Landas

JOURNAL OF LOYOLA SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
Vol. 37, No. 2 (2025)
ISSN: 0116-4856

SPECIAL ISSUE:
60th Anniversary of LST and LHS

Editor's Preface
Salvador G. Agualada, Jr., CMF

ARTICLES

Why the Council of Nicaea Still Matters for Asian Trinitarian Ontology
Patrick Vance S. Nogoy, SJ

The Bride from Bethany
Adonis G. Saclolo

The State of Global and African Ecology
Peter Knox, SJ

Christ and Religious Pluralism: An FABC Perspective
Phan Van Dinh

Toward a Christology (Masīḥiology) with Islam
Renato T. طيب Oliveros

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The Transfiguration of Jesus in Tertullian's Marc. IV, 22,1-6
Emmanuel C. Marfori

DOCUMENTATION

The First Sixty Years of Loyola School of Theology
From the Preface of the 2025 LST Statutes

LST at the Frontiers of Theology: Mission, Milestones, and Future Directions
Renato R. Repole, SJ

Landas

JOURNAL OF LOYOLA SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Landas

EDITOR

Salvador G. Agualada, Jr., C.M.F., S.T.D.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Abundio R. Babor Jr., M.S.C., S.T.D.

Hartono Budi, S.J., Th.D.

Ma. Anicia B. Co, R.V.M., S.T.D., Ph.D.

Jojo M. Fung, S.J., D.Min.

DIRECTOR OF PUBLICATIONS

Enrico C. Eusebio, Jr., S.J., J.C.D.

LAYOUT EDITOR

Jose Antonio Q. Pavia

COVER DESIGN

Nyla Katherine A. Caras-Reyes

Landas (The Way), Journal of Loyola School of Theology, is an open-access peer-reviewed journal published twice a year by the Loyola School of Theology, with address at Ateneo de Manila University, Loyola Heights, Quezon City. The digital version is available for download from the LST Publications Office website (https://publications.lst.edu/). For editorial, business, and other matters, or to place orders for hard copies, contact publications@lst.edu.

The Journal is not responsible for statements and opinions expressed in signed articles and reviews. Such statements and opinions are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editors.

© 2025 by the Loyola School of Theology
All rights reserved. ISSN 0116-4856

Contents

Landas
Vol. 37, No. 2 (2025)

SPECIAL ISSUE:
60th Anniversary of LST and LHS

vii *Editor's Preface*
Salvador G. Agualada, Jr., CMF

ARTICLES

1 *Why the Council of Nicaea Still Matters for Asian Trinitarian Ontology*
Patrick Vance S. Nogoy, SJ

19 *The Bride from Bethany*
Adonis G. Saclolo

45 *The State of Global and African Ecology*
Peter Knox, SJ

77 *Christ and Religious Pluralism: An FABC Perspective*
Phan Van Dinh

99 *Toward a Christology (Masīḥiology) with Islam*

Renato T. طيب Oliveros

Notes and Comments

125 *The Transfiguration of Jesus in Tertullian's Marc. IV, 22,1-6*

Emmanuel C. Marfori

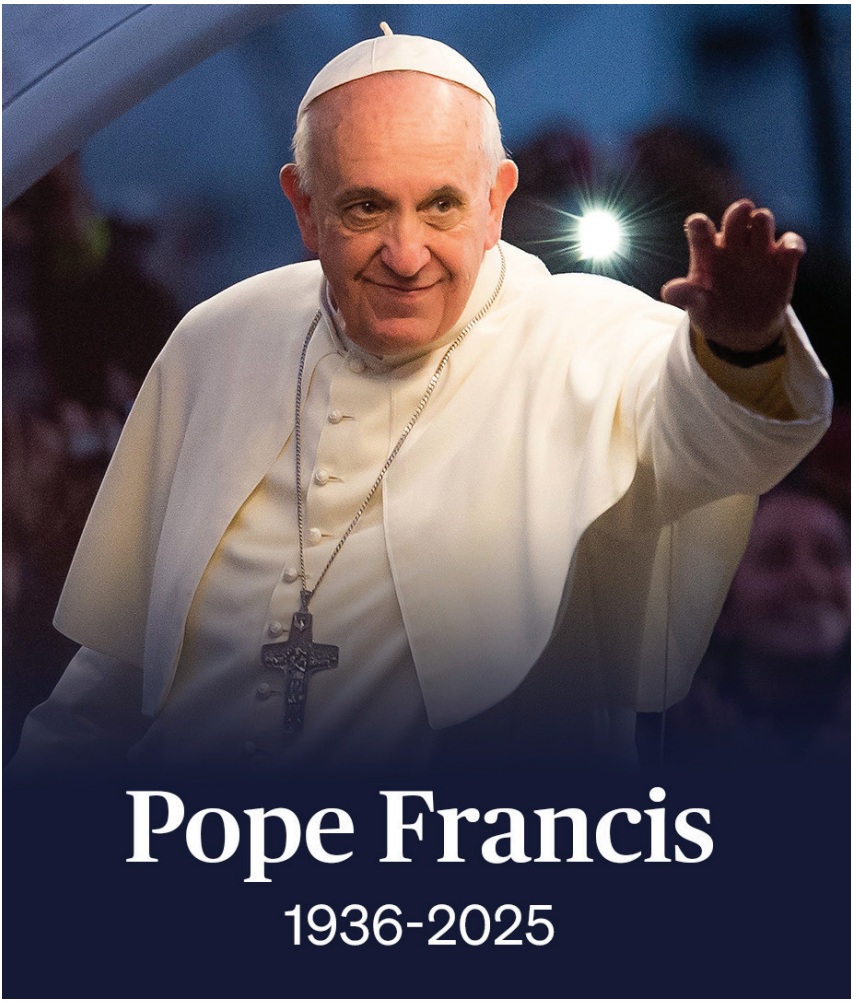
Documentation

139 *The First Sixty Years of Loyola School of Theology*

From the Preface of the 2025 LST Statutes

LST at the Frontiers of Theology: Mission, Milestones, and Future Directions

Renato R. Repole, SJ



Thank you, Pope Francis!

EDITOR'S PREFACE

My appointment as the new editor-in-chief of *Landas* took place at a pivotal moment in the life of the Church, a moment of immense ecclesial significance: the transition from one pontificate to another. The world mourned the passing of the beloved Jesuit Pope Francis on April 21, 2025, yet the season of sorrow gave way, at least in part, with the swift election of Pope Leo XIV on May 8, 2025, just over a day after the Conclave had opened. Admittedly, it is too early to assess the import of Pope Leo—an Augustinian—given that he has been in office for only a few months. The same, however, cannot be said of Pope Francis, who, having been elected Pope on March 13, 2013, held the Petrine Office for over twelve years, and whose legacy had already begun to take clearer contours in the life of the Church and beyond, even while he was still alive.

In the years and decades to come, theologians and historians will continue to assess, and perhaps even debate, the dimensions and impact of the Francis Papacy on the Church and the world. Yet, as early as now, and without attempting to be exhaustive, we may begin to identify the central themes that are likely to shape and define his pontificate, as seen in his many gestures, writings, and pronouncements: a profound emphasis on mercy (the 2015 *Jubilee Year of Mercy* and the 2016 publication *The Name of God is Mercy*); a consistent advocacy for the poor and marginalized (*Fratelli Tutti*, 2020); a passionate concern for the care of our common home (*Laudato Si'*, 2015 and *Laudato Deum*, 2023); a renewed vision of synodality, marked by inclusivity (the 2021–2024 *Synod on Synodality*, especially its 2024 *Final Document*); the reform

of the Roman Curia (*Praedicate Evangelium*, 2022); and a commitment to ecclesial decentralization (partly advanced in *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013). His decision to reside at the lowly Casa Santa Marta rather than the lofty Apostolic Palace expressed—clearly and unambiguously, at least from his perspective—the kind of Church and ministry he envisioned and desired: a Church that mirrors the incarnational descent of Christ into the full depth and complexity of the human condition, with ministers bearing the "smell of the sheep" (Chrism Mass Homily, Holy Thursday, March 28, 2013) because of their radical proximity and solidarity with the people, especially "society's most neglected members" (*Evangelii Gaudium* 186), unafraid, like the Lord they follow and serve, to plunge into the messiness, dirt, and chaos of the world and humanity.

On a more localized level, the Loyola School of Theology has also witnessed a recent leadership transition—from the presidency of Fr. Enrico C. Eusebio, SJ, to that of Fr. Renato R. Repole, SJ. Thus, this maiden issue of *Landas* under my editorship marks the first publication released during the pontificate of a new Pope and the leadership of a new LST President. In the context of this leadership change, Rev. Fr. Xavier L. Olin, SJ, Provincial Superior of the Jesuits in the Philippines, at the LST Commencement Exercises on May 14, 2025, delivered brief but heartfelt remarks honoring and expressing deep gratitude to Fr. Eusebio for his six years (2019–2025) of distinguished service to the school, a term marked by many accomplishments and lasting contributions that enriched the mission and academic life of LST. Fr. Olin also extended his warm support and prayers to the new President as he began his leadership of the institution.

As a further testament to this moment of institutional transition, this publication features the inaugural address of **Fr. Renato R. Repole, SJ**, entitled "LST at the Frontiers of Theology: Mission, Milestones, and Future Directions," delivered at his Investiture as LST's 11th President on August 20, 2025. He begins his address by recalling the many milestones that God has bestowed upon the Loyola School of Theology over the past 60 years as a theological school and 25 years as an ecclesiastical faculty. Among its notable achievements are the record-high enrollment this year with students from 45 countries, the

international recognition it shares with Ateneo de Manila University in the QS World Rankings, the growing internationalization of the faculty, the upgrading of facilities into hybrid classrooms that extend their reach beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, its fidelity to its Asian Mandate through contextualized courses, the expansion of networks with local and international institutions, and its robust research and publications featured in its monographs and journals. Looking ahead, the new LST President identifies urgent concerns that must guide the school's new Strategic Plan, rooted in the rearticulation of its Vision and Mission. These include continually forming students to theologize critically in context, particularly through critical thinking, discernment, and the development of communication skills; addressing the ethical and pastoral challenges of artificial intelligence and digital culture; emphasizing interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, and faculty development; expanding networks and collaborations with academic institutions; advancing integral ecology in light of *Laudato Si'*; concretizing the Synod on Synodality's call for conversion, reform, inclusivity, participation, accountability, and healing; and strengthening safeguarding protocols to ensure the safety and well-being of the school community. In summary, Fr. Repole envisions LST as a school grounded in service to God and the Church; a workshop of discernment engaging the Church's most pressing challenges; a focal point of local and international partnerships and collaborations; and a place of formation producing ministers who are both faithful to orthodoxy and capable of reform. Believing that the realization of this vision is not his work alone, he appeals for the support and participation of all sectors of the school, calling everyone to journey together and share their gifts, for, paraphrasing the words of St. Paul, "we can do all things in Him who strengthens us."

Here at LST, we mark these two transitions within the broader context of the institution's 60th anniversary as a theological school, celebrated under the theme "Life, Leadership, and Legacy." The Loyola House of Studies School of Theology and Ecclesiastical Studies (LHS STES) was inaugurated on September 12, 1965, the Feast of the Holy Name of Mary, by His Eminence Rufino Cardinal Santos, D.D., then Archbishop of Manila, as the Second Vatican Council—the

single most significant ecclesial and doctrinal event of the twentieth century—was drawing to a close. On March 28, 1972, the School of Theology and Ecclesiastical Studies was renamed the Loyola School of Theology (LST). LST, in this sense, may rightly be called a child of the Council, born of its spirit of *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement*, the twin principles that serve as hermeneutical keys to its vision of renewal. At its inception, the school served primarily the theological formation of the Jesuit scholastics and San Jose seminarians, along with a few other Religious under formation in the area of Ateneo de Manila University. Across six decades, through the challenges of institutional growth and consolidation, it has stood as a vital center of intellectual, spiritual, and ministerial formation, serving diocesan seminarians, Religious scholastics, and lay students not only in the Philippines but also across Asia and beyond, forming them to be faithful, effective, and creative ministers and proclaimers of the Gospel in a rapidly changing world. A concise yet substantive account of LST's 60-year history is presented in the article "The First Sixty Years of Loyola School of Theology," which is included under *Documentation*.

Milestones, such as leadership transitions and anniversaries, remind us that the Church is on a pilgrimage, journeying through changing times and seasons that carry both hope and unknowing. Yet in all these circumstances, amid her many challenges and trials, we are sustained and anchored by our faith in the promise of the Risen Lord to remain with the Church until the end. The Church is a community of faith, hope, and love, a people united in the profession of one faith. If theology—as *faith seeking understanding*—helps the Church reflect on, articulate, and deepen this faith in a systematic, coherent, and disciplined manner, then theology is indeed an indispensable dimension of the Church's life and mission. Theology, whether written or taught, and ultimately meant to be embodied in lived witness, exists in service to the Church, which, guided by the Holy Spirit, continues to grow in her self-understanding and in her awareness of the depth and breadth of her mission in the world across time and space. Within the Church's evolving theological landscape, *Landas*—as the Journal of LST—plays an invaluable role in generating and cultivating theological insights and

reflections for the Philippine Church, the wider Asian context, and the Church universal.

****

Alongside the President's Investiture Speech and an account of LST's 60-year history, both included in the *Documentation* section, this issue of *Landas* presents five scholarly papers in the *Articles* section and one contribution in the *Notes and Comments* section.

A special feature in this issue is **Patrick Vance S. Nogoy, SJ**'s article, "Why the Council of Nicaea *Still* Matters for Asian Trinitarian Ontology," which, on the occasion of its 1,700th anniversary, serves as a fitting tribute to the Council's enduring legacy for Christology, particularly through its decisive affirmation of *homoousios*, arguably the single most important word in all conciliar history. In this article, the author makes a three-part argument highlighting the Council of Nicaea's lasting theological relevance, particularly its implications for the development of Asian trinitarian ontologies. He opens the article by examining the historical context of the Council, underscoring its main achievement in safeguarding the Church's faith in Christ's full divinity against Arius, and showing how the formulation of *homoousios* was decisive in articulating the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father. Then, he reflects on Nicaea's theological legacy, especially the role of conciliar Christology in shaping the Church's understanding of the Trinity, arguing that "*homoousion* made it to the creed… [because]… it is an ontology that best expresses Trinitarian revelation." Finally, the author asserts that the Council of Nicaea remains vital for shaping Asian Trinitarian ontology today. Drawing on Raimundo Panikkar's dialogue with Hinduism and Jung Young Lee's engagement with Daoism, both approached through the *analogical dialogue*, he highlights the challenge of meaningfully engaging Asia's religious and cultural pluralism while remaining faithful to Christian tradition.

In "The Bride from Bethany," **Adonis G. Saclolo** offers a rich theological and symbolic reading of Mary of Bethany as a bridal figure in the Fourth Gospel. The author interprets Mary's sorrow over Lazarus' death in John 11 and her anointing of Jesus in John 12 as

nuptial acts that "usher Jesus the Bridegroom-Messiah into his Nuptial Passover." He sees Mary's grief and her swift response to Jesus' call as a sign of spousal devotion and an anticipation of resurrection. He examines Mary's gestures of throwing herself at Jesus' feet, shedding tears, and wiping his feet with her hair through the lens of nuptial imagery, especially as reflected in the figures of Ruth and the bride in the *Song of Songs*, interpreting them as manifestations not only of marital love but also of total self-gift. He argues that while Mary's anointing prefigures Jesus' death and burial, the fragrance of the nard discloses the fullness of his victory over death. Because the same fragrance clings to Mary herself, signifying her intimate union with Jesus, she now shares in the perfume of the Bridegroom. For Saclolo, the perfume not only symbolizes burial but also evokes marital love, restored paradise, and immortality, thus suggesting that the love between Mary and Jesus foreshadows a new creation.

In "The State of Global and African Ecology: A Cause for Growing Concern," **Peter Knox, SJ**, provides a thought-provoking theological and scientific assessment of today's worsening ecological crisis. The author begins by asserting that concern for creation is not new to Christian thought but is rooted in the Christian tradition, now underscored by *Laudato Si'* as a pillar of Catholic Social Teaching. He frames the current crisis using "Planetary Boundary Theory," noting that six of the nine boundaries—especially climate change—have already been transgressed due to severe disruptions to Earth's systems, and that ecological threats are global and transcend national or political borders. The author introduces "novel entities," which refer to toxic pollutants and hazardous substances that persist in ecosystems, harm the environment, and pose risks to human health. He advocates an urgent shift from linear economic models, which simply discard post-consumer materials once their economic value is exhausted, to a circular economy that emphasizes recycling, reusing, and repurposing. For him, although Africa is a less industrialized continent and contributes minimally to global emissions, it suffers greatly from deforestation, weak governance, and climate-vulnerable ecosystems. He laments that women disproportionately bear the brunt of the ecological crisis's fallout, while often being excluded from environmental decision-

making and opportunities. Knox presents Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum* as theological responses to the global crisis, urging an ecological conversion that calls for the responsible use of power and resources for the planet's well-being. This involves recovering, deep in our DNA, the God-given vocation bestowed in the Garden of Eden, as stewards of our common home.

In "The FABC Christology in the Context of Religious Pluralism," **John Phan Van Dinh** offers a theological reflection on how the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) presents Jesus Christ to Asia amid the region's religious diversity. According to the author, although the Catholic Church has not explicitly assigned salvific significance to other religions, God's universal saving design nonetheless extends throughout the world, as affirmed by Vatican II and *Redemptoris Missio*. He observes that the FABC regards religious pluralism not merely as a challenge or problem but as a pastoral and theological concern. Likewise, while affirming Christ as the unique mediator of salvation and the Church as necessary for salvation, the FABC holds that conversion is not always to the Church but to God and His Kingdom. The author highlights the FABC's cosmic vision of salvation by recognizing the positive values of Asian cultures and religions within God's universal saving plan. He argues that an essential feature of this Christology is its close link with Pneumatology, in which the Holy Spirit is seen as active and operative in all religious traditions. For him, dialogue serves as a privileged locus for discovering Christ and the Spirit already present and at work in the various religions of the world.

In "Toward a Christology (*Masīḥiology*) with Islam," **Renato T. Oliveros** proposes an interfaith theological approach that promotes dialogue between Islam and Christianity through a shared exploration of Jesus' identity and significance. The author begins by asserting that, despite the central theological difference between the Islamic doctrine of monotheism as expressed in the *Tawḥīd* and the Christian belief in the Trinity, Catholic Trinitarian theology "does not deviate from the fundamental teaching that God is One." Drawing from the Qur'ānic depiction of Christians as "nearest in affection" (Q. 5:82)

and from Thomas O'Shaughnessy, SJ, who emphasized, based on *Nostra Aetate*, that truths found in Christ's teachings are also present in other religions, especially Islam, he supports a dialogical approach that weaves Gospel passages with Qur'ānic texts. He examines five Christological pillars that serve as key points for dialogue between Qur'ānic Masīhiology and Nicene Christianity, carefully analyzing each to highlight theological similarities and differences: Jesus (*Eisa*) is the Christ (*al-Masīh*), Jesus is the Word (*Kalimah*) from Allah, the Hypostatic Union, the Spirit Conceives the Word Named Jesus, and the Crucifixion of Jesus. Then, while acknowledging certain areas of divergence, he explores converging soteriological themes, such as the need for faith in Allah to enter paradise, the call to do good and avoid sin, the necessity of forgiveness and repentance, and the reliance on God's mercy. In conclusion, the author highlights Mary's (Maryam's) sinless role in the Virgin Birth as part of Allah's plan, presenting her, then, as a bridge between Islam and Christianity through her purity and unique relationship with the Word and the Spirit.

Appearing in the *Notes and Comments* section, **Emmanuel C. Marfori**'s "The Transfiguration of Jesus in Tertullian" offers a nuanced patristic reflection on the theological significance of the Transfiguration narrative, particularly as understood by Tertullian in response to the heretical claims of Marcion. The author explains that for Tertullian, the presence of Moses and Elijah beside Jesus is "superfluous" because the heavenly voice itself made clear whom they were to listen to: the Son. By identifying the voice as the Father's and the one revealed as the *Filius*, Tertullian affirms the divine identity of Christ. Marfori shows how Tertullian interprets the Transfiguration event as a powerful sign of the continuity between the Old and New Testaments, with the Law and the Prophets, represented by Moses and Elijah, finding their fulfillment in Jesus. He also notes that, for Tertullian, Moses' appearance beside Christ signifies the fulfillment of his ancient request "to see the glory of God," now revealed in the person of God's Son. Rather than being silenced or superseded, Moses and Elijah are portrayed as subordinate witnesses to the Son's authority, acting as principals of His people—Moses as informer and Elijah as reformer. The author concludes by underscoring Tertullian's

view that the Father's command to listen to the Son fulfills prophecy and bears witness once more to Christ's divine identity.

****

In a spirit of reverence and gratitude, this edition seeks to honor, through this collection of rich and diverse contributions, the sacred and momentous transitions highlighted above, the 60th anniversary of LST, and all who engage in theological discourse through writing, teaching, and learning, especially here at Loyola School of Theology.

Fr. Salvador G. Agualada Jr., CMF
Editor-in-Chief

Landas 37:2 (2025) 1–17

WHY THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA *STILL* MATTERS FOR ASIAN TRINITARIAN ONTOLOGY

Patrick Vance S. Nogoy, SJ

Abstract. Does the Council of Nicaea still matter for developing Asian trinitarian ontologies? Yes. This paper examines the development of a faith-based ontology of a triune God, the centerpiece of the Nicene Creed. I advance the claim that the Nicene Trinitarian ontology is rooted in faith revelation that frames a novel construal of consubstantial (*homoousios*). From this, one can propose the concept of relation as a co-principle in being. Giulio Maspero calls this the objective genitive sense of the term *trinitarian ontology*: Christian thinkers made innovations on the dominant metaphysics of their time by discerning God's being according to revelation. Part of the failure of those who did not subscribe to the Nicene Creed (e.g. Arius) is their unbelief in a triune God. This unbelief, I will explicate, promoted ontologies that the Council would later anathematize as heresies. They are examples of ontology-driven faiths. This lesson from the Nicene case is necessary, so I shall argue, in developing sound Asian trinitarian ontologies.

Keywords: Nicaea; Trinitarian Ontology; Asia; consubstantial; faith

Introduction

From an Asian standpoint, one can argue that the language of metaphysics and trinitarian ontologies arising from the debates in the Council of Nicaea are irrelevant. They are antiquated and too European. Although *consubstantial* made it to the creed, it is challenging for believers to find it meaningful in their faith lives. In Asia, the moral and devotional dimensions of the Christian faith matter more than rational ontologies. To address this issue, some Asian theologians use local and cultural concepts (e.g., *yin-yang*, *Advaita*, and *Dao*) to convey the truths about the Trinity, hoping believers might find them relatable and more relevant in their faith lives. However, they face theoretical problems related to orthodoxy. The issue is not merely linguistic; the solution is not confined to translation approaches. For instance, the debates surrounding the *consubstantial* point to a revealed truth that Father and Son share the same divine nature. This should be captured with precision when expressed in local concepts that some Asian theologians suggest.

Does the Council of Nicaea still matter for developing Asian trinitarian ontologies? Yes. This paper examines the development of a faith-based ontology of a triune God, the centerpiece of the Nicene Creed. I advance the claim that the Nicene Trinitarian ontology is rooted in faith revelation that frames a novel construal of consubstantial (*homoousios*). From this, one can propose the concept of relation as a co-principle in being. Giulio Maspero calls this the objective genitive sense of the term *trinitarian ontology*: Christian thinkers made innovations on the dominant metaphysics of their time by discerning God's being according to revelation.[1] Part of the failure of those who did not subscribe to the Nicene Creed (e.g., Arius) is their unbelief in a triune God. This unbelief, I will explicate, promoted ontologies that the Council would later anathematize as heresies. They are examples of

[1] Giulio Maspero, "Ratzinger's Trinitarian Ontology and Its Patristic Roots: The Breakthrough of *Introduction to Christianity*," *Wrocław Theological Review 31/2* (2023): 5-33. DOI: 10.34839/wpt.2023.31.2.5-33, 7.

ontology-driven faiths. This lesson from the Nicene case is necessary, so I shall argue, in developing sound Asian trinitarian ontologies.

I begin by examining the debates surrounding the term consubstantial (*homoousion*) and its attendant concept of eternal begetting. In this second section, I argue that the belief in a triune God made these concepts proper in thinking about God's being. A serious peril lurks in fostering belief formation that proceeds from wrong, partial, or mistaken faith premises. This led to anathematized ontologies. I shall outline some of its implications for Asian trinitarian ontologies in Section III. I argue that the theoretical inquiry of ontologies found in the debates in the Council of Nicaea has significant implications for the development of trinitarian ontologies arising from the Asian context in the last section.

Arian Ontology and Revelation

Significant work has been done on the philosophical relevance and implications of the debates in the Council of Nicaea. The most popular of the lot is the Arian case. Harry Wolfson,[2] for instance, highlights the reliance of Arius and his cohorts on Aristotelian syllogism in constructing their ontological framework and their concomitant interpretation of Christian scriptures to package their beliefs. On the other hand, Rowan Williams[3] underscores Arius' motivation in fighting against what he thought was damaging to doctrinal beliefs in his bishop's preaching. According to Williams, Arius argues against Alexander's affirmative position on the substantial unity (*homoousion*) of the Father and Son because it puts in danger the Son's independent existence.[4] Arius' aim to correct what he identified as a serious threat to the Christian faith was not uncommon in his time. Marilyn Dunn

[2] Harry A. Wolfson, "The Philosophical Implications of Arianism and Apollinarianism," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers 12* (1958): 5-28, http://www.jstor.com/stable/1291115.

[3] Rowan Williams, "The Logic of Arianism," *The Journal of Theological Studies 34/1* (1983): 56-81, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23963208.

[4] Ibid., 56-57.

surveys the early Christian communities during Arius' time. Surrounded by Valentinian Gnostics and Manicheans who called themselves Christians and claimed apostolic authority, Arius tried hard to combat a range of beliefs and arguments fostered by these religious movements, some of which were mainstreamed by his fellow bishops and priests.[5] These elaborate ontologies sowed confusion and division among the faithful. Little did Arius know that his ontological framework would be as controversial and even more divisive than those he had challenged.

Let us briefly examine the debates about the use of *homoousion*. Behind the use of this term lies three essential truth claims of the Christian faith: (1) the nature of Jesus as God, (2) that He is eternally begotten, and (3) His *relation* as Son to the Father is a co-principle of being. Against this, Arius proclaims that "there was a time when the Son was not." This famous proposition yields sub-claims that are in direct opposition to faith revelation: (1) Jesus is only a creature, albeit a perfect one, (2) He is not eternally begotten but made out of nothing, and (3) his substance (*ousia*) is independent of and unique from the Father. In Arian ontology, God the Father is alone the Unbegotten, the first principle, and that which possesses divine substance fully. To claim that Jesus is homoousion of the Father is a contradiction in Arian logic because one cannot have two first principles and unbegotten(s).[6] For Arius, Jesus must be ontologically subordinate; if not, then the ontological identity of Father and Son remains modal, following the Sabellian heresy.[7] Confined with the Aristotelian understanding of *homoousion* as an individual substance, Arian ontology seems to stand on solid philosophical ground.

A closer look, however, reveals acute problems that render Arian ontology inconsistent with faith revelation. First, suppose Jesus is only a perfect creature and is limited to *partaking* in God's properties (e.g., *Sophia* and *Logos*). In this case, his role as mediator in Arian

[5] Marilyn Dunn, *Arianism* (Arc Humanities Press, 2021), 12.

[6] Dragos Andrei Giulea, "Reassessing Arianism." *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses 95/1* (2019): 63-96, doi:10.2143/ETL.95.1.3285813, 67.

[7] Ibid.

cosmology has no salvific value because He does not partake of the divine essence. The Christian faith holds that only God saves, and this will not admit an Arian ontological argument where Jesus appears as quasi-divine (partaking of properties) instead of truly God (partaking of the divine substance).

Second, Arius' unqualified defense of God as Unbegotten and Jesus as a creature exacerbates the problem of the ontological distance between God and the created world, instead of addressing it. God remains unconnected to the world by hiding behind the mediating work of Jesus. Putman similarly asserts that for Arius, God is radically immutable: (1) He cannot have direct contact with a mutable, changing creation; and this means that (2) the Son, through whom all things are made, is also alien to the Father.[8] This is incongruous with the Gospel of John, which asserts that the Word made flesh fully reveals who God is, and with St. Paul's assertion that Jesus, as Son, is the perfect image of the Father.

Lastly, Arius' central claim that "there was a time the Son was not" misunderstands the notion of time. Everything that occurs in divine substance happens outside created time and space. If applied in the case of Jesus as eternally begotten, then the term *eternally begotten* pertains to the fact that there was never a time when the Son was not with the Father. Although the Son is *caused*, the construal of *caused* is not the idea of a sequential and logical series found in the created world. *Caused* in simple terms means *from*. This is part of what begotten entails: Jesus comes *from* the Father. For the Eastern Fathers who opposed Arius, *eternally begotten* implies that (1) the begetting of Jesus occurs outside time—therefore there was *never* a time when the Son was not; (2) *caused* is understood in a lateral way as *from*—therefore Jesus as Son receives everything from the Father; and (3) not to confuse with Valentinian emanationism, *begotten* is personalizing—Jesus is always *Son*. Jacobs argues likewise that the term *begotten* is read by the Eastern Fathers analogically: it is *not* how we think of it as material emission or gestation,

[8] Rhyne R. Putnam, "Before and After Nicaea: Arianism as a Test Case for the Ongoing Development of Heresy," *Criswell Theological Review* 18/1 (2020): 3-21, www.atla.com, 11.

and yet, it *is* how we understand who the Son is, which is none other than his existence originating from the paternal communication of divine nature.[9]

The brief rehearsal and evaluation of the central tenets of Arian ontology underscore two important points. First, there is a strong tendency to confine faith revelation and its attendant beliefs within the theoretical boundaries of ontological frameworks. Here, the starting point and eventual development of beliefs is ontology. This we gleaned most clearly from the Arian case. Surrounded by different ontological views, Arius offered his own which he claims is most consistent with Christian belief. Although ontological frameworks could sometimes function as a corrective to various interpretations of faith, they can also be illusory. This means that there are occasions where they appear consistent with faith, but when unmasked, they reveal problems that generate mistaken or false beliefs. For instance, although it makes sense in Arian logic that Jesus must be ontologically subordinate because monotheism cannot admit two first principles, this argument compromises the soteriological relevance of Jesus because He is not truly God. Instead of revising his ontological views to accommodate this fundamental and universal belief, Arius insisted on Jesus' quasi-divine nature (partaking of God's properties) and reasoned that a perfect creature could do the soteriological work. This caused widespread division in the Council of Nicaea. His ontology influenced plenty of believers, including presbyters and bishops, who were attracted by the metaphysical neatness of his view and its resulting beliefs.

Corollary to the first point, Arius's attempt to associate his ontology with faith tradition is masked by his exegetical reading of selected verses of the Scriptures. According to Putnam, theorists like John Henry Newman and Rowan Williams maintain that Arius is more of a *biblicist*—an interpreter of the Scriptures—than a logician or metaphysician because his anthropocentric cosmology, confession

[9] Nathan A. Jacobs, "The Begotten-not-Made Distinction in the Eastern pro-Nicenes," *Religious Studies* 55 (2019): 503-535, doi:10.1017/S0034412518000069, 514.

of faith, and even letters have a firm grounding in Scriptures.[10] For example, his reading of Proverbs 8:22-31 affirms the key assumptions in his ontology: (1) the creation of the Son/Wisdom before the creation of the world (Prov. 8:22), (2) Wisdom is the master craftsman that helps God in creation (Prov. 8:30), and that (3) this same Wisdom is the "one through whom all the depths were brought forth (8:24), mountains were made (8:25), heavens and skies were established (8:26)".[11] Putnam emphasizes that Arius' interpretation of verses in Proverbs aligns with the philosophical, hermeneutical, and theological setting of his time.[12] In other words, Arius is not a novel or eccentric interpreter of the Scripture. This enhances his credibility because he does not depart far from the Christian faith tradition, at least in his interpretation of selected verses. More importantly, his interpretation of Scripture increases the credence level of his proposed ontological system. However, per Putnam, it seems that Arius has a strong tendency to isolate verses to suit his ontology rather than reading them from the comprehensive meaning of the Sacred Scriptures to the extent that he diverges from his opponents with similar exegetical approaches.[13] Arius' main motivation is to prove the plausibility of his ontological system. This has spawned beliefs that are radically opposed to Christian tradition. In my view, the Arian case is an example of an ontology-driven faith.

Beliefs sustained by and rooted in ontology can contradict faith, revelation, and tradition, and even doubt their plausibility. This was a serious cause of division within the church and the empire, which led to the convocation of the Council of Nicaea. The examination of the Arian case shows that the achievement of metaphysical neatness by meeting rigid syllogistic standards comes at a high price: the compromise of fundamental faith premises. In the Arian case, this

[10] Putnam, "Before and After Nicaea: Arianism as a Test Case for the Ongoing Development of Heresy," 14.

[11] Ibid., 15.

[12] Ibid., 16.

[13] Ibid.

means believing in an uninvolved and unconcerned Monad, who, despite being the Source of everything, delegates everything to a perfect creature. Belief in this perfect creature has no salvific value because he is only God-like. In addition, the God who is supposed to save us turns out to be, from an Arian framework, an uninvolved Source. This goes against the revealed truth and the apostolic witness of the scriptures and tradition.

In the next section, I explore this by arguing against the claim that the Council of Nicaea is merely a linguistic problem that the Nicaean Fathers addressed by reinventing the Greek language. This has serious implications for belief formation.

Revealed Truth and Fresh Ontology

Norman Tanner asserts that the early councils have developed a new vocabulary that could cope with the mysteries of the Christian faith rather than being confined to the language of Greek metaphysics of their time.[14] Tanner's claim can be read in multiple ways. One strand is a perspective that understands the debates in the Council of Nicaea as a set of linguistic problems. This is no surprise because most of the discussion involved the proper use of Greek words to capture the fundamental tenets of faith: *homoousion, hypostasis, logos, sophia,* etc. These words carry multiple layers of meaning, which make it appear that the Council was all about finding the right words to say. For instance, Tanner enumerates the various definitions of *hypostasis*, the Greek word for *substance*, the Latin equivalent of *person*: "support, resistance, lying in ambush, jelly or thick soup, sediment in liquids, origin, foundation, substructure, confidence, courage, resolution, steadfastness, promise, substance, reality or nature, wealth or property!"[15] To fix the problem of meaning, the early councils decided to use *hypostasis* as a reference to the *person* (i.e., Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and *ousia* to denote

[14] Norman Tanner, "Greek Metaphysics and the Language of the Early Church Councils: Nicea I (325) to Nicea II (787)," *Gregorianium* 90/1 (2009): 51-57, https://philpapers.org/rec/TANGMA-4, 57.

[15] Ibid., 54.

substance. This bold decision was not immediately welcomed, and it took subsequent councils to confirm it. But this linguistic puzzle is an outcome of ontological debates that strive to capture the Trinitarian mystery.

Take again the case of *homoousion*. It is not found in the Bible, the Greek New Testament, or the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament.[16] Its basic definition points to *substance*. This simple definition contains several conceptual problems that Arius tried to correct with his ontology. For instance, if *ousia* is construed as substance with individuating properties, then the application of *homoousion* would mean that the Father and the Son are not two individual entities but modes of one divine substance (i.e., Sabellian heresy).[17] If that is not the case, then, by logic, we are left with two substances with individuating properties, Father and Son. This contradicts the monotheistic belief in the one God. A third proposal is to think of *ousia* as a *genus*: a common genre under which the Father and Son derive their individuating properties. Here, *homoousion* would suggest that the Father and Son are examples of divine beings or gods![18] This, according to Giula, is the main reason why Arius and the Antiochene tradition rejected the use of *homoousion* because it treads towards different heresies prevalent at that time (e.g., Sabellian, Gnosticism, and Valentinian). The Nicene Fathers agree with Arius' theoretical concerns, but they have a different diagnosis: the main issue is that *ousia* is understood within the limits of Aristotelian logic.[19]

The two cases illustrate the reality that the debates in the Council of Nicaea are not mere language games. I agree partly with Tanner that one of the outcomes of the Council of Nicaea is a new vocabulary that expresses with clarity the Trinitarian mystery in a language understood by most believers at that time. However, what I take as an important

[16] Ibid., 53.

