LOYOLA PAPERS

STUDENT AND ALUMNI JOURNAL OF LOYOLA SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Volume 7 | Number 1 | 2026 | ISSN 2719-1834

ARTICLES

The Place of Touch in Greco-Roman Antiquity and in the Old Testament
Dom Joseph B. Bulan, SJ

A Critical Analysis of the Protestant Principle of *Sola Scriptura* in Light of Catholic Arguments on the Temporal Precedence of Tradition and the Formal Insufficiency of Scripture
Salvador G. Agualada Jr., CMF

Peace, Hope, and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Perspective on Political Life
La Thi Thu Trang, CMR

The Human Person as *Relatio* in Joseph Ratzinger's *Logos-Dialogos* Theology
Junmar Cris N. Caputolan

Buddha's *Dhammapada* and Jesus Christ's Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus: Evil, Freedom, and Divine Justice
Kevin Stephon R. Centeno, SJ

The Experience of Women's Dignity in the Angolan Synodal Church: A Pastoral Critical Re-Reading of *Mulieris Dignitatem* from Angolan Cosmology
José Abílio Praia, SJ

BACCALAUREATE IN SACRED THEOLOGY CAPSTONE PAPERS

Where Christ Suffers Today: A Christological, Ecclesiological, and Missiological Reflection on Human Suffering from War
Christian R. del Mundo, AA

From Refuge to Communion: A Theological Synthesis of A Missionary Experience in Guatemala
Nollen Jed D. Mendoza, MJ

CONTRIBUTORS

LOYOLA PAPERS

STUDENT AND ALUMNI JOURNAL OF LOYOLA SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Volume 7 | Number 1 | 2026 | ISSN 2719-1834

Theology and Ministry Program
School of Humanities, Loyola Schools
Ateneo de Manila University
Quezon City, Philippines

www.lst.edu

EDITORIAL BOARD

EDITOR

Leo-Martin Angelo R. Ocampo, Ph.D. Cand.

EDITORIAL CONSULTANTS

Oliver G. Dy, S.J., S.T.D., Ph.D. (Philosophy)

Enrico C. Eusebio, Jr., S.J., J.C.D. (Canon Law, Religious Education)

Jojo M. Fung, S.J., D.Min. (Systematic Theology)

Cynthia J. Gavino, Ph.D. (Family Ministry and Counseling)

Abundio R. Babor, Jr., M.S.C., S.T.D. (Moral Theology)

Rene B. Javellana, S.J., D.Min. (Church History)

Rogel Anecito L. Abais, S.T.D. (Biblical Theology)

Jose V.C. Quilongquilong, S.J., S.T.D. (Spirituality)

Joaquin C. Yap, Jr., D.Phil. (Systematic Theology)

COPY EDITOR

Lovely Remedios B. Lansang, M.A.

LAYOUT EDITOR

Jose Antonio Q. Pavia

COVER DESIGN

Bien Emmanuel C. Cruz, S.J.

MODERATOR

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

Loyola Papers, The Student and Alumni Journal of Loyola School of Theology, is an open-access, peer-reviewed journal published twice a year by the Loyola School of Theology, located at Ateneo de Manila University, Loyola Heights, 1108 Quezon City, Philippines. The digital version is available for free download from the LST Publications Office website (https://publications.lst.edu/). For editorial, business, and other matters, contact publications@lst.edu.

Aside from articles in the field of systematic, biblical, moral and pastoral theology, canon law and church history, articles on religious education, pastoral psychology and counseling, spirituality and retreat-giving, integral ecology, migration, and philosophy may be submitted to *Loyola Papers* at research@lst.edu. The manuscript, following Turabian style 9th edition, must be between 4,500 and 10,000 words, including footnotes.

Loyola Papers 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.

© 2026 by Loyola School of Theology

All rights reserved.

ISSN 2719-1834

CONTENTS

LOYOLA PAPERS
Vol. 7, No. 1 (2026)

EDITOR'S PREFACE v
Leo-Martin Angelo R. Ocampo

ARTICLES

1. **The Place of Touch in Greco-Roman Antiquity and in the Old Testament. 1**
   Dom Joseph B. Bulan, SJ

2. **A Critical Analysis of the Protestant Principle of *Sola Scriptura* in Light of Catholic Arguments on the Temporal Precedence of Tradition and the Formal Insufficiency of Scripture 31**
   Salvador G. Agualada Jr., CMF

3. **Peace, Hope, and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Perspective on Political Life 51**
   La Thi Thu Trang, CMR

4. **The Human Person as *Relatio* in Joseph Ratzinger's *Logos-Dialogos* Theology. 75**
   Junmar Cris N. Caputolan

5. **Buddha's *Dhammapada* and Jesus Christ's Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus: Evil, Freedom, and Divine Justice 109**
   Kevin Stephon R. Centeno, SJ

6. The Experience of Women's Dignity in the Angolan Synodal Church: A Pastoral Critical Re-Reading of *Mulieris Dignitatem* from Angolan Cosmology 127
José Abílio Praia, SJ

BACCALAUREATE IN SACRED THEOLOGY CAPSTONE PAPERS

7. Where Christ Suffers Today: A Christological, Ecclesiological, and Missiological Reflection on Human Suffering from War 161
Christian R. del Mundo, AA

8. From Refuge to Communion: A Theological Synthesis of A Missionary Experience in Guatemala 173
Nollen Jed D. Mendoza, MJ

CONTRIBUTORS **185**

EDITOR'S PREFACE

The recently concluded Jubilee Year 2025 was marked by a striking mix of hope and unease: an exhilarating year that laid bare both the promise and the peril of our time. On the one hand, it witnessed the rapid and continued advance of artificial intelligence, reshaping how human beings work, communicate, and even discern meaning. On the other, it was shadowed by the tragic escalation of conflicts in various parts of the world, reminding us with painful clarity of humanity's enduring capacity for selfishness, violence, and division.

For the Catholic Church, however, this Jubilee Year will be remembered above all as a moment of profound transition and grace. It was the year in which the Church bid farewell to our dear Pope Francis, whose pontificate was marked by a relentless call to mercy, synodality, care for the poor, and responsibility for our common home. From the beginning of his ministry as Bishop of Rome, the Jesuit Pontiff consistently urged the Church to go forth and become a field hospital for a wounded world, to listen attentively to the voices at the peripheries, and to rediscover the Gospel's power to heal, reconcile, and renew.

