

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[93] St. John Damascene, *Homily 1 on the Dormition* 10, PG 96, 713 D; *MFC,* 403.

[94] St. John Damascene, *Homily 1 on the Dormition* 10, PG 96, 716 A-B; *MFC,* 404.

doctrine is based on the heavenly vision of the Ark of the Covenant and the Woman clothed with the sun in Rev. 11:19–12:6.

Argument from Suitability. John argues that the Assumption is suitable for Mary's indispensable role in the Incarnation of the Word of God. The womb that contained the eternal Son of God must not experience corruption. It is not fitting for Jesus's divinity to allow his Mother to undergo decay and corruption. The Incarnation of Christ has permanently transformed the body of Mary, making it incorruptible:

> It was necessary that the body of the one who preserved her virginity intact in giving birth should also be kept incorrupt after death. It was necessary that she, who carried the Creator in her womb when he was a baby, should dwell among the tabernacles of heaven.…
>
> It was necessary that the Mother of God share what belongs to her Son and that she be celebrated by all creation. An inheritance is normally passed down from parents to children; now, however, to use the expression of a wise man, the sources of the sacred rivers flow back toward their origin, now that the Son has made all created things his Mother's slaves.[95]

Mary, the New Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant and the Woman clothed with the sun in the heavenly vision of Rev. 11:19–12:6 are both identified by John as referring to the Mother of God—Mary is the Woman, the new Ark of the Covenant.[96] Rev. 11:19–12:6 is an affirmation of Mary's bodily Assumption.[97]

> Today the holy Virgin of Virgins is presented in the heavenly temple.… Today the sacred and living Ark of the living God [the Ark], who

[95] St. John Damascene, *Homily 2 on the Dormition* 14, PG 96, 741 B; *MFC,* 404.

[96] For further discussion, see R. Salvacion, "Mary: The New Ark of the Covenant in Revelation 11:19–12:6," *Loyola Papers: Student and Alumni Journal of Loyola School of Theology* 4:2 (2023): 181–211.

[97] See Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* no. 27.

> conceived her Creator himself, takes up her abode in the temple of God, not made by human hands.[98]

The Ark of the New Covenant is no longer a container made of acacia (a wood known to be incorruptible in the ancient world) and covered with pure gold (Ex. 25:10–11) but a living person, a Woman in whose womb God and not simply the things symbolizing God's presence (the tablets of the Decalogue, the golden urn of the manna, and the rod of Aaron [Heb. 9:4]) is contained. And this same Woman is now in heaven together with her Child (Rev. 12:2). The Ark in the Old Testament can never be separated from the three sacred things contained in it. Therefore, it is the same thing with the Ark of the New Testament—she cannot be separated from Him who was once contained in her womb. Mary cannot be separated from her Son. That is why the vision shows that the Woman and the Child are together in the heavenly abode. Mary was truly assumed body and soul into heaven.

Conclusion

The evidence of the antiquity of the Church's Marian beliefs is clearly seen in the writings of the Church Fathers, who were considered as the first interpreters and commentators of Sacred Scripture. The twentieth century until the present time has seen both the advantages and disadvantages of the historical-critical method. Its advantages can be seen in how it can give, in several ways, precise details and contexts of events narrated in the Bible, its emphasis on Scripture as literature—that its passages must be understood based on the context of its literary genres, and how it provides details on how the final text was handed on and formed in the respective communities where it first saw the light of day. Its disadvantages can be seen in how the Bible is politicized and treated as an ordinary literary work that can be

[98] St. John Damascene, *Homily 2 on the Dormition* 2, PG 96, 723 was quoted by Benedict XVI in his homily on the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (2011), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20110815_assunzione.html (accessed November 14, 2022).

interpreted in the manner of secular scholars, and in how the Bible is compartmentalized, with each book treated as an independent literary work without any essential connection with the other books. Instead of being seen as the inspired text that speaks of God's unified plan for humanity, as a single book that contains God's revelation, the Bible is now seen simply as a conglomeration of ancient texts that are now at the disposal of textual scholars, historians, and literary critics.

This author is in no way suggesting the debunking of the historical-critical method because he, in the first place, believes and trusts in its advantages. But it can reach its fullest potential and truly be of service to theological reflection only when it starts to learn and appreciate the way the patristic writers have interpreted the Bible. It can interpret the Bible correctly using its sophisticated tools of interpretation only if, like the Church Fathers, it will first consider seriously what the Bible is, i.e., *a sacred text, God's revelation.* The Bible is properly understood not by isolating it from the faith community of the Church but by interpreting it in the heart of the Church that collected and compiled it.

In this study, this author tried to show how the Church's Marian beliefs are deeply rooted, in the first place, in the teachings of Sacred Scripture through the writings of the Church Fathers. The historical-critical method has done enough harm in persuading many people to believe that the Mary of faith is not actually the Mary found in the Scriptures. This happened because what the historical-critical exegetes used was a *hermeneutic of suspicion* instead of a *hermeneutic of faith*. When one reads and interprets the Bible based on suspicion toward what is supernatural, then one can never approach the text as God's revelation.

The only way for the historical-critical method to interpret the Bible as *God's word* is to have *faith* as the starting point. The Church Fathers have seen Mary clearly in the pages of the Bible because they, in the first place, have faith in Christ and His Mother. This author believes that the historical-critical exegete will also see the mysteries of faith (like the Marian dogmas) in the Scriptures if he or she learns from the patristic-medieval exegetes, i.e., that *faith* and not *doubt or suspicion* is the starting point of Biblical exegesis and hermeneutics.

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SAFEGUARDING AND HOMOSEXUALITY

James McTavish, F.M.V.D.

Abstract. The Church is actively working to promote and build up a culture of safeguarding. Those most vulnerable to abuse need care and protection. Sexual orientation is an important element to consider in safeguarding, as there are specific risks for homosexual persons, and persons with same-sex attraction (SSA) frequently experience abuse. In a sensitive and respectful way, this article examines the background elements regarding homosexuality and abuse and gives specific details that can help in formulating a vision of safeguarding that takes into account the specific reality of persons with SSA.

Keywords. safeguarding; abuse; prevention; homosexuality; same-sex attraction

Introduction

Homosexual persons form part of a larger group known as "LGBT" which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender. Sometimes the abbreviation is extended to "LGBTQIA+" where the "QIA+" represents queer (or questioning), intersex, asexual, and others (+). The percentage of persons who identify as LGBT will depend on the country, and not all have statistics.