[17] Giulea, "Reassessing Arianism," 70.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

contribution of the Council of Nicaea is a fresh ontology that is rooted in Trinitarian revelation. In other words, behind the seeking for new definitions of words and terms is the struggle to be faithful to what has been revealed and handed on in Scriptures and Christian Tradition. Even if this would cost revising or abandoning dominant philosophical approaches like Aristotelian syllogism. This seems to be the main reason why *homoousion* made it to the creed: it is an ontology that best expresses Trinitarian revelation. Similarly, Jacobs explains that, in the case of *eternally begotten*, the Eastern Fathers began with the biblical understanding of *begetting* before deepening it by using negative (apophatic) and positive (kataphatic) assertions to highlight the ontological difference between created subjects from divine subjects.[20] This led to offering a fresh trinitarian ontology consistent with revelation as received in scriptures and Tradition. In my view, this is an example of a faith-driven ontology.

The new Christian vocabulary that Tanner suggests is an outcome of the faith-seeking understanding that dominated and shaped the thinking of the Nicene Fathers. It also resulted in unique and revolutionary trinitarian ontologies. As an example, Maspero points to the concept of relation as a co-principle of being that arose from the thinking of the Nicene Fathers. He argues that the dominant conception of *logos* is a *necessary causal link*—that which mediates between God and the created world. This construal is, in Aristotelian terms, *logos ut ratio*: prime mover, intelligible cause, rational will.[21] This line of philosophical argument has made ontological problems more difficult to address, as I have highlighted in the Arian case. In contrast, per Maspero, the Nicene Fathers have understood *logos* as *logos ut relatio*. This pertains to the being of the Son as a "pure ontological relation to the Father."[22] In this case, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share in one, eternal, and

[20] Jacobs, "The Begotten-not-Made Distinction in the Eastern pro-Nicenes", 525.

[21] Giulio Maspero, "Life as Relation: Classical Metaphysics and Trinitarian Ontology," *Theological Research* 2/1 (2014): 31-52, doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.15633/thr.677, 38.

[22] Ibid.

undivided nature, and the created world is ontologically dependent.[23] Here, *homoousion* is applied without contradiction because the partaking of the divine substance of the three persons takes place in a relation: consubstantial *with*. The correlated term *hypostasis*, which pertains to the individuality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is understood together with *homoousion* in the lens of a personalizing relation. This kind of ontological thinking, which is faithful to the deposit of faith in scriptures and tradition, shaped new ways of expressing and making sense of the Trinitarian mystery.

In contrast, an ontology-driven faith (e.g., Arian case) betrays an unbelief that is composed of a double blindness. On one hand, there is strong credence in the ontological framework. In this first type of blindness, the believer only sees the interpretations of beliefs and scriptures that align with her ontological framework, whilst rejecting those that do not fit. Think of a believer as a racehorse with blinders. Blinders limit the horse's field of vision. Similarly, Arius and his followers cannot accept believing in Christ, who is of one substance with the Father. Even their exegetical interpretation of the scriptures appears cherry-picked to suit their ontology. The horizon of their field of vision is determined by the limits of their ontology. The second type of blindness is an outcome of the first one. This comes in the form of a firm rejection of revealed truths. It is very difficult for Arius and his followers to accept revealed truths even when they were forced to retract under the threats of deposition and exile. They continued to hold onto beliefs that were founded on their ontology rather than revising them in the light of revealed truths. This second blindness nurtures unbelief into stubborn false belief.

In sum, the revealed truths of faith compel the Nicene Fathers to push the limits of metaphysics to produce novel ontologies and radical vocabulary, and not the other way around. The Nicene Fathers did not solely aim to win the language games in the council. Behind the revolutionary Christian vocabulary of the Nicene Fathers is a fresh ontology rooted in faith. Although metaphysical neatness

[23] Ibid.

and Aristotelian logic are essential standards to meet, they impose limits that lead to a contradiction to revealed truths. This influences belief formation to a large extent: the rejection of revealed truths, an appeal to ontology rather than faith, and exegetical interpretations of Scriptures aimed towards the confirmation of one's ontology. It has caused confusion and division among the faithful through the spread of false beliefs.

I shall outline the implications of this in the development of Asian trinitarian ontologies in the last section.

Asian Trinitarian Ontologies and the Council of Nicaea

Teresa Grace Brown raises a very important thesis on why there is a need for new trinitarian ontologies today. She claims that there is a shift in contextual critical consciousness towards recognizing voices who are excluded, silenced, or marginalized in any dialogue, which includes the relevance of the Trinity in the post-modern world.[24] By *critical consciousness*, she underscores the kind of thinking the Church Fathers employed in their dialogue with various philosophies of their time.[25] In particular, Brown states that the Nicene Fathers, for example, did not simply transpose revealed truths into philosophical categories but worked out points of convergence and divergence in their constructive engagement with philosophy.[26] On the other hand, *contextual* refers to the *'sitz-im-leben'* or "the signs of the times", where urgent issues facing the world demand the recognition of different marginalized voices, the theological blind spots of Western theology, and the diverse trinitarian ontologies that are developing in other parts of the world.[27] Brown asserts, together with other theologians (e.g.,

[24] Teresa Grace Brown, "New Trinitarian Ontologies? Trinitarian Theology, Theological Anthropology and Contemporary Critical Consciousness in Dialogue," *Modern Theology* (2024):1-24. DOI:10.1111/moth.12952, 7.

[25] Ibid., 3.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 7.

Graham Ward and Hemmerle), that theological imagination demands that we understand our relationship with the Trinitarian God in dialogue with a range of theological anthropologies in other parts of the world, in keeping with the signs of the times.[28]

I agree with Brown that context is a crucial element in developing trinitarian ontologies that believers can understand and find relevance in their lives. In Asia, context is largely defined by religious and cultural pluralism. Asian culture is a mix of philosophies, practices, religions, social norms, and ways of thinking. Asian believers are surrounded by religions with heritage and sophisticated cosmology. Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism are examples of closed systems that contain within them a blend of religion and culture. This poses a challenge to the theological imagination in developing relevant trinitarian ontologies that also remain faithful to Christian tradition. Unlike the Arian case, which is an *intra*-faith issue, most developments in Asian trinitarian ontologies are identified as *inter*-faith. Paul Chung raises the same issue of whether our conception of the Trinity can be inter-religious or relevant to religious pluralism in Asia.[29] This is not easy. The main tension is to maintain a faith-seeking understanding that allows us to grow roots in the trinitarian mystery found in the heritage of the Christian faith, whilst extending branches in our engagement with culture. In other words, following Maspero, it is making innovations on local concepts by thinking about them according to God's revealed truth.

Take the case of Raimon Pannikar's advaitic trinitarian ontology in dialogue with Hinduism. Chung observes that in Pannikar's approach, a trinitarian structure is imposed on Hinduism whilst an advaitic structure is imposed on the understanding of the Trinity to achieve a vision where all religions and spiritualities are subsumed under the Trinity (God is in all and all is in God).[30] In this unique ontology,

[28] Ibid.

[29] Paul Chung, "The Asian Pursuit of Trinitarian Theology in a Multireligious Context," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 3 (2009): 144-156, DOI: 10.1163/156973109X448706, 144.

[30] Ibid., 145-146.

the Trinity is understood as the symbol of unity of whatever divine and human is; and, since it is advaitic (non-dual), the differences are preserved.[31] In Pannikar's Trinitarian language, Christ is the universal Logos who links the Transcendent (Father) and finite (the created world); and, as the mediator, he is present in all religions (e.g., Hindu *Isvara*, Buddhist *Tathagata*, Hebrew *Yahweh,* and Islam *Allah*).[32] The Father only expresses himself through the Son, with whom we can enter into dialogue with God, and the Holy Spirit makes this kenotic relationship between Father and Son complete and the dialogue with God through the Son possible.[33] As a result, for Pannikar, religions are variations of entering into dialogue with the Father through the revelation of the Son in the Holy Spirit.

From Chung's summary of Pannikar's advaitic trinitarianism, we can deduce that (1) local concepts are not isolated elements; rather, they are integral parts of a closed system, which implies that (2) in inter-faith cases, one must be critically conscious of a religion understood in its breadth and depth. Here, we are looking at and comparing two faith traditions in trying to find points of convergence and divergence. In my view, this should not necessarily lead to a fusion, merger, or worse, an incorporation of one into the other. Pannikar's attempt at an Asian trinitarian ontology maintains unity among differences, a key tenet in Trinitarian mystery. However, some aspects of trinitarian revelation will be muted (e.g. humanity of Jesus of Nazareth) and some will be highlighted (e.g., Christ as universal Logos) to emphasize the mediating work of Christ. Like the Arian case, Pannikar's trinitarian ontology is not a mere language game or a transposition of revealed truths to Hindu categories. In engagement with other religions, faith-seeking understanding is expressed in dialogue where one enters a world and sees it from the perspective of the Trinity. Call this *analogical dialogue*.

The Nicene Fathers have appealed to analogical thinking where, as Jacobs explains, in the case of begetting, similarities and differences are simultaneously highlighted. In my view, Pannikar applies the same

[31] Ibid., 146.

[32] Ibid., 147.

[33] Ibid.

kind of thinking in the case of two religions. There are concepts in Hinduism where the Christian understanding of the Trinity is captured, but at the same time, escapes them. This is an essential element of developing Asian trinitarian ontologies. One must be immersed in a particular culture and religion without losing the heritage of the Christian faith. It is contemplating the revelation of the trinitarian mystery through a specific religion.

This is the same case, as Chung argues, with Jung Young Lee's trinitarian ontology in dialogue with Daoism. Lee's use of theological imagination resulted in a theology of change in his exploration of *yin-yang* in Daoism and the Trinitarian mystery. The Dao, the ultimate reality, is understood as Change, and it is manifested in the *yin-yang* process.[34] Here, Christ the Logos is identified with the Dao with its powers of creativity and self-emptying revealed in the interplay of *yin-yang*.[35] This interplay, Lee emphasizes, forms and re-forms the created world. Unlike Pannikar, Lee does not aim to distinguish the trinitarian God in terms of Father, Son, and Spirit. Rather, he is focused on the active aspect of relation, which is *proceeding from* (e.g., *filioque*, *paterque*, and *spiritusque*).[36] This aligns with the dynamic flow of existence in the Daoist framework of change. Chung's rehearsal of Lee's trinitarian ontology shows that some aspects of the Trinitarian mystery are stressed to express its revelation in Daoism—these points of convergence open contextual meanings of the Trinitarian mystery. By analogical dialogue, we can examine whether Lee's trinitarian ontology is an appropriate exploration of the points of convergence between Daoism and the Trinitarian mystery. We can also identify talking points between two religions, which could serve as a basis for an Asian theology (e.g., Lee's theology of change).

Without the appeal to analogical dialogue, Pannikar's and Lee's trinitarian ontologies could easily be identified and censored as

[34] Chung, "The Asian Pursuit of Trinitarian Theology in a Multireligious Context," 150.

[35] Ibid., 149-150.

[36] Ibid., 150.

heresies. The fatal mistake of Arius and his followers is that they kept themselves within their ontological system and remained defiant in their unbelief. To avoid this, we take the cue from the Nicene Fathers by contemplating the revealed truths of God found in different religions and cultures. Analogical dialogue, like the Nicene Fathers' faith seeking understanding, aids us in seeking and understanding the revelation of the trinitarian God in the various religions and cultures around us. It demands that we understand these closed systems without losing what has been handed on to us in the Christian faith. From this, we can think of ways to communicate the Trinitarian mystery through dialogue with local concepts and frameworks. Pannikar's advaitic trinitarianism and Lee's theology of change are Asian trinitarian ontologies that arise from analogical dialogue. They are applications of theological imagination in the Asian context of religious pluralism.

Conclusion

The attempts at constructing Asian trinitarian ontologies should not be for the sake of maintaining pluralism, staying *nouveau*, appeasing marginalized voices, or implementing inculturation alone. It must stay true to the deposit of faith in dialogue with the different theological anthropologies. Here, we must allow the revealed truths of the Trinitarian mystery to motivate, shape, and push the limits of ontological thinking in dialogue with other religions with deep heritage. This is an important lesson from the Council of Nicaea: the Fathers dealt with Arius and his followers, who refused to believe and instead chose to remain within the limits of their ontological systems. Moved by the same faith-seeking understanding of the Nicene Fathers, we continue to contemplate the mystery of the Trinitarian God wherever it is revealed in and through our critical engagement with the world.

About the Author. **Fr. Patrick Vance Señga Nogoy, SJ** obtained his Master in Philosophical Studies Research and Doctor of Philosophy with a specialization in Political Philosophy from the University College London (UCL). He teaches philosophy courses

at Ateneo de Manila University and Loyola School of Theology. His published works include Touching Love: Thoughts and Stories (2016, nominated in the Inspirational Category of Catholic Mass Media Awards) and Pilosopiya, OPM, Pag-ibig, co-authored with Michael Aurelio, PhD (2024, Ateneo de Naga University Press). He entered the Society of Jesus in 2005 and was ordained a priest in 2016.

Landas 37:2 (2025) 19–44

THE BRIDE FROM BETHANY[1]

Adonis G. Saclolo

Abstract. This study explores the nuptial motif as a hermeneutical key to interpreting the Gospel of John, emphasizing its theological and narrative significance. One figure that arises in this spousal theme is Mary of Bethany, whose intimate actions and symbolic gestures position her as a representative of the ecclesial bride. The Gospel's portrayal of Jesus as both the Lamb of God and the Bridegroom Messiah reveals a deliberate intertwining of Passover and nuptial imagery, which the anointing at Bethany prefigures. Through detailed exegesis and intertextual analysis—particularly with the Song of Songs and other Old Testament texts with marital symbolisms—the paper demonstrates how Mary's grief, her posture at Jesus' feet, and her use of fragrant nard prefigure the sacrificial death and glorification of Christ. Her role not only anticipates the "hour" of Jesus' Passover but also embodies the bridal community's union with the Messiah in love, death, and resurrection. Thus, the nuptial theme emerges as a vital lens for understanding Johannine theology, revealing the Gospel's vision of restored Edenic intimacy between God and humanity.

Keywords: bridegroom king on the couch; betrothed bride**,** spikenard; hair/tresses**;** feet symbol of the person; fragrance of paradise; Passover hour; Death and Resurrection

[1] This article is an excerpt from the dissertation of the author on *The Passover of the Bridegroom Messiah: A Biblical Theology of the Nuptial Language of Jesus' Passover in the Fourth Gospel*, SThDdiss. (Loyola School of Theology, 2023), 203-231.

Introduction

The Lamb of God and the Bridegroom Messiah are titles that reveal two very important motifs in the Fourth Gospel – the Nuptial and Passover themes. At the onset of the Gospel, the witness of John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29,36). This seems to correspond to one exclusive characteristic of the Fourth Gospel which is the three Passovers that contextualize the ministry and public life of Jesus (Jn 2:13-25; 6:3-14; 13:1; 18:28,39; 19:14). This Passover of Jesus as the paschal lamb is the "hour" that fulfills the Baptizer's words about Jesus the messianic bridegroom who takes the bride community to himself (Jn 3:28-30). The Gospel narrative seems to intentionally adopt a scheme to gradually reveal the Passover of Jesus as the nuptial "hour."[2]

However, the taking of the bride seems to be foreshadowed by the encounters of Jesus with several personages, especially with women (Jn 2:1-11; 4:3-42; 8:1-11; 12:1-11; 20:1-18), as representative figures of the bride community.[3] These meetings and the inherent discourses therein create a gradual trajectory toward the nuptial Passover "hour" when Jesus sleeps on the cross and as a New Adam, brings forth the bride from his opened side (Jn 19:34). Consequently, his resurrection and ascension to the house of the Father (Jn 13:1; 20:17) resemble the bridegroom's duty to prepare the dwelling for the bride and take her there at the appointed time (Jn 14:1-3).

One of these women is Mary of Bethany, a bridal figure who ushers Jesus the Bridegroom Messiah into his nuptial Passover. Mary's anointing sends Jesus off from Bethany to Jerusalem, where Jesus will

[2] Cf. Jocelyn McWhirter, *The Bridegroom Messiah and the People of God: Marriage in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 104.

[3] Cf. Adeline Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom: A Feminist Historical-Literary Analysis of the Female Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1988), 169-180.

be immolated as the paschal victim with a pleasing odor.[4] The reference to the weight of about a hundred pounds of choice fragrances that are brought during the burial of Jesus (Jn 19:39-40) fulfills what occurred in Bethany days before (Jn 12:3,7). Jesus says that Mary may keep the perfume for the day of his burial (Jn 12:7), indicating that the anointing at Bethany is also a prelude to Jesus' death (Jn 12:7; Mk 14:8). Whereas the anointing pre-announces Jesus' demise and burial, the fragrance of the perfume that fills the house in Bethany manifests the plenitude of Jesus' victory over death.

At the Feet of the Bridegroom

John 11 is about the sickness, death, and raising of Lazarus. Jesus arrives when Lazarus is already in the tomb. Though the story of Lazarus certainly foreshadows the Passover death and resurrection of Jesus, Mary of Bethany's figure gives it a nuptial meaning. The centrality of her character manifests that she represents the bride of the nuptials to come. When Martha meets Jesus and they speak together about Lazarus' passing (Jn 11:20-27), Mary of Bethany appears disinterested and in a state of inactivity as she lingers in her solidarity with death. Mary's sitting inside the house is an explicit expression of her suffering and bitterness. After the exchange with Jesus, Martha goes immediately to Mary and announces: "The Teacher has come and is calling for you" (Jn 11:28). The designation "the teacher" (*ho didaskalos*) is very important because it presents Jesus as a rabbi who speaks with women. Rabbis normally declined to instruct women disciples because it was seen as a disgrace to speak to women publicly (*bBer* 6: 5-6 [43a]),[5] but Jesus took a radically different approach. However, the title "rabbi" was also an affective term and could be used by a woman for her

[4] Cf. Ramón Domínguez Balaguer, "La Eclesiología esponsal en el Evangelio de San Juan: A La Luz del Cantar de Los Cantares," tesis doctoral (Facultad de Teología San Vicente Ferrer: Valencia, 2004), 367, 370.

[5] Cf. Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*: *An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period*, trans. F. H. and C. H. Cave (London: SCM Press, 1969), 360.

husband.[6] This is what Magdalene, another bridal figure, calls Jesus in the resurrection account (Jn 20:16).[7] Thus, Jesus the Bridegroom Messiah is calling Mary through her sister Martha.

The verb "to call" (*phoneo*), means to call either by one's own voice or through another.[8] The call of Jesus is reminiscent of the voice of the bridegroom inviting the bride to awaken from quasi-sleep (Song 5:2). The voice of Jesus and the voice of the bridegroom in the Song are both addressed to a woman who is half awake and lying down. This is reflected in Mary's remaining in the house, half-asleep because of her inconsolable grief. She is seated down, burdened by sorrow. The half-slumbering bride of Song 5:2 also refers to Israel, who is sleeping because God is absent.[9] She is a woman in a fallen state (Song 5:2). However, the bride of the Song, Israel, "is not entirely insensible and awakens when the Lord summons her."[10] Similarly, when Mary hears the voice of Jesus (Jn 11:28), she arises (*egeiro*) quickly and goes to him (Jn 11:29). Mary's rising up quickly (*egeiro*) from sitting and weeping is not merely a physical act, but also an allusion to the resurrection in the Gospel of John.[11]

Moreover, a further aspect of the matrimonial framework is seen in the fact that Mary remains sitting in the house (Jn 11:20) while Martha is with Jesus. This presents her as a "dutiful betrothed/bride, who waits

---

[6] Cf. Frédéric Manns, *Sinfonia Sponsale nel Vangelo di Giovanni* (Napoli: Chirico, 2018), 211.

[7] Infante sees these parallelisms between the two women that in the Fourth Gospel both carry a nuptial symbolic role. "*La figura di Maria di Betania è in stretto parallelo con quella di Maria di Magdala*."Cf. Renzo Infante, "Maria di Betania e L'Unzione di Gesù: Gv 12: 1-8," *VetC* 37 (2000): 54-55.

[8] Cf. *Strong, s.v.* "φωνέω, ἐμφωνέω," 1: 77.

[9] Cf. James Luther Mays, *Song of Songs* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2005), 54.

[10] Mays, *Song of Songs*, 54.

[11] For the thirteen times that *egeiro* appears in the Fourth Gospel, eight of these refers to the rising from death (John 2:19,20,22; 5:21; 12:1,9,17; 21:14).

until her bridegroom calls her."[12] This is the modesty expected of a woman in the time of Jesus.

> A woman who conversed with everyone in the street could, like the woman who worked at her spinning in the street, be divorced without the payment prescribed in the marriage settlement. It was considered preferable for a woman, and especially an unmarried girl in general, not to go out at all… It is suitable for women to stay indoors and to live in retirement...[13]

When Mary meets Jesus, she immediately throws herself at his feet, just as she does on the day of the anointing (Jn 11:2; 12:3). In the time of Jesus, it was customary for wives to sit at their husbands' feet during suppers (*deipnon*).[14] This gesture portrays Mary as "the picture of the faithful bride."[15] It also evokes images of the bride in the Song of Songs sitting under the apple tree, which symbolizes the bridegroom. "I sat down in his shade with great delight" (Songs 2:3). This is an image of an intimate relationship: "She [the bride] not only looks at the apple tree from afar, but she places herself, figuratively, under his protecting and comforting branches."[16] In Hosea 14:8 (MT 14:7), Israel is dwelling under the shade of God (*yoshbe bezilo*), described with the same words as in Song 2:3 (*bezilo hammadti veyashabti*), where both "sitting" and "shade" are present.

Furthermore, this action is also associated with the scene in the Book of Ruth, where Boaz is asked to take the responsibility of a kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 1:21; 2:20; 3:4-8). Ruth is to stay at the feet of Boaz and raise the issue of the Levirate Law (Ruth 3:8-9). In the first

---

[12] Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom,* 95.

[13] Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 360. See also *Spec* 3:169.

[14] Cf. K. Corley, "Were the Women around Jesus Really Prostitutes? Women in the Context of Greco-Roman Meals," in *SBL 1989 Seminar Papers*, ed. D. Lull (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989): 490–94.

[15] Jeremy Lee Painter, "*The Bridegroom's Perilous Bride: A reading of Jesus' Encounters with "his own" in John's Gospel*," PhD diss. (Radboud University Nijmegen, 2020), 243.

[16] Tremper Longman, *Song of Songs*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 112.

meeting of Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 2:13), she introduces herself as a lowly female slave or *shiphah*. However, when she is lying at his feet and pleads for him to honor his role as the *go'el* (Ruth 3:9), she introduces herself as a maidservant (*amah*). The *maidservant* (*amah*) implies a higher status than that of the "lowly female slave" (*shiphah*). But more significantly, the maidservant (*amah*), is a woman "eligible for marriage."[17] The identification of someone worthy of marriage is strengthened when Ruth asks Boaz "spread your cloak over your maidservant (*amah*)" (Ruth 3:9). This is an OT idiom for saying "marry me."[18] It also goes back to Ezekiel's prophetic vision of God finding Israel as a young foundling woman, whom he marries through a covenant pact: "I spread the edge of my cloak over you … and entered into a covenant with you" (Ezek 16:8; Deut 22:30 [MT 23:2]; 27:20; Mal 2:16).[19] Ruth's words are "probably a dramatic request that she be taken under his protection as his wife (*ishshah*)."[20] "Take your maidservant under your wing" (Ruth 3:9). The word "garment-corner" (*kanaph*) can also mean "wing."[21] The use of the term "*kanaph*" triggers a beautiful link with the concept of the "wings of refuge" (*kenaphayim*), as Boaz wishes for Ruth to be under God's protection (Ruth 2:12).[22] This likewise corresponds

[17] Robert L. Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 211.

[18] E. John Hamlin, *Surely There Is a Future: A Commentary on the Book of Ruth*, ITC (Grand Rapid: Eerdmans, 1996), 45.

[19] Hubbard connects this to the marital tradition of the Arabs when a man takes a wife "by throwing a garment-corner over her." Hubbard, *Ruth*, 212 n. 33.

[20] Abigail also identifies herself as David's "servant-*amah*" (1 Sam 25:24). When David later sends for her to become his wife, she is identified as "wife-*ishshah*" (1 Sam 25:40). In humility, Abigail refers to herself as a "maidservant" (*amah*) willing to act as a "(female) slave" (*shiphhah*) and wash the feet of the "(male) servants" (1 Sam 25:41). In calling herself first of all David's *amah* who would be willing to do the work of a *shiphhah*, Abigail may have been accepting his invitation to become his wife (*ishshah*). Cf. Hamlin, *Ruth*, 44-45.

[21] Cf. *DBLH, s.v.* "כָּנָף," 4053, #2. See also John N. Oswalt, "כָּנָף," in *TWOT*, 446.

[22] The Hebrew term *kanaph* symbolically connotes the "wings" of Yahweh that symbolize protection and care. In Ruth, the same word is utilized in Hebrew but

to putting the marriage of Ruth and Boaz under God's providential guidance. In the Psalms, God's loving-kindness is repeatedly described as the reason why his bride Israel takes refuge "under the shadow of his wings" (Ps 36:7; 57:1; 63:7; 91:4). Thus, by covering Ruth with his cloak, Boaz's role as the *go'el* embodies "the protection of Yahweh's 'wings.'"[23] In light of these parallelisms, the act of Mary of Bethany's sitting at the feet of Jesus is seen to bear various nuptial overtones, as a woman placing herself under the shadow of her bridegroom's protective covenant love.

Furthermore, Mary's throwing herself at Jesus' feet manifests her desire to unburden her grief on her Lord. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (Jn 11:32). This expression emphasizes the possessive pronoun "my" (*mou*) to underline that it is her brother who died: not just anyone, but someone she deeply loved.[24] Such "emphasis would have been significant to a first-century reader who perceived Mary as the betrothed/bride of the messianic bridegroom."[25] "It was not just anyone who died because of Jesus' absence. It was the brother of his betrothed/bride who died."[26] And Jesus shows that he is in solidarity with her as his beloved bride as he too cries in sympathy with Mary's outburst of emotion. The grieving bride "deeply moves Jesus in spirit and troubles him emotionally, even to the point of weeping himself" (Jn 11:33-35).[27] Indeed, it is impossible not to shed tears before a dear person who is crying helplessly. Adeline Fehribach says that "Jesus, as God's agent, likewise is moved to tears and action by the deep emotion that the community of faith and the woman who represented that community of faith felt at the death

translated as "cloak" in many English versions. Cf. Hubbard, *Ruth*, 212.

[23] Cf. Hamlin, *Ruth*, 45.

[24] Cf. Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom*, 96.

[25] Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom*, 96.

[26] Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom*, 96.

[27] Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom*, 97.

of a loved one."[28] This seems to portray Jesus as a bridegroom who expresses his love not only in life but also in death.

The voice (*phone*) of Jesus raised Mary from being dead in spirit through sadness. That same voice now calls a physically dead person back to life. When Jesus calls (*phoneo*) Lazarus from the tomb with a loud voice (*phone*): "Lazarus, come forth" (Jn 11:43; 12:17), the emphasis is on the "voice" of Jesus. It is a voice that can "awaken [someone] from the place of the dead, from Hades…"[29] The noun "voice" (*phone*) comes from the same root word as the verb "to call" (*phoneo*) and in Johannine usage, those who listen to this voice are like the flock of the Good Shepherd, whose voice makes the listener one with him (JwS/Xn 10:3-5,16). The voice of the Bridegroom Messiah resounds beyond death to reach the one he loves, as the Song of Solomon states: "For love is *as strong as death*" (Song 8:6). Despite Mary's tragedy, she as the betrothed/bride becomes the reason for the foreshadowing of the power of the messianic bridegroom in conquering death when he resuscitates Lazarus. Lazarus and Martha listen to the voice of the bridegroom, and they become part "of the family of Jesus"[30] through "their kinship to Mary."[31]

The Bridegroom King on the Couch

In the narrative of the raising of Lazarus, at the very start of the chapter, we find an "intrusive statement" about Mary of Bethany anointing the feet of Jesus and wiping them with her hair, referring to an event that has not yet occurred (Jn 11:2).[32] This "intrusive

[28] Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom*, 96.

[29] Cf. Otto Betz, "φωνή, φωνέω," in *TDNT,* 9:303.

[30] Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom*, 85.

[31] Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom*, 85, 87.

[32] Scholars perceive that this might be a later redaction. Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, AYB (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 1: 433; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to John* (Wellwood: Burns and Oates, 1968), 2: 322.

statement" permeates the Lazarus story with marital imagery. And Mary the bride from Bethany is the central reference in this spousal theme. The intensity of nuptial symbolism increases with the act of Mary anointing the feet of Jesus with perfume. Primarily, anointing in the OT was normally for prophets, priests, and kings. But anointings could also be given in the context of marriage. In the wedding song of a king meeting his bride, the bridegroom-king is said to have been anointed with the oil of gladness, which was composed of fragrances such as myrrh, aloes, and cassia (Ps 45:7-8).[33] The kingly character of Jesus in the Gospel makes Mary's action a royal anointing.

However, the nuptial language becomes clearer if perceived as an allusion to Song 1:12: "While the king is at his table, my spikenard sends forth its fragrance." Some translations simply describe the king sitting at the "table," perhaps feasting. Others underline the reclining position (*anaklisei*) of the LXX version. In the Hebrew text, it is implied that the king is feasting or in the circle of feasters (*mesab*).[34] Thus, he is reclining, since the usual position in feasting is to recline. John 12:2 speaks of those who are in the supper, including Jesus, as reclining (*anakeimai*).[35] However, some bible versions indicate the detail that the king is on the couch (NAB, NRS). Hence, Jocelyn McWhirter proposes a connection and asserts that "the royal element lies not in the anointing [alone], but rather in Jesus' role as the king on the couch."[36] "The reclining man of Song 1:12 and the reclining Jesus in John 12:3 imply an unstated correspondence: like the man in Song 1:12, Jesus is a king:"[37] This parallelism strengthens the marital imagery of Mary's anointing of Jesus.

Four features associate the Song with the anointing at Bethany: "the king sitting on the couch," "the specific mention of the nard,"

---

[33] Cf. Marinus De Jonge, "Messiah," in *AYBD*, 4: 777-788.

[34] Cf. *Holladay*, s.v. "מסב," 203.

[35] *BDAG*, *s.v.* "ἀνάκειμαι," 65.

[36] McWhirter, *The Bridegroom Messiah*, 86 note 18.

[37] McWhirter, *The Bridegroom Messiah*, 85.

"the presence of the loving woman with perfume," and "the fragrance." These characteristics are marked with significant verbal correspondence.[38] The first link is to the bridegroom of the Canticle, who is also a king who reclines "*anakliseî*" on a couch (Song 1:12; Jn 1:49; 6:15; 12:13,15; 18:33–19:22). The fact that both Jesus and the bridegroom-king are reclining is a "resemblance… [that] is hard to mistake."[39]

> According to Song 1:12, the man on the couch is 'the king ((Basileus),' the royal bridegroom introduced in Song 1:1–4. That Jesus is a king is never stated in John 12:1–8, but that Jesus is the Messiah constitutes one of the major concerns of John's narrative. Furthermore, John 2:1–4:42 has established that Jesus is a bridegroom. Both Jesus and the king of Song 1:12 are portrayed as royal bridegrooms.[40]

Jesus reflects the imagery of the bridegroom-king of the Canticle whereas Mary is the bride, whose "spikenard sent forth its fragrance" (Song 1:12). The passage of Song 1:12 is the first reference in scripture to "nard."[41] In the Song of Solomon, perfumes are not something outside or separate from the one wearing them but an expression of their very person.[42] Thus, the woman in the Canticle says "my nard-*nardos mou*" (νάρδος μου), which perhaps explains that the perfume

---

[38] Cf. McWhirter, *The Bridegroom Messiah*, 80-88.

[39] McWhirter, *The Bridegroom Messiah*, 84-85.

[40] McWhirter, *The Bridegroom Messiah*, 85; See also Ann Roberts Winsor, *A King Is Bound in the Tresses*, Studies in Biblical Literature 6 (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 22.

[41] Nard is considered an aromatic and odorific plant from India and perhaps brought to the Mediterranean by Persian traders. The term has its possible origin in Sanskrit *nalada* from which the Persian *nardin* and Greek *nardos* originated. It was the most preferred perfume in antiquity. In some biblical versions, it is "spikenard" and its prefix "spike" pertains to the shape of the plant. Nard has a long history of romantic meaning. In the Hindu religion, nard is a perfume of love (Atharva Veda VI, 102, 5-6). Cf. Johns Varghese, *Imagery of Love in John*, AnBib 177 (Roma: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2009), 155 n. 395-397.

[42] Cf. Varghese, *The Imagery of Love*, 157.

symbolically comes from within her or represents her whole person.[43] In the text of the Song, the bride is often identified with fragrances, especially those of flowers or plants (Song 2:12; 3:16; 6:11; 7:8,14), "the aroma of which signifies the person open to union."[44] Above all, the distinct "red-white color of the species of nard suggests love and purity."[45] Nard is mentioned again twice in Song 4:13-14.[46] These texts make the marital imagery of the anointing at Bethany more interesting because the bride who brings the nard to the bridegroom-king is also portrayed as an enclosed garden that contains the nard within her.

> A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, fragrant henna with spikenard, spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices (Song 4:12-14).

Nard, as one of the plants from an enclosed garden, suggests that she is the garden and the perfume that she carries is from within her. J. Luzárraga beautifully explicates this interpretation in relation to Mary of Bethany.

> The nard begins to exert its aromatic force only after it has been used on Jesus. Mary, like the Shulamite, appears as the figure of perfume bearer, which emanates from her (Cant 4,13) and in reality, is her very self (Cant 8,14). At the same time the Shulamite as a garden (Cant 4,15) belongs completely to her bridegroom or beloved and he is reserved for her (Cant 4,12; 7,14) and for this, he retakes from her the aroma as from his garden (Cant 4,16-5,1) and he becomes perfumed by her, by her aroma, which in reality is the bride herself (symbolized by the nard), transforming himself into the nard of his bride who had come to him with her nard. In a similar way, the aroma of Mary begins to

[43] Cf. Vargehese, *The Imagery of Love*, 158.

[44] C. Calame, *The Poetics of Eros in Ancient Greece* (New York: Princeton, 1999), 161-164.

[45] Vargehese, *The Imagery of Love*, 158.

[46] In Song 1:12, it is singular and the other two verses render the term in plural. Cf. Balaguer, *Eclesiologia Esponsal*, 354; McWhirter, *The Bridegroom Messiah*, 83; Winsor, *A King Is Bound*, 23.

> be felt starting from the anointing of Jesus. Because it is from Jesus, transformed by the nard, that the nard realizes its symbolic function of releasing its aroma. And the first person on whom this aroma is felt is Mary, who is impregnated with the aroma in the act of drying the feet of Jesus. If Mary with the perfume has brought out her love for Jesus, Jesus with his perfume transfers himself to Mary presenting her as the Shulamite. There is a deep exchange and union between them.[47]

"In the imagery of the Song, the garden is also the bride… [as] eastern wives would also be secluded from the public gaze and kept for their husbands' eyes alone… [it is] regarded as a token both of protection and affection."[48] The garden is enclosed because the bride is exclusive to the bridegroom. "The garden of the Song is, however, like the garden of Eden, infinitely discreet."[49] This "suggests just the 'paradise' …that the lovers provide for each other, the paradise of the first garden in Eden. It also suggests the singlemindedness of love, as the garden is separated from all other earthly locations and the lovers are intent on each other."[50] In this interpretation the garden in Song 4:12-5:1 portrays the consummation of the lovers' marriage.[51] In this vein, Jesus and Mary of Bethany are "a couple embraced in a wonderful Eden breathing delicious aromas."[52] Hence the gardens of the Song

[47] Varghese translated this citation coming from the work of J. Luzárraga. Cf. J. Luzárraga, "El Nardo y La Sulamita en la Uncion de Maryam (Jn 12,1-8)," *Gregorianum* 83 (2002): 693; Varghese, *The Imagery of Love*, 158.

[48] Brooks, *Song of Songs*, 110. See also Jill M. Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron: The Imagery of the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 106.

[49] Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron,* 106.

[50] Winsor, *A King Bound*, 54.

[51] The author brings to the reader's attention the plentiful *double-entendres* and metaphorical use of garden terminology in the Song of Solomon. In Song 6:2 f., the seeking and finding theme could be also paralleled to the seeking of Mary Magdalene of Jesus in the Garden. Cf. G. Lloyd Carr, *Song of Solomon: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 65.

[52] Vargehese, *The Imagery of Love*, 157.

and Eden are embodied in the relationship between the Bridegroom Messiah and the bride from Bethany.