His leadership reshaped the Church's pastoral imagination. Through his emphasis on synodality, Pope Francis reminded us that the Church is not a closed institution but a pilgrim people walking together, discerning the will of the Spirit through prayer, dialogue, and shared responsibility. His concern for the poor and excluded challenged economic systems that discard the vulnerable, while his teaching on care for creation called Catholics to recognize ecological responsibility as an integral dimension of faith and moral life. In word and deed, he sought to re-center us on "the first proclamation," the very heart of the Gospel: the merciful love of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

At the same time, it was the year we welcomed Pope Leo XIV, opening a new chapter in the Church's pilgrimage through history. This passage from one successor of Peter to another unfolded against a world in flux, underscoring anew the Church's vocation to read the signs of the times and to proclaim the Good News with fidelity, wisdom, and hope amid the unrelenting changes in the global landscape.

Here in Loyola School of Theology, we also witnessed a quiet but nevertheless significant moment of transition. Rev. Fr. Renato R. Repole, S.J. took the helm from Rev. Fr. Enrico C. Eusebio, S.J. on 20 August 2025, ushering in a new period of leadership grounded in both gratitude for the past and hope for the future, especially as LST marks its diamond anniversary. In his inaugural address as the 11th President of LST, Fr. Repole acknowledged the legacy he inherits and the shared mission that lies ahead for all of us: "God surprises us and challenges us every so often to go into uncharted territories, to stretch our limits, and to make us grow." His remark reflects his humble recognition of the weight and wonder of leadership: one that is not carried alone, but with the support of community, tradition, and most of all, divine grace. This transition at LST, much like the wider transitions within the Church, calls the community to move forward in hope, rooted in the school's rich heritage yet open to new frontiers of theological reflection, collaboration, and service.

In the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, we also witnessed a transition in leadership, with Cardinal Pablo Virgilio S. David passing the mantle to Archbishop Gilbert A. Garcera, along with the appointment and installation of a number of bishops in several local dioceses.

Indeed, transitions are an inevitable part of life, arriving whether we are prepared or not. While we may not always be

able to anticipate or ready ourselves for them, we always have reason to be hopeful rather than afraid. Just like the Holy Doors that close and open in *kairos*, God's appointed time, the continuity in the Church and in life amid these countless transitions reminds us of God's abiding fidelity to his people through every promise and peril. The closing of one door is never an ending without a future, just as the opening of another is never a rupture with the past. Rather, these liminal moments embody the rhythm of salvation history itself: moments of fulfillment giving way to moments of opportunity, all held together by the steadfast love of God who guides his Church across the ages. As with the Holy Doors of a Jubilee, what matters most is not the door itself, but the faith with which the Church crosses every threshold, bearing the certain confidence and hope that the same God who has led her thus far will continue to do so.

It is with these thoughts that we are happy to present to you this present issue of *Loyola Papers*, now on its seventh volume since its revival in 2020.

First in our lineup is "The Place of Touch in Greco-Roman Antiquity and in the Old Testament" by **Dom Joseph B. Bulan, SJ**. In this study, Bulan offers a compelling retrieval of the sense of "touch" as a vital yet often neglected medium through which meaning, power, holiness, and social order were embodied in Greco-Roman antiquity and the Old Testament. Drawing from philosophy, law, medicine, religious practice, and biblical ritual, the article's strength lies in its interdisciplinary scope and conceptual clarity: touch emerges not as a neutral bodily act but as a performative and communicative force that establishes boundaries, mediates relationships, and negotiates access to the sacred. Particularly illuminating is the author's comparative synthesis, which highlights both continuity and contrast between Greco-Roman sensory hierarchies and

Israel's covenantal, purity-centered worldview, including the nuanced distinction between holiness and purity in the Torah. The study is timely and relevant, contributing meaningfully to current conversations in biblical theology, sensory studies, embodiment, ritual theory, and theological anthropology, while also opening promising avenues for further reflection on New Testament healing narratives, sacramentality, and contemporary theological ethics of the body.

Then we have **Fr. Salvador G. Agualada Jr., CMF**'s "A Critical Analysis of the Protestant Principle of *Sola Scriptura* in Light of Catholic Arguments on the Temporal Precedence of Tradition and the Formal Insufficiency of Scripture." The article offers a penetrating Catholic critique of the Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura* by retrieving the Church's classical teaching on the temporal precedence of Tradition and the material sufficiency yet formal insufficiency of Scripture. Drawing deeply from the insights of Yves Congar, and engaging authoritative voices such as Latourelle, Rahner, Ratzinger and Vatican II's *Dei Verbum*, the study brings out the intrinsic unity of Scripture and Tradition as a single deposit of faith, along with the crucial role of the Magisterium. Particularly compelling is the author's demonstration that Scripture, while normative and inspired, cannot be understood apart from the living ecclesial context that transmitted, canonized, interpreted, and continues to actualize it. The article is highly relevant for contemporary ecumenical dialogue, biblical theology, and ecclesiology, offering both a nuanced response to Reformation-era claims and a constructive Catholic synthesis faithful to conciliar teaching. By foregrounding what Congar calls "the whole genius of tradition," this work not only clarifies a long-standing doctrinal divide but also opens fruitful avenues for renewed reflection on authority, interpretation, and communion within the life of the Church today.

Next is "Peace, Hope and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Perspective on Political Life" by **Sr. La Thi Thu Trang, CMR**. A timely engagement with Augustine's political thought, this paper highlights its enduring relevance for contemporary social and political challenges marked by polarization, violence, and moral fragility. It offers a careful synthesis of Augustine's metaphysical, theological, and moral insights, particularly the concepts of *ordo amoris*, peace, and hope, as a framework for responsible political engagement amid the limits of the earthly city. By situating hope as both a sustaining virtue and a moral discipline governed by charity, Trang demonstrates how Augustine's vision reconciles realism with active civic commitment, avoiding both despair and naïve optimism. Its careful engagement with Michael Lamb's interpretation of Augustine further highlights the critical interplay between hope and charity, underscoring how theological insight can guide ethical political action.

This is followed by **Junmar Cris Caputolan**'s "The Human Person as *Relatio* in Joseph Ratzinger's *Logos-Dialogos* Theology." A timely offering on the 20th anniversary of the election of the late Pontiff to the See of Peter, this paper explores the human person through the lens of Ratzinger's *Logos-Dialogos* theology, situating the inquiry at the intersection of Christology, anthropology, and relational existence. Its strength lies in tracing the historical and theological development of the concept of personhood, from Augustine's relational *imago Dei*, through Boethius' individuality of rational substance, to Richard of St. Victor's refinement emphasizing love and other-orientation, before culminating in Ratzinger's existential and incarnational perspective. Caputolan persuasively highlights how Ratzinger reframes the human person as inherently relational, whose existence is both grounded in and directed toward God through others, making faith, reason, and love inseparable

dimensions of human self-realization. By showing that authentic human flourishing is inseparable from the Logos made flesh and framing personhood as dynamic, relational and dialogical, it calls for a renewed engagement with ethical, ecclesial, and existential questions, offering a vision of human life fully oriented toward truth, love, and communion.