The results will also depend on how one asks the questions.[1] The surveys in the USA reveal that 5–7% of persons identify as LGBT. The number of persons who identify as LGBT is growing, especially among younger people.[2]

As LGBT is an umbrella term encompassing various groups, in this essay, we will look mainly at homosexual persons—the "G" in LGBT. Perhaps a good starting point is to examine our attitudes toward persons who are homosexual. An important detail is that in many Church documents and much pastoral work, the preferred terminology for a homosexual person is "person with same-sex attraction" (SSA). Cardinal Ratzinger reminded us that "the human person, made in the image and likeness of God, can hardly be adequately described by a reductionist reference to his or her sexual orientation."[3] In using the term persons with SSA, the desire is to avoid labeling the person; after all, a person is more than his or her sexuality.

How Do We View Persons with SSA?

How do we look at persons who are homosexual or have SSA? Do we have any bias or prejudice? The Catechism of the Catholic Church asks us to treat them with compassion, sensitivity, and respect, and

[1] In surveys, different questions are asked as their focus may differ. The various areas that can be looked at include attractions, orientation, identity, and/or behavior, terms which are not always precisely defined. In this article, this author will use the general designation of persons who *identify* as LGBT or homosexuals.

[2] The Williams Institute of the UCLA School of Law, using data from the 2020–2021 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), estimates that over 15% of young adults aged 18–24 identify as LGBT. See A. Flores & K. Conron, "Adult LGBT Population in the United States" (Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, December 2023), available at https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/adult-lgbt-pop-us/ (accessed January 2, 2024).

[3] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons" (October 1, 1986), no. 16, available at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19861001_homosexual-persons_en.html.

to avoid all unjust discrimination.[4] Often, our views and attitudes will come from our experience of meeting, talking, and interacting with persons with SSA. Our cultural background can also influence our views. In some cultures, homosexuality is illegal and punished with imprisonment; in others, persons with SSA are victims of violence and killed. In these situations, it is important to fight against this abuse, in support of the rights of our fellow brothers and sisters. In other countries, homosexuality is widely accepted and encouraged. In other places, it is very difficult to even mention the Catholic Church teaching for fear of being discriminated against.[5]

What are the Causes of Homosexuality?

The cause of homosexuality is "complex and difficult to explain with simple theories."[6] On its website, the American Psychological Association (APA) explains that

> there is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or lesbian orientation. Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many

[4] See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2358, available at https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM. Hereafter referred to as *CCC*.

[5] For example, in the United Kingdom or Australia, a Catholic may experience abuse in just trying to discuss the issue of homosexuality respectfully, especially if they attempt to broach the aspect of Catholic Church teaching on homosexuality. Unfortunately, the same may also occur for students in theological studies in some Catholic academic institutions.

[6] Courage International, *Handbook for Courage and EnCourage Chaplains* (Trumbull, CT: 2020), 57, available at https://couragerc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Handbook-2020-Website-Version-No-USCCB-Doc-1.pdf (accessed January 2, 2024).

> think that nature and nurture both play complex roles; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation.[7]

The APA underlines that sexual orientation is not determined by any particular factor like genes, so it is better to avoid phrases such as "born that way."[8] They may be in fashion but are nonetheless far too simplistic, and are not supported by current scientific findings.

In many complex human traits like intelligence, for example, genetics has a role in that our genes can *predispose*, although they do not *cause*. For intelligence, one is not just "born intelligent"—one still needs to learn how to speak, study hard, etc. For homosexuality, there may be genetic influences, but to date, they have not been found to be causal. Like most complex aspects of our being, sexuality is likely to be multi-factorial, involving both nature and nurture.

This is well summarized in a 2019 study of persons who experience SSA, which states, "Many uncertainties remain to be explored, including how sociocultural influences on sexual preference might interact with genetic preferences. Overall, our findings … underscore the complexity of sexuality."[9]

Risk of Abuse

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons can be at risk for various types of abuse. At times, such abuse is driven by prejudice,

[7] American Psychological Association, "Understanding Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality" (2008), available at https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/orientation (accessed January 2, 2024).

[8] *The Tablet*, an influential Catholic news weekly published in London, seems to have fallen into this mistake in a recent editorial entitled "Homosexuality: A Church Teaching with Shaky Foundations" where it categorically but erroneously states that homosexuality "is now understood to be an inborn and lifelong orientation." This statement itself is rather shaky, as there is no credible scientific research in the field that supports such claims. Cf. Editorial, *The Tablet* (February 4, 2023): 2.

[9] A. Ganna et al., "Large-scale GWAS Reveals Insights into the Genetic Architecture of Same-Sex Sexual Behavior," *Science* 365:6456 (2019): eaat7693.

fear, and ignorance. In some cultures, a person who is gay may be attacked and beaten up just for being homosexual. A gay person can also receive a long prison sentence just for being homosexual. In such cases, it is important to raise a collective voice in defense of the basic human rights of a person.[10]

The Human Dignity Trust reports that 67 countries or "jurisdictions criminalise private, consensual, same-sex sexual activity."[11] Eleven of these countries (Iran, Northern Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Yemen, Afghanistan, Brunei, Mauritania, Pakistan, Qatar, and UAE) can or do impose the death penalty. Regarding the criminalization of homosexuality, Pope Francis stated that homosexuality is not a crime and that it is "unjust" to criminalize it.[12] Another type of abuse can occur in relationships between persons of the same sex, where one partner abuses the other in what is termed "intimate partner violence" or IPV, at a rate that is comparable to or even higher than abuse in heterosexual couples.[13] LGBT persons are known to be "vulnerable to

[10] The Church comes to the defense of LGBT persons, declaring that "for this reason, it should be denounced as contrary to human dignity the fact that, in some places, not a few people are imprisoned, tortured, and even deprived of the good of life solely because of their sexual orientation" (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas Infinita* [April 8, 2024], no. 55).

[11] Human Dignity Trust, "Map of Countries that Criminalise LGBT People," available at https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation/ (accessed January 2, 2024).

[12] See N. Winfield, "The AP Interview: Pope Says Homosexuality Not a Crime" (January 26, 2023), available at https://apnews.com/article/pope-francis-gay-rights-ap-interview-1359756ae22f27f87c1d4d6b9c8ce212?utm_source=apnews&utm_medium=relatedcontentmodule (accessed January 2, 2024).