> The garden of the Song and the garden of Eden have often been compared… If the garden of Eden story is about dislocation and exile,… the Song on the other hand simply sings of love, and in so doing, initiates a process of restoration and return… love transforms all things…The garden, which in the Genesis story becomes an inaccessible place from which humanity is exiled, in the Song is rediscovered in the woman; it is in union or communion with her that her lover rediscovers the bliss of which the Eden story spoke. As a result, the world around is also recreated; it too becomes a garden, a garden of love...[53]

"[W]hereas, in the latter, woman is a secondary figure and the initiator of Adam's fall, in the Song, she represents the original garden and is the agent of his provisory return."[54] If Mary of Bethany brought the fragrant nard to the reclining bridegroom-king like the bride in Song 1:12, then, following the interpretations above, Mary the bride is the reason why the bridegroom-king wants to restore the paradise of love. To restore Eden is to undo the fall of the first human couple, and Jesus and Mary of Bethany stand for the new spouses that will re-establish access to the garden. For this, nard, apart from being a symbol of marital love, also signifies death,[55] particularly when mixed with myrrh, a combination that suggests a funeral context.[56] The nard in Mary's hands is not only to perfume the feet of the king-messiah; its true purpose is revealed by the lips of Jesus: "keep it for the day of my burial" (Jn 12:7). "The scent that Mary has so lavishly poured on Jesus' feet will be saved for use as his embalming fluid. It serves as a shocking

[53] Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 106.

[54] Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 109.

[55] Martelli follows some studies on the relation between death and love. She writes about the Mesopotamian lore of the goddess Ishtar and her lover Tammuz. Ishtar goes to the place of death because of her love for Tammuz and this tradition was celebrated every year. Cf. Luna Martelli, "Unzione di Betania: Per La Resurrezione di un Re e di un Dio (Gv. 12, 1-8)," *EIKASMOS* XX (2009): 13.

[56] Cf. Martelli, "Unzione di Betania," 13.

reminder that this royal bridegroom will die."[57] The episode "aptly foreshadows the death of the Messiah as portrayed in John 12:12–36; 18:33–19:22 by alluding to Song 1:12 in this anointing story."[58] While the nard's fragrance stands for marital union, it also speaks of Jesus' death. Hence, anointing Jesus with nard likewise foretells that his death is the bridegroom's demise.[59]

The Passover death of the royal bridegroom, signified by the nard, seems to have a connection with the Edenic Paradise. In the Targum of Song 1:12, nard is one of the spices of Eden, a fragrant perfume that comes from paradise.[60] In Jewish belief, the nard is one of the trees in Paradise and is related to the Tree of Wisdom or Knowledge of Good and Evil (*1 En* 32:1-4).[61] The Apocalypse of Moses recounts that when Adam is cast out from Eden, he asks the angels guarding the entrance of Paradise to let him take with him the fragrant herbs and spices, and they grant his request. He takes crocus and nard, calamus, cinnamon, and other seeds (*ApMos* 29:1-6). When Adam dies, God mandates his angels to get the same fragrant herbs and spices from paradise to prepare his corpse for burial, together with the body of Abel, and both of them are buried inside Eden, at the same spot where God first took the dust to form him (*ApMos* 40:1-7).[62]

As nard is associated with Paradise, consequently, it is also linked with creation. In Jewish tradition, nard is believed to be one of the ten

[57] McWhirter, *The Bridegroom Messiah*, 86. n. 18.

[58] McWhirter, *The Bridegroom Messiah*, 88.

[59] McWhirter explains that "John's association of the reclining Jesus with the Song's king on the couch reaffirms Jesus' royal identity, while Mary's fragrant nard heralds his impending crucifixion. Jesus, the bridegroom-Messiah, is anointed with perfume intended for his burial." McWhirter, *The Bridegroom Messiah*, 88.

[60] Cf. Manns, *Sinfonia Sponsale*, 159.

[61] Cf. Frederic Manns, *L'Evangile de Jean a la Lumiere de Judaisme*, (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1991), 276-277; R. H. Charles and W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Book of Enoch*, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1917), 2.

[62] Cf. Manns, *L'Évangile de Jean à la Lumiére de Judaisme*, 277.

objects created between the two evenings during creation (*TgSong* 4: 13-14; *ApMos* 29:5-6).[63] When Jesus says that Mary "kept" (*tereo*) the nard for the day of his funeral (Jn 12:7), it means that it is conserved even from the time of Creation.[64] The fragrance of the nard in the anointing scene alludes to a restored paradise. Because the symbol of nard does not stop in death, it also speaks of immortality. Nard's characteristic as an "evergreen" plant makes it a symbol of incorruptibility and eternal youth.[65] It becomes a metaphor for longevity and immortality.[66] Thus, the anointing of the Messiah evokes not only the perfume of his burial but also immortality. Mary's keeping the nard, symbol of the perfume of Paradise, signifies immortality in Christ, who by his Passover death and resurrection opens the doors of Paradise.[67] Hence, the nard that is used to anoint Jesus incorporates all its meanings in his person and mission. Like the nard, the messianic bridegroom is a figure of marital love, self-giving death, and immortality. The anointing at Bethany prefigures the nuptial mission of the Bridegroom Messiah. The only way to conquer death is to die because of love. Christ is to restore humanity to immortality in paradise, where the intimate relationship of love between humanity and God is to be relived as in the days of Eden.

The Lovers' Bond

Another feature unmistakably present in both John 12 and Song 1:12 is that both Jesus and the bridegroom of the Song "are the object of a woman's intense loving attention."[68] In John 12:3, the scene seems

[63] Cf. Manns, *L'Évangile de Jean à la Lumiére de Judaisme*, 277.

[64] Cf. Manns, *L'Évangile de Jean à la Lumiére de Judaisme*, 277.

[65] Cf. Martelli, "Unzione di Betania," 13.

[66] This is a Hindu belief, a culture from where the nard originated. Cf. *Atharva-Veda* V, 4.

[67] Cf. Manns, *L'Évangile de Jean à la Lumiére de Judaisme*, 277-278, see note 48 on different themes that the Fourth Gospel takes from Genesis.

[68] Cf. André Villeneuve, *Nuptial Symbolism in Second Temple Writings, the New Testament and Rabbinic Literature* (Boston: Brill, 2016) Villeneuve, *Nuptial Symbolism*, 168.

to evoke the hair of the bride in the Song: "Your head crowns you like Carmel, and your flowing locks are like purple; a king is held captive in the tresses" (Song 7:5[6]). The Song speaks of the bride's locks of hair, the tresses of which bind the bridegroom-king, while Mary manifests her love to Jesus by drying his feet with her hair.[69] Thus, both in John 12:3 and Song 7:5(6), the bridegroom-king is subject to an action involving the bride's hair. Although there is also an occurrence of hair in the Song that portrays not only the beauty of the bride (Song 4:1; 6:5) but also that of the bridegroom (Song 5:11), the emphasis on Mary's hair makes her a personification of the Canticle's bride (Song 4:1; 6:5; 7:6).[70]

Wiping Jesus' feet with her hair presents Mary of Bethany's intimate relationship with Jesus.[71] In the culture of first-century Palestine, the way a woman presented her hair described her status. To maintain their dignity, women typically braided their hair (1 Cor 11:4; 1 Tim 2:9; 1 Pet 3:3). A woman's unbound hair was a scandalous sight (*Ant* 3:270) and could provide grounds for divorce (*mKet* 7:6; *yGitt* 9:5). It could even impede a woman from getting married (*mKet* 2:10).[72] She could, however, let down her hair before a man with whom she had a relationship (*mBabKam* 8:6).[73] "In her wedding procession

[69] Many authors have asserted this possible interpretation. Cf. McWhirter, *The Bridegroom Messiah*, 82; Winsor, *A King is Bound*, 20–22; Balaguer, *Eclesiologia Esponsal*, 355 n. 62; Luis Antonio Schökel, *Simbolos Matrimoniales en la Biblia* (Navarra: EVD, 1999), 54-57.

[70] Cf. Luzarraga, "El nardo y la Sulamita," 695; Renzo Infante, *Lo Sposo e La Sposa: Percorsi di Analisi Simbolica tra Sacra Scrittura e Cristianesimo delle Origini* (Milano: San Paolo, 2004), 184; Luis Alonso Shökel, *I Nomi dell'Amore: Simboli Matrimoniali nella Bibbia*, Trad. Marco Zappella (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1997), 55.

[71] Cf. Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom*, 90-91.

[72] The only scene in the OT close to this imagery is Judith 10:3.

[73] Jeremias relates that "[w]hen the Jewess of Jerusalem left her house, her face was hidden by an arrangement of two head veils, a head-band on the forehead with bands to the chin, and a hairnet with ribbons arid knots, so that her features could not be recognized." Cf. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 359. See also B. Witherington

was a bride seen with her head uncovered, and only if she were a virgin, not a widow" (*mKet* 2:1).[74] A woman worthy of respect would be conscious of the fact that only "her husband had the right" to see her hair.[75] In the strict implementation of this cultural convention, a woman never uncovered her hair in public because this was done only in the intimacy of the matrimonial chamber.[76] Mary's gesture speaks of the nuptial character that she assumes in herself. In this context, the highly unusual gesture of Mary drying the feet of Jesus with her hair has only one comprehensible meaning, it is a manifestation of a spousal relationship.[77]

The symbolism of the feet also suggests marital imagery. Looking at the OT, feet are often used as a metaphor for the action of the person (Gen 30:30; Ps 119:101; Pro 1:15-16; Sir 6: 24,36). Moreover, the feet also allude to the genitals (Ex 4:25; Is 6:2; 7:20) and are often mentioned in a nuptial context (Ruth 3:4,7-8,14).[78] Similarly, "washing the feet" bears marital symbolism (Song 5:3; 1 Sam 25:41; 2 Sam 11:18). In Jewish Literature, the text of Joseph and Aseneth is perhaps the closest to the marital scene in John 12. Aseneth invited Joseph to her house and while he was sitting down, she brought water and washed his feet. This later led to their marriage (*JAA* 20:1-5). Thus, the choice of the "anointing of the feet" under the light of the ancient customs shows the intimate union between Jesus and Mary of Bethany.

The feet also stand for the whole of the person (Jn 13:8-10). The anointing of the feet of Jesus is thus understood as the anointing of his whole person. Not only does Mary anoint Jesus with perfume but

---

III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A Study of Jesus' Attitudes to Women and their Roles as Reflected in His Earthly Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 113. n. 209.

[74] Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 360.

[75] Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 360.

[76] Cf. Balaguer, *Eclesiologia Esponsal*, 365.

[77] Cf. Balaguer, *Eclesiologia Esponsal*, 357.

[78] Cf. Infante, *Lo Sposo e La Sposa*, 182.

she also establishes a bond with him through her hair. This seems to convey that Jesus in his wholeness is being bound to a woman by her hair. The term used for being captive or bound in the LXX of Song 7:5(6) is "*dedemenos*" (δεδεμένος), a perfect passive participle of the verb "*deo*" (δέω). If "*deo*" is used in a spousal context, it refers to the bond of mutual commitment to the marriage vow (Rom 7:2).[79] Going to his nuptial mission, Jesus the Royal Messiah is "literally bound."[80] "The Jewish guards seized Jesus and bound him" (Jn 18:12), "Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest" (Jn 18:24),[81] and the body of Jesus is bound with burial cloths along with the spices (Jn 19:40).[82] Thus, Jesus' being bound to Mary's hair with the spices of nard prefigures his Passover, the "hour" of giving himself for his own.

The spousal context of the episode "sees Mary as the betrothed/bride of Jesus, and the meal that he shares with her and her family at Bethany as a betrothal meal in preparation for his subsequent passion and death as his messianic wedding."[83] The gesture of anointing is a "prophetic action," the meaning of which lies beyond the act itself and has a "theological purpose."[84] Likewise, "it is conceivable that the anointing could have been understood as a romantic action."[85] However, biblical scholars agree on the close relationship between the "washing of the feet" and the "anointing of the feet." These actions express that Christ is laying down his own life for the bride. The drying of his feet with her hair, by which the bridegroom becomes bound

[79] The term used in the Epistles to the Romans is "*dedetai*", the perfect passive indicative of "*deo*". Cf. *Friberg, s.v.* "δέω," 107.

[80] Cf. Winsor, *A King is Bound*, 22.

[81] In John 18:12, the term used is "*edesan*" (ἔδησαν) and in 18:24 we find "*dedemenon*" (δεδεμένον), the perfect passive participle accusative form of "*deo*" (δέω).

[82] The term used is "*edesan*", the aorist active indicative form of "deo" (δέω). Cf. *Friberg, s.v.* "δέω," 107.

[83] Villeneuve, *Nuptial Symbolism*, 172.

[84] Brown, *John*, 1: 454.

[85] Villeneuve, *Nuptial Symbolism*, 171.

to the bride, expresses that Jesus lets himself be tied up out of love for "his own." Whatever romance exists in this text, it is not a merely human love story but one that is divine.

The Fragrance of the Bridegroom

Another characteristic of the anointing in Bethany associated with the Song of Solomon is the fragrance of the perfume "*osme murou*" (ὀσμὴ μύρου) that fills the house.[86] In the LXX, the fragrance "*osmē*" (ὀσμὴ) appears 72 times. The term is used to signify a bad odor, and one example is the stench of death (Is 34:3), or a smell produced by a repugnant sickness (2 Mac 9:9). But the word also connotes a pleasing odor, like the sacrifices acceptable to the Lord. The NT also receives this meaning 6 times, as a pleasing odor is mentioned in reference to the liturgical aspect of offerings worthy of the Lord.[87] Moreover, fragrance or odor (*osme*) also represents the person, his breath, or his clothes.[88] In Genesis 27:27, the smell of Esau's clothing deceived the already blind Isaac to give the blessing to Jacob. Also, in the Song of Solomon, the fragrance that comes from the bride's dress is described as an aroma stronger and more intense than all the fragrances and perfumes of Lebanon put together (Song 4:10-11). In Song 7:9, the fragrance of the bride's breath is compared to that of freshly harvested fruits. Such an association reaches a point where the presence of the odor is indistinguishable from the bride.[89] Fragrant perfume also identifies the bridegroom of the Song. "Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfume poured out. No wonder the young women love you!" (Song 1:3). The name of the bridegroom is

[86] For fragrances of various perfumes in the Song of Solomon see Song 1:3–4; 2:13; 4:10–11; 7:9,14. Cf. Villeneuve, *Nuptial Symbolism*, 168.

[87] Cf. Barth, *Ephesians,* 2: 559.

[88] Cf. Infante, *Lo Sposo e La Sposa*, 187.

[89] Cf. Winsor, *A King is Bound*, 52-53.

an aroma that flows out,[90] which means that his person releases this odor, indistinguishable from who he is. Thus, the perfume and the fragrances are inseparable from the identity of the person.

> The personal aspect of the fragrance is important, as a sign of a presence and recognition of the beloved person that is known through his/her perfume, it is an expression of the personal intimacy towards the one to whom it is directed. This relationship between the perfume and the person is very much underlined in the Song of Songs, in which the person as such is characterized by the perfume. The bride is for the bridegroom as also his myrrh and its balsam (Song 5:1), while the bridegroom is for the bride like a bag of myrrh or a cluster of henna (Song 1:13-14). The perfumes permeate one another up to the point that they cannot be distinguished from one another.[91]

Like the bridegroom and his fragrance, the nard also represents the bride's whole person (Song 1:12; 4:13-14). As Mary's perfume stands for her whole being, it is likewise not applied only to a part of Jesus' body but to the totality of his being, since the feet stand for the entire person (John 13:10). Even in the Song, the bridegroom and the bride personify the perfume they share as an expression of the love between them (Song 1:3,12; 4:11; 7:8). André Villeneuve concludes that "[t]he Johannine text also seems to echo Cant 1:3 with its description of the beloved's name as a poured ointment and the love of the maidens for him."[92] "[W]hen Mary of Bethany goes with her nard and with it anoints Jesus, one could see it as a union of both of them, especially in the perfume and the aroma that remains therein."[93]Mary's wiping dry the feet of Jesus leaves the "king bound in the tresses" (Song 7:6).

---

[90] In Hebrew, there is a very close assonance between perfume "*shemen*" (שֶׁמֶן) and name "*shem*" (שֵׁם). Cf. Infante, *Lo Sposo e La Sposa*, 188 n. 219.

[91] The translation is mine. Balaguer, *Eclesiologia Esponsal*, 356.

[92] Villeneuve, *Nuptial Symbolism*, 168.

[93] Translated by Varghese from Luzárraga. Cf. Luzárraga, "El Nardo y La Sulamita," 693; Vargehese, *The Imagery of Love*, 158.

And by drying Jesus' feet with her hair**,** she herself is anointed, not only with the perfume of the nard but with the fragrance of Christ.[94]

> The effect of this is that part of the ointment which had been poured on the feet of Jesus gets attached to the hair of Mary. Thus, the hair of Mary now partakes of the perfume from the feet. She is enclosed with its perfume. From this moment the perfume used on Jesus becomes the perfume of Mary.[95]

"Mary anoints Jesus with the best of what she had. Jesus is surrounded or enclosed with the abundance of the nard and returns the perfume that is now transformed. Thus, Mary herself participates in the perfume" of Jesus.[96] Mary's hair becomes pervaded by the same fragrance of the perfume that the Lord has; and her hair, which is the crowning pride of a woman, is enriched by this bouquet that she shares with him. Mary now wears the perfume of the Bridegroom Messiah; he is bound to her and she to him.[97] She is now indistinguishable from Christ as the perfume creates a symbolic nuptial unity between the messianic bridegroom and the bride. The nuptial union effected by the fragrant perfume will be fulfilled on the Passover of Jesus, for the nard is conserved for this very hour.[98] The nard on the feet of Jesus will be applied to his whole body as an embalming fluid.[99] The body of Jesus will be prepared with an enormous quantity of fragrances, that seem

---

[94] Cf. Infante, *Lo Sposo e La Sposa*, 192 n. 234.

[95] Varghese, *The Imagery of Love*, 157.

[96] Varghese, *The Imagery of Love*, 158.

[97] With this woman's action, the bridegroom is already bound with his own. Cf. Secundino Castro Sanchez, *Evangelio de Juan: Comprension Exegetico-Existencial* (Madrid: Desclée De Brouwer, 2001), 276 n. 16; Juan Mateos y Juan Barreto, *El Evangelio de Juan* (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1979), 540.

[98] Cf. Balaguer, *Eclesiologia Esponsal*, 356.

[99] McWhirter says that scholars consider this as a royal anointing but her view is that the royal aspect is "Jesus' role as the king on the couch." McWhirter, *The Bridegroom Messiah*, 86; See also Brown, *John*, 1: 454; Lindars, *John*, 414; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*: *An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 341.

no longer the funeral bath of a corpse, but rather the preparation of a bridegroom before entering his "matrimonial bed."[100]

Studies also connect the fragrance of the perfume "*osme murou*" of John 12:3 with the gloomy oracle of Jeremiah 25:10 about the demise of the bridegroom. The LXX version changes the "sound of millstones" in the Masoretic text to "fragrance/scent of ointment/perfume:"

> And I will destroy from among them the voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the fragrance/scent of perfume/ointment (ὀσμὴν μύρου), and the light of a candle (Jer 25:10 LXX).

Villeneuve comments on the interrelation of LXX variant of Jeremiah 25:10 to the Fourth Gospel and infers:

> As we have seen, this is one of the prophet's oracles about the voice of the bridegroom and the bride that is possibly alluded to in John 3:29. Could John's ὀσμὴ μύρου be an allusion to Jeremiah's ὀσμὴ μύρου accompanying the voices of the bridegroom and bride? Second, the word ὀσμή in the LXX usually refers to the pleasing odor of a sacrifice, and only four times does it refer to the fragrance of perfume (with three of these four references found in Cant 1:3–4 and Jer 25:10). Could the evangelist be hinting at the impending sacrificial death of Jesus by emphasizing the pleasing ὀσμή of the sacrifice filling the house? This seems all the more likely since the narrative specifically tells us that Mary's anointing is oriented towards Jesus' death: The scene takes place six days before the Passover on which he would die (Jn 12:1), and Jesus himself defends the woman's action by announcing that she has kept this for the day of my burial (Jn 12:7).[101]

The modification of Jeremiah 25:10 to "fragrant perfume" in the LXX, associated with John 12:3, in all likelihood alludes to the reversal of the doom announced by the prophet, and the fragrance of the perfume symbolizes the return of the wedding feast restored by the messianic bridegroom: "the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume."[102] As John the Baptist hears again the "voice of the

[100] Cf. Balaguer, *Eclesiologia Esponsal*, 351-352.

[101] Villeneuve, *Nuptial Symbolism*, 170.

[102] Cf. Infante, *Lo Sposo e La Sposa*, 188.

bridegroom" (Jn 3:29), the smell of the "fragrance of the perfume" that comes from the bride and the bridegroom likewise return (Song 1:3,12; 4:13-14).[103] As the baptizer is filled "*peplerotai*" (πεπλήρωται) with joy upon hearing the voice of the Bridegroom, the house[104] of Bethany is also filled "*eplerote*" (ἐπληρώθη) with the presence and fragrance of the bridegroom.[105] The miserable atmosphere of the house following the death of Lazarus (Jn 11:39) is transformed by Mary's devoted action, which fills the house with fragrance.[106] The house is no longer filled with the unpleasant smell of the deceased but with the fragrance of the perfume of Mary and Christ.

The perfume in the hair of Mary (Ruth 3:3; 2 Sam 14:2; Ps 23:5; 45:7) signifies the Jewish anointing of "the hair profusely with fragrant ointments, especially in seasons of rejoicing" (Mt 6:17; Lk 7:46).[107] The perfume of the nard in John 12 does not only project Christ's death, but more significantly, the joyous event of his resurrection. That is why Jesus requested this perfume to be conserved (Jn 12:7), and brought out once again for another meeting with a woman in the garden of the resurrection (Jn 19:41; 20:14-16). It is possible that John 12:3 is likening the perfume, which comes from the body of Jesus, to the pleasing odor of his sacrifice (Phil 4:18; Eph 5:2).[108] Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet was to prepare him for the "Passover hour." In this manner, Mary represents the bride of Christ when she binds

[103] Cf. Mateos-Barreto, *Juan*, 540; Infante, *Lo Sposo e La Sposa*, 188.

[104] The term "house" (*bayit-oikos*) indicates the material house, but also signifies figuratively the family, the descendants, and even the body. This may mean that the whole community of faith is filled with the love of the Bridegroom Messiah, who is like a fragrant perfume (Psa 133:1-3; John 13:34-35; Acts 2:44-45). Cf Infante, *Lo Sposo e La Sposa*, 186; Mateos-Barreto, *Juan*, 540.

[105] Cf. Infante, *Lo Sposo e La Sposa*, 188.

[106] Cf. Dorothy A. Lee, *Symbolic Narratives: The Interplay of Form and Meaning* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 222 n. 2.

[107] Cf. *EBD*, *s.v.* "Hair."

[108] Cf. Infante, *Lo Sposo e La Sposa*, 187.

her whole being to Jesus, the sacrificial lamb, but also anticipates the "hour" when this love offered for the bride becomes the glorification of the bridegroom.[109]

The Passover sacrifice indicates that Jesus needs to die like a grain of wheat falling to the ground (Jn 12:24) to fill the house of God with children born not of human seed (Jn 1:11).[110] Jesus' body falls to the ground in his burial so that the house will be filled with his perfume. The perfume that is not contained merely in his physical body, but his body that has been prepared by those who have faith in him, that is, the ecclesial bride.[111] Thus, filling the house with this pleasing scent means that the Passover death and resurrection of Jesus establish the house community (Jn 2:19-21; 1 Pt 2:5) of those who have faith and will believe in him.[112] Therefore, the nuptial and Passover context of the anointing presents Mary as the betrothed bride representing the people who believe and will have faith in Jesus. In the Passover death and resurrection of Jesus as the Bridegroom Messiah, he reopens the access to the perfume of Paradise. His anointed body on earth is associated with the glory of his divinity and the immortality alluded to by the perfume of the nard, which reaches back as far as the primal Eden and the Tree of Life.[113]

Summary

This study has brought to light the rich nuptial symbolism woven throughout the Gospel of John, asserting that the spousal theme is not peripheral but one of the central threads to its theological vision.

---

[109] Cf. Balaguer, *Eclesiologia Esponsal*, 371.

[110] Jesus is the *aner-erchomenos* who will generate the children of God not by human flesh. Cf. Painter, *The Bridegroom's Perilous Bride*, 233 n. 546; Cf. Schökel, *Simbolos Matrimoniales*, 119.

[111] Cf. Manns, *L'Évangile de Jean à la Lumiére de Judaisme*, 278.

[112] Cf. Infante, *Lo Sposo e La Sposa*, 186.

[113] Cf. Manns, *L'Évangile de Jean à la Lumiére de Judaisme*, 278.

Mary of Bethany's anointing of Jesus' feet stands as a climactic moment in this spousal narrative—a deeply evocative act that echoes ancient conjugal actions and the romantic language of the Song of Songs. Her posture at the feet of Jesus, her lavish offering of fragrant oil, and her intimate touch all speak the language of covenantal love, positioning her as the ecclesial bride who recognizes and honors the Bridegroom in the moment before his sacrificial glorification. This act prefigures the bridal Church's participation in Christ's death and resurrection, marking the Passover hour as a nuptial event in which divine love is consummated.

The contribution of this research lies in its interdisciplinary approach—blending literary, historical, and theological analysis—to foreground the nuptial theme as a key to Johannine hermeneutics. By highlighting Mary of Bethany's role within this framework, the study expands existing scholarship and offers a compelling vision of the Gospel as a love story between the Messianic Bridegroom and his Ecclesial Bride. It affirms that the Johannine narrative is not only a proclamation of salvation but an invitation to intimate communion in faith—a restored Eden, the paradise of love where the Bridegroom and bride are bound together in eternal covenant.

About the Author. **Fr. Adonis G. Saclolo** is a Filipino Catholic priest ordained in 2010 for the Archdiocese of Manila. He currently serves as Formator and Prefect of Studies at the Redemptoris Mater Missionary Seminary of Manila. He completed his philosophical studies at Christ the King Mission Seminary and earned his Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology from the University of Santo Tomas. He later pursued advanced theological formation at the Loyola School of Theology, where he obtained both his Licentiate and Doctorate in Biblical Theology. Fr. Saclolo teaches Sacred Scripture in San Carlos Seminary Graduate School of Theology, Don Bosco School of Theology, and Loyola School of Theology. He also serves as the Archdiocesan Minister for the Ministry on Biblical Apostolate of the Archdiocese of Manila (RCAM). As part of this ministry, he anchors the radio program *Ang Bibliya Ngayon* on Veritas 846.

Landas 37:2 (2025) 45–76

THE STATE OF GLOBAL AND AFRICAN ECOLOGY

Peter Knox, SJ

Abstract. This article recounts the growth of concern for the environment in the latter half of the 20th Century, and its entry into Catholic magisterial theology. It expands on the ecological theory of planetary boundaries, and identifies how the theory surfaces in Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*. Based upon solid contemporary science, the encyclical is well founded to outline an appropriate and compassionate moral theology of care for creation. The article cites multiple instances where African people are at the nexus of environmental and social crises, focusing on how contemporary ecological factors affect women in particular. Environmental crises should not induce a state of eco-anxiety, but, by following Pope Francis' theological ecology, we are empowered as hope-filled Christians to care for our common home.

Keywords: *Laudato Si'*; Africa; Planetary Boundaries; ecology; climate change

A Cause for Growing Concern

When Pope Francis published the encyclical *Laudato Si'*: *On Care for Our Common Home*, on Pentecost Day, 2015, many Christians responded that he was taking the church in

new directions and focusing attention on a matter that is not of high priority. In fact, as he demonstrates convincingly in the first chapter of the encyclical, care for the environment has a venerable tradition in the Christian practice. The encyclical makes explicit something that has been present for many generations, and solidifies the status of environmental care as one of the pillars of Catholic Social Teaching. The urgency of the matter has become more evident in recent years.

In 1967, Lynn White published his seminal article identifying Christian anthropocentrism as the root cause of the current "ecologic crisis."[1] His argument was that over the centuries, Christians had taken seriously the injunction of Genesis 1:28f[2] to subdue the earth, and this has led to the Western dogma of human transcendence and mastery over all that is not human. White maintains that: "[w]e will continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence except to serve man."[3] Whether White is entirely correct or not is not the focus of this chapter.[4] What is important is that it demonstrates, already fifty-five years ago, there was a growing realization that things were going very badly for the natural world.

Thus, the perception of a pending global catastrophe is not new. Since the 1960's there has been concern about the state of global ecology. I remember reading three fascinating books in the

[1] Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (10 March 1967).

[2] "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it; be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all the living creatures that move on the earth."

[3] White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," 1207.

[4] In partial agreement with White, Pope Francis identifies human activity—although not specifically Christian activity—as the cause of the ecological crisis. Chapter 3 of his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*: On Care for Our Common Home is entitled "The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis." Here Francis names the globalized technocratic paradigm as the chief culprit, and locates the paradigm in a "modern anthropocentrism" which ignores the dignity or autonomy of creation.

LIFE Sciences library[5]—and being aware, as a child, of the fragility of our planet. In this article, we examine some of the parameters of the state of the global ecology, for insight into the "greatest existential threat of our time."[6] This will illustrate why Francis and his immediate predecessors have been so vocal on matters concerning the environment. A suffering planet inevitably means that the people living on that planet are also suffering. And it is the poorest of these people who suffer most.

In 1972, the "Club of Rome" published the insightful *Limits to Growth*. The book explores the obvious fact that the planet has limited dimensions and resources. Earth cannot continue to support indefinitely growing populations or economies. In particular, five factors limit growth: "population increase, agricultural production, nonrenewable resource depletion, industrial output, and pollution generation." Using sophisticated (at the time) computer modeling, the authors demonstrate that the human population can reach and maintain a sustainable level, with an equilibrium between consumption and the restoration of the earth's resources.[7] In certain quarters, the book was not well received: capitalism is prefaced upon unlimited growth and expansion of markets and production. Certain Catholics considered the implication that the human population should be limited to be against Church teaching.[8]

---

[5] Cf. Arthur Beiser, *The Earth* (New York: Time–Life Books, 1969); Leonard Engel, *The Sea* (New York: Time–Life Books, 1968); and A. Starker Leopold, *The Desert* (New York: Time-Life Books).

[6] Cf. The Elders, "Five Reasons Climate Change Is the Greatest Existential Threat of Our Time," 5 October 2018, accessed 3 September 2024, https://www.theelders.org/news/five-reasons-climate-change-greatest-existential-threat-our-time.

[7] See Donella H. Meadows et al., *The Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe Books, 1972), http://www.donellameadows.org/the-limits-to-growth-now-available-to-read-online/.

[8] However, the Church teaches responsible parenthood and natural family planning.

In Stockholm in the same year 1972, the United Nations held the first-ever Conference on the Human Environment. The Stockholm Declaration "placed environmental issues at the forefront of international concerns and marked the start of the dialogue between industrialized and developing countries on the link between economic growth, the pollution of the air, water and oceans and the well-being of people around the world."[9] While more industrialized nations were calling for stringent measures to protect the environment, a group of 77 developing nations and China did not want their prospects for development to be jeopardized by more compelling environmental concerns. Since the Stockholm Conference, there has been more or less the same dynamic. Less-industrialized countries want to "catch up," while the more-industrialized countries are pointing out the ecological hazards of their own developmental paths and the immeasurable destruction that their trajectories have caused to the natural environment.

Since Stockholm, the United Nations has held conferences which have focused global attention on, and resulted in protocols or resolutions regarding the following environmental issues: biological diversity, ozone depletion, nuclear energy, persistent organic pollutants, the seas, climate change, sustainable development, hazardous waste, international trade in endangered species, watercourses, biosafety, pesticides, etc. Likewise, at the level of the African Union, there are conventions or protocols on plant safety, conservation of nature and natural resources, development, hazardous waste, nuclear weapons, human and people's rights, and separate protocols on the rights of women, children, older people, and people with disabilities.[10] Similar sets of regulations exist in every continental grouping, indicating the great and growing concern for ecologies and the flourishing of people within their environment.

[9] Cf. United Nations, "United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, 5–16 June 1972, Stockholm," accessed 22 February 2024, https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/stockholm1972.

[10] Cf. African Union, "OAU/AU Treaties, Conventions, Protocols & Charters," AU, 2023, accessed 27 February 2024, https://au.int/treaties.

In 1987, the UN World Commission on Environment and Development published its famous report *Our Common Future,* which recognized multiple threats to the environment and proposed new trajectories for sustainable development, which "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."[11] *Our Common Future* recognizes the paradox that "Environmental degradation, first seen as mainly a problem of the rich nations and a side effect of industrial wealth, has become a survival issue for developing nations."[12] This article will examine some of the most pressing dimensions of this "survival issue" of environmental degradation as they concern both the wealthy and the developing nations, and in particular, how they apply in Africa.

Planetary Boundaries

Research into the state of global ecology is an ongoing enterprise. There is no definitive statement on the deteriorating conditions of the planet. For example, between 2013 and 2019, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) published regular iterations of its *Frontiers* reports, which highlighted emerging issues of environmental concern. Over the years, these have dealt with synthetic biology, ecological connectivity, permafrost peatlands, nitrogen fixing, maladaptation to climate change (in the 2018-2019 edition)[13] the financial sector, zoonoses, microplastics, unavoidable impacts of climate change on ecosystems, accumulation of toxins in crops, the

[11] *United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future* (Oslo: UN, 1987), 37. http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf. This document is sometimes known as the Brundtland Report, after its chairperson, Gro Harlem Brundtland.

[12] *United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future*, 37.

[13] *United Nations Environment Programme*, Frontiers 2018/19: *Emerging Issues of Environmental Concern* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2019).

illegal trade in live animals (in the 2016 edition),[14] etc. These emerging issues have global significance. Indeed, in 2019, one zoonosis (the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2) transferred from an unidentified species to human hosts which had no resistance to this virus, causing the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic caused an estimated 3 million 'excess deaths.'[15] Each one of the UNEP-identified issues warrants full understanding and attention if we are to protect our common home for both present and future generations.

In addition to the regular bulletins from the UNEP, the most comprehensive overarching theoretical approach to the maladies of our planet was first announced in 2009, initially quantified in 2015, and further elaborated in 2023. "Planetary Boundary Theory" first came to world attention with the simultaneous publication in the journals *Ecology and Society* and *Nature* in September 2009, by a team of prominent international geoscientists under the leadership of Johan Rockström of the Stockholm Resilience Centre.[16] The theory asserts that during the geological epoch known as the Holocene,[17] specific conditions of temperature, humidity, oxygen concentration, and other factors have prevailed, which have enabled human life to flourish. Rockström et al. identify nine mutually-interactive physical planetary preconditions necessary for humans to survive (as biological organisms).

---

[14] United Nations Environment Programme, Frontiers 2016 Report: Emerging Issues of Environmental Concern (Nairobi: UNEP Division of Early Warning and Assessment, 2016).

[15] Cf. World Health Organization, "The True Death Toll of COVID-19: Estimating Global Excess Mortality," *WHO*, accessed 25 February 2024, https://www.who.int/data/stories/the-true-death-toll-of-covid-19-estimating-global-excess-mortality.

[16] Cf. Johan Rockström et al., "Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity," *Ecology and Society* 14, no. 2 (2009), accessed 22 February 2024, http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss2/art32/. See also Johan Rockström et al., "A Safe Operating Space for Humanity," *Nature* 461 (24 September 2009), accessed 22 February 2024, http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v461/n7263/full/461472a.html.

[17] This refers to the last 11,700 years since the last major 'ice age.'

There is general agreement among scientists that the world has now entered the third epoch of the Quaternary Period—the Anthropocene—in which it is possible to see the effects of human beings on the geology of our planet. In particular, since the 1950s' "great expansion", anthropogenic changes to the earth's surface area, atmosphere, nutrient cycling, oceans, and climate, etc., have intensified.[18] Planetary boundary theory explores how the Anthropocene is, in fact, less conducive to human existence than its predecessor epoch, the Holocene.

The original 2009 version of the theory posited the existence of planetary boundaries and their interaction, making rough estimates about the state of each. By 2009, three of the boundaries had already been overstepped. By 2015, many scientists around the world had researched the nine parameters and proposed numerical levels for the danger levels and thresholds beyond which the "Earth System" becomes inhospitable to human life. In the 2023 version of the research, scientists demonstrated that six of the nine boundaries had already been transgressed due to unprecedented human disruption of the Earth's systems.[19] They acknowledge that there are still significant numerical uncertainties, and that the theory is evolving as the interactions between the various parameters are better understood:

> The distinction between zones of 'increasing' and 'high' risk cannot be sharply defined. There is accumulating evidence that the current level of boundary transgression has already taken the Earth system beyond a 'safe' zone. However, we still lack a comprehensive, integrated theory, backed by observations and modeling studies, that can identify when a transition from a rising level of risk to one with very high and dangerous risks of losing a Holocene-like Earth system state may occur.[20]

---

[18] John P. Rafferty, "Anthropocene Epoch," *Britannica.com*, Feb 2024, accessed 25 February 2024, https://www.britannica.com/science/Anthropocene-Epoch.