We also have "Buddha's *Dhammapada* and Jesus Christ's Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus: Evil, Freedom, and Divine Justice" by **Kevin Stephon R. Centeno, SJ**. In this study, Centeno offers a nuanced comparative analysis of moral evil, human freedom, and justice through the lens of Buddhism and Christianity, focusing on the *Dhammapada*'s chapter on evil and Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Integrating insights from Ricoeur and Hick with scriptural and canonical texts, he highlights how both traditions address the consequences of moral action while framing human freedom responsibly. The paper demonstrates the relevance of these teachings for contemporary ethical reflection, showing that, despite fundamental theological differences between Buddhism's non-theistic karmic law and Christianity's divine justice, the two traditions converge on the principle that human actions have inevitable moral consequences. By linking these insights to a spirituality of responsible freedom, the paper underlines how ethical life is both empowered and accountable, offering practical guidance for interreligious dialogue and joint efforts toward human flourishing.

We are likewise pleased to feature **José Abílio Praia, SJ**'s **"**The Experience of Women's Dignity in the Angolan Synodal Church: A Pastoral Critical Re-Reading of *Mulieris Dignitatem* from Angolan Cosmology." By situating John's Paul Apostolic Letter on the dignity and vocation of women within Angolan cultural cosmology, the study brings to the fore the paradoxical

tension between the symbolic reverence for women and their structural marginalization in Angola, revealing how indigenous notions of relational, life-giving, and moral authority can inform a liberative theology. Praia's critical feminist and pastoral approach demonstrates the generative potential of the late Pontiff's text while exposing its limitations, particularly in addressing patriarchal ecclesial structures and essentialist constructions of femininity. With his integration of African and Asian feminist theological insights, nuanced reading of Marian anthropology, and call for a Synodal ecclesiology that is grounded in lived experience, co-responsibility and structural transformation, Praia presents a vision of the Church in Angola and the broader Global South that is deeply attentive to justice, communion, and the embodiment of women's dignity as central to ecclesial identity and mission.

For our capstone papers, we are proud to share "Where Christ Suffers Today: A Christological, Ecclesiological and Missiological Reflection on Human Suffering from War" by **Christian R. del Mundo, AA** and "From Refuge to Communion: A Theological Synthesis of A Missionary Experience in Guatemala" by **Nollen Jed D. Mendoza, MJ**.

Del Mundo's paper is a powerful theological reflection that brings Christology, ecclesiology, and missiology into direct conversation with the concrete suffering of war refugees today. Drawing from the author's firsthand missionary and pastoral experience among displaced persons across Europe, it grounds theological reflection not in abstraction but in lived encounter, most strikingly through the haunting image of the crucified Child of Kyiv and the personal narrative of Nathalia, a Ukrainian refugee. Timely and urgent, it speaks prophetically to our world today marked by armed conflict, displacement, and indifference, offering rich potential for pastoral praxis,

theological education, and missionary renewal by insisting that authentic Christian faith must stand at the foot of the cross wherever it appears today.

Meanwhile, Mendoza presents a concise yet profound theological synthesis with his missionary experience in Guatemala as point of departure, tracing a transformative movement from a "theology of refuge" to a "theology of communion." By emphasizing *kenosis*, dialogue, and reciprocal evangelization, the author reframes the poor and indigenous communities not as objects of charity but as privileged sites of God's presence and revelation. Both pastorally grounded and theologically rigorous, he offers timely insights for missionary formation and ecclesial practice, calling the Church to rediscover mission as shared life, solidarity, and communion.

Taken together, the contributions in this volume reflect a Church and an academy attentive to the signs of the times, unafraid to engage complexity, and deeply committed to faith seeking understanding in the midst of rapid change and enduring human struggle. Across diverse themes spanning embodiment and ritual, Scripture and Tradition, political life, relational anthropology, interreligious ethics, women's dignity, spirituality, suffering, and mission, all of these essays converge on a shared conviction: theology is most authentic when it remains rooted in lived experience, ecclesial communion, and the concrete realities of the world God so loves. Far from being isolated inquiries, these studies speak to one another, revealing theology as a dialogical, incarnational, and hopeful enterprise that bridges tradition and contemporary questions with rigor and pastoral sensitivity.

As *Loyola Papers* enters its seventh year since its revival, may this issue stand as a testament to the vitality of theological study and reflection at Loyola School of Theology and

beyond. May it continue to invite scholars, pastors, students, and readers alike to cross thresholds with faith: to think more deeply, to listen more attentively, and to act more courageously in service of the Gospel. In a time marked by transition, uncertainty, and promise, may these pages contribute, in their own modest way, to the Church's ongoing task of discernment and mission, strengthening our hope that the Spirit continues to guide, renew, and send us forth for the life of the world.

Leo-Martin Angelo R. Ocampo

ARTICLES

THE PLACE OF TOUCH IN GRECO-ROMAN ANTIQUITY AND IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Dom Joseph B. Bulan, SJ

What is the place of touch in Greco-Roman antiquity and in the Old Testament? What are some tactile attitudes and practices that belong to these two periods? In the investigation that follows, touch is seen to operate within a specific sensory worldview, playing a performative and communicative role in these cultures. Its applications in daily life are regulated by hierarchies and socio-cultural conventions, and it serves as a crucial vehicle for the establishment, maintenance, and/or disruption of boundaries important to a community. With the Old Testament in particular, tactile attitudes and practices are governed by the central covenant relationship between God and his people.

Touch in Greco-Roman Antiquity

The period of antiquity provided a vibrant landscape in which the sense of touch became significant in everyday life. During the primacy of Greco-Roman culture from 5th century BCE to 5th century CE, touch, along with the other senses, "[created] and [expressed] a huge range of cultural meanings." The combination and interaction between these senses, which Toner terms *synesthesia*, has led to a dynamic environment that promoted a given order in society, along with an established set of values, beliefs, and ideas.[1] In particular, touch and its applications have helped set boundaries among persons and

1 Jerry Toner, "Introduction: Sensing the Ancient Past," in *A Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity*, ed. Jerry Toner, vol. 1 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 2-4.

social groups, navigate relationships, facilitate transactions, promote health and well-being, express praise and worship with the divine, and establish conventions in the ancient world concerning rank, hierarchy, purity, and cleanliness.