[13] L. Rollè, G. Giardina, A. Caldarera, E. Gerino, & P. Brustia, "When Intimate Partner Violence Meets Same Sex Couples: A Review of Same Sex Intimate Partner Violence," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (August 21, 2018), 393254: 2. A review of 42 existing studies on IPV and sexual abuse among LGBT persons "found a lifetime prevalence of IPV among lesbian and bisexual women, gay and bisexual men, and transgender people that is as high as or higher than [that of] the U.S.

human trafficking,"[14] involving numerous abuses such as discrimination and exploitation as well as physical and sexual violence.

Children who identify as LGBT face specific challenges that make them vulnerable to child sexual abuse. For one, they may hesitate to report abuse as it may lead to disclosure of their LGBT identity. And when they do report, they may be less likely to be believed and their sexuality may be blamed for the abuse.[15] LGBT children are also at risk of cyber-abuse as they frequently use social media platforms to begin exploring their sexual identity. They may take the risk to use apps and websites meant for adults and thus increase the risk of being abused.

A subtle form of psychological or emotional abuse to be vigilant for is when a young person, who may have some confusion about his or her sexuality, is encouraged or even cajoled to "come out" when in fact he or she may simply be passing through a phase of exploring his or her sexual identity.[16] Self-care for persons with SSA

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general population" (see T. Brown & J. Herman, "Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Abuse Among LGBT People" [Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, November 2015], 2, available at https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/ipv-sex-abuse-lgbt-people/).

[14] See U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report* (June 2021), 9, available at https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/TIPR-GPA-upload-07222021.pdf.

[15] Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, *The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse*, Executive Summary (United Kingdom: October 2022), 1, available at https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/inquiry/final-report/executive-summary.html.

[16] An adolescent "often confuses a 'crush' she has on an older girl or a female teacher as a form of homosexuality. She should be shown that she is simply going through a stage of strong admiration and needs to take care not to make an idol out of another person. Meanwhile, she must continue to seek friends within her peer group and learn to form good human relationships with both sexes" (J. Harvey, *Same Sex Attraction: Catholic Teaching and Pastoral Practice* [New Haven: Knights of Columbus, 2007], 34–35, available at https://www.kofc.org/un/en/resources/cis/cis385.pdf [accessed January 2, 2024]).

is vital to avoiding damaging actions that can be harmful, thereby avoiding the serious health risks that can accompany some aspects of homosexual behavior.[17]

Safeguarding Children with Gender Dysphoria

A most disturbing trend in relation to safeguarding LGBT youth has been the treatment of young people who express gender dysphoria. The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith recently gave an updated presentation of the Church's teaching on gender and sex change in its document *Dignitas Infinita*, reminding us that "respect for both one's own body and that of others is crucial in light of the proliferation of claims to new rights advanced by gender theory."[18] Oftentimes, the Church's vision on gender is critiqued especially by LGBT theologians. However, the Church teaching is supported by the very latest medical evidence, as witnessed by the publication of the Cass Review,[19] which came out just two days after the publication of *Dignitas Infinita*. It was commissioned by the National Health Service in England and led by Dr. Hilary Cass, the former President of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. The Cass Review is the world's biggest study to date on gender medicine. Interestingly, the report, the result of a four-year intensive study, gives credence to the Church teaching on gender.

The findings of the Cass Review call for a serious rethinking of the way young people with gender issues are treated. We know that there has

[17] These are well-documented and include higher rates of infection, particularly HIV, syphilis, and gonorrhea, as well as substance misuse. For more information on this topic, see J. McTavish, "Chastity and Homosexuality: Combating the Scourge of HIV and AIDS," *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 14:4 (Winter 2014): 637–645.

[18] Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas Infinita*, no. 59.

[19] National Health Service England, *Independent Review of Gender Identity Services for Children and Young People* (April 2024), available at https://cass.independent-review.uk/home/publications/final-report/.

been an explosion of young people over the last few years, the majority of them being adolescent girls, presenting with gender concerns. The gender affirmative approach has railroaded them until now into a medicalized care pathway that consists of social transitioning, puberty blockers, and cross sex hormones (testosterone for the females and estrogens for the males). What is of utmost concern is that the Cass Review has demonstrated that there is insufficient scientific evidence for such an approach, and that the worldwide guidelines (from the World Professional Association for Transgender Health) followed in many countries are unreliable and lack scientific rigor.[20] This means that thousands of children have undergone unnecessary treatments of dubious benefit and that may even be harmful. Many of these young people were neurodiverse, expressed autism, sometimes had serious concomitant psychological issues such as eating disorders, anxiety, depression, or suicidal ideation, or experienced sexual abuse. However, with a myopic focus solely on gender, these serious issues in much need of care and attention were, sadly, often overlooked. The Cass Review will likely change the way young people expressing gender issues are treated in the future, and other countries will be similarly challenged to take up more evidence-based practices.

The safeguarding concerns here are obvious—we need to protect our youth in that period of adolescence when they are questioning their identity, and not hurriedly dive in to medical treatment that is unproven, may be dangerous, and will have lifelong consequences. Indeed, an additional safeguarding concern here is that many of these gender confused young people actually experience SSA. It seems that instead of helping them to welcome their sexual orientation and live it well, they may have been offered a form of "conversion therapy," incorrectly addressing their SSA by encouraging them to change their gender medically.

[20] National Health Service England, *Independent Review of Gender Identity Services for Children and Young People*, 28.

Abuse and Sexual Orientation

Worldwide, abuse is predominantly carried out by heterosexual persons, and the majority of victims are female. Moreover, most homosexuals do not molest minors.

In the Catholic Church experience, most of the victims are male. In the John Jay study, 81% of victims of clerical sexual abuse were males, and 51% were 11–14 years old.[21] Experts gathered in a Vatican symposium in 2003 proposed that homosexuality is a risk factor in, but not the cause of the sexual abuse of adolescent males.[22] Dr. Martin P. Kafka of the Harvard Medical School commented, "We described it as a risk factor," noting that the majority of cases in the American crisis involve adolescent males. Kafka emphasized, however, that this does not mean homosexuality causes sex abuse. "A risk factor is not a cause," he said. "The great predominance of homosexual males are in no way sexual abusers," Kafka said. "There is, however, a subgroup at risk."[23]

In the general population, the proportion of males who declare that they are gay is approximately 2–3%.[24] In the priesthood, the

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[21] John Jay College of Criminal Justice, *The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States 1950–2002* (Washington, DC: February 2004), available at https://www.bishop-accountability.org/reports/2004_02_27_JohnJay_revised/2004_02_27_John_Jay_Main_Report_Optimized.pdf.