[19] Katherine Richardson et al., "Earth Beyond Six of Nine Planetary Boundaries," *Science Advances* 9, no. 37 (13 September 2023), accessed 22 February 2024, https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.adh2458.

[20] Richardson et al., "Earth Beyond Six of Nine Planetary Boundaries," 3 of 16.

The nine planetary boundaries (in the 2023 version of the research) are:

- Stratospheric ozone depletion
- Atmospheric aerosol loading
- Ocean acidification
- Biogeochemical flows – which include the nitrogen and phosphorus cycles
- Freshwater change – divided for the first time between "green" and "blue" water
- Land system changes, which include deforestation, wetland depletion, and desertification
- Biosphere integrity – which references both functional and genetic biodiversity
- Climate change – incorporating CO_2 concentration and radiative forcing
- Novel entities – such as microplastics, organic pollutants, radioactive waste, etc.

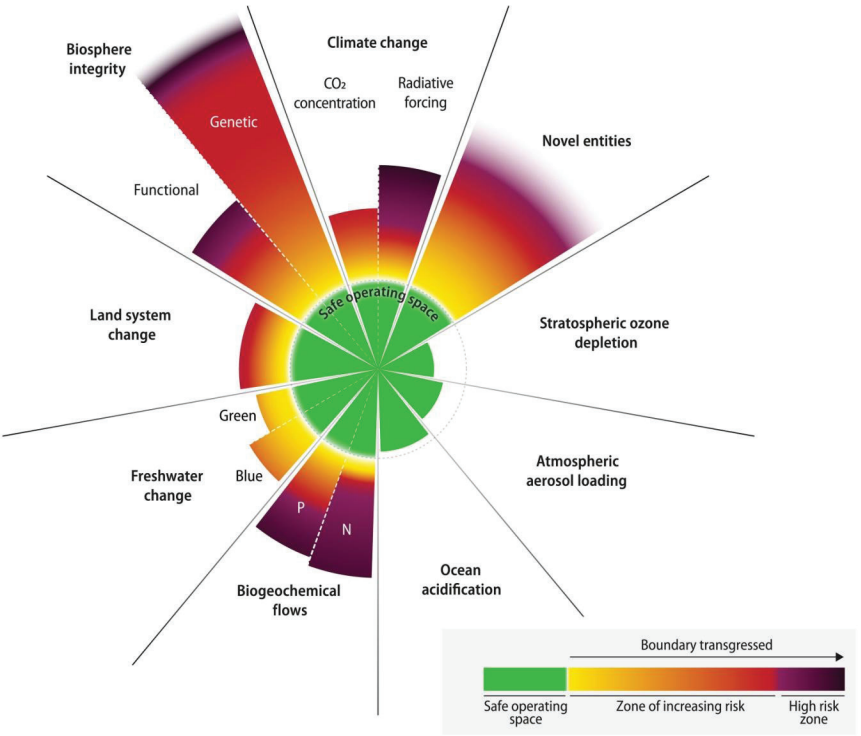


Fig. 1: Planetary boundaries in 2023 from Richardson, Steffen et al.

To the layperson, part of the appeal of the planetary boundary theory is that it can be represented in one simple infographic, which requires minimal knowledge of mathematics or science (Fig. 1). The infographic presents the current situation of the nine planetary boundaries and how near or how far the Earth is to overstepping the thresholds for human survival. The infographic indicates for each parameter whether the world is in a safe operating space, a zone of increasing risk, or a zone of high risk. From the infographic for the 2023 research, it can clearly be seen that of the list of nine parameters, the world is still in a safe operating space for the first three. However, we are in zones of increasing risk, or in high-risk zones, for the other six of the nine planetary boundaries. Of greatest concern are the indicators for climate change, biosphere integrity, and biogeochemical flows. One thing that is immediately clear from the graphic is that climate change is not the only threat to the well-being of planetary life. The collapse

of biodiversity (genetic biosphere integrity) and the disturbance of the phosphorus and nitrogen cycles are two other causes for great concern.

To add to the complexity, it is not yet possible to predict what effect the transgression of one boundary will have on the situation regarding the other boundaries:

> Quantifying interactions between boundaries remains a major challenge. However, some progress has been made since the last framework update. Recent studies […] have shown that additional or more extensive transgression of one planetary boundary can change risk gradients for other boundaries. For example, there is increasing evidence to suggest that transgressing either the climate change or biosphere integrity planetary boundary can potentially lead to more steeply increasing risk in the other.[21]

We realise from the planetary boundary theory that the threats facing humanity are global. No ecological phenomenon follows national or political borders. For example, the whole world is experiencing unprecedented weather events due to climate disturbance, which may ultimately have been caused by patterns of production and consumption in industrialized countries. However, the threats may cause stronger or weaker local manifestations of the transgression of boundaries. Although global climate change is so complicated with so many factors coming into play, the retention of heat (known as positive radiative forcing) of the planet is *felt* more acutely by populations around the tropics, on which solar radiation falls more directly. Thus, tropical areas may be subject to longer and more intense periods of drought. On the other hand, global climate change is causing catastrophic melting of the permafrost, ice, and glaciers in the Arctic and Antarctic Circles. This ice turning to water is flowing into the oceans, ultimately causing the sea levels to rise. This effect is obviously observed more in coastal areas, and threatens low-lying towns and settlements. Warmer ocean water means more evaporation, with the formation of denser clouds where these clouds precipitate, the hail, rain or snowfall might be heavier than many areas have been accustomed to during the previous millennia of a more stable climate.

[21] Richardson et al., "Earth Beyond Six of Nine Planetary Boundaries," 3 of 16.

Climate Change

In addition to the localized experiences of climate change, the transgressions of several of the boundaries have feedback loops, which intensify the actual transgression. For example, as the Arctic permafrost melts, methane (CH_4),[22] which has been sequestered in the frozen permafrost for thousands of years, is released into the atmosphere. The methane causes even more intense global climate change.

The major cause of so-called 'greenhouse gases' (GHGs) is the combustion of fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas since the European Industrial Revolution of the 1750's. The burning has released carbon dioxide (CO_2) into the atmosphere on a scale previously unseen in human history. Up till the early 20th Century, the concentration of atmospheric CO_2 was stable at around 280 parts per million (ppm). Since 1900, the concentration has risen to approximately 424 ppm as measured in one instance in Hawaii in May 2023.[23] Like a good warm blanket, CO_2 and other GHGs that have been released over the two hundred and sixty years since the start of the industrial revolution, have been accumulating in the atmosphere, trapping the radiative heat of the earth. This has caused the planet's temperature to gradually increase by more than 1.5°C above the levels that prevailed before the industrial age.

The fossil fuels, which have sequestered carbon from decomposing vegetation and animal matter for millions of years, have been used for locomotion, industry, and heating. The burning of these fossilized chemicals simply re-releases all of that carbon into the Earth's

[22] Methane (CH_4), produced by the rotting of organic matter, is a much stronger greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide (CO_2), which is produced mainly by the combustion of organic matter.

[23] This refers to the estimated CO_2 concentration in May 2023. It is no coincidence that 2024 has been the hottest year in recorded history. Cf. World Meteorological Organization. "WMO Confirms 2024 as Warmest Year on Record at about 1.55°C Above Pre-Industrial Level," 10 January 2025, accessed 3 February 2025, https://wmo.int/news/media-centre/wmo-confirms-2024-warmest-year-record-about-155degc-above-pre-industrial-level.

atmosphere as CO_2. Perhaps the worst things that the Industrial Revolution has given the world are the internal combustion engines, which have proliferated worldwide in all kinds of motor transport and consistently spew out climate-changing CO_2. To try to minimize climate change, the world needs to transit away from heavily polluting fuels to "cleaner" renewable sources of energy from the wind, the sun, waves, hydroelectricity, etc. In a race against time, the technology to achieve this is being improved day by day. But there are so many sunken costs already in the fossil-fuel value chain that some petrochemical companies and countries are reluctant to transition from their oil-based economies. Against the tide of history and to the detriment of the global climate, some countries continue to permit multinational companies to prospect for and exploit new oil fields.[24]

But the combustion of fossil fuels is not the only source of GHGs. It is estimated that approximately "25-30% of total GHG emissions are attributable to the global food system. These are from agriculture and land use, storage, transport, packaging, processing, retail, and consumption."[25] The amount of CH_4 produced in the growing of rice in paddies is becoming such a serious concern that new ways are being explored for the cultivation of the food-crop that feeds billions of

[24] In one of the ironies of history, countries in Eastern Africa are demanding climate-change compensation, while at the same time developing new oilfields and the infamous heated East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP).

[25] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Special Report on Climate Change, Desertification, Land Degradation, Sustainable Land Management, Food Security, and Greenhouse Gas Fluxes in Terrestrial Ecosystems* (Geneva: IPCC, 2019), chap. 5, "Food Security," https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/.

people.[26] On the meat-side of our diet, ruminants[27] burp out so much CH_4 , that industrial-scale farming, with over 1 billion cattle, makes a significant contribution to global climate change.[28]

In addition, modern industrial-scale agriculture depends heavily on the use of nitrate and phosphate fertilizer inputs.

Indeed, at the United Nations General Assembly on 26 October 2021, the Secretary General António Guterres said concerning climate change:

> Rarely have we faced a crisis like this one. A truly existential crisis that if not addressed threatens not only us but succeeding generations. There is one path forward: A 1.5 degree future is the only livable future for humanity. And I urge leaders to get on with the job before it is too late.[29]

---

[26] It is estimated that the anaerobic decay of organic material in rice paddies contributes about "40 million tonnes of methane, or 8% of global anthropogenic emissions, per year." Cf. Polina Checerina, "Using Climate-Smart Rice to Reduce Methane Emissions from Agriculture," Climate & Clean Air Coalition to Reduce Short-Lived Climate Pollutants, 1 December 2022, accessed 27 February 2024, https://www.ccacoalition.org/news/using-climate-smart-rice-reduce-methane-emissions-agriculture.

[27] Ruminants typically have four stomachs, the largest of which is the rumen, which aids in the digestion of vegetable matter. Cattle, sheep, goats, camels, giraffes, etc., belong to this class of animals. They produce methane by enteric fermentation in their rumination, as well as in their large intestines. So this GHG is emitted from both ends of their digestive tract. Cf. Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, *Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Ruminant Supply Chains: A Global Life Cycle Assessment* (Rome: FAO, 2013). https://www.fao.org/3/i3461e/i3461e00.htm.

[28] Other major environmental problems attributable to the industrialization of agriculture and the so-called "Green Revolution" of the last century include excessive use of pesticides and fertilizers (mostly nitrates and phosphates which degrade soil fertility), monoculture of a few commercial crop cultivars (reducing overall crop resistance), and exclusion of those who do not have the finances to purchase the seeds each year.

[29] See António Guterres (@antonioguterres), X (formerly Twitter), https://twitter.com/antonioguterres/status/1453075204696166401?lang=en

Pollution and "Novel Entities"

In 2017, *The Lancet* medical journal dedicated an entire issue to the report of the Lancet Commission on Pollution and Health. The journal highlighted the dangers that pollution poses to human health.[30] In particular, in 2015, the authors estimate that 9 million premature deaths were caused by pollution, and 92 percent of all these pollution-related deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries, and in all countries, pollution-related diseases are among the minorities and the marginalized. Children are at the highest risk of pollution-related diseases, particularly in utero and in early infancy, when even a small exposure can lead to death, disability, or life-long disease. In many low- and middle-income countries, pollution is often overlooked as a health issue.[31] There are obviously economic costs when a country's burden of disease increases.

Pollution can be broadly understood to be things that are not in the place where they are supposed to be. Pollution can be in the air we breathe, the water we drink, and on the land. Fumes from vehicles, power generation, mining, manufacturing industries, domestic cooking, decaying matter, sewage, and animal dung all affect human lungs. Airborne particles as small as 2.5 micrometers[32] are frequently emitted by the exhausts of vehicles, household cooking, bush or forest fires, etc., and can enter human lungs, interfering with the air-blood interface, and causing serious respiratory diseases. Air pollution can travel thousands of kilometers from its source, even crossing oceans. An often underestimated form of pollution is noise pollution, which can significantly impact cognitive and cardiovascular health, disrupt sleep, and impair hearing, as well as work and school performance. The World Health Organization reports that: "Impairment of early

[30] See Philip J. Landrigan et al., "The Lancet Commission on Pollution and Health," The Lancet Commissions 391, no. 10119 (19 October 2017), https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(17), 32345-0.

[31] Landrigan et al., "The Lancet Commission on Pollution and Health," 462.

[32] Or 2.5 x 10^{-6} m. Soot, or "black carbon," from incomplete burning of organic matter, is a widespread small particle pollutant.

childhood development and education caused by noise may have lifelong effects on academic achievement and health."[33]

The novel entities in the planetary boundary theory refer to chemicals, radioactive waste, nanoparticles, plastics, pharmaceuticals, and other persistent organic pollutants. These are novel in a geological sense, being created by human beings, and they might have impacts on the integrity of the Earth system.

For example, when plastic, which is specifically designed to be cheap, long-lived, flexible, and lightweight, is discarded and persists in the environment rather than being recycled or reused, this constitutes pollution by a novel entity. Plastic pollution is ubiquitous. It is in rivers, estuaries, the depths of the oceans, the high Arctic, the atmosphere, and most landscapes. When people burn plastic to stop it from flapping around in the environment, this produces highly toxic fumes.

Similarly, the extractive and manufacturing industries are responsible for various types of chemical pollution, contaminating freshwater, landscapes, and releasing fumes into the air. It is almost impossible to decontaminate chemically polluted air, water, and landscapes, and these are unusable or harmful to living organisms. Chemicals frequently enter the food chain, and through a process known as bioaccumulation, may end up poisoning the species higher up the trophic pyramid. When motor vehicles or ships reach the end of their useful life, they are often abandoned or taken to places where relatively cheap laborers can break them down into smaller usable parts.[34]

---

[33] See World Health Organization, "Noise," *WHO Europe*, 2010, accessed 1 March 2024, https://www.who.int/europe/news-room/fact-sheets/item/noise.

[34] For example, the Gujarati ship breaking industry based in Alang, and the formerly pristine Ghanaian coastline are places where large ships are beached for demolition. The scrapping process invariably allows toxic paint, oil, lead, mercury, etc. to come into the sea water. This has seriously harmful effects on the people doing the ship breaking, as well as on the fishing, on which thousands of people depend for a livelihood. Mangroves are polluted and can no longer function as the breeding grounds for fish. Plankton, fish and crustaceans ingest

When we discard household products or create electronic waste without delivering it to facilities that can recycle or repurpose the materials, they end up leaching toxic chemicals into the environment, frequently near human habitation. Often, when we throw something "away," we have no idea where that product ends up. It is out of sight and out of mind. In some human settlements, it ends up in a landfill site, where it can stay for hundreds of years in a potentially toxic mix with other discarded solid waste.

Better organized societies invest a significant amount of expertise and resources in separating out solid waste, in order to recycle, reuse, or repurpose the detritus of contemporary commercialized life. Plastics, glass, metals, papers, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, etc., can all be removed from the waste flow and disposed of in ways that are less damaging to the environment than simply discarding them on a dump site. A "circular economy" recognizes that everything has a "pre-life" and an "after-life," which are often much more complicated than the brief useful life of a product. Circularity attempts to connect the pre- and post-lives, ensuring that products are not used only once in a linear manner and then discarded. Rather than being recycled, most plastic packaging, for example, ends up in landfill sites and can remain there for centuries. Packaging can be blown away by the wind and end up scattered around landscapes. It can be consumed by animals, causing choking or blocking their digestive tracts, or break down under the effects of sunlight and water into microplastics or mini-microplastics, which are less than 5mm or less than 1mm in size, respectively. These small plastics can last in the environment for decades and not break down any further. These end up in the stomachs of smaller animals and can starve them because they have no nutritional value. They can also end up in the food and drinks that humans consume, either through vegetables or in the tissues of fish, birds, or mammals that we consume.

---

the pollution and die, become sterile, or accumulate the poisons, which then get passed up the food chain—often ending up in human beings. See Marian Ansah, "Ghana Ignores Shipbreaking Rules," *Mail and Guardian* (Johannesburg), 23–29 February 2024; and See also Kit Chapman, "The Toxic Tide of Ship Breaking," *Chemistry World*, 21 February, 2022, accessed 3 February 2025, https://www.chemistryworld.com/features/the-toxic-tide-of-ship-breaking/4015158.article.

In addition to the upset of biogeochemical flows, modern industrial-scale agriculture depends heavily on the use of nitrate and phosphate fertilizer inputs. This has led to the imbalance of the natural nitrogen and phosphorus cycles on a planet-wide scale. These fertilizers degrade the soil, and irrigation water easily runs off into watercourses, making the water hyper-fertile. Algae and other plants grow easily in polluted rivers and water bodies, depriving them of light and oxygen, killing off fish and other aquatic life, and ultimately altering the species domination in the water. This process is called "eutrophication."

Consequences for Africa

We may think that many of these environmental challenges do not relate to Africa, since ours is a less industrialized continent. But ecological threats are no respecters of political or continental boundaries. They are carried on the winds and the ocean currents, by migrating animals, or by international trade and travel. Our economies are interlinked with global economies, and industrial products are sold every day. Since Africa is rich in minerals required for the green energy transition, many mining companies are establishing operations in the continent's shores. Many of these multinational corporations have a record of benefiting from the weak observation of legislative frameworks designed to protect African natural conditions and blessings. There is no evidence to suggest that future governments will be more diligent in enforcing environmental laws than existing governments. Transgressions of planetary boundaries have global implications, and their effects will persist for generations.

In addition, we have our own homegrown trajectories of overexploiting and damaging our environment. These cannot be blamed on colonialism or "The West." It is the lack of foresight of African people—often our elected leaders—that leads directly to the transgression of boundaries. "National resources and public funds are often diverted into foreign bank accounts to the profit of domestic or foreign private interests. [Pope] John Paul calls this 'plain theft,' no

matter what camouflage is used."[35] As an example, in the European colonial era, timber and ebony were "harvested" and exported from Africa in vast quantities. But in the postcolonial era, "Agriculture is the largest direct cause of forest loss, accounting for approximately 75 percent of deforestation in Africa. This includes both subsistence farming and industrial agriculture—which includes cocoa and oil palm production—and cattle ranching"[36] This applies to both the dry forests and the Congo basin rainforests.

It is almost impossible to predict what Africa will experience in the future. Because the continent is so large and encompasses a wide range of climatic zones, the disruptions caused by climate change vary across the continent. As the climate changes, so do the land systems, expanding deserts in some regions but perhaps creating ideal conditions for forests to grow in other places. With rising temperatures in some regions, dry-season wildfires may burn unchecked over vast areas of savannah or forest for long periods. These will release more climate-changing CO_2 into the atmosphere and particulate matter (smoke) into the air, which will affect the air quality for all creatures that need to breathe. With more arid and hyper-arid land than any other continent,[37] entire African communities are already being forced to migrate from their homes which they have inhabited for many decades, as prolonged drought and human activity make their area uninhabitable. Other

[35] Cf. Peter Knox, "Theology, Ecology and Africa: No Longer Strange Bedfellows," in *Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: The Second African Synod*, ed. A. E. Orobator (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2011). This includes reference to John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 113.

[36] Cf. Paolo Omar Cerutti, Thiago Kanashiro Uehara, and Jon Wallace, "Deforestation in Africa," *Royal Institute of International Affairs* (Chatham House), 2023, accessed 12 March 2024, https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/05/deforestation-africa.

[37] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Special Report on Climate Change, Desertification, Land Degradation, Sustainable Land Management, Food Security, and Greenhouse Gas Fluxes in Terrestrial Ecosystems*, chap. 3, "Desertification."

populations will be compelled to move as excessive rainfall floods vast areas, and there is no way to plant crops or tend livestock.

If the aforementioned land-system changes are caused by global climate change, there are also direct changes to land systems resulting from human activity, which in turn have immediate consequences for biodiversity. As human populations increase, the need for habitation expands, and the footprints of cities and towns grow. It is easier to drain wetlands than to build on mountains or in deserts. So wherever populations are growing around the world, wetlands are being destroyed, and along with them the habitats of many aquatic species. The quality of surface water (one of the nine planetary boundaries) deteriorates, and the supply becomes more erratic. This is because the wetlands function as giant sponges and filters, retaining and purifying rainwater or water from streams and rivers. If human habitation expands into forests or savannahs, or if people rely on charcoal as a cooking fuel, the vegetation is cut down and the species of plants and animals originally living there are no longer able to retain a foothold. In addition, as habitats are fragmented, populations of animals become unsustainable, and the migratory species cannot follow their traditional routes.[38] In these cases, the expansion of human populations has direct consequences for the breakdown of the biosphere's functional integrity. As some plant and animal species die out completely,[39] the

[38] Cf. Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, "Major New Global Initiative to Protect and Connect Natural Areas Launched at UN Wildlife Meeting," *CMS*, 14 February 2024, accessed 27 February 2024, https://www.cms.int/en/news/major-new-global-initiative-protect-and-connect-natural-areas-launched-un-wildlife-meeting. The meeting launched a Global Partnership on Ecological Connectivity to ensure migratory species may continue using their habitual migratory routes through contiguous spaces without entering into conflict with humans who have moved into the landscape.

[39] Some scientists maintain that Earth is currently in its sixth mass extinction in half a billion years. About one-tenth of living species are expected to die out. This "Sixth Great Extinction" is largely due to human activities and will leave the surviving species much more vulnerable to calamitous widespread diseases, etc. Cf. Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (New York: Macmillan, 2014).

genetic variety of life on the planet is reducing. This leaves insufficient plant and animal genetic resilience to survive a catastrophic event like a viral or bacterial infection, depletion of the soil, or excess temperature.

With a taste for "bush meat," some African societies are contributing directly to the extinction of animal species. When human populations were smaller and more spread out, it was possible to kill enough wild antelope, primates, birds, or reptiles from the natural environment and still ensure that there would be sustainable populations. Nowadays, in towns and cities, people still want to consume bush meat in traditional ways. But there are so many more people that the demand outstrips the limited supply. This is unsustainable and results in the killing off of the favorite species.

In traditional African societies, some streams, hills, forests, or animal species, or foods were considered sacred.[40] It was therefore taboo for people who were not permitted to do so to visit these areas or to consume these foods. Only those who had ritual permission were allowed to enter the taboo spaces—to communicate with the ancestors or to perform other interventions on behalf of their societies. The imposition of taboos often served to protect particular spaces or species of biological importance or ecological sensitivity. With the movement of people around Africa, traditional society has undergone a breakdown, and former taboos are often no longer respected. The attitude is: "your religion is not my religion." This means that the spaces and species no longer enjoy the protection afforded to them by ancient traditions.[41] Once pristine rivers, forests, or mountains have

[40] For example, in *Sesotho, malome o ja hloho*—the (elder) uncle is the only person who would eat the head of an animal. This meant that the limited resource (head) was reserved to a small number of people, and so not everyone developed a taste for that part of the animal. Similarly, the liver of a slaughtered animal was reserved for elderly women.

[41] For example, the Modimolle Mountain in Limpopo Province, South Africa, was once considered sacred but has since lost that protection. Cf. SABC News. "Local People in Limpopo Want to Turn Modimolle Mountain into a Tourism Hotspot," 2021, accessed 12 March 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-mU3sBpuiE.

lost that quality. When and if local or national governments intervene to conserve an area, it is often not understood, and people might claim that their forebears had access to these places, arguing that the current generation should not be prevented from accessing the spaces.

Although African countries have set aside large areas for national parks or protected areas, the boundaries of these areas are often porous. This means that poachers can enter and remove protected minerals, animals, or parts of plants.[42] It also means that animals can move beyond the boundaries of the parks, where they either enter into conflict with local residents, frequently over competition for food, or they are killed outright because they pose a danger or have commercial value. There is increasing recognition of the fact that migrant mammal species are not great respecters of human-drawn boundaries, such as those around countries or protected areas. So sometimes neighboring countries allow contiguous areas to remain wild in what are known as 'transfrontier parks.' The most famous example of this is the Serengeti-Mara-Ngorongoro biome, which allows the free passage of the famous wildebeest and zebra migration between Kenya and Tanzania. There are also several transfrontier parks in southern Africa that permit the migration of herds of elephants.

Not Gender Blind

It is important to note that ecological factors are not gender blind. Most often, women who also care for elderly or housebound relatives are on the front lines of environmental disturbances. In various African cultures, women work in the fields, cultivating crops and providing food for their households or for sale. The IPCC notes that: "Women will be

[42] This also happens in very public conservation areas like the Table Mountain National Park in Cape Town, South Africa. Cf. Don Pinnock, "A Conversation with the Man Who Paints Trees to Prevent Bark Stripping," *Daily Maverick* (Johannesburg) 25 February 2024, accessed 27 February 2024, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-02-25-meet-the-man-who-paints-trees-to-combat-bark-stripping/.

impacted more than men by environmental degradation, particularly in those areas with higher dependence on agricultural livelihoods."[43]

The IPCC *Special Report on Desertification and Land* continues:

> Socially structured gender-specific roles and responsibilities, daily activities, access and control over resources, decision-making and opportunities lead men and women to interact differently with natural resources and landscapes. For example, water scarcity affected women more than men in rural Ghana as they had to spend more time fetching water, which has implications on time allocations for other activities… Women are usually excluded from local decision-making on actions regarding desertification and climate change… Food security for them is associated with land productivity and women's contribution to address desertification is crucial.[44]

When climate change makes cultivation or livestock raising more challenging, it is often women who end up doing additional work or having to stretch their budgets to make food supplies last. In addition, women bear the burden of childbearing and play a disproportionate role in the raising of children. Rising ambient temperatures place living organisms under great stress. When that is a mother bearing a child, the stress is magnified.

Pope Francis' Theological Ecology

In 2015, Pope Francis published *Laudato Si'*, a groundbreaking encyclical on care for our common home. The title of the encyclical echoes the canticle of St Francis of Assisi, praising God for all the wonders of creation. The encyclical is a masterly synthesis of environmental, sociological, and theological teaching. The major insight of the encyclical is that "we are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and one social, but rather one complex crisis which is

[43] IPCC, *Special Report on Climate Change*, 251.

[44] IPCC, *Special Report on Climate Change*, 274.

both social and environmental."[45] He states that: "a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*."[46]

The pope's point of departure is his Christian compassion for human suffering. He realizes that so much misery has its origin in human abuse of the planet, which God has given to accommodate and sustain all of living creation. To diminish this ecology-related suffering, all of humankind should undergo an "ecological conversion."[47]

In *Laudato Si'*, the pope makes a profound analysis of what is happening to our common home, and states unambiguously that this tragedy, caused by human greed, arrogance, and lack of foresight, contradicts the Gospel of Creation. Following the insight of Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis insists that human beings are part of nature, not set apart or another order of existence. There is no human-nature dualism: "Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live."[48] Everything involved in daily life—the economy, food systems, the urban environment, wildlife, and more—is part of an integral ecology. We need to consider all things as part of a functioning whole, and not in isolation. As a necessary alternative to the contemporary destructive, extractive, consumptive "throwaway" economy of capitalism, Francis proposes a worldview that sees humans as part of their interconnected environment, taking special care of future generations and the common good of all creatures. To do this, we need to have dialogue between all people on the Earth—at

[45] Francis, *Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home: Laudato Si'* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), 139. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

[46] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 49.

[47] "Ecological conversion," the title of section three of the final chapter of the encyclical, shows the interpenetration of the natural and spiritual dimensions of our existence.

[48] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 139.

the international and local level, privileging the experience of the poor and indigenous people who live closest to the land. This dialogue will lead people to understand that their true value and fulfillment lie not in what they purchase and possess, but in how they are connected with their universe. This dialogue must bring together people from the perspectives of religion and the sciences as we realize that these two parallel, non-competing discourses are both trying in their own way to understand the depth of creation. Finally, the pope urges all people to become better educated about their environment and to cultivate a deeper covenant with Creation. This will manifest in a profound spirituality that cherishes and celebrates the love of God for all creatures.

The encyclical reveals that the pope is informed by up-to-date scientific research and data.[49] Although he does not explicitly cite planetary boundary theory, the pope addresses seven of the planetary boundaries.[50] These are:

- Climate change and the necessity to reduce greenhouse gases[51]

[49] The publication of *Laudato Si'* in 2015 followed closely after the joint workshop of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences in May 2014. The workshop—"Sustainable Humanity, Sustainable Nature, Our Responsibility"—was the second time that the two academies had ever met together. The encyclical itself is neither purely environmental nor purely social, but holds these two disciplines in dialogue.

[50] At the workshop, Partha Dasgupta (professor emeritus of economics, Cambridge University), Jeffrey D. Sachs (director of the Earth Institute, Colombia University, NY), and Achim Steiner (executive director, UNEP and UN under-secretary-general) all referred to the theory of planetary boundaries. So it was no surprise that elements of the theory should appear in the encyclical. See Pontifical Academy of Sciences and Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, *Sustainable Humanity, Sustainable Nature: Our Responsibility* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), available at https://www.pas.va/en/publications/extra-series/es41pas.html.

[51] In his 2023 apostolic exhortation on the climate crisis, *Laudate Deum* (section 17), Francis writes about critical points, which unleash cascading effects with

- Biosphere integrity – which is addressed in an entire section of chapter one[52]
- Fresh water pollution (and commodification)[53]
- Biogeochemical flows, where he writes about pollution caused by fertilizers, soil acidity, etc.[54]
- Land system changes (deforestation, desertification and draining wetlands)[55]
- Atmospheric aerosol loading, where he writes about air pollution causing multiple health hazards and causing millions of premature deaths[56]
- Novel entities (without naming them as such) – "hundreds of millions of tons of waste, much of it non-biodegradable, highly toxic and radioactive" from multiple sources.[57]

Although the church is not beholden to any individual scientific theory, Pope Francis is entirely in line with modern climate-change research. He insists on the urgency to curb greenhouse gas emissions and to oppose exploration for, and extraction of, new fields of fossil fuels. The Vatican State is on target to have only electric vehicles in its

unpredictable outcomes. This notion is central to planetary boundary theory. Cf. also Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 169.

[52] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 24, 32–34, 175.

[53] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 48.

[54] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 20. In paragraph 24, he specifically addresses the carbon cycle.

[55] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 23, 51, 169, 8, 39, etc.

[56] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 20.

[57] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 21.

fleet by 2030,[58] and to be the first "carbon-neutral" state in the world. But he is not content with having the Holy See represent a small island of good practice.

The pope is unambiguous that the present crisis stems from the human commodification of the planet. Everything is seen as a potential resource for human consumption, valorization, and trade. The pope identifies this as an excessive modern anthropocentrism[59]—the mentality that humans are the center and the purpose of every created thing, and that they may therefore take anything for themselves irrespective of the cost to the rest of the created universe. This self-centeredness disregards the fact that we are beneficiaries of what has been handed to us by the creator, from previous generations, and that we are meant to be responsible stewards on behalf of future generations. In this worldview, there is no space for gratitude or acknowledgement of the gifted-ness of nature.

In the rush to exploit the Earth's many resources, people have completely overlooked the damage this is causing to the planet itself. Deriving from a profound anthropological disorientation, this mentality leads to a "constant schizophrenia, wherein a technocracy which sees no intrinsic value in lesser beings coexists with the other extreme, which sees no special value in human beings."[60] Consequently, human beings and human relationships become disposable, and part of the "throwaway culture." When something or someone no longer has novelty or immediate utility, he, she, or it can be disposed of. Humans have not yet adopted the model of the natural world, which is a circular economy. This is why things become waste and end up polluting the air,

[58] Philip Pullella, "Vatican in Deal with Volkswagen for All-Electric Car Fleet by 2030," *Reuters*, 15 November 2023, https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/vatican-deal-with-volkswagen-all-electric-car-fleet-by-2030-2023-11-15.

[59] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 116.

[60] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 118.

water, and land. No wonder that: "[t]he Earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth."[61]

The pope's engagement with environmental issues is not limited to the publication of his first magisterial encyclical. He has addressed the Pontifical Academy of the Sciences at their regular meetings.[62] From these allocutions, it is clear that he considers the scientists' vocation to advance knowledge that can be put to the service of caring for humans and our environment. When meeting with members of the German Max Planck Institute in 2023, he repeated the age-old teaching of the church that there is a place for pure science, "that is uninfluenced by prejudices that are political or economic in nature."[63] This is knowledge of the universe for the sake of the knowledge itself, which can be used to give greater glory to the God of the universe.

---

[61] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 20–22.

[62] For example, in his address to the plenary session of the Pontifical Academy of Science, Pope Francis appreciates how the members' concern for present and future generations is rooted in their great care for mother earth. He urges the members to promote sustainable development by "the full assuming of our human responsibilities regarding creation and its resources, as well as the search for social justice and the overcoming of an immoral system that produces misery, inequality and exclusion." See Francis, *"Address to Participants in the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences,"* Speeches, 28 November 2016, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/november/documents/papa-francesco_20161128_pontificia-accademia-scienze.html . In his address to the September 2022 plenary session of the same academy, he appealed for greater "ecological conversion" in order to "save our common home and life" rather than "increasing inequality, exploitation and destruction." "The drive toward scientific achievements… must always be directed to the needs of fraternity, justice, and peace, in order to help meet the great challenges facing our human family and environment." Cf. Sophie Peeters, "Pope to Pontifical Academy: 'Science Is a Tool for Peace,'" *Vatican News*, 2022, accessed 6 March 2024, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-09/pope-francis-science-as-tool-for-peace.html.

[63] Cf. Sophie Peeters, "Pope Says Science Should Be at the Service of Humanity," *Vatican News*, 25 February 2023, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-02/pope-science-must-be-at-the-service-of-humanity.html.

As further testimony to his grave concern regarding climate change, Pope Francis wrote a special, brief apostolic exhortation, *Laudate Deum*, in 2023, entirely to urge people around the world to address the climate crisis with much greater seriousness. The issue of climate change requires the participants at the COP28 of the UNFCCC[64] (and subsequent COPs) to "be strategists capable of considering the common good and the future of their children, more than the short-term interests of certain countries or businesses."[65] He has very high expectations of political decision-makers and the decisions to be made at the national and international level and also expects the wider population to make cultural changes through their individual personal choices.[66]

In *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis dedicates additional paragraphs to analysing the "growing technocratic paradigm."[67] Here he repeats his reflection from *Laudato Si'* that the increase of power at the disposal of human beings is not equitably shared, and that power ends up dangerously concentrated in the hands of a few people. We have witnessed in the past how this has led to greater potential for the misuse of power—such as the capacity to "decimate populations, drop atomic bombs and annihilate ethnic groups." An increase in technical potential has not been accompanied by a growth in ethical restraint. Thus we need to rethink our use of power, and apply it for the benefit of a healthy ecology. Pope Francis holds up the example of indigenous cultures which have been able to reshape their environment without destroying or endangering it. To this he contrasts the destructiveness

[64] This refers to the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change held in Dubai, November–December 2023.

[65] Francis, *Laudate Deum*: Apostolic Exhortation on the Climate Crisis (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2023), 60. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html.

[66] Francis, *Laudate Deum*, 69–70.

[67] Francis, *Laudate Deum*, 20–33.

of the technological paradigm, which needs to learn to "include the interaction of natural systems 'with social systems'."[68]

Eco-action, Not Eco-anxiety

A survey of more than 10,000 people in 10 countries in 2021 found that:

> [r]espondents across all countries were worried about climate change… More than 50% reported each of the following emotions: sad, anxious, angry, powerless, helpless, and guilty. More than 45% of respondents said their feelings about climate change negatively affected their daily life and functioning, and many reported a high number of negative thoughts about climate change (e.g., 75% said that they think the future is frightening and 83% said that they think people have failed to take care of the planet). Respondents rated governmental responses to climate change negatively and reported greater feelings of betrayal than of reassurance.[69]

The above research was funded by AVAAZ. Their website adds a further observation about eco-anxiety: "These [survey] results are scary, but psychologists say it's not just affecting children. Climate anxiety is being felt by people of all ages everywhere."[70]

Pope Francis dedicated his November 2021 prayer intention to praying for people suffering from depression and anxiety. The Pope's Video website of that month indicates that "the COVID-19

---

[68] Francis, *Laudate Deum*, 27.

[69] Caroline Hickman et al., "Climate Anxiety in Children and Young People and Their Beliefs about Government Response to Climate Change: A Global Survey," *The Lancet Planetary Health* 5, no. 12 (Dec 2021): e863, https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(21)00278-3 . In addition to young people from European countries and the USA, the respondents included 1,000 individuals aged 16–25 from Nigeria, the Philippines, and India.