Touch in Philosophy

In Greek philosophy, various thinkers have reflected on the role and value of touch with respect to the other senses. For Plato, sight ranks the highest among the senses because it "was more akin to the intellect than any other sense."[2] Touch, on the other hand, is relegated to a lower place, because while "the eye is sovereign,...[the] tactile body is a beast of burden and contagion to be kept in place."[3] For him, sight is the means to contemplate and access what is ideal, as seen in his praise of sight both in the *Republic* and in *Timaeus*;[4] touch, since it shares a greater affinity to what is corporeal and earthly, is simply inferior to it.

In contrast, Aristotle in his *De Anima* affirms the universality and sensitivity of touch as compared to the other senses. It is universal because not only do all creatures have this sense, but it is always active, even when one is at rest. Furthermore, its universality is evident in how the other senses can be understood as involving some form of contact between an external stimulus and a particular organ: "light strikes the iris, sound the tympanum, odor the nose buds, [and] taste the tongue."[5]

Regarding its sensitivity, touch makes it possible for humans and other creatures to perceive and distinguish among

2 Pablo Maurette, *The Forgotten Sense: Meditations on Touch* (University of Chicago Press, 2018), 13

3 Richard Kearney, *Touch: Recovering Our Most Vital Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 33.

4 Maurette, *The Forgotten Sense: Meditations on Touch*, 13.

5 Kearney, *Touch: Recovering Our Most Vital Sense*, 35.

various temperatures, textures, and other physical sensations, through the medium of flesh (*sarx*). Consequently, touch allows one to identify, recognize, and distinguish one person from another, and one thing from another. That is why, for Aristotle, someone who is "thick-skinned" is dull, while a "thin-skinned" person is discerning.[6] For him, while touch is the most basic because of its universality across different species, it is also the most necessary, since the sensitivity it possesses as a sense faculty is essential for an organism's survival, interaction, and communication with the world.[7]

Touch in Social Hierarchy and Organization

Aristotle's insight into the discerning quality of touch is seen in how it distinguishes among people belonging to different social classes. For example, in ancient Rome, Toner points out that slaves can be differentiated from ordinary citizens through bodily marks which resulted from physical torture such as whipping, branding, or wearing a slave collar; other external manifestations, such as rough hands and a bent posture because of intense manual labor, are also used in ancient Greece to distinguish them from free persons.[8]

These, in turn, enable one to determine another's place in the social hierarchy. In other words, the presence or absence of these marks communicates one's rank and social status to another. Especially for former slaves turned free citizens, these marks continue to bear witness to their past identity, along with the emotional and psychological trauma that

6 Ibid.

7 Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies* (New York, NY: Berg, 2007), 17.

8 Toner, "Introduction," in *A Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity*, 6 and Gregory S. Aldrete, "Urban Sensations: Opulence and Ordure," in *A Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity*, ed. Jerry Toner, vol. 1 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 62.

comes with it. It is understandable, then, that these become a cause of pride or embarrassment, with some former slaves even attempting to "cut out the scars or [burn] them to conceal their original meaning."[9]

In addition, people belonging to different social classes are normally forbidden to be in contact with one another; a person from a lower class is generally prohibited from touching someone from a higher one. Such rules on touching and other forms of interaction are in place to maintain order, which usually benefits the elite classes who are distinguished from the rest of society. Toner says about the Roman emperor:

> To share the emperor's food, to hear him speak, to touch his very clothes, those were things that only the members of the imperial entourage or the leaders of the community could hope to do. Distinctions of sensory experience shaped the sense of class, privilege of rank, and worth that day. The average person was simply not good enough to hear the emperor's voice, touch his clothes, eat his food, smell his perfume, or see him in an intimate setting.[10]

Here, it is interesting to note how despite the generally low regard for the sense of touch especially by the upper segments of society, it is precisely touch which mainly distinguishes the royalty from the commoner, since while the emperor can be seen by everyone, not all have the privilege to touch him, and by extension, anything associated with him, such as his clothes, food, and royal throne.

Access through touch, therefore, implies a kind of equality between the one touching and the one who is touched; or at the very least, it expresses a tacit permission from the one with the higher social rank. Otherwise, this constitutes a violation

9 Aldrete, "Urban Sensations," 62.

10 David Potter, "The Social Life of the Senses: Feasts and Funerals," in *A Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity*, ed. Jerry Toner, vol. 1 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 24.

and subversion not only of these conventions, but of the underlying social order that it expresses and upholds. This hints at a certain power and authority that is attributed to touch (and the ability to touch and be touched), both from the perspective of the agent and its recipient.

Touch and the Law

Apart from distinguishing among different social classes, touch also plays a communicative role in legal settings. For example, Hibbits observes that in performance cultures[11] such as those found in Greece and Rome, an oath is usually made "by touching an altar or other object of religious significance."[12] This signals that one is making a particular promise or commitment to the person or institution associated with the object one touches (ex., swearing an oath by touching an altar intended for a specific deity expresses allegiance).

He also notes that touching another person or thing signifies legal authority or ownership over it.[13] In ancient Rome, the practice called *legis actio sacramentum* used a ceremonial rod to touch a slave to claim him as one's own property, along with the words "I affirm that this man is mine by Quiritary right according to his proper title. As I have declared, so, look you, I have laid my staff on him." [14] Here, the verbal claim is legitimized by the gesture, just as the gesture signifies that

11 Hibbits defines a "performance culture" as a society in which "significant information is delivered through many media and not just orally." Members of these cultures communicate and express themselves not only through speech, but also via "gestures, touch, smell, and taste." See Bernard J Hibbitts, "Coming to Our Senses: Communication and Legal Expression in Performance Cultures," *Emory Law Journal* 41, no. 4 (1992): 882–884.

12 Hibbitts, "Coming to Our Senses," 928.

13 Ibid., 929-930.

14 Ibid.

the slave and his body are now part of the master's property, as proclaimed. Similarly, in the *mancipatio*, a traditional Roman legal ceremony that facilitates the transfer of ownership of certain goods such as cattle, what is being transferred is "taken by the hand" from the previous master by the new one to explicitly communicate this change of status.[15]

In addition, tactile gestures in legal settings can impute culpability on a specific person or party. In ancient Mesopotamia, for instance, touching a person's hem can be understood as making a legal complaint, while in Rome, a creditor can claim a delinquent debtor by grasping a part of the debtor's body.[16] Finally, touch can also be used in performance cultures to establish guilt or innocence. The accused can be made to touch an object associated with a spirit or deity (ex, a hot iron, boiling water), and if the touch can be sustained without harm or injury to the accused, then he/she is innocent. Otherwise, that person is judged guilty, with the harm/injury interpreted as a visual and tactile confirmation of his culpability. While sight in this instance is necessary to validate guilt, it is the tactile reaction of the accused that communicates it.[17]

Taken together, touch in legal settings in the ancient Greco-Roman world is used to express commitments, legitimize transactions and other agreements between two parties, establish ownership of people and property, and determine guilt and innocence, along with the degree of culpability of the accused.