[22] J. L. Allen Jr., "Homosexuality a risk factor, Vatican told" (National Catholic Reporter, 18 April 2003), available at https://natcath.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2003b/041803/041803n.htm (accessed January 2, 2024).

[23] *Ibidem.*

[24] The research done by Kinsey in the late 1940s reported that 10% of males are homosexual (A. Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* [Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1948]). Nowadays, this figure is heavily critiqued and generally considered unreliable. However, the 10% myth still lingers on. For the latest statistics on sexual orientation in the U.K., see Office for National Statistics, "Sexual Orientation, UK: 2021 and 2022," available at https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/

percentage of persons with SSA is higher and is likely to be around 15–20%. Sullins estimates that around 17% of Catholic priests in the United States are persons with SSA, a rate 4–5 times higher than in the wider population. He also reports that "today half of all Catholic priests are between the ages of 60 and 84, and about one in five of these priests is homosexual; but less than one in thirty priests under age 50 is homosexual."[25]

It is thought that most cases of abuse of minors occurred in an "opportunistic" fashion such that as more males were around—in the context of the minor seminary, or serving at the altar—there were more male victims. This type of opportunistic or situational homosexuality is on par with what occurs in mostly male environments like the military or prison settings. For Sullins, though, he notes that

> the decline in male victims since the 1980s has not occurred due to a rise in the abuse of girls, but because of a dramatic drop in the abuse of boys.… What has changed since then is not that more girls are being abused, but [that] far fewer boys are being abused.[26]

He proposes that more priests were persons with SSA in the past, and thus there were more male victims. Now the number of male victims is falling because the percentage of persons with SSA in the new generation of priests has fallen—from more than 20% in the past to just 8% of those ordained after 2000.

It seems we have two camps—at one extreme, there are those who blame the whole abuse crisis on homosexuality, and, on the other, those who deny that homosexuality has anything to do with it.

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sexualidentityuk/2021and2022 (accessed January 2, 2024). For U.S. figures, see Flores & Conron, "Adult LGBT Population in the United States."

[25] D. Sullins, *Receding Waves: Child Sex Abuse and Homosexual Priests since 2000* (The Ruth Institute, The Catholic University of America, 2019), 3, available at http://sullins.epizy.com/published%20articles/Receding%20Waves%202019.pdf?i=1 (accessed January 2, 2024).

[26] Sullins, *Receding Waves: Child Sex Abuse and Homosexual Priests since 2000*, 14.

Where Do We Stand as Safeguarders?

We can clearly reiterate the advice of the Catechism to avoid unjust discrimination, which seems to be behind those who erroneously blame the abuse crisis solely on homosexuality. We are also aware that homosexuality is not the cause, although it can be a risk factor.

We also note that the priesthood has a higher percentage of persons with SSA than is present in general society. It is also worth mentioning that we see some hypocrisy at times in the Church hierarchy, where Church leaders may publicly denounce homosexuality, on the one hand, but seem to accept if not practice it readily.[27]

Church Teaching on Homosexuality

Traditional Catholic moral teaching makes a difference between a homosexual orientation and homosexual acts. The homosexual orientation is not in itself sinful. This means that statements such as "The Catholic Church teaches that homosexuality is a sin" are incorrect as they lack precision. We can only connect an orientation, either homosexual or heterosexual, to sin when the person with the orientation engages in sinful thoughts, words, or actions, such as, for example, sexually fantasizing about another, watching pornography,

[27] In 2012, Scotland's only cardinal, Keith O'Brien, publicly denounced same-sex relationships as being "harmful to the physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing of those involved" and stated that same-sex marriage would be "a grotesque subversion of a universally accepted human right" (K. O'Brien, "Cardinal O'Brien: Same sex marriage would be 'a grotesque subversion of a universally accepted human right,'" *Sunday Telegraph* commentary [Scottish Catholic Media Office, March 4, 2012], available at https://scmo.org/news-releases/perma/1330857739/article/cardinal-obrien-same-sex-mar.html [accessed January 2, 2024]). Cardinal O'Brien, who was then the President of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland and Britain's most senior Catholic, later had to step down for the purpose of "spiritual renewal, prayer and penance" after it was revealed that he had been having long-standing abusive homosexual relationships with various men, who accused O'Brien of either sexually harassing them or pressuring them into sex.

masturbating, or engaging in a sexual act with another (who is not one's spouse).

Francis, who famously stated, "If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge him?", also recently underlined that any sexual act outside of marriage is a sin.[28] The document *Fiducia Supplicans* from the Dicastery (formerly Congregation) for the Doctrine of the Faith opens the door for non-liturgical blessings of same-sex couples.[29] The document underlines that blessings are aimed at "giving glory to God for his gifts, asking for his favors, and restraining the power of evil in the world."[30] The document does not endorse same-sex unions and also takes pains to underline that it is only in the context of marriage "that sexual relations find their natural, proper, and fully human meaning. The Church's doctrine on this point remains firm."[31] The teaching in the document, when properly understood and correctly applied, is a welcome step toward a greater acceptance of persons with SSA.

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[28] Francis, "Lettera del Papa a padre James Martin su omosessualità e peccato," *L' Osservatore Romano* (January 28, 2023). The *Osservatore Romano* here is reporting on a Spanish letter handwritten by Francis dated January 27, 2023, addressed to the Jesuit priest James Martin. Fr. Martin had asked the Pope to clarify what he meant when he said that homosexuality is a sin. The Pope lacked precision in his informal statement, so in his letter, he wrote,

> When I said it is a sin, I was simply referring to Catholic moral teaching, which says that every sexual act outside of marriage is a sin. Of course, one must also consider the circumstances, which may decrease or eliminate fault. As you can see, I was repeating something in general. I should have said, "It is a sin, as is any sexual act outside of marriage." This is to speak of "the matter" of sin, but we know well that Catholic morality not only takes into consideration the matter, but also evaluates freedom and intention; and this, for every kind of sin (p. 12).

[29] Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Fiducia Supplicans* (December 18, 2023).

[30] Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Fiducia Supplicans*, no. 10.

[31] Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Fiducia Supplicans*, no. 4.