[70] Avaaz, "Briefing: What Is Climate Anxiety?," *Avaaz*, 2021, accessed 8 March 2024, https://secure.avaaz.org/campaign/en/climate_anxiety_briefing_2021/?slideshow.

pandemic has had a major impact on mental health."[71] But the video omits to specifically refer to climate anxiety as a major source of mental disturbance, particularly among younger people who will live for decades with an ailing planet. Experience has shown that acknowledging that one is not alone in this, belonging to a network, and taking action are significant ways to overcome eco-anxiety.[72]

In one way or another, every September – the month of the liturgical Season of Creation – the intention of the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network relates to the environment. For example, the intentions for September 2020 and 2021, respectively, were for "respect for the planet's resources" and for "an environmentally sustainable lifestyle."[73] For September 2019, the prayer intention focused on protecting the oceans, and the accompanying video specifically highlighted ocean plastic pollution, which had been brought to the attention of the pope by fishermen the previous month. This plastic pollution, he warns, will be the death of the oceans and, by extension, our own.

Rather than spreading doom, gloom, despondency, or anxiety about the state of the environment, Pope Francis encourages us to pray for a whole month for these concerns (and others). This empowers the person who takes the prayer intention seriously, perhaps motivating them—as prayer does—to take action according to their means, rather than sitting down and brooding. We must rise to the challenge

[71] See Francis. "People Who Suffer from Depression," *Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network*, November 2021, accessed 8 March 2024, https://thepopevideo.org/november-people-who-suffer-from-depression/.

[72] Cf. Green Schools Project UK, "What Is Eco-Anxiety and How Can We Help Combat It?," 29 April 2022, accessed 12 March 2024, https://www.greenschoolsproject.org.uk/2022/04/29/elementor-2248/. Suggested actions may include participating in community activities; changing lifestyles (e.g., reducing meat consumption, using fewer single-use plastics, cycling or walking); shifting investments away from fossil fuels; writing to politicians; reconnecting with nature; etc.

[73] See The Pope Video, https://thepopevideo.org.

of prayer, followed by meaningful action. This will prevent us from succumbing to eco-anxiety.

Much of what scientists tell us about the state of global ecology is not good news. But Pope Francis engages these challenges with a faith-inspired, can-do attitude. In *Laudate Deum,* he puts a great deal of faith in ordinary people to do what is right and in climate change negotiators to have sufficient political will to make meaningful commitments. He sees the need to reconfigure multilateral institutions, giving them greater authority, to enhance their effectiveness.

To address deforestation, alone, there are international and governmental policies. At the multilateral level, the REDD+ mechanism of the UN aims to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, to sustainably manage forests and conserve forest carbon stocks in developing countries.[74] The international Great Green Wall Initiative is designed to restore 100 million hectares of hyperarid land across the Sahel region, and to create millions of green jobs.[75] At the national level, many countries are engaged in the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100) to bring 100 million hectares of land in Africa into reforestation by 2030.[76] This is in line with the Bonn Challenge and with the African Union Agenda 2063 to achieve inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development over 50 years.

However, it is not all in the hands of our governments or the multinational corporations. In addition to the above-mentioned government-level projects, there is plenty that we ordinary citizens can do in Africa to stem the destruction of our habitat. On a more

[74] Cf. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. "What is REDD+?," accessed 12 March 2024, https://unfccc.int/topics/land-use/workstreams/redd/what-is-redd.

[75] Cf. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, "Great Green Wall Initiative," accessed 12 March 2024, https://www.unccd.int/our-work/ggwi.

[76] Cf. AFR100, "People Restoring Africa's Landscapes," accessed 12 March 2024, https://afr100.org/.

personal level, there are overpowering spiritual motivations, born out of faith, for a "pilgrimage of reconciliation with the world that is our home."[77] Pope Francis challenges every household "to reduce pollution and waste, and to consume with prudence," thereby generating a new counter-throwaway-culture.[78] We can move away from coal or charcoal as our primary source of fuel for cooking. Gas—including biogas—is a cleaner fuel which is healthier in the home, and in the case of biogas, is a renewable, rather than a fossil fuel. We can make sustained efforts to plant trees, and to ensure their growth and survival over many years. We do not just plant and forget about a tree. It needs to be cultivated and tended. As God settled our First Ancestors "in the garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it,"[79] so it is deep in our DNA to be stewards and not destroyers of our common home.

About the Author. **Fr. Peter Knox, SJ** is a South African Jesuit. He was trained in chemistry, education, philosophy, and theology in South Africa, England and Canada, respectively. His doctoral work at St Paul University in Ottawa, Canada focused on traditional South African religion, HIV-AIDS, and Christian soteriology. Peter has worked in parishes and university chaplaincy, and has taught theology in South Africa, Kenya, and the Philippines. He enjoys cycling, swimming, bird watching, and natural history.

[77] Francis, *Laudate Deum*, 69.

[78] Francis, *Laudate Deum*, 71.

[79] Gen. 2:15.

Landas 37:2 (2025) 77–97

CHRIST AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM: AN FABC PERSPECTIVE

Phan Van Dinh

Abstract. Acknowledging religious pluralism as a reality in Asia, the Asian bishops firmly believe that conversion to Christianity is not the only path to salvation for people of other faiths. They also reaffirm that no one can be saved without participating in Jesus Christ. While the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) primarily focuses on pastoral activities rather than theological reflection, particularly Christological reflection, the Asian bishops seek to articulate Christ's centrality and ultimate role in salvation, including for adherents of other religious traditions who do not profess the Christian faith.[1] Drawing on various documents of the FABC, this essay presents the Asian bishops' understanding of how Jesus Christ works for the salvation of people of other faiths through creation and the Incarnation within God's universal design and through the universal work of the Holy Spirit. The Christ-event, inseparable from the Word, is the decisive manifestation of God and the foundation of salvation for adherents of other faiths.

Keywords: religious pluralism; receptive pluralism; Paschal Mystery of Christ; living Christ; Christ-event

[1] FABC Office of Evangelization (FABC-OE), "Conclusions of the Theological Consulation," nos. 27-28, in *For All the Peoples of Asia* (FAPA) I, 341.

Introduction

Grounded in God's universal plan of salvation, the Second Vatican Council affirmed the "ray of truth" (AG 2) and grace of God as a gift of the Holy Spirit in other religious traditions (AG 9).[2] According to the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, the Holy Spirit is mysteriously present and active not only in individuals but also in society and history, peoples, cultures, and religions (RM 28).[3] However, the Church has never declared salvific values in all other religious traditions.

In their first meeting with Pope Paul VI at Manila (1970), the Asian bishops acknowledged religious pluralism not merely as a theological issue, as it is often framed in the West, but as a lived reality in Asia. The FABC Office of Theological Concerns interprets the plurality of religions and cultures as part of the divine will through the operative presence of the Spirit: "The plurality of religious traditions is viewed as diverse ways in which people respond to the prompting of the Spirit, who is the author of religious pluralism."[4] The Belgian theologian Terrence Merrigan insists that the FABC viewed religious pluralism as a starting point for theological reflection.[5] In the First

[2] Vatican II, *Decree Ad Gentes*: *On the Mission Activity of the Church*, December 7, 1965 (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2014), nos. 2 and 9.

[3] Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*: *On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate*, 7 December 1990, Vatican Archive, accessed March 15, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html, no. 28.

[4] "We value pluralism as a great gift of the Spirit. There is also a situation of pluralism that results from the different ways people respond to the prompting of the Spirit, which the Asian Bishops have called 'receptive pluralism'. Again, people encounter the Spirit in their context, which is pluralistic in terms of religions, cultures, and world-views." FABC Office of Theological Concerns (FABC-OTC), "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," no. 5.4, in *FAPA III*, 321.

[5] Asian theologians and the FABC have made it clear that, in the Asian context, pluralism is, in the first place, a starting point for theological reflection, not an object of such reflection. Pluralism here denotes more than the mere fact of

Plenary Assembly, the FABC consistently affirmed significant and positive elements in other religious traditions and accepted cultural and religious values as God's eternal will in the divine economy of salvation. Although professing that Jesus Christ is the sole Mediator of salvation and that the Church is necessary for human salvation, the FABC maintains that the conversion of adherents of other religions is not always to the Church, but to God and the Kingdom of God.[6] This implies that receiving baptism is not always necessary for people of other faiths to be saved. This essay explores the FABC's reception of Vatican II's teachings and its Christological reflection in the context of religious pluralism.

1. Christology in Relation to God's Universal Design of Salvation

In encountering the diversity of cultures and religions in Asia, the FABC underlines the cosmic dimension of salvation by recognizing the positive values of these traditions within God's universal plan of salvation.[7] These values originate not merely from the sages or founders of these religions through their own ability, but from God's grace, seeds of his Word, the Holy Spirit, and the paschal mystery of Christ.

1.1. Universality of the Word and Grace of God

In the FABC vision, although the Son of God began his visible presence at a particular time and in the religious tradition of Israel, God's eternal plan of salvation is not bound to the Jewish tradition

religious diversity. Terrence Merrigan, "Jacques Dupuis and the Redefinition of Inclusivism," in *In Many and Diverse Way: In Honor of Jacques Dupuis*, eds. Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 66.

[6] FABC Theological Advisory Commission (FABC-TAC), "Theses on Interreligious Dialogue," *FABC Papers*, no. 48, accessed November 24, 2023, https://fabc.org/document/fabc-papers-048/, 16.

[7] Miguel Quatra, *At the Side of the Multitudes: The Kingdom of God and the Mission of the Church in the FABC Documents* [1970-1995] (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2000), 38.

or Christianity but extends to the whole of humanity. God's universal salvific will is seen as the basis for interpreting the presence of God and the seeds of His Word in other religious traditions. The diverse presence of the seeds of God's Word is expressed in FABC V: "Seeds of the Word are found in cultures and religions."[8] BIRA IV/12 explicitly affirms the presence of Seeds of the Word in cultures and religions: "Our response to the Word in the Spirit should be open to the presence of the Word in all creation and particularly in the different cultural and religious traditions."[9] Through his Word, God is not merely present but "at work, in many different ways, in all religions."[10] The purpose of God's presence and action is to bring the whole of humanity to his salvation. The FABC Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy points out:

> God speaks to people through their cultures and sows the seeds of His Word in every human culture, because God wants all people to be saved. For this reason, Christians should dialogue with other cultures in order to discover the seeds of the Divine Message planted there which take root, grow, and bear fruit.[11]

The Asian bishops also declare their belief in the universality of God's grace. Following the teachings of Vatican II, BIRA II affirms the universal dimension of God's grace and further underlines the mysterious action of grace in members of other religions: "God's grace may lead some to accept baptism and to enter the Church, but it cannot be presumed that this must always be the case. His ways are mysterious and unfathomable, and no one can dictate the direction of His grace."[12]

---

[8] Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC V), no. 3.1.1, in *FAPA I*, 279.

[9] Twelfth Bishops' Institutes for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA IV/12), no. 37, in *FAPA I*, 331.

[10] BIRA II, no. 12, in *FAPA I*, 115.

[11] FABC Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy, no. 3, in *FAPA II*, 22.

[12] BIRA II, no. 12, in *FAPA I*, 115.

Through their reflections on the universality of seeds of the Word and grace of God, the FABC believes that although people of other faiths remain in their own religious traditions and do not desire to be Christians, they can receive God's grace and encounter Jesus Christ, present as the "seeds of the Word," in their own religions. Acknowledging the universal grace and seeds of the Word provides theological elements for Vatican II to profess the "ray of truth" in other religious traditions (NA 2) and for participants of BIRA V/3 to perceive the ineffable divine mystery in all religions.[13] These reflections, Mendoza observes, originate from the FABC's lived experiences of other religions and through its interreligious dialogues with particular religions.[14] This acknowledgement of God's saving presence and action through his grace and Word supports the interpretation that believers can participate in the divine mystery through their own religious traditions.[15] Receiving baptism is not always the only way for humankind to follow God's saving plan.

1.2. Christ's Presence and Action in History

To explain how God works in other cultures and religions, the Asian bishops acknowledge that God's salvific plan begins not with the establishment of the continent and their cultures or the Incarnation, but with creation. In the First Plenary Assembly, the FABC underlines the presence of God in Asian traditions, such as in ancient worship and traditional beliefs, and even in the oriental philosophies. In ways known only to Him, God has been present with the people of Asia from the beginning, involving Himself in their lives and leading them

[13] "Religion as they are manifested in history are complementary perceptions of the ineffable divine mystery, the God-beyond-God. All religions are visions of divine mystery." BIRA V/3, no. 6, in *FAPA II*, 157.

[14] See Ruben C. Mendoza, *A Journey to the Kingdom in the Spirit: Becoming a Church for all the Peoples of Asia* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2014), 51-57.

[15] Mendoza, *A Journey to the Kingdom in the Spirit*, 107.

to Himself[16]. Thus, for the Asian bishops, from the beginning of Asian history, God has been present in the midst of the people of Asia:

> From the beginning, He has been present in our history, in our traditions. In hidden ways, He has led the peoples of Asia, enlightening our ancient worship, guiding our traditional beliefs, appearing in strange forms in our folklore, and speaking to us in our oriental philosophies. Through the quiet centuries, patiently, He has drawn us to Himself.[17]

God's presence at the beginning of the world is the presence of love.[18] The act of creation is understood as an act of love. Reaffirming God's love as the reason for creation, FABC VIII asserts that human life began only because of God's love. While discussing "the culture of integral life," the FABC also explains that the culture of integral life is rooted in the love of God, the Creator and Giver of all life.[19] The life of the world originates from God's creation or "divine creation."[20] God's love in the beginning of the world is seen as the primary reason for God's divine creation and human life.

While describing the spirituality of dialogue, BIRA IV/12 (1991) expresses the relationship between God and humankind in the moment of creation through the Word. In this dialogue, God comes to humankind through his Word and moves them forward to the Ultimate. The Word is considered the foundation for unity between God and humankind. However, in this dialogue, the FABC does not distinguish between the operation of God's Word and Jesus Christ. The dialogue between God and humankind in the moment of creation has its decisive expression in Jesus Christ as the Word made flesh:

---

[16] FABC V, no. 3.1.1, in *FAPA I*, 279.

[17] FABC I, "Briefer Statement of the Assembly," no. 31, in *FAPA I*, 24-25.

[18] "Redeemer of our peoples, it is He who has loved them from the dawn of the ages, and who in the fullness of time made their human condition his own." FABC I, no. 44, in *FAPA I*, 18. The FABC VI also expresses God's love in creation: "Creation of all the living out of sheer love." FABC VI, no. 13.2, in FAPA II, 6.

[19] FABC VIII, no. 53, in *FAPA IV*, 20.

[20] FABC V, no. 2.3.9, in *FAPA I*, 279.

> Christian spirituality is at heart a spirituality of dialogue. It is life in that Spirit which is the bond of relationship between God and humankind, a relationship established through the Word of God. Thus, Christian spirituality is a response in the Spirit to the call of God which comes to us through the Word. It is a spirituality of dialogue in which the whole of humanity is moving towards the Ultimate. This dialogue begins in the very moment of creation (Gen 1:1-3), and has its enfleshed and decisive expression in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh (Jn 1:1-3.14). It thus lays the foundation for unity between God and humankind.[21]

The presence of God is the saving presence. The dialogue between God and humankind is a dialogue of salvation through the Word: "It is the continuation in time and space of the dialogue of salvation initiated by God and brought to a culmination when he uttered his Word in a very concrete historical situation."[22] The relationship between God and humanity is always established through the Word. Through this framework, the Asian bishops interpret the saving role of the Word in relation to God's universal plan of salvation.

God's salvific design is not merely reserved for some individuals, but encompasses social relations, humanity as a whole, and all of creation: "This spirituality embraces the plan of God for the whole creation…, not merely individual salvation but embraces the whole man and all men and the rest of creation."[23] God's plan is not only conceivable in the moment of creation, but also through the continuing process of re-creation. BIRA IV/1 maintains that the destiny of his plan is to gather all peoples and nations into one family, to move them towards his great design of unity as their ultimate goal, and to bring

---

[21] BIRA IV/12, no. 36, in *FAPA I*, 331.

[22] First Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate (BIMA I), no. 9, in *FAPA I*, 94.

[23] Sixth Bishops' Institute for Social Action (BISA VI), no. 18, in *FAPA I*, 226. "God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person, but also social relations existing between them. In this context, it is an important obligation and a criterion of all social action of the People of God to hear the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth." FABC-OTC, "The Body of Christ in Pandemic," part 3, A, in *FAPA VII*, 225.

all things to fulfillment in a new heaven and a new earth.[24] Reflecting on the final prayer of BIRA I, Quatra observes that the fulfillment of God's plan for humanity is not only unity between people of other faiths but building a communion of love and peace with them as true brothers and sisters.[25]

The fullness in God's salvific plan does not merely manifest itself at the end of history, but in transformation of the world into the fullness of life in Christ, the Word of Life,[26] through the Holy Spirit. [27] The fullness of life rooted in the life of the Trinity is not only the destiny of Christians but of all Asians. Together with the Asians, the FABC wishes to pray, to work, to struggle for a better human life, and promote the fullness of life in social, economic, cultural, and all human dimensions.[28] This fulfillment does not exclude secular and profane values. It manifests a loving relationship between God and humanity in their concrete cultural, religious, social, economic, and political situations.[29]

Jesus Christ is the center of fulfillment in God's plan. God's plan is to bring all things to fulfillment in Christ.[30] Jesus Christ is described as the climax of God's plan. In Christ as the Incarnate Word, God has personally entered human history, dialogued with human beings and

---

[24] BIRA IV/11, nos. 8-9, in *FAPA I*, 319.

[25] Quatra holds that "the destiny of all humans is to live as true brothers and sisters, and to achieve a communion of love, peace and unity among all people." Quatra, At the Side of the Multitudes, 34. Also see BIRA I, "Final Prayer," in *FAPA I*, 112.

[26] FABC VIII, no. 58, in *FAPA IV*, 21.

[27] "The fullness of life can be realized only in and through Christ and his Gospel, and by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit." *FABC VI*, no. 3, in *FAPA II*, 2.

[28] FABC VI, no. 3, in *FAPA II*, 2.

[29] FABC II, "Summaries of the Workshop Reports," no. 2, in *FAPA I*, 44.

[30] First Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate (BIMA I), no. 12, in *FAPA I*, 94-95.

offered them salvation.[31] It is Jesus Christ who renews all things, heals, transforms, and redeems humanity,[32] and who is the fullness of truth and salvation.[33] The mission of Christ is to save not only humanity but also the world.[34] Thus, in working for God's plan for transformation and fulfillment of the world, Jesus Christ is involved in all dimensions of human life.

Considering the Asian way of thinking, which focuses on personal experience,[35] Asian Christians consider Jesus Christ as the way for them to reach God through their lived experiences, and then to bear witness of God to others. According to Peter Phan, Jesus Christ, for the Asian Christians, is not only the only Savior, but their personal Savior: "The strength and fervor of this witness are born not out of the theological conviction that Jesus is the only Savior but out of the deep experience that he is the personal Savior for me."[36] In the goal of proclaiming Christ through dialogue and deeds, the FABC through interreligious dialogue discovers images of the hidden Christ in other religious traditions and introduces to them the other Asian faces of

[31] "God so loved the world… that He sent his only Son into the world not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved by him. To save, to liberate the world was the mission of Jesus, who 'came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many' (Mk 10:45)." Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church (ACMC), "Conclusions," no. 22, in *FAPA I*, 72. Also see FABC-OE, "Conclusions of the Theological Consultation," no. 28, in *FAPA I*, 341.

[32] See FABC IV, no. 3.7.5, in *FAPA I*, 188.

[33] BIMA II, no. 14, in *FAPA I*, 101.

[34] "God so loved the world… that He sent his only Son into the world not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved by him. To save, to liberate the world was the mission of Jesus, who 'came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many' (Mk 10;45)." ACMC, "Conclusions," no. 22, in *FAPA I*, 72.

[35] Felix Wilfred, "Asia and Western Christianity," *Pacifica* 2 (1989): 272-274.

[36] Peter Phan, "Ecclesia in Asia: Challenges for Asian Christianity," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, ed. Peter Phan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 256.

Christ, such as Beloved Brother, Liberator, Evangelizer, Servant, and the Way of Salvation.[37] Through the discovery of these images, the Asian Christians' experiences of Christian faith can be enriched and can enrich others in interreligious dialogue.

In summary, from the Asian bishops' perspective, God's saving plan is seen as a global plan that begins at the moment of creation, and has developed in history to restore and to bring all things to the final fulfillment in a new creation, a total liberation and reconciliation between God and the whole world. Christ, the Word made flesh, is central to God's salvific design. If someone asks how the FABC justifies placing Christ in the center of God's saving plan, it is hard to find the answers in the FABC documents. Quatra comments that it is possible to go further on this question, but the FABC does not aim to interpret Christological doctrine systematically but rather to reflect on pastoral aspects. The FABC mentioned Christology in its documents occasionally.[38] The FABC and its offices held a number of conferences and wrote a great number of final statements, but not all of them were published. The researcher was unable to find all the documents of the FABC. Additionally, the ultimate aim of this paper is not to explore Christological dimensions of the FABC documents but reflections relevant in interpreting the FABC regnocentric approach.

2. Christology in Relation to Pneumatology

2.1. The Universality of the Holy Spirit

Besides the universal presence of grace, the FABC acknowledges the universal presence and operation of the Holy Spirit as the agent of

[37] A. Alangaram, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Toward an Asian Contextual Christology Based on the Documents of Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences* (Bangalore, India: Asian Trading Corporation, 1999), 70-73. Also see FABC V, no. 4.1, in *FAPA I*, 282.

[38] Quatra, *At the Side of the Multitudes*, 63: "It is possible to go further and question the documents on why Christ occupies such a central place in God's salvific plan. The problem was never systematically faced by the FABC, which has been concerned with Christology only occasionally."

positive values in religions. In the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) Pope John Paul II declared the universal presence and action of the Holy Spirit in individuals, societies, cultures, and religions. However, according to the Pope, the universal action of the Holy Spirit is understood as preparing people of other faiths to gain full maturity in Christ through entering the Church.[39] Participants of BIRA IV/3 in 1986 also asserted the mysterious presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the Asian nations and religions: "It is the same Spirit, who has been active in the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Christ and in the Church, who was active amongst all peoples before the incarnation and is active amongst the nations, religions and peoples of Asia today."[40] The Holy Spirit is at work not only in human souls but also in the contexts people encounter, such as social, economic, political, and cultural structures.[41] Furthermore, the FABC stated that the Holy Spirit is active beyond the confines of the visible Church.[42]

Going further, the FABC, in the context of diverse cultures and religions in Asia, acknowledges plural ways people respond to God's call through the Holy Spirit and proposes a theological concept of "receptive pluralism":

> People encounter the Holy Spirit within their context, which is pluralistic in terms of religions, cultures, and worldviews. In this light, we affirm a stance of receptive pluralism. That is, the many ways of responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit must be continually in conversion with one another.[43]

Declaring their belief in "receptive pluralism" in this text means that the participants of the BIRA IV/3 acknowledge the various ways the Spirit works in other religious traditions and the diverse ways

[39] Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, nos. 28-29.

[40] BIRA IV/3, no. 6, in *FAPA I*, 259.

[41] BIRA IV/3, no. 16, in *FAPA I*, 261.

[42] Ibid.

[43] BIRA IV/3, no. 16, in *FAPA I*, 261.

humans respond to the action of God in their own religions through the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Religions reflect ways the Spirit inspires their followers to recognize the ray of truth and divine mystery and respond to God's saving work in their own religions. Spiritual experiences in religions manifested in their scriptures and creeds can be considered ways their members respond to God's revelation through his Spirit. BIRA IV/7 expresses: "The great religions of Asia with their respective creeds, cults, and codes reveal to us diverse ways of responding to God whose Spirit is active in all peoples and cultures."[44] The Holy Spirit is active in other religious traditions, in their members' lives, in their sacred books, cults, creeds, and prayers.

Instead of considering divine mystery in other cultures and religions as mere preparation for the Gospel declared by the encyclical RM 29, the FABC promotes interreligious dialogue between Christianity and other religious traditions. Since the same Spirit works in religious traditions, interreligious dialogue is seen as a way the Church discerns the Spirit's presence and activity in other religions. Interreligious dialogue is seen as the work of the Holy Spirit: "The journey of dialogue therefore, at its very core, entails perceiving and honoring the divine Spirit at work in all peoples, cultures, and religions."[45]

Furthermore, the participants of BIRA V/3 (in 1995) held that religions as they are manifested in history are "complementary perceptions" of the divine mystery.[46] FABC I accepted other religions as "significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation" because they are mysteriously given the ray of truth and divine revelation through the Holy Spirit. In dialogue, the

[44] BIRA IV/7, no. 12, in *FAPA I*, 310.

[45] First Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs (FIRA I), nos. 2.4-2.5, in *FAPA III*, 120. Also see BIRA IV/3, no. 10, in *FAPA I*, 260.

[46] Beyond the extremes of inclusivism and exclusivism, pluralism is accepted in resonance with the constitutive plurality of reality. Religions as they are manifested in history are complementary perceptions of the ineffable divine mystery, the God-beyond-God. All religions are visions of divine mystery. BIRA V/3, no. 6, in *FAPA II*, 157.

Church discovers the presence and action of the Holy Spirit and the seeds of the Word in other religious traditions: "There is no Spirit without the Word; and there is no Word without the Spirit."[47] Since the discernment of the Spirit's presence is inseparable from Jesus Christ, discovering the Spirit's action in other religions provides an understanding of the mystery of Jesus Christ within them.[48] The goal in this mutual complementarity and enrichment among religions is for them to grow together towards the fullness of life, that is, unity, love, truth, justice, and peace,[49] and towards the fulfillment of God's saving plan. The diversity of cultures and religions in Asia is not a threat to Christian unity, not a negative issue nor something to be abolished, but something to be promoted and celebrated because "it represents richness and strength" to Christianity.[50] Acknowledging the context of diversity in this way, the FABC fosters the Asian churches to promote unity in diversity.[51] Since the Church is not only enriched but enabled to understand more fully the reality of religious pluralism, religious pluralism, Mendoza observes, can be seen as God's gift to the Church and to the world.[52]

In an explanation of complementarity among various religions, the Theological Advisory Commission maintains that complementarity

---

[47] FABC-OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," no. 3.10.2.3, in *FAPA III*, 298. Also see FABC I, nos. 14-16, in *FAPA I*, 14-15.

[48] The Office of Theological Concern states that "the more we follow the leading of the Spirit, the deeper and closer will also be our understanding of the mystery of Jesus Christ. It also helps us to relate in a harmonious and integral way the universal plan of God manifested in Jesus Christ with our Asian history and experiences." FABC-OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," Introduction, in *FAPA III*, 238.

[49] BIRA I, nos. 5 and 15, in *FAPA I*, 110-111.

[50] FABC-OTC, "Methodology: Asian Christian Theology," no. 1.4, in *FAPA III*, 336.

[51] FABC-OTC, "Methodology," 336.

[52] Mendoza, *A Journey to the Kingdom in the Spirit*, 77.

among religions regards the historically and culturally conditioned ways in which people have experienced and expressed their relation to the Absolute.[53] Since every religion is limited in the experience of God's revelation and all religions are considered mutually complementary, BIRA V/3 declared that no particular religion can be considered the norm for other religions.

With regard to explaining the limits of the religions, Michael Amaladoss, an Indian theologian, adds that every religion, even Christianity, is limited and relative not because Reality is in any way limited, but because the religion's capacity to experience and to express the Absolute is limited.[54] Avoiding the term relativeness regarding Christianity, the FABC does not explicitly claim that Christianity encounters limitations or needs to fulfill its doctrine from other religions, but perceives limitations in Christian experiences and Christian expressions of their experiences to God.[55] Of course, both the FABC and Amaladoss avoid any kind of indifferentism that declares all religions are the same.[56]

---

[53] Complementarity among religions is not affirmed with regard to the Absolute to which each one feels committed, but to the historically and culturally conditioned ways in which people in a pilgrim state have experienced and expressed their relation to and the significance-to-life of the Absolute. FABC-TAC, "Thesis on Interreligious Dialogue," 14.

[54] Michael Amaladoss, *Making all Things New: Dialogue, Pluralism, and Evangelization in Asia* (Gujarat, India: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1990), 229-230.

[55] "We know from experience that any human knowledge is limited… In theological knowledge, the expression always falls short of reality, precisely because we are dealing with a mystery which cannot be fully comprehended. Since no expression is perfect, additional expressions are not only possible, but beneficial for a fuller understanding of the mystery." FABC-OTC, "Methodology: Asian Christian Theology," no. 1.5, in *FAPA III*, 337.

[56] BIRA IV/10, no. 10, in FAPA I, 314. Also see Amaladoss, *Making all Things New*, 250.

2.2. Christology in Relation to Pneumatological Dimension

Although the Holy Spirit described in the FABC documents is not always directly related to the Word or Jesus Christ, the Spirit is inseparable from Christ. Participants of the BIRA IV/3 identify gifts of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit as the gift of the Father to humankind in the Son and the Holy Spirit who bears witness to Jesus Christ.[57] Although professing the inseparable action between Christ and the Holy Spirit, Quatra also expresses the distinct action of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Father and to Jesus Christ. In the former relation, Christ and the Holy Spirit act conjointly. The latter considers Christ as the one who acts through the Spirit.[58] Thus, it is possible to call the Spirit the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of Christ.

Participants of BIRA IV/12 see the Holy Spirit as "the bond" of the relationship between God and humanity, a relationship established through the Word.[59] The Holy Spirit is the link in which God establishes a relation with humanity through the Word and is the outpouring of the Father who communicates himself through Jesus Christ.[60]

Creation is not only the work of the Father and the Son but also of the Spirit. The FABC VI gathered in 1995 named "the Creator Spirit" who relates all life of the world to creation. Then in the document "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today" (1997), the FABC Office of Theological Concern confirmed the intimate relationship between the Word and the Holy Spirit in God's work of creation: "The Spirit of God is intimately

---

[57] BIRA IV/3, nos. 9-11, in *FAPA I*, 260.

[58] Quatra, *At the Side of the Multitudes*, 67.

[59] "It is the life in that Spirit which is the bond of the relationship between God and humankind, a relationship established through the Word of God. Thus, Christian spirituality is a response in the Spirit to the call of God which comes to us through the Word." BIRA IV/12, no. 36, in *FAPA I*, 331.

[60] See BIRA V/3, no. 5, in *FAPA II*, 157.

related to the Word of God. Already in creation, we find the intimate relationship between the Spirit and the Word. If it was the Spirit who was at work in creation, it was through the Word that God called the universe into existence."[61]

Moreover, Jesus is considered "the source of the Spirit." With regard to the Spirit given to Jesus' disciples at Pentecost, Jesus, according to the Office of Theological Concern, is seen as the one who sends the Spirit from the Father so that Jesus and the Father will be present with Jesus' disciples. The FABC considers the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ and the dependence of the Spirit on Christ. If Jesus Christ is the Truth, the Spirit who guides people to Jesus Christ is called the "Spirit of Truth."

> The Holy Spirit is presented as the Spirit of Jesus Christ, especially in the Gospel of John. The giving of the Spirit to the disciples through the breathing of Jesus (Jn 20:22) is an indication of it. The Spirit is given by the Father at the request of Jesus (Jn 14:16) and in the name of Jesus (Jn 14:26). It is Jesus who sends the Spirit from the Father (Jn 15:26). Through the Spirit, Jesus and the Father will be present with the disciples. The Holy Spirit is qualified as the 'Spirit of Truth' while Jesus is the Truth.[62]

The Holy Spirit is the one whom Jesus himself breathed on his disciples commissioning them to fulfill what Jesus had begun. Since mission is understood as "a continuation in the Spirit of the mission of Christ,"[63] the Spirit enlightens the Church to continue Christ's mission. The Spirit of Christ renews the face of the earth and leads the mission of Christ to fulfillment.

However, Jesus Christ is seen as dependent on the Spirit in his life and ministry, from the incarnation to the resurrection. Reflecting on Biblical passages, the FABC-OTC writes:

---

[61] FABC-OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," no. 3.5, in *FAPA III*, 287.

[62] FABC-OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," no. 3.6.2, in *FAPA III*, 289.

[63] FABC V, no. 3.1.2, in *FAPA I*, 280.

> Jesus is conceived and born of the Holy Spirit. Jesus starts his public ministry having been anointed by the Holy Spirit. He is led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. The presence of the Spirit in Jesus was manifested in his preaching the Gospel, in his teaching with authority, in his miracles, in his power to forgive sins, in his prophetic knowledge and utterances, and finally in his death and resurrection.[64]

Jesus Christ is truly seen as Spirit-filled and Spirit-led.[65] The relationship between Christ and the Spirit is not limited to creation and incarnation but extends to revelation, sanctification, and salvation. Moreover, the FABC recognizes the Spirit's action as representing and communicating the mystery of Christ. The BIRA IV/3 states:

> We affirm any effort towards an experience of immediate access to the Spirit to be seen in relation to Jesus Christ to whom the Spirit bears witness. What is done in the name of the Holy Spirit must be in keeping with the life, teachings, and mission of Jesus Christ… What the Spirit does, and continues to do, is inseparable from what Christ said and did.[66]

In this text, BIRA IV/3 stresses the close connection between the action of the Holy Spirit and the paschal mystery of Christ. Additionally, the FABC reaffirms the declaration of Vatican II concerning the relationship between the Spirit and Christ's paschal mystery: "The Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal

---

[64] FABC-OTC, "The Spirit at Work in Asia Today," no. 3.6, in *FAPA III*, 288. FABC VI also states: "Conceived in the virgin's womb by the Spirit's power, anointed by the Spirit at his baptism in the Jordan, driven to the wilderness by the Spirit to be prepared for his mission, sent to preach the good news of salvation by the Spirit's action, Jesus ushers in the new creation, the fullness of life in God. As the Risen One, he breathes the Holy Spirit on his disciples, making them partakers of his life and mission." FABC VI, no. 12, in *FAPA II*, 6.

[65] "Filled with the Spirit, he [Jesus] preached the Good News of the Kingdom of God and commanded his disciples to do the same." FABC V, no. 3.1.1, in *FAPA I*, 279.

[66] BIRA IV/3, no. 11, in *FAPA I*, 260.

mystery."[67] Since the Holy Spirit is mysteriously present and operative beyond human history, social, cultural, and religious structures, the Christ-event consisting of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is also mysteriously present and operative in all human situations. Quatra rightly underlines that according to the FABC, "in the paschal mystery of Christ, the Christ-event transcends, through the Holy Spirit, the limits of time and space and extends itself in all dimensions of the whole history."[68] Through the Holy Spirit, the Christ-event, or the living Christ, has been active in human history before the Incarnation, after Jesus Christ's resurrection, and in the present situations of all people. Wherever and whenever the Holy Spirit is present and active, Christ also is.

3. Uniqueness and Universality of Christ

The uniqueness of Christ is not the primary aim of the FABC's documents. The belief that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world is not a problematic issue in the bishops' discussion. Explaining this reality, Mendoza notes that the traditional proclamation regarding Jesus' uniqueness is not problematic for the bishops, but the question of "how Jesus is to be proclaimed and how the Church's faith in him is to be reinterpreted in a manner that is faithful to the Christian tradition and, at the same time, is intelligible and meaningful for Asians."[69] The Asian bishops focus their interpretations on Christ's salvific role in the context of religious pluralism: "The main questions are the following: how do we understand the centrality and decisiveness of Jesus Christ in the context of religious pluralism?"[70] Additionally, the uniqueness of Christ is understood not only as the uniqueness of salvation in

[67] FABC-OE, "Conclusions of the Theological Consultation," no. 49, in *FAPA I*, 346. Also see Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22.

[68] Quatra, *At the Side of the Multitudes*, 87.

[69] Mendoza, *A Journey to the Kingdom in the Spirit*, 238.

[70] FABC-OE, "Conclusions of the Theological Consultation," no. 27, in *FAPA I*, 341.

and through Christ but also as the fulfillment of all things in Christ as God's universal plan of salvation: "In the context of dialogue we tried to penetrate the meaning of uniqueness of Christ in our own inner experience, in our contact with others, in the very plan of God to bring all things to the fulfillment in Christ as head."[71]

Reflecting on the mysterious presence and action of the Christ-event offers the bishops a profound understanding of the Incarnation in the Asian context. In the Incarnation, Christ made "his own totally of the human condition,"[72] not in abstract beings but in concrete persons determined in time and place.[73] In the First Plenary Assembly, the Asian bishops implicitly confessed that human histories, traditions, and religions are traced by the living Christ as "Christ of the peoples of Asia":

> Christ of the peoples of Asia… You have been present already in their histories and traditions. In hidden ways, you have led them, because for them too, you are the *Way*. In ways unknown to us you have enlightened them in their worship, their beliefs, and their philosophies, since for them, you are the *Truth*. In diverse manners, you have already made yourself present in their lives, for you are their *Life*. From the beginning, you have called all peoples, and from your Cross, you have drawn them to yourself.[74]

In hidden ways, Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life was present at the beginning of creation and has called all the peoples of Asia to communicate with him and has enlightened them in their own religions and cultures. While expressing the cosmic dimension,

---

[71] BIMA I, no. 10, in *FAPA I*, 94.