15 Ibid., 930.

16 Ibid., 931.

17 Ibid., 934.

Touch in Medicine

Just like in law, touch also plays a vital role in the field of medicine. In *Regimen*, one of the medical texts by the Greek philosopher and physician Hippocrates, touch is identified as one of the means used to help identify a person's symptoms and subsequently determine illness. Together with sight, hearing, smell, taste, speech, and breath, an ancient physician "reads" the body of the patient by touching it, which in turn would inform the prescribed intervention given to restore that person back to health.[18] Examples of tactile diagnostic methods include touching the skin to check body temperature, using the fingers to know the regularity and intensity of a patient's pulse[19], or feeling the abdomen for lumps or other irregularities. Here, touch operates alongside the other senses, as ancient doctors recognized that the simultaneous engagement of the senses can help improve the accuracy of one's diagnosis.[20]

Apart from determining illness, touch also has therapeutic value. The Greek demigod and centaur Chiron, as well as his disciple Asclepius, often use touch to heal, particularly by way of massages, baths, or laying on of hands, in conjunction with music, potions, and medicinal herbs.[21] The Roman statesman Cato the Elder, meanwhile, recommends chanting along with touching the hips with a green reed to remedy dislocation of the joints. The Roman thinker Pliny suggests taking a warm

18 Helen King and Jerry Toner, "Medicine and the Senses: Humors, Potions, and Spells," in *A Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity*, ed. Jerry Toner, vol. 1 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 142-143.

19 The Roman physician Galen has written extensively on the use of pulse as a medical diagnostic method. See Rebecca Flemming, "Losing Touch: Impaired Sensation in Greek Medical Writings," in *Touch and the Ancient Senses*, ed. Alex Purves (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 180-191.

20 King and Toner, "Medicine and the Senses," 142-145.

21 Kearney, *Touch: Recovering Our Most Vital Sense*, 66-67.

sheep's lung to wrap around a person's head struck with brain-fever to help cure the disease.[22]

With the above examples, it is evident how both direct and mediated touch are presumed to have both diagnostic and therapeutic qualities in the ancient world. The diagnostic capacity ties well with Aristotle's insight regarding the sensitivity of touch, while its therapeutic nature affirms a highly embodied approach to medicine, as opposed to modern methods, which rely more heavily on sight, especially in terms of diagnosis.[23]

Touch and Religious Practice

Finally, religious practice in ancient times, like the other aforementioned areas of daily life, was also heavily reliant on the body. Here, Toner remarks how "the senses were not simply intrinsic but also functionally significant", because they "elicited and marked divine presence or absence."[24] The different religious traditions existing during this period – which include, but are not limited to, Jewish, Roman, Greek, and Christian – used embodied gestures to articulate their beliefs, conduct rituals, express their relationship with the divine, and pass on practices from one generation to the next. Needless to say, many of these involved some form of tactile engagement, just as it did with the other senses.[25]

For instance, it was generally believed that touching or kissing a religious statue belonging to a particular cult would provide one with inspiration or transfer the deity or spirit's power to the person in contact with it. This is because these

22 King and Toner, "Medicine and the Senses," 157-158.

23 Kearney, *Touch: Recovering Our Most Vital Sense*, 22.

24 Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "The Senses in Religion: Piety, Critique, Competition," in *A Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity*, ed. Jerry Toner, vol. 1 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 91.

25 Ibid., 92-96.

statues were "thought to embody the spirit of the divinity and to represent the god in shrines and temples."[26] This leads to two insights. First, for the ancient world, touch is a concrete means to access the divine, but this access is nevertheless mediated (in this case, by a thing); and second, that divine power is in fact transmittable through embodied means.

Susan Harvey comments that behind this practice is a worldview that recognizes the constant intersection between the realm of the human and the divine, and thus, sensory practices such as touching religious objects facilitate their interaction. Nevertheless, despite their constant exchange, they remain distinct, and dialogue between these two domains is governed by a set of rules so that humanity may be deemed pure and/or whole so as to interact with the divine, which is considered the paragon or ideal of purity and wholeness.[27]

That is why, for the Greeks, only pure persons (*hagnos*) are allowed to offer sacrifice; impurity comes from sexual intercourse or contact with death (ex, touching a corpse). While divine bodies are *hagnos* by default, they believed that human bodies were not. With the Romans, an impure (*impurus*) person or thing implies pollution and contamination from physical dirt or sexual activity, thereby making one *profanes* – unclean and unfit for religious activities; to be pure (*purus*), in contrast, qualifies a person or thing to be *consacratus* or *sacer* – set apart for a religious or divine purpose.[28]

---

26 Toner, "Introduction: Sensing the Ancient Past," in *A Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity*, 8, and Mark Bradley, "Art and the Senses: The Artistry of Bodies, Stages, and Cities in the Greco-Roman World," in *A Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity*, ed. Jerry Toner, vol. 1 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 192.

27 Harvey, "The Senses in Religion," 96.

28 Potter, "The Social Life of the Senses," 25-26.

As a result, for both cultures, religious men and women in charge of worship or offering sacrifice were very particular about what and whom they came in contact with, in view of maintaining their purity, which comes from their status. For the Romans, in particular, these included the male priests and religious officials, as well as consecrated women of the cult of Vestal Virgins, who were known for their chastity. Hence, it was common for them to practice ceremonial washing, refraining from sex, and/or distancing themselves from any form of physical contact with death and dirt to avoid contamination, which can threaten their physical integrity.[29]

The same applies to religious sites and objects. For example, the Romans believed that consecrated objects needed to be guarded against external elements that could jeopardize their sanctity, since they represented the divine. In the *Laws* by Cicero, he stressed the importance of physical purity for anyone who wishes to be in contact with the divine, while Aulus Gellius in *Attic Nights* exhorted that temples are only for worship; hence, they should be regarded with purity and should not be used for any other profane purpose.[30] The various Greek cults also emphasized the same idea, and they believed that keeping sacred sites clean and pure is a shared responsibility of those working in the temple and those who hold office in the city-states and communities.[31]

---

29 Ibid., 25-26, 37-38, and Jack Lennon, "Contaminating Touch in the Roman World," in *Touch and the Ancient Senses*, ed. Alex Purves (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 122, 127.