Admission to Seminary

For admission to the seminary and ordination to the priesthood, the *ratio fundamentalis* for priestly formation in many countries will usually follow the guidance given by the Dicastery (then the Congregation) for Catholic Education in 2005. The Dicastery identified three groups of men who cannot be admitted to the seminary or holy orders: those who practice homosexuality, support the so-called gay culture, or present deep-seated homosexual tendencies.[32]

Deep-seated Tendencies

When we say "deep-seated," to what exactly are we referring? Although the term "deep-seated" is often used in Church documents regarding homosexuality, they do not give a further explanation. Kleponis and Fitzgibbons describe deep-seated SSA in the following way.

> Those with deep-seated homosexual tendencies often identify themselves as "gay men" which is based to a large extent upon their sexual attractions. They often reject the current scientific findings that there is no genetic or biological basis for SSA and believe they were born this way. They do not view homosexuality as a disordered inclination, are comfortable with their sexual attractions, subscribe to the increasingly prevalent belief that homosexuality is a normal variation in human sexuality, and think there is nothing wrong with homosexual acts. Their beliefs make them highly vulnerable to sexual acting out.
>
> Men with deep-seated homosexual tendencies are usually unwilling to examine the possibility that they experienced emotional conflicts in significant male relationships that result in same-sex attraction. When asked, they are often unable to name a best male friend in elementary school. Their strong physical attraction to other men's bodies and to

[32] Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in view of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders* (November 4, 2005), no. 2. This teaching is simply repeated in Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation* (*Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*) (Vatican City: December 8, 2016), no. 200.

> the masculinity of others is the result of profound weakness in male confidence, a craving for male acceptance, and a poor body image. They have a significant affective immaturity with excessive anger and jealousy toward males who are not homosexual. Their insecurity leads them to avoid close friendships with other men who do not have SSA.[33]

As previously reported, this allows us to identify three aspects of deep-seated SSA.[34] First, this depth can be gauged by the intensity of the feelings and whether the candidate finds them manageable or not. Second, it makes a difference whether these feelings have been present since childhood, for as far back as the seminarian can remember, or are of more recent origin. Third, if a man has had multiple sexual encounters with other homosexual (or bisexual) men, the behavior itself can become deep-seated, as in a vice or vitiated state.

Safeguarding and HIV Infection

The abovementioned points will have a largely universal application. Now as we wrap up, we pass on to an example of contextualized theology. Our discourse on safeguarding would remain somewhat incomplete if we were to ignore the current HIV crisis in the Philippines and its implications for persons with SSA. Dr. Lui Ocampo, the UNAIDS Philippines Director, commented that despite an overall global decline, the Philippines experienced a 327% increase in annual new infections between 2010 and 2021.[35] The current rate of transmission has been described as "fast and furious." What is of

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[33] P. Kleponis & R. Fitzgibbons, "The Distinction between Deep-Seated Homosexual Tendencies and Transitory Same-Sex Attractions in Candidates for Seminary and Religious Life," *The Linacre Quarterly* 78:3 (2011): 355–362.

[34] J. McTavish, "Same-Sex Attraction and the Priesthood," *Ethics and Medics* 44:4 (April 2019): 2.

[35] A. Bancud, "UNAIDS: PLHIV in the PH could reach 364,000 by 2030" (Philippine Information Agency, May 23, 2023), available at https://mirror.pia.gov.ph/news/2023/05/23/unaids-plhiv-in-the-ph-could-reach-364000-by-2030#:~:text=In%20terms%20of%20annual%20death,15%20to%2024%20years%20old (accessed January 2, 2024).

particular concern is that the main mode of transmission is among males who have sex with other males (MSM).[36] The MSM group is variously composed of gay males, persons engaged in transactional sex or prostitution (who may also be heterosexual), and those who have sex with both males and females. As part of safeguarding efforts, serious consideration needs to be given to the startling statistic that 47% of new HIV cases in the Philippines occur among youth aged 15–24 years old, with MSM interactions being the main mode of transmission.[37]

The Courage Ministry

The group called "Courage" is a ministry to persons with SSA in the Catholic Church that has ecclesiastical approval.[38] Founded in 1980 in the USA by Fr. John Harvey, it is present today in various dioceses around the world. The goals of Courage are:

[36] In 2012, *The Lancet* ran a series of articles on HIV in men who have sex with men. They described MSM thus: "Men who have sex with men (MSM) is a term introduced in 1992 to attempt to capture a range of male-male sexual behaviours and avoid characterization of the men engaging in these behaviours by sexual orientation (homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual, or gay) or gender identity (male, female, transgender, queer). MSM includes gay-identified men, heterosexually-identified men who have sex with men, bisexual men, male sex workers who can have any orientation, men engaging in these behaviours in all-male settings, such as prisons, and the rich and wide array of traditional identities and terms for these men across cultures and subcultures" (C. Beyrer et al., "Global Epidemiology of HIV Infection in Men Who Have Sex with Men," *The Lancet* 380:9839 [2012]: 368).

[37] L. Cabato, "HIV daily average cases on the rise in 2023—DOH," *Inquirer.net* (November 14, 2023), available at https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1859709/hiv-daily-average-cases-on-the-rise-in-2023-doh-2 (accessed January 2, 2024).

[38] See the Courage International website which also contains helpful testimonies and resource material at https://couragerc.org (accessed January 2, 2024). A most helpful pastoral resource is Harvey, *Same Sex Attraction: Catholic Teaching and Pastoral Practice*.

1. To live chaste lives in accordance with the Roman Catholic Church's teaching on homosexuality (Chastity);

2. To dedicate our entire lives to Christ through service to others, spiritual reading, prayer, meditation, individual spiritual direction, frequent attendance at Mass, and the frequent reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist (Prayer and Dedication);

3. To foster a spirit of fellowship in which we may share with one another our thoughts and experiences, and so ensure that no one will have to face the problems of homosexuality alone (Fellowship);

4. To be mindful of the truth that chaste friendships are not only possible but necessary in a chaste Christian life; and to encourage one another in forming and sustaining these friendships (Support);

5. To live lives that may serve as good examples to others (Good Example/Role Model).[39]

There is also the Encourage ministry, which caters to those parents who have children with same-sex attraction.

Conclusion

Homosexuality is a delicate and challenging issue. When discussing it, we must always consider the person, treat them with dignity and respect, and avoid unjust discrimination. It is important to denounce the physical abuse and violence that LGBT persons may be subject to, as well as the criminalization and often-related threat of the death penalty.[40]

[39] See https://couragerc.org/about/.