[72] The FABC I affirms: "…God's Son assumes the totality of our fallen human condition so that He might make it truly His own, and redeem it in his paschal mystery." FABC I, no. 12, in *FAPA I*, 14.

[73] In BIRA IV/7 the bishops write: "For us Christians, such a commitment flows from our faith in Jesus Christ who identified himself through his incarnation with every person and with every aspect of human life." BIRA IV/7, no. 9, in *FAPA I*, 309.

[74] FABC I, no. 46, in *FAPA I*, 19.

the bishops, in this text, are not speaking about the role of the Word but Christ of the Cross, as the Redeemer. In number 12 of this final statement, the FABC emphasizes the saving action of Christ by stating that the Son assumes every human condition, makes it truly his own, and redeems it.[75] Through the power of the Holy Spirit the living Christ has been active and present in all other religious traditions and human situations.[76] Likewise, Quatra underlines that for the Asian bishops, the living Christ of the Gospel is a concrete answer of God to the injustice, marginalization, poverty, oppression, and suffering of the Asian people.[77] Reflecting on the living Christ provides the key not simply to encountering religio-cultural dimensions, but also socio-political issues.

The paschal mystery of the living Christ is considered the decisive action of God in human history, including traditions and religions. The FABC maintains that in Jesus Christ God has personally entered human history and that the Christ-event ushers in the renewal of creation and constitutes the decisive step of God's Kingdom on earth.[78] Quatra also concludes that the Christ-event is not understood in terms of beginning, but the foundation, the personal entrance of God into history, and the decisive step in God's universal design of salvation.[79] The Christ-event is decisive also because it has manifested and sealed the relationship between God and humanity. Through the influence of the living Christ God's own destiny has become "involved with

[75] FABC I, no. 12, in *FAPA I*, 14.

[76] FABC I, no. 46, in *FAPA I*, 19.

[77] Quatra, *At the Side of the Multitudes*, 79 and 89.

[78] FABC-OE, "Conclusions of the Theological Consultation," no. 28, in *FAPA I*, 341.

[79] "They [the Asian bishops] describe the meaning of the Christ-event not in terms of beginning, but by having recourse to expressions like 'to lay the foundation,' 'to incarnate,' or enfleshed moment,' personal entrance of God into history,' decisive step.' That is to say that God's universal salvific plan effectively covers the whole history, and each age falls equally, without discrimination under the action of divine grace." Quatra, *At the Side of the Multitudes*, 87.

humanity's destiny."[80] Therefore, the human history extended by the Christ-event to cultures, traditions, and religions becomes the history of salvation in Christ.

Summary

From the Asian bishops' perspective, God's design of universal salvation acts through his grace and Word, through the Holy Spirit and the living Christ in all aspects of human history. God's salvific love through the Spirit and the living Christ has been present and active not only in the incarnate Christ but also in the condition of every individual. The paschal mystery representing both the principle of a historical-human foundation and God's saving plan is the decisive foundation of salvation for Christians and people of other faiths.[81]

About the Author. **Phan Van Dinh, STD** is a Vietnamese diocesan priest. He earned a Licentiate in Sacred Theology at the Catholic University of America in the United States and a Doctorate in Sacred Theology at the Loyola School of Theology in the Philippines.

[80] Quatra, *At the Side of the Multitudes*, 87.

[81] Quatra, *At the Side of the Multitudes*, 88.

Landas 37:2 (2025) 99–124

TOWARD A CHRISTOLOGY (*MASĪḤIOLOGY*)[1] WITH ISLAM

Renato T. طيب *Oliveros*

Abstract. The divinity of Jesus (*Eisa*) is the Christological stumbling block in the Muslim-Catholic Dialogue of Theological Exchange. It is noteworthy to note that outside the New Testament, the Qur'ān is the only sacred scripture that mentions Jesus the-Christ (*Eisa al-Masīḥ*) by name. This shared Christological revelation is not accidental but divinely intended, serving as a challenge to both Muslims and Christians, for it is through Jesus that they are bound in a unique relationship of nearest affection (Q5:82). In the Qur'ān there are two identical Christological *ayat* (or verses تايآ): Surah 3 (*Al-Imran*) 3:45a and Surah 4 (*An-Nisa*) 4:171a that highlight four embedded Christological doctrines: (1) Jesus (*Eisa*) is the-Christ (*al-Masīḥ*); (2) Word from Allah (*KalimatuHu/Logos*); (3) Hypostatic Union: Son Mary and the-Christ; and (4) The Spirit conceives the Word: 21:91 & 66:12. The Fifth (V) Section on the Crucifixion of Jesus is integrated into the list given its significance. A close reading of the two Qur'ānic verses can be interpreted in light of Catholic Christology summarized in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. One can discern God's divine plan flowing through the lives of Jesus and Mary. God's divine plan is dramatically inaugurated in the virgin birth and the subsequent entry of *Eisa* (Jesus) into human history. After all, the virgin birth in Islam is not about Maryam but more about the miraculous birth of the child *Eisa*.

[1] An adaptation of Greek Christ to Arabic *Masīḥ* as Islamic theology or *Kalam*.

Keywords: Christology; Islam; *Masīḥ; Maryam; Kalimah; Yahya;* Qur'ān; Incarnation; Hypostatic Union; Soteriology; Word; Spirit

Introduction

A profound moment in Muslim-Catholic relations was the signing by Pope Francis (+) and Ahmad al-Tayyeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, of the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace* in Abu Dhabi in 2019. Five years later, in September 2024 in Jakarta, Francis and Nasaruddin Umar, Grand Imam of Istiqlal Mosque, signed the *Joint Declaration Fostering Religious Harmony for the Sake of Humanity*. These watershed documents affirm the core contribution of *Nostra Aetate* to Muslim-Catholic relations in its radical declaration that Muslims, like Catholics, worship the One and the same God. The Catholic Church affirms Muslims with great esteem for they "adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth … they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God." The recognition by the Catholic Church that Muslims and Catholics adore the One and the same God is a radical affirmation of commonality.

The beauty of Islam is in its *Tawhid* that proclaims "there is no god but God" (*lā ʾilāha ʾillā-llāh*). In negating false gods, the oneness of God is upheld and is the basis for Muslims to question Christians about the "Trinity." The Christian "Trinity," however, is not the same as the trinity that the *Qur'ān* criticized (4:171b[2]) in the milieu when Christianity faced heresies and excesses like Collyridianism, a Christian heretical movement in pre-Islamic Arabia whose adherents worshipped Mary as god.[3] The Catholic Trinity does not deviate from the fundamental

[2] "So believe in Allah and His messengers and do not say, 'Trinity.' Desist!"

[3] The Qur'ān mentions this excess in Surah 5:116. "And 'on Judgment Day' Allah will say, 'O Jesus, son of Mary! Did you ever ask the people to worship you and your mother as gods besides Allah?'"

teaching that God is One. *Credo in unum Deum* (I believe in one God), the opening line of the Apostle's Creed, is the Christian *Tawhid*. "Trinity" is a complex form of *Tawhid*.

The Christological Problem: The Divinity of Jesus

The 2nd Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate* acknowledges that "Muslims adore the one God the Creator who is merciful and all-powerful, who has spoken to humankind. … Though they (Muslims) do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet."[4] The Catholic Church admits that the difference lies in Jesus the-Christ (*Eisa*[5] *al-Masīḥ*). Yet it is significant to recognize that outside the New Testament, the only sacred scripture that mentions Jesus the-Christ (*Eisa al-Masīḥ*) by name is the Qur'ān. This shared Christological revelation is not an accident. God meant it to be in order to challenge and strengthen the bond between Muslims and Christians. Thus, a Christology with Islam is a discerned rightful direction in *our time*.

My esteemed professor and mentor, Mahmoud Ayoub, published in 1976 and in 1980 "Toward an Islamic Christology …" I and II. His words below on the difficult but necessary task have inspired me to take the challenge:

> I am convinced that this theological barrier is not an impenetrable wall dividing our two communities. Rather, in the spirit of the divine challenge for Muslims to seek harmony and concord with the people of the book through dialogue and "fair exhortation", this wall could be transformed into a beacon of light guiding us all to God and the good. This essay is a humble attempt to make a small breach in this wall[6] (Ayoub).

---

[4] Second Vatican Council, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, *Nostra Aetate*, 28 October 1965, #3.

[5] Although Isa is the accepted Romanized transliteration in the Qur'an. It means "one" for Filipinos and many Malay speakers. I use Eisa to avoid confusion and identify it exclusively to Jesus.

[6] Mahmoud Ayoub "Christological Issues-- Muslim Perspectives, A Muslim View of Christianity," (2007): p. 118.

I take to heart Ayoub's words and humbly contribute to the Christology in Dialogue with Islam. Some of what is presented here will be controversial to most Muslim readers. Without intending to offend, I am motivated by the Gospel(s) and the Qur'ān to build a Christological bridge that Muslims and Christians worship the same God: "Say, O people of the Book, come to common terms as between us and that we worship none but God …" (Q. 3:64a). Jesus the Christ (*Eisa al-Masīḥ*) may be a stumbling block, but he is the one who can bind Muslims and Christians as nearest in affection.

The Qur'ān's reminder that "The nearest in affection to Muslims are those who say We are Christians" (5:82) should give us hope toward an endeavor in a Christology that is larger than any culture and language in multi-cultural and multi-religious Asia. A deep sense of affinity can heal the wounds and correct the mistakes taught to our children that Muslims or Christians do not worship and pray to the same God. Pope Francis (+) reminds us that we are all brothers and sisters (*Fratelli Tutti*), that we all are *magkakapatid*[7]. May this Christological pursuit form a deep sense of common humanity in a shared mission to bring the God of mercy, peace, and compassion to all peoples in Asia and the rest of the world in the 21st century.

Methodology

A standard methodology in Islamic studies is the strict separation of orthodox interpretation (*tafsir*) of the *Qur'ān* from Biblical exegesis. However, there are contemporary Islamic studies that are open to canonical Arabic versions of the Bible to help illuminate *tafsir* (exegesis) of the Qur'ān. This theological essay is an attempt to weave Gospel texts with Qur'ānic ones, a humble contribution to the Dialogue of Theological Exchange between Islam and Christianity. The Christological interpretations lean more toward theology rather than strictly scripture studies.

[7] The Filipino word *Magkapatid* (siblings) is an inclusive term for *Fratelli* that Pope Francis use to define a Christian's relationship with believers of other religions. Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 53: loc. cit., 874f.

From within the Qur'ānic milieu, due to a lack of Biblical sources and unavailability in Arabic, some Qur'ānic *tafsir* (exegesis) on Jesus differed from Catholic Christology. Nonetheless, when Qur'ānic orthodox interpretation deviates from Catholic Christology, it does not mean that the Qur'ān contradicts the Gospel(s). The Gospel (*Injil)* is described by the Qur'ān as one of the four sacred scriptures in Islam, revealed by Allāh, the others being the Psalms (*Zabur*), the Torah (*Tawrat*), and the Qur'ān. Unfortunately, the Gospel(s) have been rejected in mainstream Islam because of a blanket statement by some Muslim scholars that the Gospels are corrupted.[8] Nonetheless, we are hopeful because there are many Qur'ānic exegetes (*mufassirun*) who draw upon the Old and New Testaments to enrich their commentaries on Qur'ānic verse (*ayat*) that may need an extra-Biblical source to elaborate it. In the same way, the Qur'ān confirms and enriches what was revealed seven centuries earlier in the Gospels of Luke, Mathew, Mark, and John. However, are Christian exegetes open to the *Qur'ān*?

If guided properly, Christians must not be afraid to read and learn from the *Qur'ān*. Thomas O'Shaughnessy, SJ argues that "… truths found also in Christ's teaching can arise outside the Church (*Nostra Aetate*, 2-3) … If this is true of world religions in general, it is even more valid for Islam, which arose in surroundings already influenced for centuries by Judaism and Christianity… (thus) the Qur'ān does not set itself in opposition to any Biblical teaching."[9] A rereading of the Qur'ānic "Jesus the-Christ" (*Eisā al-Masīḥ*) can help shed light on the dogma of the Trinity.

Framework: Qur'ān 3:45a and 4:17a

In the Qur'ān, there are two Christological *ayat* (verses آيات), both revealed in Madinah: Surah 3 (*Al-Imran*) 3:45a and Surah 4 (*An-Nisa*)

[8] This, despite Islam's belief that the following are sacred scriptures: *Tawrat* (Torah), *Zabur* (Psalms), and *Injil* (Gospel).

[9] T. O'Shaughnessy, *Word of God in the Qur'ān*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1984), Foreword.

4:171a. They are identical save for the mention of the Spirit (*Rūh*) in 4:171a.

> **3:45a-**Madinah: The angels said, "O Mary, Allāh announces the good news: Of a ***Word from Him*** (*bi-Kalimatimin-hu* -Allāh) whose ***name is the-Messiah Jesus*** (*smuhu-[a]l-u Eisa*) ***son of Mary*** (*ibn Maryam*)".
>
> **4.171a-**Madinah: ***The-Messiah Jesus son of Mary*** (***al-u Eisabnu Maryama***) is a messenger of Allāh *(rasuulullaahi)*, and ***His-Word*** (*wa* ***KalimatuHu*)** that ***He*** (Allāh) ***sent down*** to Mary (*al-qaahaa ilaa Maryama*) and **a *Spirit from-Him*** (*wa* ***Rūh****um-**minHu***).
>
> [4:171a Paraphrased**:** The-Messiah Jesus son of Mary is a Messenger (*Rasul*) of Allāh. He (Allāh) sent down to Mary ***His-Word*** *and* ***His-Spirit***.]

In the repetition of these *ayat* (verses), the Qur'ān highlights the four (4) embedded Christological doctrines. The fifth (V) one is not mentioned but integrated into the list, given its significance. Like the Five (5) Pillars in Islam, in the spirit of Muslim-Catholic theological exchange, there are also Five (5) Christological Doctrines cited in the Qur'ān aligned with the Nicene Creed:

I. Jesus (*Eisa*) is **the-Christ** (*al-Masīḥ*)

II. **Word** from Allah (*KalimatuHu/Logos*)

III. **Hypostatic Union**:

- Jesus is Truly Human in *ibn Maryam*
- Jesus is Truly Divine in *al- Masīḥ* and *Kalimah*

IV. **The Spirit conceives the Word: Surah 21:91 & Surah 66:12**

By blowing into Mary, the Spirit (*Rūh*) conceives the Word named Jesus the-Christ. (NC: ***and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin***).

V. **Crucifixion of Jesus: Surah 4:157**

"*wa lakin shubihah lahum*" (but so it was made to appear to them**).**

- A denial of the crucifixion?

- Soteriology: Sin and Repentance

The theological interpretations for Sections I-IV are based mainly on these two verses as interpreted in light of Catholic Christology as summarized in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (325/381 AD):

I believe in *one Lord Jesus Christ*,

the Only *Begotten* Son of God,

born of the Father ***before all ages***…

through **Him** all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation
He came down **from heaven,**
and by the *Holy Spirit* was *incarnate* of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.

I. Jesus (*Eisa*) is the-Christ (*al-Masīḥ*): Qur'ān 3:45a confirmed in 4:171a

Messiah (Hebrew: מָשִׁיחַ, *mašíaḥ*, or המשיח, *mashiach*; Aramaic: משיחא; Syriac: ܡܫܺܝܚܳܐ, *Məšīḥā*; Latin: *Messias*) literally means 'anointed one'. The Greek verb is ***chrio*** from which we derive *Christos* meaning the Anointed One. The Greek is a borrowed translation of the Hebrew *mashiah* (מָשִׁיחַ) or Aramaic *mshiha* (מְשִׁיחָא). The Hebrew is *Ha-mashiach* (המשיח, "the *Māšíaḥ*"). In Judaism, he is a liberator-king figure believed to be the savior of the Jews from persecution and oppression. The Arabic word used by Christian Arabs is borrowed from the Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac *Messiah* (***Meshihā***). Jesus is referred to as *Yasūʿ al-* (يسوع المسيح) and *Eisā al-* (عيسى المسيح) by Arab Christians.

The New Testament Greek form ***ho Messiahou*** (the Christ) is the equivalent of the Qur'ān's *al-*. The title is never used in the Qur'ān without the definite article—*al*. The full Qur'ānic name for Jesus is *al-u Eisa* – "the Messiah Jesus" (Qur'ān 4:157, 4:171). The Qur'ān establishes that the title Messiah is solely applied to Jesus by the name *Jesus the-Messiah* (*Eisa al-Masīḥ*). It confirms that this Messiah is no other than Jesus. It rules out any possibility that the title can be applied to anyone else, distinguishing Jesus from false messiahs in human history who claimed to be the messiah. Jesus is not a messiah or one of the messiahs; he is *the* Messiah (*al-Masīḥ*). Jesus is not only called *al-u Eisa*, and on a number of occasions in the Qur'ān the title *al-* appears by itself. Jesus is inseparable from his title as Christ—*Eisa al-Masīḥ* according to the Qur'ān.

What is the meaning of *al-Masīḥ* (the-Christ) in Islam? For some Muslim commentators, the title *al-Masīḥ* (the-Messiah), mentioned ten (10) times in the Qur'ān, has no connection to the Jewish and Christian understanding of Messiah as "*the anointed one*." Some Muslim commentators downplay the meaning and significance of the title Messiah in Jewish and Christian theology. Some Muslim authorities interpret ***Masīḥ*** by unearthing the triad consonant root ***m-s-h*** or ***mim***, ***sin*** and ***hah*** to explain its meaning, stating that Jesus was so called *Masīḥ* because the title is derived from the verb *saha*. For Ibn Kathir, *al-Masīḥ* means Jesus' continuous journeying from place to place with no fixed place to stay, and that Jesus is flat-footed meaning flat or smooth.[10]

The great Muslim scholars Zamakhshari and Baidawi, "rejected these theories and admitted that it was a borrowed word."[11] In defining the *Masīḥ* according to its Arabic etymology, what is lost is the original and intended meaning of Messiah provided by Jewish or Christian sources. Rightfully, the Arabic root must not be applied because it is a borrowed Hebrew, so it is proper that it must be understood from the context when it was read in earlier scriptures, i.e., the 7th-century

[10] Ayoub, *The House of Imran*, 131.

[11] Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, 265.

*Qur'ā*n. The *Qur'ān* cannot be faulted for its misrepresentation and misinterpretation.

In Christianity, there was a historical gradual transition from the use of the definite article "the" before the word "Christ" to its disappearance or absorption into the proper name of Jesus as the promised Messiah. In 3:45a and 4:171a, the *Qur'ān* confirms the name "The Messiah Jesus," revealed seven centuries earlier in the Gospels of Matthew 1:1, Mark 1:1, and John 1:17. Jesus is inseparable from his title as Christ, *Eisa al-Masīḥ,* according to the *Qur'ān*. What used to be a title "Christ" is understood as a name solely identified with Jesus. In the Gospel of John, the word "Messias" is mentioned thrice (Jn 1:17, 1:41, 4:25). John 1:17 uses the name *Jesus Christ sans* the definite article "the" before Christ. The same is true in the Gospel of Mark 1:1.

II. A Word named Jesus the-Christ

1 *In the beginning* was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** ***He*** was with God in the beginning. **3** Through ***him*** all things were made; without ***him*** nothing was made that has been made (John 1:1-3).

In the beginning ***God*** created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the ***Spirit of God*** was hovering over the waters. And God uttered (Word), "(Let there) ***Be*** light," and there was light (Genesis 1:1-3).[3]

3:45a: The angels said, "O Mary, Allāh announces the good news: Of a ***Word from Him*** (*bi-**Kalimat**imin-**Hu*** **(**Allāh) whose ***name is the-Messiah Jesus*** (*smuhu-[a]l-u Eisa*) son of Mary (*ibn Maryam*).

4:171a: The-Messiah Jesus son of Mary (*al-u Eisabnu Maryama*), is a messenger of Allāh *(rasuulullaahi)*, and ***His-Word*** (*wa **KalimatuHu*** **(**Allāh**)** that ***He*** (Allāh) ***sent down*** to **Mary** (*al-qaahaa ilaa Maryama*)…born of the Father *before all ages*…. through **Him** all things were made (NC).

Word (*Kalimah*/Logos) is both a proper noun and an imperative verbal command "(Let there) ***Be***"[12]**— *Kun*** (Arabic) or ***Yehi* (Hebrew).** In Filipino, it is the command (*mag*)***-Ka*** (Be). In Biblical theology, "Be!" was uttered first in Genesis 1:3 and 1:6: "God said, '(Let there) ***Be***…'" (*Allāhu saya**kūn**u hunāka*)"[13]. Through ***him*** all things were made; without ***him*** nothing was made that has been made (John 1:1-3). The stumbling block is in the Islamic interpretation that the ***Word*** is only a command (*Kun*) but failed to see the Word (*Kalimah*) as a proper noun that the *Qur'ān* named *Eisā al-* (Jesus the-Christ; 3:45a and 4:171a). He is the *Word (Kalimat*/Logos) sent by God to Mary (4:171a; NC[14]: "*He came down from Heaven"*). Qur'ān 3:47 is reminiscent of the Gospel of Luke 1:34 and 1:37, Mary asked: "My Lord (*Rabbi*), how shall I have a son seeing no man has touched me? Even so, God said, God wills what He wills. When He (God) decides on something, He simply says to it ***Be*** (Kun), and it is." (Q. 3:47) "Thus Allāh creates what He wills when He wills on a matter. He simply says "**BE**"—and it is (***KUN****-fa-yakun*) (3:47b). For with God nothing ***Will Be*** impossible. Then Mary replied, "I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done unto me according to your Word (Will)" (Lk 1:37-38).

The pre-existent Word became human in Jesus, an assertion that Muslim scholars reject by reducing it simply as *kun* as a command "Be", to create Jesus, rather than *Kalimah* (Word) which is the *kun* personified in Christ whereby from **him and through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation, the Word came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate in the Virgin Mary, and became man.** In the Gospel of John, the Word is Jesus, and "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3). This Gospel verse is the basis of the Nicene Creed's "through **Him** all things were made". In John 1:17, this ***Word*** is named "Jesus Christ," confirmed in the *Qur'ān* 3:45a and 4:171a, naming a ***Word*** as ***the-Messiah Jesus***. Qur'ān 4:171 clearly

[12] Be is the Word "…through him all things were made" (Nicene Creed).

[13] Ayoub, *The House of Imran*, 13.

[14] Nicene Creed, 325 AD.

states that the *Kalimah* (Word) is His or from Him, and does not imply that Jesus is created but is from Allāh.

Incarnation. The identity of the "Word" is remembered in the Preface of the Holy Mass: "He [Jesus Christ] is the Word through whom you made the universe." The evangelist John employs the personal pronouns "He, Him" to address the "Word." The Word conceals His Glory in becoming flesh. "Now that John has definitely reached the climax of his introduction in speaking of the Word become flesh, he never calls him the Word: The Gospel is testimony not to the eternal Word but to the **Word become flesh**, **Jesus Christ** …"[15] The uncreated *Word* **born of the Father before all ages** and was there from the very beginning is *made finite and human in Jesus*. This transformation is the spiritual generation of the Divine Word to become human, **a** tremendous mystery of the Incarnation.

The *Qur'ān* fully defines that this Jesus is the-Christ. This is one classic case in point wherein the Qur'ān affirms John 1 by establishing the fundamental relationship between the *Word* (*Logos*) and *the-Messiah*. The *Word* is named the-***Christ*** according to the Qur'ān. And that Word is incarnated, named Jesus Christ (Jn 1:17). In the Incarnation, the Word (*Logos*) in the *Qur'ān* becomes man, who is the co-eternal and uncreated Word whose name is ***al-Masīḥ*** (the Messiah, the-Christ). John, the evangelist, stopped using *Word* when the Word was already incarnated in Jesus Christ. The *Word* ceased to be *Word* (un-incarnated) until the eternal Word became human in Jesus.

The seed of the Word, who is Christ, is present in non-Abrahamic religions formed by man. The seed of Christ as ***Word*** (***Logos***) has been active in history and present in peoples, even predating Jesus, who is the incarnation of the Word as revealed in John 1. We trace this teaching to Justin Martyr (100-165 CE), whose theology on *Logos Spermatikos,* meaning "semen-bearing word" or "seminal logos." The Word (*Logos*) is inseparable from the presence of the Spirit. It is the

[15] The Jerome Biblical Commentary, Bruce Vawter, C.M., in G. Kittel in ThDNT 4, 132, 423 (Prentice Hall, NJ, 1968).

Spirit who sows the "seeds of the Word" in scripture and cultures of non-Christians, preparing them for full maturity in Jesus Christ.[16]

Yahya (John the Baptist) Witnesses to the Word.

From within the same pericope of Surah 3 (Medina) is revealed the angels who greeted Zechariah (Zacharias): "Allah gives you the good news of Yahya (John the Baptist) as a Witness of a Word (Christ) of Allah." (3:39) The angels also greeted Maryam: "Allah gives you the good news of a Word from Him (Allah) whose name is Messiah..." (3:45).

The role of Jesus as savior may differ in Islam, but Surah 3's depiction of the Word, conceived in Maryam and witnessed by Yahya (John), has a strong parallelism with the Gospel according to John Chapter 1, which reveals the incarnation of the Word becoming flesh. Tabari interprets the phrase, "confirming a Word of God," to refer to the al-Masīḥ (the Messiah), Jesus the son of Mary. Neither the *Qur'ān* nor the Hadith mentions Maryam's visit to her cousin *Ilisabat* (Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah). It is in al-Tabari's *tafsir* that it is written: "The wife of Imran said, O Mary! Truly I feel that what is in my womb is stirring before what is in thy womb" (Tafsir III, p. 157)[17].

Al-Tabari reported that al-Dahhak said, "John was the first to assent to Jesus and to bear witness that he was a Word of God."[18] It first happened as Ibn Kathir reported on the authority of Ibn Abbas that, "John's mother (*Ilisabat*) used to say to Mary, 'I feel the child in my womb bowing down in reverence to the child in your womb.' This was

[16] *Redemptoris Missio* 28; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium*, 17; *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church: Ad Gentes*, 3.

[17] V. Courtois, SJ, "Notes On Islam, Oriental Institute," St. Xavier's College, Calcutta, 1952, p. 62

[18] Ayoub, *The House of Imran*, Tabari, VI, pp. 373-372, p.108.

the manner in which John confirmed Jesus while still in the womb."[19] Tabarsi argued that John was obligated by God to be a witness to the fact that Jesus is, in truth, the Word of God. John has credibility and integrity that people believed John's word because of his veracity and asceticism[20] instead of testifying that Jesus is the Lamb of God, the Messiah.

III. Hypostatic Union: 3:45a/4:171a

In the *Qur'ān*, the "hypostatic union" of two natures, truly human and truly divine, in Jesus is defined by him being the *son of Mary* (*ibn Maryam*), and him being *the-Christ* (*al-Masīḥ Eisa*),[21] the eternal incarnated ***Word***. The Word's name is *the-Christ Jesus* (*Eisa al-Masīḥ*), who is the son of Mary (*ibn Maryam*). Jesus is both *Ibn* and *Walad,*[22] being both truly human truly divine. Truly *ibn,* son of Mary, and truly *Walad,* as begotten son of God.

The angels said, "…Of a ***Word from Him*** whose ***name is the-Messiah Jesus*** (*smuhu-[a]l-u Eisa*) ***son of Mary*** (*ibn Maryam*) (Q. 3:45a).

1. Jesus is Truly Human. *Eisa-ibnu Maryam* affirms that Jesus is truly human and finite.

2. Jesus is Truly Divine. In *al-u Eisa* (Jesus the-***Christ***) is divine by virtue of him being the infinite and uncreated Word, born of the Father *before all ages*. …begotten, through **Him** all things were made.

---

[19] Ayoub, *The House of Imran*, Ibn Kathir, II, 34, p. 108.

[20] Ayoub, *The House of Imran*, Tabarsi, III, p.72; cf. Tabataba'I, III, pp. 176-177, p. 109.

[21] Christ is one of the names of Jesus, note for 3:45, Holy *Qur'ān* with English Translation, Ensar Nesriyat, Istanbul, 1996, p. 54.

[22] Mahmoud Ayoub, *Jesus the Son of God: A Muslim View of Christianity* (New York: Orbis Books), 118.

The *Qur'ān* leans more towards *Eisa ibn Maryam* (Jesus *son* of Mary), mentioned twenty-three times in the *Qur'ān*, for it respectfully attributes the human sonship of Jesus to Mary his mother, ***ibn*** ابن in *al-ibnu Maryam*—"the Messiah son of Mary" (Surah 9.31). This Arabic translation of the concept "son" (*ibn*) used on Jesus in the *Qur'ān* is related to the Hebrew word *bin*, בן." "Son" (*Ibn* (ابن)) can be applied to Mary because Jesus was conceived in her womb and His flesh was drawn from Mary his mother. *Ibn* ابن (son) of *Maryam* (Mary) is Jesus in relation to his mother Maryam.

Jesus is Truly Human. In reference to Jesus, the Qur'ān makes a statement of belief on key theological points that the ***Word*** (*Kalimah*) is ***Jesus the-Christ*** (*Eisa al-Masīḥ*).[23] This Qur'ānic verse affirms Christian theology that the "Word" (*Kalimat*) or the *Logos* that became flesh is named Messiah, the Son of Mary (*Maryam um Eisa*).

The *Qur'ān* portrays Jesus' birth as a miraculous event, a sign of God's power and a testament to the unique nature of Jesus's birth, where Jesus is conceived by Mary through divine intervention without a father. It is in the ***Eisa*** *ibn Maryam* that Islam teaches that Jesus is truly human, which, incidentally, is a fundamental belief in Christianity.

Jesus is Truly Divine. By virtue of Jesus, conceived by the Holy Spirit, by virtue of Jesus as the eternal Word, and by virtue of Jesus as *al* implies that Jesus is divine. Surah 4:171 verse affirms that Jesus is the Messiah, and that he is more than just a messenger (*Rasul*). Rather, he is the Word of God named Jesus. Surah 4:171a, if rephrased, reads: "*The Messiah Jesus (who is) the son of Mary, is a messenger of Allāh and His-Word that He (Allāh) sent down to Mary, and a Spirit from Him (Allāh).*" The medium who is *Jesus the Word* is Himself the message of God. Surah 4:171a confirms the announcement of the good news to Mary on the incarnation of the Word as Jesus the-Christ through the Holy Spirit[24].

[23] "Toward a Muslim-Christian Christology in Asia," 2025.

[24] Renato T. Oliveros, "Thomas O"Shaughnessy, S.J. & Fazlur Rahman: The Incarnation in the *Qur'ān*," *Asia Pacific Mission Studies* 4, no. 2 (2022). Available at https://archium.ateneo.edu/apms/vol4/iss2/5.

*Peter and Martha: You are the Christ, Son (***Walad***) of the living God.*

When Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter declares, "You are the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the living God." (Mt 16:16) هُو المسيحُ بنُ اللهِ الحيّ. *Huwa al-hu ibn Allah alhayi* (You are the Christ, the son of the living God). The claim that Jesus is the son of God depends on which Gospel one reads. Peter either says: "You are the Christ" (Mark 8:29); or "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," (Matthew 16:16), or "God's Messiah" or "The Christ of God" (Luke 9:20). It confirms Peter's declaration of faith in Matthew 16:13-20, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Jesus said that Peter was blessed, as this was revealed to him by God.

In the *Qur'ān*, Jesus had only Mary as a single parent. Unlike in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Joseph is absent to dispel doubts on Mary's virginity that she herself attests: "My Lord (*Qaalat Rabbi*), how can I have a son when no man has touched me, nor have I been unchaste?" (Q. 3:47, 19:20b).

Jesus as ***walad*** ولد means he is the begotten son of God. According to Ayoub, "begotten" is the past participle of the verb "beget," which means for a father to produce an offspring, which implies physical generation.[25] *Walad* (وَلَد) in this case denotes a son born of sexual relations, which is inappropriate. This heresy was taught by one of those heretical groups in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, which prompted the *Qur'ān* to condemn and warn those who teach this heresy. "And Exalted is the Majesty of our Lord: He has taken neither a spouse nor a son (ولد, *walad*; 72:3)". The *Qur'ān* rejects the idea that Jesus is the physical son (*walad*) of God because the idea that God has a spouse (*zawja*; *asawa* in Filipino) to sire a human being is reprehensible.

Theologically, Islam is not criticizing Christianity because mainstream Christianity does not teach that God had sexual relations with a spouse to beget Jesus. But Jesus as ***walad*** ولد is non-physiological in meaning, not a physical generation but more of a spiritual generation

[25] Ayoub, *Jesus the Son of God*, 118.

because the *Word* (*Kalima, Logos*), before the incarnation, already existed and was co-eternal with God. It is in the incarnation of the Word as conceived by the Holy Spirit that the Sonship of Jesus Christ to God is analogous to his sonship to Mary in Islam. In the Gospel of Mark (Mk 6:3), Jesus is addressed as the "son of Mary," *ibn* Maryam.

To Him is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth: How can He have a son (ولد, *walad*) when He has no spouse? When He created all things, and He hath full knowledge of all things (6:101).

The Jews said, "Ezra is the son of God," and the Nazarenes said, "The Messiah is the son of God." Such are their utterances with their mouths, they imitate the sayings of those before them. God will fight them. They are deluded from the truth! (9:30)

And to warn those who say, "God has begotten a ***son***." (18:4)
يذلِنا االَوق يَنُذرَو اتخّذ لَّلـاهُ ولـدًا

Is it really difficult to relate to God as a Father, being the most compassionate and most merciful? In Islamic theology, anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*) goes contrary to God's absolute transcendence. The real problem rests in the usage of "Father" because as father, it implies that God begets a son.

IV. The Spirit conceives the Word named Jesus; the Spirit is not Jesus.

The-Messiah Jesus, son of Mary (***al-u Eisabnu Maryama***), is a messenger of Allāh *(rasuulullaahi)* and ***His-Word*** (*wa* ***KalimatuHu***) that ***He*** (Allāh) ***sent down*** to Mary (*al-qaahaa ilaa Maryama*), ***and a Spirit from-Him*** (***wa Rūh****um-minHu*). (4.171a)

The conjunction "*wa"* (and) means that there were two beings sent to Mary, the *Word* who co-existed with God, who *became flesh* (*asbah lahman; laman* in Filipino), and the other being is the "Spirit *(Rūh)*," wrongly identified by some *Mufassirun* (exegetes) as Jesus. Mainstream Islam, however, identifies the Spirit as Gabriel—a topic discussed in detail in another essay.[26] O'Shaughnessy puts the blame on the early

[26] Oliveros, "Thomas O'Shaughnessy, S.J. & Fazlur Rahman."

commentators who were behind the push to equate the Spirit with Gabriel. By then, the early commentators were unanimous in seeing Gabriel as synonymous with the Spirit.[27] They integrated the teaching in their commentaries on Surah 3: 42,45 that the *malaaikatu* (plural angels) who spoke to Maryam is Gabriel, although the name Gabriel is not mentioned in Surahs 3 and 19.

Mary recognized the Spirit and addressed Him as Lord (*Rabb*), a title reserved only for God. Maryam asked: "My Lord (*Qaalat Rabbi*), how can I have a son when no man has touched me, nor have I been unchaste? (Q. 3:47, 19:20b). According to 21:91 and 66:12, the Spirit blew the Word into Mary's womb as a seed. It is the Spirit planting the Seed of the Word (*Logos Spermatikos*) in Mary, thereby conceiving Jesus, who was born in the Spirit. If the Spirit is the Spirit *of* God or *from* God according to the Qur'ān, then the conception of Jesus is *of* and *from* God Himself, a powerful experience of affinity and intimacy that made Jesus exclaim that God is his Father, and acclaim "I and the Father are one" (Jn 10:30).

And remember her (Mary) who guarded well her chastity (*ah-sanat farjaha*), so **We** breathed (*fanafakhnaa*) into her *(fiha)* **Our Spirit** *(mir-**Rūh**inaa;* 21:91/Makkah).

And Mary…who guarded well her *generative organ*[28] (*ah-sanat farjaha*), and so **We** breathed *(fanafakhnaa)* into it (womb, ***fihi***) of **Our Spirit** (*mir-**Rūh**inaa*, Q. 66:12-Madinah[29]) … what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit (Mt. 1:20b).