30 Lennon, "Contaminating Touch in the Roman World," 124.

31 Linda-Marie Günther, "Concepts of Purity in Ancient Greece, with Particular Emphasis on Sacred Sites," in *Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism*, ed. Christian Frevel and Christophe Nihan (Boston, MA: Brill, 2013), 258-259.

Touch, Pollution, Life, and Death

As seen above, the separation between who or what is regarded as pure and/or sacred and impure and/or profane helps uphold a particular order in ancient Greek and Roman societies. To mix the two is seen as threatening this agreed way of life, and so rules are in place to help keep the *status quo* and restore order in cases of transgression. These rules, in turn, are founded on a shared definition of who and what are considered dirty, with dirt generally understood as anything or anyone that "threatens the shared sense of order."[32]

As Mary Douglas notes, pollution "exists in the eye of the beholder,"[33] depending on what each culture deems a threat to this established order. Here, pollution is made real and communicated through the body via touch, which functions as the most immediate and concrete means by which impurity spreads, sacred boundaries are breached or maintained, and one's state of purity is communicated to one's surroundings.

Touch plays a crucial role in this regard because, among the different senses, it is the most effective means that can be used to cross this division, which can subsequently upset the social and religious order. Lennon observes that since dirt is often organic in origin, physical contact with the sources of pollution becomes a particularly dangerous means by which contamination can be carried, transmitted, and received, and consequently compromises one's physical cleanliness and state of ritual purity.[34] Through touch, bodies become carriers for impurity, and one's tactile actions can defile and disrupt both the social and religious order.

---

32 Ibid., 122.

33 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1984), 2.

34 Lennon, "Contaminating Touch in the Roman World," 122.

Now, what exactly makes something or someone dirty? For ancient cultures in Greece and Rome, dirt and pollution are closely related to matters of life and death, made real through bodily contact. Sexual activity is believed to make one impure because of the exchange of bodily fluids through physical intimacy. Thus, across various regions in ancient Greece, men are allowed to offer sacrifice only after a number of days following sex with one's wife or a prostitute, with some areas also requiring public washing to cleanse one's body and make oneself fit to worship.[35]

Similarly, in Rome, ritual sexual abstinence was practiced in preparation for taking part in different religious festivals throughout the year, to maintain the separation between the sacred and mundane.[36] These practices are not just symbolic, but express the idea that touching someone's body in sexual union introduces impurity that needs to be avoided before approaching the divine. It also puts a premium on bodily cleanliness and the avoidance of any prior contact that would compromise the purity required for sacred activities.

Aside from sex, body deformations and excretions are also regarded as a source of impurity – not by their mere presence *per se*, but due to their potential to make contact with others. For example, for Roman religious officials, having sores on the body is a sign of impurity, which restricted them from performing particular rituals.[37] In early Greek sacred laws, one of the hallmarks of purity is to be free from the "taint of childbirth", with taint referring to not so much to the event

35 Potter, "The Social Life of the Senses," in *A Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity*, 26.

36 Lennon, "Contaminating Touch in the Roman World," 125.

37 Ibid., 126.

itself but to the fluids, like blood, that touch the body during the process.[38]

Roman literature also depicts touch as the vehicle of defilement, especially in cases involving blood. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, Aeneas asks his father to carry the sacred images of the Roman household gods because his body was covered by the blood of his enemies, and he can only touch them after washing in a running stream. Similarly, in Seneca's *Hercules*, Amphitryon forbids his stepson to offer sacrifice to the gods while his hands were still bloodied from killing Lychus.[39] In both cases, the pollution rests not only in the act of killing but in its physical and tactile manifestation – the body stained by blood, along with the risk of transferring this impurity through touch to a sacred object or site.

In matters concerning death, contamination through contact becomes even more pronounced. Among the Greeks, inflicting injury or death on another required ritual purification before the individual could be reintegrated into the community, because the act of harming the body of another rendered one impure.[40] In another example, when a person dies in Athens, the place of death automatically becomes unclean. Contact with the corpse is restricted to a select few, usually women, who would draw water from an unpolluted house for washing upon leaving the site of death. The funeral procession

38 Noel Robertson, "The Concept of Purity in Greek Sacred Laws," in *Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism*, ed. Christian Frevel and Christophe Nihan (Boston, MA: Brill, 2013), 214, 219, 235, 237.

39 Lennon, "Contaminating Touch in the Roman World," 124.

40 Robertson, "The Concept of Purity in Greek Sacred Laws," 232.

is then done early in the morning to avoid physical contact with other people and prevent unwanted contamination.[41]

The Romans held a similar view – a corpse, and by extension, that person's entire household and property, became a source of pollution following death. During the period of mourning, any member of the deceased's family is forbidden to offer sacrifice in the temple because they have been exposed to death; they can only worship again after the funeral, when the body has already been laid to rest.[42]

Finally, certain professions were seen as inherently impure, primarily because of their regular and sustained contact with impure substances or bodies. Corpse handlers, executioners, and other death-related workers were avoided by the Romans because they routinely handled the dead. Prostitutes were deemed defiled as well by both Greeks and Romans, both due to their sexual activity and their places of work, which are associated with filth, bodily excretion, and social disorder. [43] Here, impurity is rooted in both occupation and touch: what one handles, touches, and is touched by defines one's state of cleanliness.

In summary, purity for the ancient Greco-Roman world was maintained by carefully regulating what and whom one could touch, and under what circumstances. Because impurity was embodied, it was something transmitted through contact, specifically by physical proximity and interaction with bodies, fluids, and spaces associated with sex, death, and disease. Purity rules were thus in place to protect the community

41 Potter, "The Social Life of the Senses," in *A Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity*, 37.

42 Ibid., 39.

43 Toner, "Introduction," in *A Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity*, 7, and Lennon, "Contaminating Touch in the Roman World," 128-132.

from the threat of pollution, which emerged most clearly at the point of bodily contact between what is acceptable to the established sense of order and what deviates from it.

The Place of Touch in Greco-Roman Antiquity

From the exposition above, it is evident how touch played an important role in various aspects of daily life. Drawing on the universal, sensitive, and corporeal elements of touch, the concept and practice of touch in Greco-Roman antiquity has become a mark of one's social status; it helped distinguish between social and economic classes, while reinforcing the established order in a community. In this regard, touch communicated privilege and power because of the capacity to allow or restrict access to individuals or groups of people.

This power of touch is also operative in legal contexts, as a way to express ownership or enforce agreements and obligations. In ancient medicine, its power lies in its diagnostic and therapeutic capabilities, which can be either through direct or mediated contact. In religious settings, touch helped facilitate an encounter with the divine by helping determine and regulate the boundaries between the sacred and profane.