[40] CCC, 2267 (2018 revision): "Consequently, the Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that 'the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on

Most persons with SSA do not molest minors, and the majority of victims worldwide are female. Homosexuality is not the cause of child sexual abuse, but for a sub-group of males with SSA, it can be a risk factor.

The percentage of priests with SSA (estimated at 15%) is higher than the percentage of males with SSA in general society (2–3%). Deep-seated same-sex attraction can mean that the person is not suitable for seminary life or ordination, whereas transitory or passing same-sex feelings may be worked out and most likely overcome. The admission criteria of seminaries and houses of religious formation for admitting men with homosexuality vary, and Church teaching does not yet clarify what deep-seated tendencies are.

Of particular concern is the current epidemic of new HIV cases among Filipino youth (aged 15–24 years old). Our safeguarding efforts should aim to reduce the high rates of transmission, especially in the MSM group.

Various obstacles may be encountered when seeking to provide pastoral support to persons with SSA. The United States bishops note that "the pervasive influence of contemporary culture creates, at times, significant difficulties for the reception of Catholic teaching on homosexuality."[41] Nevertheless, the Courage and Encourage groups are doing good work in the dioceses where they are present.

Overall, the person with SSA is called to holiness.

> The Church seeks to enable every person to live out the universal call to holiness. Persons with a homosexual inclination ought to receive every aid and encouragement to embrace this call personally and fully. This

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the inviolability and dignity of the person,' and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide."

[41] US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care* (November 14, 2006), no. 24.

> will unavoidably involve much struggle and self-mastery, for following Jesus always means following the way of the Cross.[42]

The reality of homosexuality presents particular and specific issues. It is hoped that the overview provided in this article can help us in our work of safeguarding persons with SSA.

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He completed his undergraduate studies in medicine at Cambridge University, England and graduated as a medical doctor in 1992, pursuing a career in surgery and eventually gaining his fellowship in general surgery with the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh. He met the Verbum Dei missionaries in Sydney, Australia, joined them in 1999, and had his formation years in the Philippines.

He studied and obtained his License in Moral Theology from the Accademia Alfonsiana (the Redemptorist Higher Institute of Moral Theology) and an M.A. in bioethics at the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum in Rome. He has published over 80 articles in international journals and has written several books. He completed the Diploma in Safeguarding at the IADC institute of the Gregorian University, Rome, and has been part of the international Safeguarding team of his community for the last three years.

[42] US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care*, no. 13.

Landas 36:1 (2024) 155–165

AMORIS LAETITIA ON NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

A Pastoral Approach[1]

Antonio J. Ledesma, S.J.

Amoris Laetitia,[2] the post-synodal pastoral exhortation of Pope Francis on love in the family, was signed in Rome on March 19, 2016, the Solemnity of St. Joseph, during the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. On its fifth anniversary, Francis declared an "*Amoris Laetitia* Family" Year from 2021–2022 to help people "experience the Gospel of the family as a joy that fills hearts and lives" (AL 200). This period also interfaced with the initial call to all dioceses of the Church to start a synodal process of listening, praying, and walking together.

Translated literally as "the joy of love," *Amoris Laetitia* dwells on issues surrounding the family today—in terms of challenges, its vocation, love in marriage, fruitfulness, the education of children, spirituality, and pastoral perspectives. The document synthesizes the deliberations of the two special Synods of Bishops on the Family in 2014 and 2015 and thus represents the concerns and outlook of the universal Church with the Holy Father.

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[1] Permission to republish this article was obtained from LiCAS.news Philippines. The original is available at https://philippines.licas.news/2021/03/17/amoris-laetitia-on-natural-family-planning-a-pastoral-approach/.

[2] Hereafter cited in-text as AL followed by the paragraph number.

It is in this light that Responsible Parenthood and Natural Family Planning are seen as integral to the calling of families. This is summarized in a single paragraph, no. 222 of the document, and explained further in other sections. Fortuitously, the four pastoral guidelines followed by our program on "Responsible Parenthood and All-Natural Family Planning" are also pointed out as key principles in AL 222. These are:

1. We are Pro-Life as our first principle;

2. We are for Responsible Parenthood as our goal;

3. We are for Natural Family Planning as the means; and

4. We are for helping couples make an Informed and Morally Responsible Choice, according to the dictates of a Right Conscience, within the context of a pluralistic society (see Figure 1).

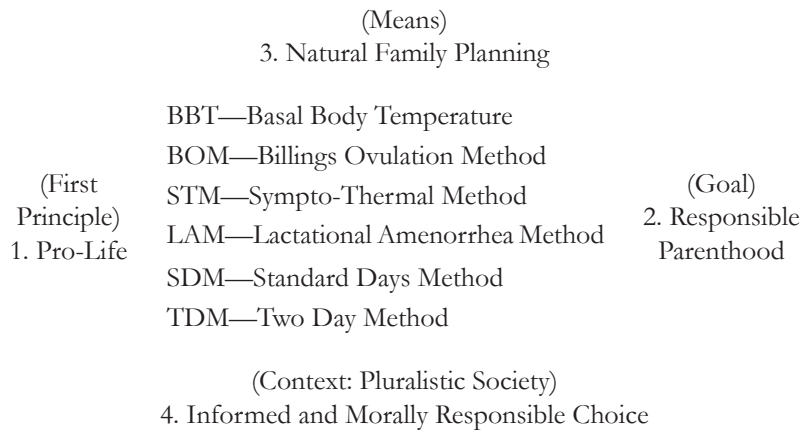


Figure 1: Four Pastoral Guidelines for an RP-ANFP Program

1. We are Pro-Life as Our First Principle

In the section "Accompanying the First Years of Married Life," the opening sentence of AL 222 states: "The pastoral care of newly-married couples must also involve encouraging them to be generous in bestowing life." "If the family is the sanctuary of life, the place where life is conceived and cared for," note Francis and the bishops, "it is a horrendous contradiction when it becomes a place where life is rejected and destroyed" (AL 83).

In unambiguous terms, the bishops say "No!" to abortion:

> So great is the value of human life, and so inalienable the right to life of an innocent child growing in the mother's womb, that no alleged right to one's own body can justify a decision to terminate that life, which is an end in itself and which can never be considered the "property" of another human being. (AL 83)

Lately, the RP-ANFP (Responsible Parenthood-All Natural Family Planning) Network has carried out a signature campaign to enlist the Philippines' support for the Geneva Consensus Declaration signed by representatives of 34 countries in October 2020. The declaration reaffirms "the dignity and worth of every human person" and that "in no case should abortion be proposed as a method of family planning." It also points out that "there is no international right to abortion."