In relation to Allah, the Qur'ānic phrases "From Him" and "of Him" relate the Word and the Spirit, not just a part of God but intimately one with God, e.g., **Our Spirit** (*mir-**Rūh**inaa*) and ***His-Word*** (*wa **KalimatuHu***). **The Qur'ān reveals the** *Word* ***from*** *Him*

[27] O'Shaughnessy, *Word of God in the Qur'ān*, 54 and 57.

[28] Ibn Kathir interpretation of *farjaha.*

[29] Actually, Meccan based on style and similarity. See O'Shaughnessy, *Word of God in the Qur'ān*, 25.

(*bi-Kalimatim min**Hu***, 3:45a), and the *Spirit **from** Him* (*Rūhum-minHu*, 4.171a). "*Hu"* refers to Allah. *Minhu* (مِنْهُ) in Arabic translates to "from him" or "of him." It is formed by combining the preposition *min* (مِن) meaning "from" with the pronoun *hu* (هُ), which is the third-person masculine singular pronoun. Therefore, "minhu" indicates that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are two Persons *from* God, maintaining each distinct and unique persons as Spirit and as Christ.

The *Word* and the *Spirit* from Allah (*minHu*) sent to Mary are not created beings. In 4:171, a Spirit from God (***Rūh**um-**minHu***) is sent to Mary to conceive the Word (*KalimatuHu*) through God's Spirit (*mir-**Rūh**inaa*, 21:91 & 66:12). It is through the *Spirit* that the Jesus (*Eisa*) is conceived, thus making it improbable that the Spirit and the Jesus are the same person. The *Spirit* (*Rūh*) has His own essence distinct from *Eisa*'s (Jesus) essence. However, in Christian spirituality, the Spirit is different yet inseparable from Jesus. Wherever and whenever Jesus is present, the Spirit is also there. The Spirit for Christians is the Holy Spirit (*Rūh al Qudus*) and is divine. The *Word* that co-existed with God is divine as well. The Trinitarian discourse may be difficult to accept in a strictly monotheistic Islam, but one cannot deny the compelling reason why the three persons of the Trinity are alluded to the One God.

IV. The Denial of the Crucifixion of Jesus?

"…but they killed him not, nor crucified him (Jesus) '*wa lakin shubihah lahum*'" (but so it was made to appear to them)" (4:157).

An interpretation of 4:157 describes the accusers who witnessed the crucifixion, and it appeared to them that Jesus was crucified and died on the cross; yet it was not Jesus but a substitute who looked like Jesus. By denying the crucifixion and death of Jesus, mainstream Islam challenges Christianity's core belief:

For our sake, *he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,*
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day. (Nicene Creed)

The contentious fifth Christological/*Masīḥiological* doctrine is the crucifixion and death of Jesus. Most Muslim exegetes reject the crucifixion of Jesus. From the Qur'ānic milieu, Muslims' denial of the crucifixion and death of Jesus arises from their belief in the omnipotence of Allah. To deny the crucifixion is to defend Allah's omnipotence. Jesus, a great prophet in Islam, to be crucified and humiliated, goes contrary to Allāh's omnipotence. It supports a Jewish critique which stipulates that the Jesus of the Gospels is not the Messiah, and that someone else shall come who is like David, not one who is humiliated on the cross, to which most Muslims concur. On the other hand, Mahmoud Ayoub believes in the historicity of a Jesus from Nazareth who was crucified and died on the cross. Ayoub argued that historical evidence shows that Jesus indeed was crucified and died on the cross under Pontius Pilate. Eusebius of Caesarea, a 4th-century historian, recounts Jesus' crucifixion within the context of the Roman Empire and the Jewish people. While not a firsthand eyewitness account, Eusebius placed Jesus' crucifixion in the reign of Emperor Tiberius. Why then, it must be asked, does the *Qur'an* deny the crucifixion of Christ in the face of apparently overwhelming evidence? Muslim commentators have not been able to convincingly disprove the crucifixion.[30]

Eid al-Adha commemorates Abraham's submission to Allah's will to offer Ismael, his firstborn, as a sacrifice. A parallel theme resonates in Christianity when God offers His only Son as a sacrifice for the salvation of man. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son" (John 3:16). His sacrifice is efficacious because he is God Himself offering self for the salvation of all. The grand commission of Jesus to his disciples is repentance from sin. Conversion by turning away from sin and turning back to Christ, in whatever understanding, is inherent in religions. But when believers in God embrace the depth of meaning of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross, it becomes redemptive and manifests God's perfect love for man.

[30] Hans Küng, *Christianity and the World Religions* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1986), 111.

Without the crucifixion, Christianity cannot speak of a resurrection. The key verse to address the implication of Christ not rising from the dead is in 1 Corinthians 15:14-15: "And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is also in vain. More than that, we are found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he raised from the dead." From a soteriological point of view, what comes with the denial of the crucifixion is the denial of redemption. Resurrection ascertains that Jesus is the-Christ and fulfills God's plan to redeem humanity from sin. The resurrection of Jesus is the central pillar of the Christian faith. Without the resurrection, there is no forgiveness of sins, and the power of sin remains unbroken. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, it would mean the Christian faith is fundamentally flawed, and all hope for salvation is lost. Paul's preaching would be in vain, and the faith of believers would be worthless. The gospel, which is the message of forgiveness and reconciliation through Jesus' death and resurrection, would be rendered meaningless.

Universality of Sin and Forgiveness

For Christians, the Messiah named Jesus is the savior-redeemer of man from sin. Mahmoud Ayoub, however, argues that in Islam, there is no need for a salvific figure because the reality of sin is not as poignant as in Christianity. Nonetheless, one cannot deny that the *Qur'ān* reveals that man shall be tempted to sin by the cunning *Shayṭān* or *Iblis*, mentioned eleven (11) times in the Qur'ān, assisted by *jinns* (devils) who whisper into man's heart, tempting man to sin and disobey Allah (Surat 113 and 114).[31] This mirrors the prayer of Jesus: "*Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one (the devil).*" (Aramaic: *Wela tahln l'nesyuna* [lead us not into temptation], *ela patzan min bisha* [but deliver us from the evil one]).

Muslims pray to Allah as the Most Compassionate and Most Merciful (*ar-Rahman ar-Rahim*). Sin in Islam is not a state, but an action

[31] Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Death of Jesus, Reality or Delusion: A Muslim View of Christianity* (New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 176.

(a bad deed). They seek refuge in Allah from the one who tempts them to commit bad deeds. If a Muslim falls and sins, they beg for Allah's mercy and forgiveness. In Christianity, in Islam, even in Buddhism and Hinduism, believers universally experience the reality of sin, conscience, guilt, and the longing for forgiveness for transgressions committed against one's fellowmen, nature, and God. To be a Muslim is to submit to Allah and seek Allah's mercy for one's sinful ways. Both Muslims and Christians know that to depend solely on one's strength is futile, but to depend totally on God's mercy and compassion, a Muslim can be a better Muslim. Without God, man cannot redeem himself from his sinful ways. For Christians, the messianic figure is the Christ, the Son of the living God, who came into the world to save humankind, who are incapable of redeeming themselves and are forgiven from their sin.

The grand commission of Jesus to his disciples highlights repentance from sin. Every missionary is being commissioned by Christ to call for the conversion, repentance, and forgiveness of sins (Lk 24:47). Here we see that Matthew and Mark used "***Baptism***," which is a baptism of repentance, while Luke and John explicitly mention "*forgiveness"* after repentance from sin.

> **Matthew** 28:19. [19] Therefore, go and make *disciples* of all nations, ***baptizing*** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ..."
>
> **Mark** 16:15-16a. 15 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the *gospel* to every creature. 16a Whoever believes and is ***baptized*** will be saved …"
>
> **Luke** and **John**, on the other hand, emphasize the being "***Sent***" by Jesus as said in Luke (Lk 24:46-49) and (Jn 20:21-22).
>
> **John** 20:21-22. 21 Jesus said, "Peace be with you! *As the Father has sent me, I am sending you*." 22 And with that, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you *forgive people's sins*, they are forgiven …"

> **Luke** 24:46-48. [46]He (Jesus) told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah (Messiah) will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, [47] *and repentance for the forgiveness of sins* will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. … [49] I am going to *send* you what my Father has promised.

Da'wa is mission in Islam. It is to call man to Allah, submit to Allah's will, and live the straight path. Like the Prophet Muhammad, the **icons of the mission to call named by the Qur'ān are the *Spirit* and *the-Christ* introduced as** رسول (*rasul*) (plural رسل *rusul*) **or Messenger(s) of God.** The Word (*Logos*) who became incarnate,[32] named Jesus the-Christ (*al-Masīḥ*), is a *rasul* (messenger) sent not only to his people the Jews, but to all humanity. In Christianity, Jesus, the messenger, is himself the message. Contrary to Islam, Jesus did not receive the *Injil* (Gospel) for he himself is the Gospel—the good news to humanity.

The-Messiah Jesus son of Mary (***al- Masīḥ Eisabnu Maryama***) is a messenger of Allāh ***(rasul****ullaahi,* **4.171a).**

He (the Spirit) said, "I am only a ***messenger***[33] of your Lord (***Rasulu*** *Rabbiki*) that **I may give you a pure son**[34]" (Q. 19:19).

Soteriology: Catholic and Muslim Convergence

In Islam, salvation refers to the eventual entrance to *Janna* (Paradise). Islam teaches that people who die disbelieving in Allah do not receive salvation. Those who die believing in the one God and His message (Islam) receive salvation. Further, one must also avoid sinning along with performing good deeds. Islam acknowledges the inclination of humanity towards sin. Therefore, Muslims are constantly commanded to seek God's forgiveness and repent. Allah only accepts the repentance of those who commit evil "ignorantly or recklessly"

---

[32] *Holy Qur'an*, trans, Ali Quli Qara'i (UK edition, 2005).

[33] The Spirit is on a mission or sent to blow into Maryam.

[34] *Gulaaman-Sakiyya* also means an intelligent son, not just a pure son.

then repent soon after; Allah will pardon them. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise (Surah An-Nisa 4:17). He does not forgive associating others with Him "in worship," but forgives anything else of whoever He wills. Whoever associates others with Allah has indeed committed a grave sin (Surah An-Nisa 4:48). 'Aisha narrates: The Prophet said, "Do good deeds properly, sincerely and moderately, and receive good news because one's good deeds will not make him enter Paradise." They asked, "Even you, O Allah's Messenger?" He said, "Even I, unless and until Allah bestows His pardon and Mercy on me" (Sahih al-Bukhari 6467).

1. Non-Muslims who die believing in God but disbelieving in His message (Islam) are left to God's will. Islam teaches that no one can gain salvation simply by virtue of their belief or deeds; instead, it is the Mercy of God which merits them salvation. We have to know that by the mercy of God, we are doing the good deeds and we are believing in God.

2. Intercession. Not everyone consigned to hell will remain there. This is somewhat like the Catholic concept of Purgatory; sinful Muslims will stay in "hell" until purified of their sins. The possibility of intercession on behalf of sinners (*shafa'a*) on Judgement Day to save them from hellfire is a major theme in the eschatological expectations of Muslims. While the Quran "is both generally and clearly negative" regarding the possibility of intercession on behalf of sinners on the last day to save them from hellfire, the idea is that every individual must take responsibility for his or her own deeds and acts of faith.

Conclusion: Allāh's Divine Intervention in Human History

For us men and for our salvation, he (Eisa al-Masīḥ) came down from heaven (NC). Islam, however, is silent on Allah's unique intervention in human history in the miracle of the Virgin Birth. Reading the Qur'ān parallel to the Gospels of Luke and John, one can discern God's divine plan flowing through the lives of Jesus and Mary. A logical question that a Muslim must ask is: What is it in Jesus that God has to go through all the trouble to intervene in human history, particularly the Virgin

Birth? The usual explanation given is that it is a sign from God: "So will it be! Your Lord says, 'It is easy for Me. And so will We make him a sign for humanity and a mercy from Us'" (19:21). However, the *Qur'ān* does not explain the reason for Allah's direct and unique intervention in Jesus entering human history through a virgin birth. Some Muslim commentators note that Maryam was chosen for a divine plan. Allāh's plan was dramatically inaugurated in the virgin birth and the subsequent entry of *Eisa* (Jesus) into human history. However, they did not explain what this divine plan is. Some classical Muslim exegetes praise Maryam but remain silent about the mission of *Eisa.* After all, the virgin birth in Islam is not about Maryam but more about the miraculous birth of *Eisa.* Further, there is little explanation in the Qur'ān that elaborates on what happened to the child who became an adult and realized Allāh's divine plan. Who is this child, and what will eventually be his mission to fulfill God's divine plan?

Maryam (Mary) mentioned in *ayat* (verses) 3:47 & 19:20 are indicative of her role as the bridge to Jesus the-Christ and Spirit (*Rūh*) toward a Christology and Pneumatology with Islam.[35] A Qur'ānic Pneumatology in line with Thomas O'Shaugnessy, S.J.'s 1953 classic *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran* was published in 2022.[36] It is through a Qur'ānic Mariology that Catholic Christology can respectfully present to Muslims why, for Catholics, Jesus Christ is divine. Both persons, the Spirit (*Rūh al-Qudus*/Holy Spirit), and Jesus the-Christ (*al-Masīḥ*), are believed to be divine by Christians. Mary encountered both in a deeply personal and spiritual way, making her the bridge to knowing them to enrich Muslim-Catholic relations. It is only in sharing in Mary's mystical experience of Jesus through the Spirit that a believer may exclaim Thomas' "My Lord and My God" (Jn 20:28). Mary is the bridge to enrich Muslim-Catholic Christology.

[35] Three (3) papers on Muslim-Catholic Maryamology (Mariology) are published in LST's Landas and EAPI's APMS.

[36] RT Oliveros, "Thomas O'Shaughnessy, SJ & Fazlur Rahman: The Incarnation in the Qur'ān," *Asia Pacific Mission Studies* (APMS) 01/2022, Ateneo Journal Online (AJOL), https://archium.ateneo.edu/apms/vol4/iss2/5/.

Why did Muslim exegetes not inquire why Allāh uniquely intervened in human history? If one looks into God's unique intervention in human history, the question one might ask should be—why did God choose Maryam and for what purpose? It was not just that she was chosen by Allāh for something bigger than herself. Mary's immaculate nature is not meant to *draw attention to herself* but to Jesus the Christ (*Eisā al-Masīḥ*). It was not purity for purity's sake. The virgin birth changed the life of a lowly maiden named Mary. She was "made pure" by Allāh (3.42) to be the perfect receptacle of the "Word" who is Jesus, the Christ (3.42). It implies that as part of Allāh's divine plan, the mother must be sinless and immaculate because she will be the mother of the child that the Qur'ān refers to as *Kalimat-ullah*—"a Word (*kalimah*) from Allāh" and his (Allāh's) Word (3:45, 4:171). The Qur'ān mentions that her virgin birth is to be the mother of the WORD. It does not explain, however, God's plan as initially executed in Maryam giving birth to *Eisā* (Jesus).

In Asia, the devotion to Mary is not exclusive to Catholics. Muslims and Hindus go to her for her prayers. In the mid-16th century town of Velankanni (India), at the Basilica of Our Lady of Velankanni (the Virgin of Velai), Catholics, Muslims, and Hindus turn to her for prayers. In Flores, Indonesia, in the month of August, days before the Feast of the Assumption (August 15), Muslims and Catholics come together to pray and join processions. In the Philippines, remnants of mostly Muslim women who wear hijab join veiled Catholic women in a procession to pray and honor Mary at the feast of Nuestra Señora del Pilar in the City of Zamboanga. The young maiden from Nazareth is the icon of interfaith relations in Asia.

About the Author. **Renato Taib Oliveros**, a Filipino raised by a Muslim mother and a Catholic father, teaches Catholic Catechism at Mater Dei Academy in Tagaytay. He has a Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology, Fu Jen Catholic University, Taiwan; Master's in Theology, Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU); Master's in Islamic Studies, Hartford International University, Connecticut; and a Doctorate in

Islam, Temple University, Philadelphia (Academic Advisor: Mahmoud Mustafa Ayoub). He was a recipient of the *Cardinal Sin Marian Chair* (2007-2008), Loyola School of Theology, ADMU.

Landas 37:2 (2025) 125–138

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS IN TERTULLIAN'S *MARC.* IV, 22,1-6[1]

Emmanuel C. Marfori

The author wishes to know whether or not the Latin Fathers said anything about Christ's Transfiguration, and where to start, than with the first known Christian writer in Latin, Tertullian? Here are the findings, focusing on Tertullian's words in his lengthy *opus*, *Adversus Marcionem*, book four, after browsing mainly the *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*. Admittedly, the author was not expecting to find more than an excerpt or two, or perhaps a fragment. But it turns out that Tertullian would mention Jesus' Transfiguration in one of his heated exchanges with one of dualism's famous representatives during his time: Marcion. Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus[2] (baptized

[1] This paper corresponds to "Marc IV, 22, 1-16 (Tertullianus)" pp. 43-59 of my Doctoral Dissertation entitled, "*La Teología de la Transfiguración según los Padres Latinos*", under the mentorship of Prof. Dr. Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco, my beloved Professor, of the Diocese of Seville, Spain. The Dissertation was defended at the Universidad de Navarra (Spain) in 2009. Translation into English is mine.

[2] Native of Carthage, a convert to Christianity around 193, a passionate and scholarly writer, Tertullian is known for his "inexhaustible vigor, burning rhetoric, and biting satire. His attitude is uncompromising. Forever a fighter, he knew no relenting towards his enemies, whether pagans, Jews, heretics, or, later on, Catholics (QUASTEN, II, 247)"; cfr. C. KANNENGIESSER (ed.), *HOPE,* 593. "Except for St. Augustine, Tertullian is the most important and original ecclesiastical author in Latin" [QUASTEN, II, 247; cfr. C. Kannengiesser (ed.), *HOPE,* cit., 593]. Of Tertullian's 42 works known to date, 31 survive.

193), pioneer of the *latinitas christiana,*[3] shows in *Marc. IV* (maybe 209–210[4]), his longest work,[5] how Jesus revindicates and fulfills the ancient prophecy,[6] against Marcion,[7] who makes others believe that Moses and Elijah were in the mountain with Jesus transfigured because they were going to be destroyed by the voice.[8]

Tertullian explains the dialogue between Moses, Elijah, and Christ,

[3] Cf. C. Kannengiesser (ed.), *HOPE,* 593.

[4] C. Moreschini – R. Braun (tr.), *Tertullien, Contre Marcion, tome IV (livre IV)*, SC 456, 2001, 19.

[5] "...le plus long des traités de Tertullien" [R. Braun, *Tertullien, Contre Marcion, tome I (livre I)*, SC 365, 1990, 7]. The length of *Marc I-V* is one-fifth of the entire *opera tertullianea* (cfr. ibid.). Antonio Casamassa says that *Marc* is "la più estesa di quante ne ha scritte Tertuliano contro le eresie in particolare" (*Scritti Patristici, Volume II*, in "Lateranum, Nova Series, an. XXII, n. 1-4", Roma, 1956, 162). Besides, Tertullian uses the Scripture very much in defending the Catholic faith, since "Tertullian hatte erkannt, dass die wichtigste und gefährlichste Waffe der Gnostiker und Markioniten im Kampf gegen die Katholiken die Bibel war" (M. Fiedrowicz, *Theologie der Kirchenväter*, Verlag Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 2007, 173).

[6] "...showing how Jesus vindicates and fulfills ancient prophecy" [C. Kannengiesser (ed.), *HOPE,* 609].

[7] "Iam et hoc uel maxime erubescere debuisti" (TE *Marc IV*, 22, 1, CChr.SL 1, 1954, 600).

[8] "...quod illum cum Moyse et Helia in secessu montis conspici pateris quorum destructor aduenerat (...). Definiendo enim, quem audirent, quoscumque alios uetuisset audiri" (ibid.). Tertullian and Marcion both agree that the voice (cfr. Mt 17,5) suffices. But as to why it sufficed, one notices the discrepancy between the two. Tertullian corrects Marcion by saying that, indeed, Moses and Elijah were superfluous, but not because Christ annihilated them, but because the voice defined clearly who Moses and Elijah would listen to: the Son. If Marcion were to be right, God should've prohibited to be heard not only Moses and Elijah, but any and every OT character. In order to illustrate this, Tertullian mentions two prophets: "Aut numquid Esaiam et Hieremiam ceterosque, quos non ostendit, permisit audiri, si uetuit quos ostendit?" (TE *Marc IV,* 22, 2, CCL 1, 1954, 600).

> which is an indicator of familiarity. [If Marcion were right, then they should] not [have been shown] in the unity of clarity[9], which is an example of dignity and grace. Rather, [they should've been depicted] in dirty clothes, as a proof of their ruin; moreover, [they should've been seen] in the Creator's darkness, for whose dissipation he was sent. And also, [they should have been depicted as] set very far from Christ's clarity, who would have to separate from the Gospel their very voices and writings.[10]

Tertullian draws the arguments in favor of Moses and Elijah, or in other words, in favor of the unity of the Scriptures:

> Is that the way[11] how [Christ] shows that those [Moses and Elijah] are others, [precisely] while he has them with him? Is it how [Christ shows] that [Moses and Elijah] must be dragged out, [while] he associates them with himself? Is that the way [Christ] destroys them, when [Christ] exalts them with the rays of his glory? What would their Christ [Marcion's Christ] do? I suppose, according to how absurd [Marcion's doctrine is], that he would have shown them how Marcion's Christ should have done it, or at least, he would have depicted himself with some other [OT characters] more than [with] his prophets. However, what is more fitting to the Creator's Christ than to manifest himself to those who preached about Him? [What's more fitting to the Creator's Christ,] than to be seen with those through whom he had been seen in the theophanies? [What's more fitting to the Creator's Christ,] than to speak with those who had spoken about Him? [What is more fitting to the Creator's Christ,] than to communicate his glory to those by whom he was called

---

[9] Cfr. Lc 9,31.

[10] "...quod familiaritati indicium est, nec in consortio claritatis, quod dignationis et gratiae exemplum est, sed in sordibus aliquibus, quod destructionis argumentum est, immo in tenebris creatoris, quibus discutiendis erat missus, longe etiam discreti a claritate Christi, qui uoces et litteras ipsas eorum ab euangelio suo erat separaturus" (TE *Marc IV* 22, 2, CChr.SL 1, 1954, 600-601).

[11] *"Sicin"* implies: "est-ce ainsi que?" (Gaffiot, 1457). Again, Cicero's rhetorical device of using triplets appears (*sicin... sic... sic...*). Braun coments: "...la forme sicin qu'on lit chez les Comiques (...) est parfaitement admissible ici, quoique non attestée ailleurs chez T. (...). L'absence d'apocope est normale avec l'initiale vocalique qui suit. Le mouvement oratoire justifie pleinement le recours à cette forme pour l'introduire" [C. Moreschini – R. Braun (tr.), *Tertullien, Contre Marcion, tome IV (livre IV)*, SC 456, 2001, 277, note 4].

> 'Lord of glory'? [It is fitting to the Creator's Christ to be seen] with the principals[12] of his people – the first as the people's informer, and the second as the reformer [of the same people], one starting the Old Testament and the other concluding the New Testament.[13]

The above references are important, especially so because during Tertullian's time, Marcion was one of the main advocates of dualism, shown in the fact that Marcion believed that there were principally two Gods, the punishing God of the Old Testament and the merciful God of the New Testament.

In order to justify Moses' and Elijah's presence with Christ,[14] Tertullian presents *three arguments of convenience.*[15] Tertullian speaks of

[12] The *principales* were the princes of the municipal senates. Cfr. Bouché-Leclerq, *Manuel des Institutions Romaines,* 166, 186, n. 1; cfr. C. Moreschini – R. Braun (tr.), *Tertullien, Contre Marcion, tome IV (livre IV)*, SC 456, 2001, 278, note 5.

[13] "Sicin alienos demonstrat illos, dum secum habet? Sic reliquendos docet quos sibi iungit? Sic destruit quos de radiis suis exstruit? Quid faceret Christus ipsorum? Credo, secundum peruersitatem tales eos reuelasset, quales Christus Marcionis debuisset, aut quoscumque alios secum <ostendisset> quam prophetas suos. Sed quid tam Christi creatoris quam secum ostendere praedicatores suos? Cum illis uideri, quibus in reuelationibus erat uisus? Cum illis loqui, qui eum fuerant locuti? Cum eis gloriam suam communicare, a quibus dominus gloriae nuncupabatur? Cum principalibus suis, quorum alter populi informator aliquando alter reformator quandoque, alter initiator ueteris testamenti alter consummator noui" (TE *Marc IV,* 22, 3, CChr.SL 1, 1954, 601).

[14] Not Marcion's Christ.

[15] 1) It is more fitting for the Creator's Christ to show himself in the presence of those who prophesied about him; 2) It is more fitting for the Creator's Christ to let himself be seen by those who had seen him before through revelations or theophanies (e.g. Moses); 3) It is more fitting for the Creator's Christ to let himself to speak with those who had spoken about him. The distribution of the arguments go *in crescendo*, and *another argument* is added, *also based on the Transfiguration*. On the other hand, the expression "Lord of glory" seems to come from Ps 23,10: *Dominus uirtutum ipse est rex gloriae*. *Dominus* substitutes *rex*, implying that they are synonyms.

Peter[16] who recognizes the legitimate intimacy (*contubernium*[17]) among Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Tertullian insists that Peter experienced the alienation of reason[18] – relating *amentia* with extasis, in order to base on the Scripture the Montanist teaching[19] dear to Tertullian:

> How would [Peter] have recognized Moses and Elijah, [if it were not for the spirit]? Because the people did not have their images or statues, by the Law's prohibition, unless he had seen them in spirit[20]?[21]

Even as Tertullian was defending the Church's teaching from Marcion, among other adversaries, like Praxeas, Tertullian himself was immersed in his own issues, like his attraction towards Montanism, a

---

[16] "Igitur et Petrus, meritum contubernium Christi sui agnoscens, <in> indiuiduitatem eius suggerit consilium (...). 'Sed nesciens, quid diceret.'" (TE *Marc IV,* 22, 4, CChr.SL 1, 1954, 601). '*Sed*' points to the Marcionite idea that Peter did not know what he was saying because he did not know Christ's true nature (cfr. SC 456, 280, note 1).

[17] The classical meaning of *contubernium* is the "camaraderie entre soldats qui logent sous la même tente: P. Cornelius Tacitus, *Annales,* 1, 41, 3; (...) commerce, société, intimité, liaison d'amitié; (...) tente commune: C. Iulius Caesar, *De bello ciuili,* 3, 76, 3" (GAFFIOT, 426). Tertullian uses *contubernium* only here (cf. C. Moreschini – R. Braun (tr.), *Tertullien, Contre Marcion, tome IV (livre IV)*, SC 456, 2001, 279, note 7).

[18] "Quomodo nesciens? Vtrumne simplici errore an ratione, qua defendimus in causa nouae prophetiae gratiae extasim, id est amantiam, convenire?" (TE *Marc IV,* 22, 4, CChr.SL 1, 1954, 601).

[19] "In spiritu enim homo constitutus, praesertim cum gloriam dei conspicit uel cum per ipsum deus loquitur, necesse est excidat sensu, obumbratus scilicet uirtute diuina" (ibid.). On the topic of extasis, Tertullian says: "inter nos et psychicos quaestio est" (ibid.). However, Tertullian doesn't specify what the dispute is about. When he alludes to man "having to be" in εκστασις before the divine presence, so that he might, as it were, be protected by the divine power, this very affirmation might be the disputed question. I am not dealing with the history of the question of the κστασις.

[20] To what does Tertullian refer with *spiritus*? J.E.L. Van der Geest affirms: "Le Christ est *filius,* comme nous l'avons vu à propos des théophanies, *sermo* ou *spiritus*" (*Le Christ et l'Ancien Testament chez Tertullien,* Dekker & Van de Vegt – Nijmegen, 1972, 236).

[21] "Quomodo enim Moysen en Heliam cognouisset, [nisi in spiritu ?] – nec enim imagines eorum uel statuas populus habuit nec similitudines, lege prohibente– nisi quia in spiritu uiderat?" (TE *Marc IV,* 22, 5, CChr.SL 1, 1954, 601-602).

heresy which, among other things, advocates the present time of the Spirit, unlike the time of the Father and of the Son, both of which had already happened. But we digress. Let us go back to Tertullian's take on the Transfiguration event.

Tertullian insists that if Peter[22] had already confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God[23], then there would be no reason why Peter would commit a mistake in affirming Jesus' divinity.

> ... if [in this case of the Transfiguration, Peter] erred by the earlier motive[24], then be sure yourself that on that day, no divinity was revealed by Christ and [be sure, too,] that up to now Peter would not have erred, insofar as Christ, until then, would not have revealed anything to him, and that at the same time, Christ did not have to be considered as coming from some other god if not from the Creator, whose order He even expressed here[25].

After seeing in the triune number the Scriptures' verification of the Apostolic testimony on Jesus' Transfiguration, Tertullian places the following scene atop the Transfiguration scene: a superior god[26] would have a right to make use of the realities of the world which belonged to the Creator God: if the Marcionite hypothesis evoked by Tertullian were true, then a cloud of the superior god would go across the God

---

[22] According to Braun, "...au Pierre de Marcion égaré par son judaïsme, T. oppose un Pierre illuminé par la grâce et mis en état d'extase (...) cet état qu'il définit comme une *amentia* provisoire occasionnée par la venue de l'Esprit dans l'homme" [C. Moreschini –R. Braun (tr.), *Tertullien, Contre Marcion, tome IV (livre IV)*, SC 456, 2001, 280, note 2].

[23] Cf. Mt 16,16.

[24] Mt 16,16.

[25] "Quodsi ideo et hic errauit quia et supra, ergo certus es in illum diem quoque nullam nouam diuinitatem a Christo reuelatam et usque adhuc non errasse Petrum, Christo usque adhuc nihil eiusmodi reuelante, et tamdiu non alterius deputandum Christum quam creatoris, cuius omnem et hic ordinem expressit" (TE *Marc IV,* 22, 6, CChr.SL 1, 1954, 602). 25 Cfr. ID., *Marc IV,* 22, 7.

[26] For Marcion, a superior, good, NT God, God the Father, is unknown to the other, evil OT God, the Creator.

Creator's heaven, and this would imply that that "superior" god would, ironically, have to take recourse to the elements of his subordinate and enemy[27]. Tertullian illustrates this point with the Transfiguration:

> So, thus, the cloud was not mute even now, but the already known voice from heaven bore witness anew of the Father about the Son, to whom Psalm 1 refers[28]: *You are my son, today I have begotten you*[29], and also by Isaiah: *Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant?*[30] [31]

Tertullian says that when the voice presents the Son, it is implied that Christ is the *Filius*, and that the voice is the Father's. Thus, presenting Him – *This is my Son*[32] – it is implied: *whom I have promised anew.*[33]

Here appears the *repromissio* topic, by which Tertullian places in the Father's mouth the words "whom I promised" in order to establish an

---

[27] This invalidates the Marcionite thesis on the absolute irrelevance and annihilation of the OT with the arrival of the NT. According to Braun, "T. conteste (...) selon un thème polémique habituel, le droit du dieu supérieur de se servir des réalités d'un monde appartenant au Créateur. Après l'hypothèse ironiquement présentée d'une nuée propre à ce dieu supérieur et qu'il aurait amenée avec lui à travers le ciel du Créateur, il revient à l'explication habituelle (*proindè*) et dénigrante (*precario*): ce dieu doit recourir aux éléments de son subalterne" [C. Moreschini – R. Braun (tr.), *Tertullien, Contre Marcion, tome IV (livre IV)*, SC 456, 2001, 283, note 3].

[28] However, '*filius meus es tu...*' is not from Psalm 1, but from Psalm 2. Braun comments that "...l'erreur de chiffre (...) est sans doute imputable à T." [C. Moreschini –R. Braun (tr.), *Tertullien, Contre Marcion, tome IV (livre IV)*, SC 456, 2001, 284, note 1].

[29] Psalm 2,7: "*Tú eres mi hijo. Yo te he engendrado hoy*" (SagBi 3, 190).

[30] Is 50,10: "*¿Quién [de vosotros] teme al Señor, y escucha la voz de su siervo?*" (SagBi 4, 242). Tertullian uses *filius*; the Neovulgate uses *servus.*

[31] "Itaque nec nunc muta nubes fuit, sed uox solita de caelo et patris nouum testimonium super filio, ad quem in primo psalmo: filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te, de quo et per Esaiam: quis deum metuens? Audiat uocem filii eius" (TE *Marc IV,* 22, 8, CCL 1, 1954, 602).

[32] Lc 9,35 "Éste *es mi Hijo*" (SagBi 5, 449).

[33] "Itaque iam repraesentans eum – hic est filius meus – utique subaudit: quem repromisi" (TE *Marc IV,* 22, 9, CCL 1, 1954, 602).

OT–NT link[34]. Tertullian insists that one must listen "...only to him who had been proclaimed pronounced from the beginning[35] in order to be listened to as prophet, since he had to be considered a prophet by the people"[36].

Christ does not annihilate the OT; rather, there is a *decessio-successio* (from the OT to the NT)[37]. The mention of the *repromissio* and the *decessio-successio* is important since these terms imply valuing *both* Testaments of the one Scripture, as against the aforementioned dualism:

> Indeed, even if there be some displacement of listening, from Moses and Elijah to Christ, it is not as if [Christ proceeded] from another god nor from another christ, but from the Creator to his Christ, according to the disposition of the Old and the succession of the New Testament. Isaiah says: *it was not an angel, but God himself saved them,*[38] he himself now preaches and brings to fulfillment the Law and the Prophets.[39]

The transfer of the listening (from the Law and the Prophets to Christ) is not *ex nihilo,* because the God listened to in the OT and in the NT is the same God.

---

[34] The OT promise, only *started*, was fulfilled suddenly (from the Apostles' viewpoint) in the NT. What the voice said did not only describe Jesus as the Son of the Father, but that he also became – for anyone who knew the Law and the Prophets – the fulfillment of the Lord's promise (*repromissio*).

[35] Tertullian alludes to the Son's preexistence (cfr. Jn 1,1).

[36] "Quem? <Nisi quem> ab initio edixerat audiendum in nomine prophetae quoniam et prophetes existimari habebet a populo" (TE *Marc IV,* 22, 10, CChr.SL 1, 1954, 602).

[37] This term, far from establishing discontinuity, destruction, annihilation (like Marcion pretended), it marks the distinction, the passage, the OT–AT *continuum*.

[38] Cf. Is 63,9: "the angel of his presence saved them."

[39] "Itaque et si facta translatio sit auditionis a Moyse et Helia in Christum, sed non ut ab alio deo nec ad alium Christum, sed a creatore in Christum eius, secundum decessionem ueteris et successionem noui testamenti: non legatus, inquit Esaias, nec nuntius, sed ipse deus saluos eos faciet, ipse iam praedicans et implens legem et prophetas" (TE *Marc IV,* 22, 11, CChr.SL 1, 1954, 602).

Tertullian explains how the *decessio* and the *successio* take place: "... Christ even shares his glory with Moses and Elijah. But we also have all the structure of this vision in Habbakuk[40], where the spirit sometimes comes in the person of the Apostles: *Lord! I have listened to thy proclamation, and I feared*[41]. Who else [was listened to] but the one of this celestial voice: *This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!*[42]? (...) *Thou shalt be known amidst two animals*[43] of Moses and Elijah, near to whom Zechariah also saw under the figure of two olives and two olive branches (cfr. Za 4,3 and Za 4,14[44])."[45]

Tertullian situates in the words of the two Prophets the Old Testament echo of: 1) Moses' and Elijah's presence on both sides of Jesus; and 2) the luminous aspect of the Transfiguration:

---

[40] Tertullian roots the listening to the Son in Ha 3,2, and there one senses the prophet's very *personal* side, when he affirms having listened to the Lord's voice; this is understood, if he has experienced a vision [cf. F. Andersen, *Habakkuk,* from W. Albright – D. Freedman (eds.), AncB*,* Doubleday, New York, 2001, 276].

[41] Ha 3,2. Unlike the text Tertullian knew, above translated, the verse in English (RSV) reads: "O Lord, I have heard the report of thee, and thy work, O Lord, do I fear".

[42] Lc 9,35: "Éste *es mi Hijo, el elegido: escuchadle*" (SagBi 5, 449).

[43] This is Ha 3,2, as the author knew it. But the verse in English and Spanish reads very differently: "In the midst of the years make it known"; "En nuestros días dalas a conocer" (SagBi 4, 1191). Here, I don't enter into the question of why there was a discrepancy in the translation or the versions in Latin.

[44] "Me contestó: Ésos *son los dos hijos del aceite puro que asisten al servicio del Señor de toda la tierra'"* (SagBi 4, 1258).