Finally, in relation to life and death, touch was deeply intertwined with concepts of purity and pollution, where physical contact with birth, bodily fluids, or death needed acts of purification to restore social and religious order back to the *status quo*. Taken together, these demonstrate how touch is a potent medium through which cultural, social, legal, and religious values were expressed and maintained in the ancient world of Greece and Rome.

Touch in the Old Testament

After taking a closer look at ancient Greco-Roman attitudes and practices concerning touch, it will likewise be instructive

to inquire into its function, meaning, and purpose in the Old Testament. As such, this section will begin by looking at touch in the Hebrew Scriptures, specifically as part of the overall sensorium the text presents. It will then move into a few examples of stories where touch plays a central role in the Old Testament, and afterwards, locate the role of touch in the purity codes found in the Torah.

Touch in the Hebrew *Septasensorium*

Yael Avrahami argues that, in contrast to the Greco-Roman pentasensory model, the Hebrews categorized the senses into seven, resulting in a septasensory model. She concludes that in addition to sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell, the ancient Hebrews also considered speech and kinesthesia as distinct senses – each associated with specific body parts which embody and actualize their functions.[44] Speech includes both the process of thinking and articulating one's thoughts, with the mouth (more specifically, the tongue and lips) as its primary organ; with kinesthesia, it comprises both mobility and posture, with the foot or leg as its primary organ.[45]

For the sense of touch, the Hebrew Scriptures understand this to involve both touching and feeling. Touch between humans can be an expression of fondness and care (cf. Gen 21:18, 26:8, 29:11,13)[46] At times, it substitutes for sight, in cases where the person is blind or has defective eyesight, or when what needs to be seen is concealed from the eyes (cf. Gen

44 Yael Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture: Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible* (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2012), 2, 114-115.

45 Ibid., 75-93, 118-124, 127.

46 Victor H. Matthews, *Experiencing Scripture: The Five Senses in Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2023), 27.

27:12, 21; Gen 31:34, 37; Deut 28:29, etc.).[47] Also, just like the sense of taste, its practice is to be conformed to biblical law, and can also be used euphemistically to describe the sexual act (cf. Prov 6:29). Tactile imagery may likewise be employed to express one's capacity for discernment, or the ability to know – whether a particular skill or craft, or knowledge associated with a specific profession (cf. Gen 4:21, Ez 27:29, Jer 2:8, etc.).[48] Lastly, when predicated of the divine, touch becomes an articulation of God's power and might (cf. Ps 104:32).[49] It can mean knowledge of God (as in the people whose hearts he touched, cf. 1 Sam 20:26), divine election (cf. Jer 1:9), or the bestowal of divine inspiration or strength (cf. Dan 10:10, 16, 18).[50]

The primary Hebrew word for touch, *nāga*ʿ, connotes some form of non-violent outward contact between inanimate figures, human beings, or God (in the case of theophanies). Most of the instances of this verb are found in the sacred laws concerning purity, sacrifice, and food.[51] When used figuratively, it can denote harm or affliction (in a legal setting), forbidden sexual advances of a man to a woman (but not a euphemism for the sexual act), or the application of punishment, disease, or affliction. For spatiotemporal contexts, it means "to extend," "to reach," or "to attain" towards someone or something. Finally, the associated noun *nega*ʿ can generally mean a disease

47 Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 106-107.

48 Ibid., 159-160.

49 Ibid, 106-109.

50 Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper III Longman, eds., Dictionary of Biblical Imagery (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 880.

51 L. Schwienhorst, "נָגַע Naga; נֶגַע Nega," in Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 203-205.

sent by God, or in specific cases, either bodily harm or a specific type of "leprosy" in legal and medical contexts, respectively.[52]

Touch as the "Hand of God"

Now, in contrast to the Greeks' association of touch with flesh (*sarx*), the Hebrew conception of touch assigns the hand as its principal organ, specifically as the "feeling limb".[53] Avrahami notes how it "is the agent of multiple acts and experiences that are tactile, and... [represents] the tactile even in expressions that are not explicitly related to touch"; thus, "there is no real differentiation between touching and holding," as both are traced to the hand.[54]

To touch is usually descriptive of some action performed by the hand; it can express either support (Ez 33:22, Jer 26:24) or harm (Job 19:21, 1 Sam 6:9), whether from another human person (Ps 105:1, Chr 16:22, Job 5:19, etc.) or from God (Jdg 20:34, 1 Sam 6:9, 2 Kgs 15:5, Ps 104:32, etc.).[55]

Of particular interest is the term the "hand of God." In the Hebrew Bible, divine providence to humans in need often employs bodily metaphors to articulate it in more familiar terms.[56] As seen previously, the hand is an image that connotes support; hence, the "hand of God," which stands for his strength, is used to express assistance from the Lord who "helps," "upholds," "grasps," or "strengthens" the party in distress (ex: Is 41:10, Ps 63:8-9, Ps 139:10, Ez 30:24, Job 4:3, etc.).[57] This, in turn, makes the abstract idea of divine help

52 Ibid., 205-209.

53 Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture*, 125.

54 Ibid., 127.

55 Ibid., 126.

56 Ibid., 130.

57 Ibid., 138-139, 154-157.

more concrete through specific acts of God's hand, specifically God's "right hand," which in turn represents him and his will.[58]

Nevertheless, just as how the "hand" can connote harm, so God's hand can likewise be a cause of punishment and or the absence of his providence. In other words, the same power that can help can also harm or punish another. This comes in various forms, like disease, unnatural death, or war (Ex 9:3, Dt 2:15, Jer 6:12, etc.).[59]

At the same time, despite the usage of this imagery, it is interesting to note that in the Old Testament, God (and the things of God) can neither be seen nor touched directly, for fear of death. In Ex 19:12-13, the Lord commands Moses to prohibit Israel from ascending Mount Sinai or even touching the edge of it, otherwise they will die. Similarly, in 2 Sam 6:6-11, when Uzzah, son of David, touches the ark of the covenant, he dies, since it is believed to contain the presence of God. This made David unwilling to take in the ark under his care, such that it remained in the household of Obed-edom the Gittite for three months.[60]

Stories of Touch in the Hebrew Scriptures

Now, looking at the various stories of touch in the Hebrew Scriptures, we can classify them broadly into four different categories: *healing and blessing, violence and punishment, laws and rituals, and holiness and purity*. While each category will not exhaust all the stories of touch in the Old Testament, it will use a few examples to help illustrate each.

58 Ibid., 139.

59 Ibid., 139-140, 155-156.

60 Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman, (eds.), *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 879.