2. We are for Responsible Parenthood as Our Goal

Citing St. John Paul II, the document points out that

> responsible parenthood does not mean unlimited procreation or lack of awareness of what is involved in rearing children, but rather the empowerment of couples to use their inviolable liberty wisely and responsibly, taking into account social and demographic realities as well as their own situation and legitimate desires. (AL 167)

This empowerment of couples requires the formation of conscience: "Decisions involving responsible parenthood [presuppose] the formation of conscience, which is 'the most secret core and sanctuary of a person. There each one is alone with God, whose voice echoes in the depths of the heart' (*Gaudium et Spes*, 16)" (AL 222).

Still citing Vatican II, Francis and the Synod Fathers elaborate on the decision of parents:

> The couple will make decisions by common counsel and effort. Let them thoughtfully take into account both their own welfare and that of their children, those already born and those which the future may bring. For this accounting they need to reckon with both the material and the spiritual conditions of the times as well as of their state in life. Finally, they should consult the interests of the family group, of temporal society and of the Church herself. *The parents themselves and no one else should ultimately make this judgment in the sight of God.* (GS 50, in AL 222 [italics added])

In light of the declining population growth rates in several countries, the bishops remind couples that "the Creator made man and woman share in the work of [God's] creation and, at the same time, made them instruments of [God's] love, entrusting to them the responsibility for the future of [humankind], through the transmission of human life" (AL 81). It is in this light that Church documents use the term "procreation" rather than "reproductive health" to stress the complementary role of parents with the Creator in bringing forth a new human life.

In a distinctively pastoral approach, and noting the wide range of concrete situations, the bishops' reflections encourage couples to "undertake a responsible personal and pastoral discernment of particular cases, one which would recognize that, since 'the degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases,' the consequences or effects of a rule need not necessarily always be the same" (AL 300).

3. We are for Natural Family Planning as the Means

Francis and the bishops reiterate the previous teaching of the Church on family planning and the use of natural methods. They point out that

> family planning fittingly takes place as the result of a consensual dialogue between the spouses, [and] respect for times and considerations of the dignity of the partner. In this sense, the teaching of the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* and the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* ought to be taken up anew in order to counter a mentality that is often hostile to life. (AL 222)

The bishops point out the rationale for NFP:

> The use of methods based on the "laws of nature and the incidence of fertility" (*Humanae Vitae*, 11) are to be promoted since "these methods respect the bodies of the spouses, encourage tenderness between them and favour the education of an authentic freedom" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2370). (AL 222)

In this light, our RP-ANFP program has made available information on *all* modern and scientific methods of Natural Family Planning. These include: BBT, BOM, STM, LAM, SDM, and TDM (cf. Figure 1). Over the past 17 years, our All-NFP program in the Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro has been adopted by more than 28,000 couples! As a simplified method, the Standard Days Method has been widely accepted by more than 40% of these couples. The rest have opted to adopt the other methods, mostly LAM and BOM.

In 2012, the Responsible Parenthood-All Natural Family Planning (RP-ANFP) Network was formed. This included several dioceses and some church-affiliated organizations with nationwide outreach like the Catholic Women's League and Assisi Development Foundation. Over the years, network members have given NFP trainings to participants coming from 77 (out of 85) arch/dioceses. Of these, 44 dioceses had the trainers' trainings in their own area.

"From the outset, love refuses every impulse to close in on itself," note the bishops; "it is open to a fruitfulness that draws it beyond itself. Hence no genital act of husband and wife can refuse this meaning" (AL 80). The teaching includes a call for the generosity of parents, that "children are a wonderful gift from God and a joy for parents and the Church. Through them, the Lord renews the world" (AL 222).

4. We are for Enabling Couples to Make an Informed and Morally Responsible Choice, according to the Dictates of a Right Conscience

Today we live in a pluralistic society not only in terms of various religious persuasions but also in the manifold circumstances of daily living. Within this context, families, schools, and churches are called to exert every effort "to encourage the development of an enlightened conscience" (AL 303). "Yet conscience … can also recognize with sincerity and honesty," the bishops continue,

> what for now is the most generous response which can be given to God, and come to see with a certain moral security that it is what God [in God's self] is asking amid the concrete complexity of one's limits, while yet not fully the objective ideal.

Paraphrasing St. Thomas Aquinas, the Apostolic Exhortation states: "It is true that general rules set forth a good which can never be disregarded or neglected, but in their formulation they cannot provide absolutely for all particular situations" (AL 304). In the same vein, the International Theological Commission has pointed out that "natural law could not be presented as an already established set of rules that impose themselves *a priori* on the moral subject; rather, it is a source of objective inspiration for the deeply personal process of making decisions" (AL 305).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church mentions some mitigating factors and situations when individuals or couples make a decision: "Imputability and responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate

attachments, and other psychological or social factors" (no. 1735, cited in AL 302). In the Philippine setting, one cannot disregard the situation of extreme poverty affecting many families, and the lack of education and moral formation for many couples.

Thus, *Amoris Laetitia* points out: "It can no longer simply be said that all those in any 'irregular' situation are living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace" (301). In assessing the sinfulness of any action, it would be helpful to recall the moral theologian's examination of the various dimensions—namely, the object or act; the intention or motivation; full knowledge and consent; and the circumstances.

On the part of the Church's Family Life ministry, our role is to provide information on all modern scientific methods of NFP as a *pastoral imperative*, assist couples in adopting the method of their choice, and help them form, but not force, consciences. Likewise, Francis and the bishops note:

> We find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them. (AL 37)

Critical Engagement with Government

We have adopted the term *All*-NFP for our program to connote four meanings: 1) to include *all* modern NFP methods; 2) to reach out to *all* families in our parishes and chapel communities; 3) to promote NFP *all* the way, without combining this with contraceptives; and 4) to engage *all* family-oriented organizations, including government agencies. At the national and local levels, government agencies have considerable resources in terms of personnel and budget to also promote natural family planning.

Can we then engage with government in promoting NFP, despite its pronounced emphasis on promoting the use of contraceptives

for family planning? Our objectives in this regard would be: 1) to use available public funds for the promotion of NFP; 2) to press government in implementing the provisions in the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Law that also mandate the promotion of NFP; and 3) to strengthen the government's own program for NFP and share the principles underlying NFP among many government workers who are also practicing Catholics.