[45] "...societatem esse etiam claritatis Christi cum Moyse et Helia. Totum autem habitum uisionis istius habemus etiam apud Abacuc, ubi spiritus ex persona interdum apostolorum: domine, audiui auditum tuum et extimui – quem magis quam uocis caelestis illius: hic est filius meus dilectus, hunc audite? (...) In medio duorum animalium cognosceris, Moysi et Heliae, de quibus et Zacharias uidit in figura duarum olearum et duorum ramulorum oleae" (TE *Marc IV,* 22, 12, CChr.SL 1, 1954, 602).

> Since these were the ones to whom it was said: *two sons of pure oil*[46] *who stand by the Lord of the whole earth*[47]. Again, Habakkuk: *His glory covered the heavens*[48]*,* evidently with that dense cloud, and *his brightness was like the light*[49], evidently by which his clothing shone with splendor. And if we remember the promise made to Moses, this [promise] will be found to be fulfilled here[50] [51].

Tertullian explained God's promise to Moses, fulfilled centuries after Moses' passage on earth, in the Transfiguration of Jesus, to

---

[46] Cf. Za 4,14: "two anointed". Tertullian sees Za 4,14 as the vision's *Höhepunkt* of Part II of Zechariah's Book I [cf. C. Meyers – E. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8,* de W. Albright – D. Freedman (eds.), AncB*,* Doubleday, New York, 1987, 275] as the *locus* where Moses and Elijah appear prefigured, they who proclaim Christ's arrival. In Za 4,14, בני־היצהר means "very abundant", and not literally "children of the olive"; it thus implies productivity, pointing to the two individuals who will accompany God's restored presence in his people (cfr. Meyers-Meyers, cit*.,* 258). Carol Meyers and Eric Meyers observe that "'sons of oil' (...) functions in two ways. First, both governor and high priest provide a constant flow of oil to the lampstand. They support both the temple and Yahweh's sovereignty. (...) Second, the oil also represents fecundity and prosperity. As such, the trees are connected with divine favor and its attendant blessings" (ID., cit., 276).

[47] Za 4,14: "*asisten al servicio del Señor de toda la tierra*" (SagBi 4, 1258). BRAUN comments that "...dans cette traduction littérale de la LXX, *opimitas* répond à πιότης ("graisse"). En rapport avec la "figure" des oliviers, T. paraît l'entendre dans un sens spirituel ("abondance de grâce"). Le sens dégagé par la TOB est tout autre: 'les deux hommes désignés pour l'huile'" [C. Moreschini – R. Braun (tr.), *Tertullien, Contre Marcion, tome IV (livre IV)*, SC 456, 2001, 288, note 1].

[48] Ha 3, 3–4: "*Su gloria cubre los cielos*" (SagBi 4, 1191). Tertullian quotes Ha 3, relating the sun rising in between the mountains of Teman and Paran with Jesus transfigured between Moses and Elijah.

[49] Ha 4: "*Su fulgor es como la luz*" (ibid).

[50] Cf. Ex 33,17: "Esta petición que me has dirigido también te la concederé, porque has hallado gracia a mis ojos y te conozco personalmente" (SagBi 1, 434).

[51] "Nam hi sunt, de quibus dictum est illi: duo filii opimitatis adsistunt domino uniuersae terrae. Et rursus idem Abacuc: operuit caelos uirtus, utique nubilo illo, et splendor eius ut lux erit, utique qua etiam uestitus eius refulsit. Et si commemoremur promissionis Moysi, hic inuenietur expuncta" (TE *Marc IV,* 22, 13, CChr.SL 1, 1954, 602).

Moses, who wished "evidently [to see] That One, that figure of which the prophet had an intuition[52]. Besides, he had already heard that [as to] God's face, *man shall not see me and live*[53] *This very thing*, he said, *you have spoken, I will do.*[54]"[55]

Tertullian describes the promise to Moses, after he asked the Lord:

> ...*show me thy glory*[56]. And the same thing, the Lord, [referring to] the future: *I will make all my goodness pass before you*[57], *et cetera.* (...) saying also to Aaron: *If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses (...) with him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly* - evidently, making himself seen

[52] Reading between Moses' line was his desire to see the condition God would take unto himself when the Word becomes flesh, something of which Moses "had an intuition" as a prophet, Tertullian surmises. The gist of Moses' intuition in Ex 33,13 is condensed in the verb *sciebat,* which – in this context – doesn't seem to refer to any empirical knowledge, but rather seems to point to an intuition, a prophecy.

[53] According to Tertullian, this is from Ex 33,20: "Construyó allí un altar y lo llamó El-Elohé-Israel" (SagBi 1, 192). But this seems incongruent. What happens, then? Braun offers an explanation: "C'est par erreur que T. peut supposer déjà connu de Moïse l'énoncé d'Ex 33, 20 qui suit tout juste la scène évoquée ici. Cette méprise s'explique sans doute par le fait qu'il cite de tête un verset célèbre, qui avait déjà acquis une autonomie dans les *testimonia* théologiques. En *Prax.* 14, 1, il ne commet pas cette erreur" (SC 456, 289, note 5).

[54] Ex 33,17: "*Esta petición que me has dirigido también te la concederé*" (SagBi 1, 434).

[55] "..eum conspectum desiderans, in quo hominem esset acturus, quod propheta sciebat, –ceterum dei faciem, iam audierat, nemo homo uidebit, et uiuet– et hunc, inquit, sermonem, quem dixisti, faciam tibi" (TE *Marc IV,* 22, 14, CCL 1, 1954, 603-604).

[56] Ex 33,18. It is worth noting that Moses is aware, at least in part, of what human language uses to refer to that being in the presence of God himself: to show his *glory.* Another thing is whether Moses, while he was on earth, knew the implications of what he asks from his Friend, the Lord.

[57] Ex 33,19: "*Yo haré pasar todo mi esplendor ante ti*" (SagBi 1, 434).

under the human aspect[58], which he would be wearing – *not in dark speech* (Nm 12,6-8[59]).[60]

Tertullian speaks of Moses, centuries after, during the Transfiguration, seeing fulfilled his desire when he was still living on earth:

> Because, although Marcion did not wish to show him [Moses] speaking with the Lord, but [merely] standing, however, standing, he did not speak mouth to mouth but also face to face, – *with him*[61], said [Luke], not 'away from him' – in the glory of [Christ] himself; not only in his presence. And enlightened by this glory, [Moses] set himself far from Christ, not differently from how he used to set himself from [the presence of] the Creator; therefore wounding, [back] then, the eyes of Israel's sons[62], in the same way, too, now he wounds the eyes of the blind Marcion, who had not seen that this argument also went against him.[63]

---

[58] Nm 12, 6–8. Braun comments that it's about "voir Dieu sous l'aspect de son Incarnation, le seul sous lequel il soit visible de l'être humain" [C. Moreschini – R. Braun (tr.), *Tertullien, Contre Marcion, tome IV (livre IV)*, SC 456, 2001, 291, note 3].

[59] "*Y si hubiere entre vosotros un profeta, mediante visiones me daré a conocer, en el sueño yo le hablo. Esto no lo hago con mi siervo Moisés; conversamos cara a cara, mediante visión, no por enigmas*" (SagBi 1, 650). Again, the *repromissio* topic arises in order to understand the link between the Lord's promise to Moses (cfr. Ex 33,13s.) and the Transfiguration of Jesus.

[60] "...ostende mihi gloriam tuam. Et dominus similiter de futuro: ego praecedam gloria mea, et reliqua. (...) etiam ad Aaronem dicens: et si fuerit prophetes in uobis, in uisione cognoscar illi et in uisione loquar ad eum, non quomodo ad Moysen; os ad os loquar ad eum, in specie – utique hominis, quam erat gestaturus – non in aenigmate" (TE *Marc IV,*22, 15, CChr.SL 1, 1954, 604).

[61] Lc 9,32: "*a su lado*" (SagBi 5, 448).

[62] Cf. Ex 34, 29–30.

[63] "Nam et si Marcion noluit eum conloquentem domino ostensum, sed stantem, tamen et stans os ad os stabat et faciem ad faciem, – cum illo, inquit, non 'extra illum' – in gloria ipsius, nedum in conspectu. De qua gloria non aliter inlustratus discessit a Christo quam solebat a creatore, proinde tunc oculos percutiens filiorum Israhelis, quemadmodum et nunc excaecati Marcionis, qui hoc quoque argumentum aduersus se facere non uidit" (TE *Marc IV,* 22, 16, CChr.SL 1, 1954, 604). 65 Cf. Ex 33,13.

Principal Affirmations

Against Marcion, Tertullian defends the true motive of Moses' and Elijah's presence in Jesus' Transfiguration: in order to show the fulfillment of the ancient prophecy (which for Moses is the granting of his request to see the face of the Lord in another mountain, Sinai; a request about which Moses himself had an intuition), the unity (with the consequent unity of God Creator and Father God: they are not two gods – like what Marcion would say – but the one and only God) between the OT and the NT (*decessio* y *successio*[64]), and at the same time, to show that Moses and Elijah serve as the *principales* of Jesus, the Son.

Tertullian affirms that behind Peter's words lies his *amentia*, extasis, in order to comprehend that those who are beside Jesus are Moses and Elijah. If it were not so, Peter would not have made any sense in confessing earlier about Jesus, the Son of the living God.

The number three means unity among Moses, Elijah, and Jesus.

The Father's mandate to listen to the Son fulfills the prophecy.[65] And so, the Father again bears witness about the Son. Moses was even given a throwback to the time when he had wanted to see God's face, but it would be in Jesus' time, during the Transfiguration, to be exact, when Moses gets to face God in the flesh.

On the practical, polemical part, these affirmations are a cogent response to the dualist-Marcionist theories regarding Jesus' Transfiguration. So, Tertullian did not only say something about the Transfiguration of Jesus, but had said it in a polemical context, with Tertullian's typical temperament in his defense panel showing in his word choice, as a response to an error of interpretation of Christian Scripture being peddled to the Christians of his time.

---

[64] Cf. Ha 3,2; Za 4,14. 67.

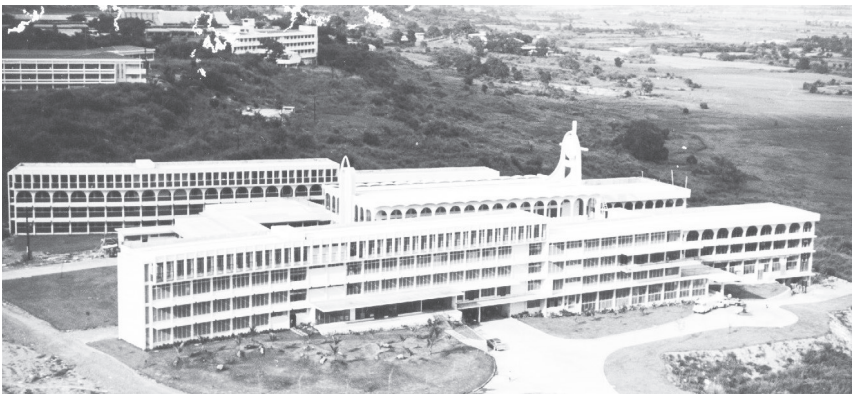
[65] Cf. Is 50,10.

About the Author. **Fr. Emmanuel Cuello Marfori** was sent to the Universidad de Navarra in Spain to study: Baccalaureate in Philosophy (1998), Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology (2001), Licentiate in Sacred Theology (2008), and Doctorate in Sacred Theology (2009). Ordained for the Diocese of San Pablo in Laguna, Philippines (2003), he is now Assistant Oeconomus and a Guest Priest at the Cathedral Parish of St. Paul the First Hermit, San Pablo City. He teaches at St. Peter's College Seminary (San Pablo City), St. Alphonsus Regional School of Theology (Lucena City), Divine Word Seminary (Tagaytay City), and at the Loyola School of Theology (Quezon City).

Landas 37:2 (2025) 139–146

THE FIRST SIXTY YEARS OF LOYOLA SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

From the Preface of the 2025 LST Statutes[1]



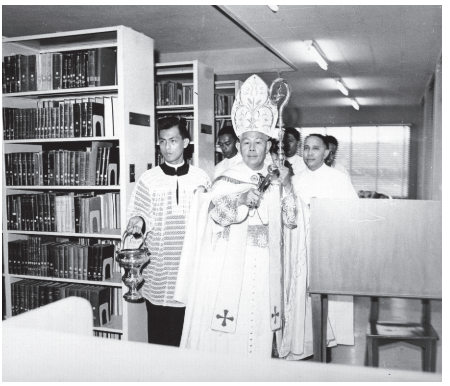
Loyola School of Theology was inaugurated in 1965 to provide theological formation for the scholastics of the Society of Jesus, the seminarians of San Jose Seminary, and the scholastics of a number of other religious orders. It is the result of a fusion, first proposed by the Jesuit Provincial Fr. Francis X. Clark, of the faculties of Berchmans College in Cebu City (the former Jesuit Scholasticate) and San Jose Seminary in Highway 54, Quezon City.

[1] This article is adapted from the Preface of the 2025 Statutes of Loyola School of Theology. It draws significantly on Fr. Victor R. Salanga, S.J.'s work, *The History of the Relationship Between Loyola School of Theology and Ateneo de Manila University* (2006), which served as a key secondary source integrated into the narrative. More recent developments and updates have also been incorporated to provide a fuller and up-to-date historical account.



San Jose Seminary itself traces its origin to the Colegio de San Jose, founded on 25 August 1601. On 08 August 1621, Pope Gregory XV issued a brief authorizing the Archbishop of Manila to confer degrees, including degrees in theology, on the candidates presented to him by the Rector of the Jesuit College of Manila, in which the students of the Colegio de San Jose attended lectures. After the expulsion of the Society of Jesus from the Philippines in 1768 and the extinction of the Jesuit University of San Ignacio, the Colegio de San Jose continued as a separate institution under the administration of the secular clergy until it was incorporated into the University of Santo Tomas by the Spanish government in 1875 as a school of medicine and pharmacy. By a brief of Pope St. Pius X to the Most Reverend Ambrose Agius, then Apostolic Delegate to the Philippines, dated 03 May 1910, the Colegio de San Jose was restored to the administration of the Society of Jesus for the explicit purpose of the education of priests. Its existence as an interdiocesan seminary for the entire Philippines was recognized again by Decree no. 645 of the First Plenary Council of the Philippines in 1953.

On 12 July 1965, the Provincial Superior of the Society of Jesus in the Philippines, Fr. Horacio de la Costa S.J., with the authorization of the Jesuit Superior General Fr. Pedro Arrupe S.J., opened the present School as an institute of philosophy and theology incorporating within

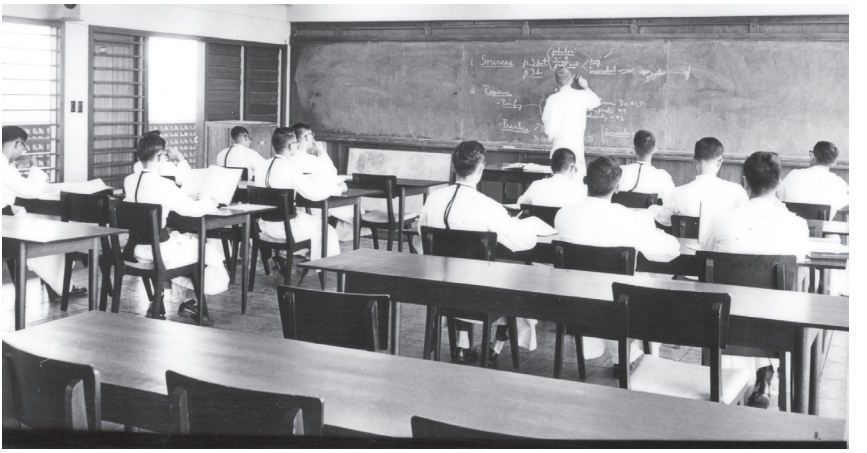


it the Faculty of ecclesiastical studies of San Jose Seminary. After one academic quarter at San Jose, the School moved to the present site on the campus of the Ateneo de Manila University and was called the Loyola House of Studies School of Theology and Ecclesiastical Studies (LHS STES). On 12 September 1965, the Feast of the Holy Name of Mary, the LHS STES was formally inaugurated by His Eminence Rufino Cardinal Santos, D.D., then Archbishop of Manila, just as the Second Vatican Council was drawing to a close in Rome. The first classes at the new site were held on 18 September 1965.

For a whole year before the opening of STES, there were meetings to discuss the new house of studies, and one of the questions discussed was the relationship of the House of Studies to the Ateneo de Manila University. Ever since the opening of the school, the nature of this relationship has come up time and again in many faculty meetings.

Various proposals have been offered regarding the nature of the relationship. Early in the deliberations of the Committee on the House of Studies, Fr. Francis X. Clark, then Provincial, suggested that the House of Studies should be "a corporate college within the University". Nothing definite was decided. The reason is perhaps best seen in the Minutes of the LHS Faculty Meeting of March 7, 1967, where a majority of the faculty expressed themselves "in favor of a fairly loose relationship between STES and the University. Most felt that no contract should be drawn up at present, but that we be allowed to operate as we have this past year, experimenting and testing various approaches." Hence, for the school year 1967-68, it operated as a federated institute of the University.

Yet even then, there was a proposal from the University administrators that there should be one University-wide Department



of Theology, with the LHS *Praeses* (Director) as an *ex officio* overall chairman of theology and holding ultimate responsibility for the theology program[2]. This last proposal was accepted in the LHS Faculty Meeting of February 6, 1968, and later confirmed by Father Provincial Horacio de la Costa.

Meanwhile, on 01 January 1968, the *Normae Generales de Studiis*, the new statutes for studies in the Jesuit Order, became effective; and on 16 January the Jesuit Provincial constituted the School of Theology and Ecclesiastical Studies as an institute separate and independent in administration and finances from the Jesuit Community of Loyola House of Studies, under its own President, responsible directly to the Provincial.

Apparently the proposal to establish a University-wide Department of Theology with the LHS STES *Praeses* (Director) leading the Department never got off the ground because on 11 July 1969, Fr. de la Costa still writes about it as a goal to be accomplished: "I take it that the direction in which we wish to move is for the Loyola House of Studies to be in the truest sense the Divinity School of the Ateneo de Manila, with full charge of and responsibility for the graduate and

[2] This can be seen from the proposal submitted by Fr. John F. Doherty S.J., Academic Vice-President of the Ateneo de Manila University, on 12 December 1967 to Fr. Joseph Galdon S.J., Assistant Dean of the Ateneo College of Arts and Sciences, for discussion among the University Administrators.

undergraduate theology programs; and that the financial agreement now reached is a step in this direction.... Every effort should be made to move expeditiously in the same direction."

And so the representatives of the Ateneo, the LHS Jesuit Community, and STES met on May 25, 1971 at the STES Conference Room to review and revise the existing relationships between the three entities concerned for a more effective and fruitful collaboration between them. The representatives formally agreed, among other things, that LHS STES, "an affiliate unit of the AdMU, serves the University by helping staff the Theology Department of the School of Arts and Sciences" and that "STES offers an MA/PhD program in the Science of Theology...a degree obtained through the School of Arts and Sciences, Ateneo de Manila University." The Memorandum of Agreement was signed by Fr. Francisco Araneta S.J., Rector and President of the Ateneo de Manila, Fr. Ruben Tanseco S.J., Rector of LHS, and Fr. Pedro Sevilla S.J., Director of STES.

A first draft of the Statutes of STES was proposed for discussion on 07 December 1971. On March 28, 1972, the present name, Loyola School of Theology, was adopted for STES. In February 1977, the Jesuit Provincial and Superior General approved the Statutes that govern LST for a trial period. A semi-final revision was completed on 14 July 1983. In view of the School's affiliation with the Theological Faculty of Fujen Catholic University, Taipei, for the purpose of granting the ecclesiastical degree Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology to LST graduates, the Statutes were partially revised again according to the pertinent sections of the Apostolic Constitution of Pope John Paul II, *Sapientia christiana*. This revision was completed on 02 August 1984. On 09 October 1985, the Congregation for Catholic Education granted the School affiliation with Fujen Catholic University for a period of five years.

Another revision of the Loyola School of Theology Statutes was completed on 24 February 1988, and on 18 March 1989, the Congregation for Catholic Education constituted and declared the School aggregated to the Jesuit Faculty of Theology at Fujen Catholic

University for a period of five years for the purpose of granting the Licentiate and Doctorate degrees in Theology (STL and STD). At the end of three years, a slightly revised edition of the Statutes was sent to the Congregation and was approved conditionally on 07 April 1992 for a period of two years. The Statutes with the suggested changes were forwarded to the Congregation in January 1993, and the Faculty at Fujen gave their approval in February 1993.

After reports on the School in October 1993 by the Dean of the Fujen Faculty of Theology and then by Loyola School of Theology itself, the Congregation expressed willingness to move toward definitive approval of the aggregation pending a final revision of the Statutes. This requested revision of the Statutes was completed on 25 August 1994 and then submitted, through the Fujen Faculty of Theology, to the Congregation for final approval and definitive aggregation. On 01 December 1994, the Congregation approved the Statutes and granted definitive aggregation to the Jesuit Faculty of Theology at Fujen Catholic University for an indeterminate period of time.

In light of the request for the erection of an Ecclesiastical Faculty at Loyola School of Theology, the Chancellor submitted amendments to the Statutes of the School. These proposed changes are amendments to the Statutes, published in 1995. They were endorsed by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines in July 1999, and approved by the Congregation for Catholic Education *ad experimentum* for five years on 13 August 1999[3], thereby instituting Loyola School of Theology as an Ecclesiastical Faculty of Theology.

Meanwhile, the administrative structure of the School of Arts and Sciences of the Ateneo de Manila University became more complex and elaborate as it evolved and branched out into the Loyola Schools, comprised of the School of Humanities, John Gokongwei School of Management, School of Science and Engineering, and School of Social Sciences.

[3] The LST Statutes were further revised and approved by the Congregation for Catholic Education of the Holy See in August 2004, October 2014, and October 2020.



As both LST and the Loyola Schools of the Ateneo de Manila University expanded, their relationship has become more and more complicated and has never been definitively defined. The time came to clarify their relationship that was initially agreed upon in the 1971 Memorandum of Agreement. Thus, a new MOA was signed by Fr. Bienvenido F. Nebres S.J., President of Ateneo de Manila University, and Fr. Victor R. Salanga S.J., President of Loyola School of Theology on March 17, 2006, effective from SY 2006-2007 to SY 2011-2012. By virtue of a renewed agreement signed on May 25, 2015, LST, while remaining a federated unit in the University as it had been since 1968, was established as the new Theology and Ministry Program of the School of Humanities.

In the years that followed, LST's mission expanded beyond its home campus through affiliations recognized by the Holy See. On November 9, 2017, the Congregation for Catholic Education, by decree signed by His Eminence Giuseppe Cardinal Versaldi, D.D., Prefect, approved the affiliation of the Theological Program of St. John Vianney Theological Seminary (SJVTS) in Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines with LST. Shortly thereafter, on January 23, 2018, a

similar decree signed by the same officials granted the affiliation of St. Joseph Jesuit Scholasticate (SJJS) in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. By virtue of this relationship, the Congregation for Catholic Education authorized LST, as an Ecclesiastical Faculty, to confer the Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology (STB) degree upon SJVTS and SJJS students. These affiliations signaled the growing trust of the Holy See in LST's ability to extend its academic and ecclesial mission beyond its Quezon City campus, fostering theological formation across the Philippines and Asia.

Landas 37:2 (2025) 147–154

LST AT THE FRONTIERS OF THEOLOGY: MISSION, MILESTONES, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS[1]

Renato R. Repole, SJ

Your Excellency, Most Rev. Elias L. Ayuban, Jr., CMF, our bishop here in the Diocese of Cubao, Your Excellencies, Bp. Roberto Gaa of the Diocese of Novaliches, Bp. Jose Rapadas III of the Diocese of Iligan, and Bp. Noel Pedregosa of the Diocese of Malaybalay, Very Rev. Fr. Primitivo Viray, Jr., S.J., President of the Jesuit Conference of Asia-Pacific and my batchmate, Very Rev. Fr. Provincial, Fr. Xavier Olin, S.J., esteemed members of our Board of Trustees, Rev. Fr. Roberto Yap, S.J., President of the Ateneo de Manila University, and his administrative team, Superiors and Directors of Works of our Jesuit communities and institutions, Very Reverend superiors of our students from various congregations, dear benefactors and mission partners, dear faculty and staff of Loyola School of Theology and other institutions, dear alumni, dear members of my family and relatives, beloved former students, dear friends, beloved students of LST, brother Jesuits, good morning!

First of all, I am very happy and grateful for your presence today in this opening Mass of the Holy Spirit and academic convocation. Thank

[1] This article is the inaugural address of Fr. Renato R. Repole, S.J., delivered on 20 August 2025 at the Oratory of St. Ignatius, Loyola House of Studies, Ateneo de Manila University, on the occasion of his investiture as the 11th President of the Loyola School of Theology.

you very much for taking the time to be with the LST community as we begin another academic year. We are grateful to God for the blessings He has bestowed on LST for the past 60 years as a theological school and 25 years as an ecclesiastical faculty. Today, we formally open not just another academic year but, indeed, a formation year, with the Mass of the Holy Spirit, invoking His guidance and grace. Today, I have been installed as the 11th President of this venerable institution. Honestly, I did not expect to be appointed to this mission since, as many of you know, I have been involved in formation work throughout my priestly life—not to mention gardening and raising chickens, on the one hand, and teaching Greek and St. Paul, on the other hand. But, as we all know, God surprises us and challenges us every so often to go into uncharted territories, to stretch our limits, and to make us grow. So, feeling humbled but also honored to have been chosen to carry this task, I accepted it wholeheartedly, relying on the grace of God and on the promise of prayers and support from my superiors and from all of you. This feeling of being supported I already experienced even before I formally took over last May 17, 2025, especially from my predecessor, Fr. Enrico C. Eusebio S.J., who has been patiently walking with me through the labyrinth of administrative and institutional tasks, and even sharing some of my responsibilities. The rest of the staff have also been quite solicitous of my needs and have been very generous in assisting me in my transition into this new role, making sure that I have all the support I need. Thanks to all of you.

Even as the task ahead of me and my team is enormous, I feel fortunate that the legacy I inherit from my predecessors is one that has reached many milestones through its 60 years as a theological school and 25 years as an ecclesiastical faculty. This past year, we celebrated these milestones, even graced by the presence of representatives from the Holy See. We held our annual International Conference on Ignatian Spirituality, Pedagogy, and Leadership together with the Gokongwei Brothers School of Education and Learning Design (GBSEALD) of the Ateneo de Manila University, which was so well received and attended that most likely it will have a Season 2 this coming year. Moreover, from a small theological school originally intended only for Jesuits and Josefinos and a few other religious congregations, LST

has grown much in number, reaching a total of 557 enrollees this semester, including affiliates—the highest so far in LST's history—representing some 45 nations. Another milestone is our sharing in the honor and prestige earned by Ateneo de Manila University in the QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) World Rankings for Theology, Divinity, and Religious Studies for two years in a row now, placing within the 101–140 bracket in 2024 and in the 101–150 range in 2025, out of more than 1,700 participating universities worldwide, with the Ateneo de Manila being the only Filipino university included in this worldwide ranking. Still another milestone worth mentioning is the growing internationalization of our faculty, thanks to the untiring efforts of past administrations to invite more international faculty, and thanks, too, to the generosity of those who have accepted our invitation, some of whom are already here with us. Moreover, in the area of instruction, ironically, the pandemic allowed LST to upgrade its facilities in order to accommodate the necessity of online courses, which, in the process, expanded our reach, as we now have several hybrid classrooms that can serve especially those who cannot attend face-to-face classes. To improve even more the quality of our program, LST has undergone the preparatory visit of the PAASCU for its Theology and Ministry Program under the School of Humanities of the Ateneo de Manila; and soon, we shall also be visited by AVEPRO, the Vatican's accrediting body for Ecclesiastical Faculties and Universities.

Over and above these, LST has continued to honor its Asian Mandate through our Asian Theological Program, that is, the mandate to pay particular attention to our Asian contexts by offering courses contextualized in both content and method. Hence, for our monthly theological hours, our Student Council and the Administration have tried to identify topics or issues relevant to the Churches in Asia and, indeed, the world at large. To this same end, LST also tries, whenever possible, to offer courses conducted in Asian languages (like Vietnamese, Korean, and Indonesian) to cater to groups from these Asian countries. In addition, LST has greatly expanded its network with other institutions, not just local but also international. Within the campus alone, we collaborate with various institutions like the Ateneo de Manila, which grants our civil degrees for the MA in Theological

Studies, PhD in Theology, Doctor of Ministry, and other masteral programs; the East Asian Pastoral Institute, Center for Ignatian Spirituality, Emmaus Center, Catholic Safeguarding Institute, Jesuit Communications, and the Center for Family Ministries. Consequently, LST and these institutes and centers offer a wide array of courses and programs that help develop skills and capacities for mission and ministry. Our latest addition to these programs—and a popular one—is the DIVAS (Diploma in Integral Vocational Accompaniment Towards a Synodal Church). We have also recently launched the Diploma in Integral Leadership and Community Development (DIL) in cooperation with Fondacio-Asia here in the Radio Veritas compound, Quezon City.

Another area worthy of mention is the affiliation with LST of some theologates, both local and international, for the purpose of granting the ecclesiastical degree Baccalaureate in Theology to their graduates: St. John Vianney School of Theology in Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines, and Saint Joseph Jesuit Scholasticate Theological Institute in Saigon, Vietnam. Then, there are the ongoing applications for affiliation of the St. Vincent School of Theology in Quezon City and the Durando Institute for Philosophy and Theology of the Vincentians in Dalat, Vietnam. Internationally, LST is a member of the CTI (Collaborative Theological Initiative), the network of the seven English-speaking Jesuit theological centers in the world, for the purpose of helping one another in our parallel mission. Finally, we cannot fail to mention LST's vigorous efforts to promote publication and research from our own faculty and from outside sources, including student outputs—major papers, capstone projects, theses, and dissertations—that are published in our Loyola Papers, Loyola Monographs, and *Landas*.

Having reckoned the many milestones LST has achieved, what else is there for me, for us, to do? If the Lord is coming soon, then probably no more! Seriously, ahead of us is still a big challenge. The previous Strategic Plan of LST is expiring this year (2025), and so we need to craft a new one for the next 5 years, at least. But, as we know, contrary to what others think, this is not only the President's task. So

don't expect to hear of my strategic plan here, because we shall do it together, starting with revisiting our existing Vision and Mission, out of which we shall identify probably 4 or 5 Strategic Areas to pursue in the light of our reading of the present and the anticipated future circumstances and needs of the Church and the world, not to mention the Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, the Philippine Province Plan, and the directives and orientations from the Vatican document *Veritatis Gaudium* (VG), the Apostolic Constitution governing Ecclesiastical Faculties and universities. Definitely, given the many positive aspects of our theological program, we are determined to continue and develop them as much as we can.

Having said that, I want to highlight some issues or areas of concern that I think we need to consider as we begin to craft our plan.

To begin with, I would like to underline that, as I have said in my interview with *Tinig Loyola*, LST exists not just to teach theology or the content of the Faith but to train students to theologize or do theology in context; not just to memorize dogmas or teachings but to grapple with and make sense of the various issues that confront us believers, using the tools of Faith and Reason, and everything else that helps. An important aspect of this task is to develop our critical thinking, discernment, and communication skills. I hope we can really fulfill this aspiration.

A pressing concern we need to address is the burning issue of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which our present Pope, Leo XIV, describes as "humanity's critical challenge"—a very helpful tool, along with other forms of digital technology, but with serious implications for human dignity, labor justice, and social ethics, not to mention its impact on the quality and integrity of our students' academic projects and outputs. Actually, AI is just one aspect of the whole challenge posed by the technological or digital explosion: there is the grim truth of addiction to gadgets that has taken captive practically all of us, if we are to be honest. And we know what this means in terms of our physical and mental health, and the quality of our relationships, compromising depth and personal encounters.

Equally significant is the reminder of *Veritatis Gaudium* that theological endeavor must not only remain abstract and academic, but also pastoral and missionary, impacting the lives of the poor and marginalized and other societal issues. This implies that theology and theologizing must not only happen and end in the classroom but must speak to and impact the lives of, especially, the disadvantaged. Is our theology and theologizing here at LST already on this level?

Closely related to this is the call of *Veritatis Gaudium* for greater interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity in theology—interdisciplinarity understood as disciplines or fields working together but staying distinct, and transdisciplinarity as knowledge and methods being blended into something that transcends the original fields, often including non-academic or practical perspectives. This means, therefore, that we have to invest more in Faculty and Staff Development to better equip ourselves for a more demanding task.

In addition, in the area of organizational capability, *Veritatis Gaudium* strongly encourages ecclesiastical faculties to network or collaborate with other institutions, both local and international. I believe this is one of the strengths of LST, given the growing number of institutions that are now networked with us both within campus and outside, and even internationally, as I have mentioned earlier. Still, there is room for more collaboration among us and other related institutions.

Another global concern that deserves our attention is the promotion of Integral Ecology, which also features in the Ateneo de Manila's strategic plan, in the Philippine Province, in the four Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, and Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

Furthermore, in the light of the recent Synod on Synodality, one of the most significant legacies of the late Pope Francis, LST needs to see how it can concretize the summons and the invitations contained in the final document, which emphasizes conversion on various levels, structural reforms, women's leadership, enhanced lay participation, accountability, transparency, and healing.

Finally, given the various factors and influences that may endanger the safety and well-being of our community members, we need to come up with well-thought-out safeguarding protocols to promote a culture of safety and protection, as all other institutions have been mandated to do.

All of these holy desires and aspirations, as I have mentioned, cannot be the work of the President or his team alone. In my Paul class, especially on the theme of the Church, I underline the Apostle's teaching on the Church as a living or organic body with many members, each with distinct functions, all of which must work together for the proper functioning of the body. At the same time, I remind them of the charisms or gifts of the Holy Spirit with which each member of the Church is endowed—gifts that are not to be hidden under the bed or bushel basket, as our Lord reminds us, but to be discovered, cultivated, and used for the building up of the Church. Often, a person is endowed not only with a single gift, but with a few, even many, gifts. Imagine, therefore, what a community can become if everyone contributes or shares the gifts they have! St. Paul exhorts the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 5:19: "Do not quench or extinguish the Spirit" (*to pneuma mē sbennute*). Yes, it is possible to extinguish the Spirit, to prevent it from inflaming us to love and service. But that is not what a disciple of Christ is. And that is not the Ignatian way, which is the way of *magis*, the way of giving greater glory to God.

It is in this light, therefore, that I invite all of you, friends and partners of LST, to join me and my team in accepting the challenges and invitations I have enumerated above. We pray and hope that we can indeed come up with a Strategic Plan that addresses the major and pressing concerns of LST. We are still in the Year of Hope, which our beloved Pope Francis declared last year. As members of the Church, we are pilgrims on a journey to the Kingdom of God. And we journey with and in hope, knowing that, as St. Paul says in his *Letter to the Romans*, "hope does not disappoint or put us to shame, for the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5).

To end and to summarize, perhaps we can ask: what does it mean for LST to be a Jesuit theological school in these times? It is, first of all, to be a school rooted in the service of God and the Church, forming ministers and theologians who are deeply spiritual, doctrinally sound, and pastorally effective; second, a theological school at the frontiers—a laboratory of theological discernment that dares to engage the pressing spiritual, social, and cultural challenges of the Philippines, Asia, and beyond; third, a hub of global and local collaboration, a community of discerners and companions, its members bound together by a shared mission, listening to the Spirit, and fostering collaborative leadership rooted in spiritual freedom; and, finally, a place of formation that sends wise, loving, and courageous ministers, who are not only trained in orthodoxy but also capable of reading the signs of the times and reforming structures for God's work and mission.

These are bold aspirations, but much of this is already happening. Still, we aim for more—walking together, relying on God's help, and using our human, material, and spiritual resources. We journey together in hope, with St. Paul's words from *Philippians* to reassure us (4:13): "I can do all things in him who strengthens me." Yes, we can do all things in Him who strengthens us. Once again, thank you very much for your presence and support of LST, and may the Good Lord bless all of us and the long journey ahead. *Kalemera*, good morning!

About the Author. **Renato R. Repole, SJ** obtained his Licentiate in Sacred Scriptures (SSL) from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome in 1997 and his Doctorate in Sacred Theology (STD) from the Pontifical Gregorian University in 2002. Since 1996, he has been teaching the Synoptic Gospels, the Johannine Writings, the Letters of St. Paul, and Biblical Greek at the Loyola School of Theology, Quezon City, Philippines. He was part of the Pedro Calungsod Bible Translation Project that translated the New Testament from the original Greek to Cebuano. He was also a member of the board that drafted the *Ratio Formationis Sacerdotalis Nationalis* for the Philippines, which was released in 2023 by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.


Loyola School
of Theology