Indeed, in Cagayan de Oro, the city government has asked for the assistance of our archdiocesan RP-ANFP program to conduct seminars and provide teaching manuals for the various NFP methods. At the national level, a member of the RP-ANFP Network has also helped the Commission on Population to publish its manual on NFP. The majority of young couples interviewed would actually prefer NFP provided they are given adequate information. To this end, government support could accelerate the holding of NFP training seminars and the dissemination of NFP materials.

In this light, we have welcomed the support of government agencies in funding training seminars *solely* for NFP promotion. CBCP statements in the past have opted for non-collaboration with the government's contraceptive program. However, with the current law providing a parallel track for NFP promotion, it would be remiss for church organizations not to use government budgets set aside for NFP. If not used, we are told by government officials themselves, these would go into the further promotion of contraceptives.

Nonetheless, it is important that dioceses and church organizations first develop their own viable programs for NFP promotion before entering into "critical engagement" with government. In this way, it cannot be said that they are being "used" by government for ulterior motives or that they are using "tainted" funds. On the contrary, they will be using public funds coming from taxpayers' money to address the felt needs of many couples for NFP information as well as values formation.

Following the same line of reasoning on the morality of using an anti-COVID vaccine "tainted" by the use of an aborted fetus earlier in

its production, we could say that any engagement of the church with government on NFP could be considered *material* cooperation, not formal cooperation, in promoting contraceptives, since our intention is to use public resources solely for NFP promotion. It is also *indirect*, not direct, cooperation, since one of our objectives is actually to provide an alternative to artificial methods of family planning. And finally, it is *remote* cooperation, since NFP promotion is done separately from the government agency's seminars for contraceptives.

Key Aspects in the Pastoral Approach of *Amoris Laetitia*

Critical engagement with government on NFP promotion is just one feature of attending to the needs of couples in marriage situations. We can now summarize the distinctive features in the pastoral approach of *Amoris Laetitia* that apply to the variegated cases of married and divorced couples, including couples adopting NFP or using other means.

a) *Gradualness*. Mindful of the difficulties encountered by many couples, Francis and the bishops recall the "law of gradualness" proposed by St. John Paul II, acknowledging that the human being "knows, loves and accomplishes moral good by different stages of growth." The bishops explain this further:

> This is not a "gradualness of law" but rather a gradualness in the prudential exercise of free acts on the part of subjects who are not in a position to understand, appreciate, or fully carry out the objective demands of the law. (AL 295)

b) Discernment. Francis, in a homily to new cardinals, mentioned two traditional ways the Church responds to situations of weakness or imperfection: "casting off and reinstating." He points out that "the Church's way, from the time of the Council of Jerusalem, has always been the way of Jesus, the way of mercy

and reinstatement" (AL 296). Hence, for the Synod Fathers, "the discernment of pastors must always take place 'by adequately distinguishing,' with an approach which 'carefully discerns situations.' We know that no 'easy recipes' exist" (AL 298). This applies to the discernment of mitigating factors for, in such cases, "a negative judgment about an objective situation does not imply a judgment about the imputability or culpability of the person involved" (AL 302).

c) *Integration*. Referring to couples who are divorced or civilly remarried, Francis and the Synod Fathers point out that

> the logic of integration is the key to their pastoral care, a care which would allow them not only to realize that they belong to the Church as the Body of Christ, but also to know that they can have a joyful and fruitful experience in it. (AL 299)

Would this pertain also to couples in "irregular situations" regarding the adoption of family planning methods?

d) *Accompaniment*. Instead of casting off from the community of the Church, Francis recommends "a process of accompaniment and discernment which guides the faithful to an awareness of their situation before God" (AL 300). The Synod Fathers state: "The Church must accompany with attention and care the weakest of her children, who show signs of a wounded and troubled love, by restoring in them hope and confidence" (AL 291). "Let us not forget," the Pope adds, "that the Church's task is often like that of a field hospital."

e) *Pastoral Mercy*. Francis decries the attitudes of some pastors who focus on rules alone:

> A pastor cannot feel that it is enough simply to apply moral laws to those living in "irregular" situations, as if they were stones to throw at people's lives. This would bespeak the closed heart of one used to hiding behind the Church's teachings. (AL 305)

Instead, he emphasizes the "primacy of charity" and that "mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life.… Mercy is the fullness of justice and the most radiant manifestation of God's truth.… We are called to show mercy because mercy was first shown to us" (AL 310–311).

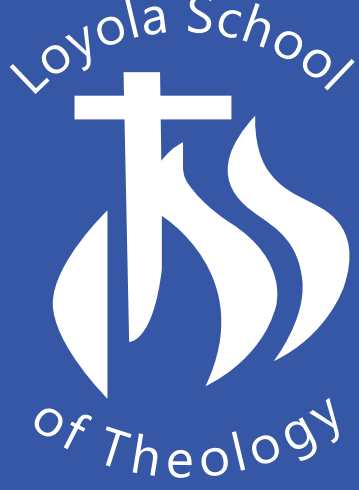
In summary, *Amoris Laetitia*

> offers us a framework and a setting which help us avoid a cold bureaucratic morality.… Instead, it sets us in the context of a pastoral discernment filled with merciful love, which is ever ready to understand, forgive, accompany, hope, and above all integrate. (AL 312)

In many aspects, this Pastoral Exhortation coming from two special Synods of Bishops with the Holy Father offers a complementary pastoral approach to *Humanae Vitae*, the encyclical of Pope Paul VI in 1968, addressed also to families on the regulation of birth.

This synodal process of accompaniment and integration can be applied to our ongoing RP-ANFP program—which, with its concrete, if modest, results, has led a member of the network to muse whether this could be the contribution of Catholic Christians in the Philippines to the universal Church, especially in the poorer regions of the world.

About the Author. **Archbishop Antonio J. Ledesma, S.J.** is Archbishop Emeritus of the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro, where he served from 2006 to 2020. Shortly after his installation in 2006, he initiated the Responsible Parenthood and All-Natural Family Planning (RP & All-NFP) Program of the Archdiocese as one of his priority programs. Through his leadership, the Archdiocese launched two books on natural family planning in 2010 as part of the Catholic Church's promotion of NFP as an alternative to artificial contraceptive methods. The first book, titled "Natural Family Planning: Values, Issues and Practices," which contains a compilation of articles about the issue of NFP, gives the Church's values formation and simplified methods like the standard days method. The other publication is the trainer's manual aimed at teaching NFP to potential trainers and counsel providers.


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