First, touch and physical contact can either facilitate healing or impart blessings on another. In 2 Kgs 4:34-35, we find Elisha raising the dead son of the Shunammite woman by direct physical contact; in 2 Kgs 5:1-14, he instructs Naaman the Syrian to wash himself seven times in the Jordan River, implying that even touching the waters will already lead to healing.

Regarding blessings, in Gen 48:13-20, Jacob imparts his blessing onto Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph's sons, by placing his crossed hands on their heads, thereby bestowing on them favor from God. Meanwhile, in Gen 27:18-40, Jacob deceives his blind father, Isaac, to receive the blessing meant for his brother Esau by using touch. With the help of his mother Rebekah, his hands and neck were covered in goat skins, so he could pose as his brother Esau, who was a hairy man. Presumably, the same placing of hands over the head was done to Jacob by Isaac, so that he might receive the paternal blessing.

Second, touch can also inflict violence or punishment upon another. For example, 2 Sam 13:11-14 tells the story of Amnon's sexual assault on his sister Tamar. Here, non-consensual touch is used to dominate and violate, leading to Tamar's disgrace and Absalom's vengeance. Meanwhile, in Ex 21:21-27, one can find provisions of Mosaic law concerning striking another person physically, with a list of physical punishments corresponding to the severity of the offense. Dt 25:11-12 also mentions what to do when a wife intervenes in a fight between men by grabbing a man's genitals – her hand must be cut off. With the last two examples, we see clear instances of both violent touch and retributive touch.

Third, touch figures symbolically in various Jewish laws and rituals. For instance, in Gen 24:2, Abraham asks his servant to place his hand under Abraham's thigh as he makes an oath

to find a wife for Isaac, and in Gen 47:29-31, Joseph places his hand under Jacob's thigh while swearing to bury his father in Canaan. In Ex 22, touch is legally invoked in both the transfer of property from one party to another, as well as in cases of loss and liability.[61]

Moreover, in Lev 1:4 and 16:21, the priest's act of placing his hands over the sacrificial animal symbolizes and communicates the imputation of sin or guilt, as the animal becomes the representative of the people and serves as the atonement for their offenses. With 1 Sam 10:1 and 1 Kgs 19:19, the anointing of oil by Samuel to Saul and the throwing of the mantle by Elijah to Elisha, respectively, embody divine consecration, approval, and empowerment on the one hand, and discipleship and the transfer of prophetic authority on the other. In all these examples, touch contains a deeper meaning that goes beyond the act itself.

Holy and Profane, Pure and Impure

Fourth, and perhaps the most important, touch is central to how ideas of holiness and purity are experienced in daily life. For the Israelites, their relationship with God and with one another revolves around the regulation of two mutually exclusive pairs of opposites: holy and profane, and pure and impure. Thiessen critically observes that these two pairs are not equivalent; in other words, holiness is not the same as purity, and neither is profanity equal to impurity.[62]

The first pair, holy and profane, classifies persons, places, animals, things, and events according to their intended

61 Matthews, *Experiencing Scripture: The Five Senses in Biblical Interpretation*, 27-28.

62 Matthew Thiessen, *Jesus and the Forces of Death: The Gospels' Portrayal of Ritual Impurity within First-Century Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 9.

purpose; for Israel, anything holy is meant especially for God and worship of God (cf. Lev 11:44, 20:7,26; 22:32), while anything profane is for common or everyday use.[63] Bandstra further observes that holiness for Israel is a characteristic of God, who is radically different from humanity, particularly regarding his power and wholeness. Hence, every Israelite needs to acknowledge this inherent alterity, live in respect, awe, and reverence to this divine being who is totally unlike them, and strive towards the same holiness through covenant fidelity and obedience to God's commandments – "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev 11:44, 19:2).[64] Here, profanity in itself is not wrong or sinful; when one is profane, it simply means that something or someone is not reserved for God and for cultic worship.

Now, the elements of the second pair, pure and impure, pertain to whether something or someone is properly constituted or in its proper place, according to a society's agreed conventions.[65] Furthermore, Meier observes that impurity is subdivided into several categories: ritual, moral, and genealogical.[66] Among the three, only ritual impurity is communicable

63 Ibid., 9-10.

64 Barry L Bandstra, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible,* 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2009), 152.

65 Neyrey, who closely follows the insights of Mary Douglas, notes how the idea of purity helps biblical Israel to establish and maintain order in their society, according to how God intended it to be. Whatever follows or keeps this normal sense of order is classified as "pure" or "clean;" whatever violates it is "dirty," "polluted," or "unclean," which happens when "the wrong *thing* [or person] appears in the wrong *place* at the wrong time. See Jerome Neyrey, "Idea of Purity in Mark's Gospel," *Semeia* 35 (1986): 91-92.

66 A fourth classification, dietary laws, falls somewhere in between moral and ritual purity. For a more in-depth discussion, see John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus: Law and Love*, vol. 4 (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 347-352.

through touch and physical contact; the rest are not directly transmissible through tactile means.[67]

To give an example, killing another person or engaging in idolatrous worship leads to moral impurity, while giving birth or experiencing menstruation only results in ritual impurity. Meanwhile, intermarriage between a Jew and a Gentile constitutes genealogical impurity. Here, Harrington notes that moral impurity is normally a consequence of disobedience of God's laws; ritual impurity, on the other hand, refers to certain life conditions that do not make a person sinful, but render one unfit to be in contact with anything and anyone sacred.[68] Still, Thiessen observes that ritual impurity can potentially lead to moral impurity and sin when it is not addressed in the right way and time.[69]

Now, these two pairs (holy and profane, pure and impure) make up a continuum that governs everyday life for biblical Israel. Touch is critical here, since ritual impurity can be transmitted through direct or indirect contact. Bandstra explains it this way:

> [A] clean thing could be elevated to the status of holiness through the process of sanctification (literally, making holy). Clean things could become unclean *through contact with other unclean things*, such as dead bodies. For an unclean person or thing to get back to the state of cleanness, it had to be purified. Once clean, it could then be sanctified through an additional procedure. Once made holy, it was set apart from the rest of the world and was devoted

67 For an extensive discussion into the differences of ritual, moral, and genealogical purity, ee Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus: Law and Love*, vol. 4, 343-347. See also Thiessen, Jesus and the Forces of Death, 12-20, for a similar discussion.

68 Hannah K. Harrington, "Clean and Unclean," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 681-685.

69 Thiessen, *Jesus and the Forces of Death*, 13.

> exclusively to divine service. Holy persons and things could be rendered profane, or unholy, through ritual procedures of decommissioning or *by contact with something unclean*. A profaned thing could be clean or unclean, but in either case, it could not be in direct contact with YHWH (italics supplied).[70]

This, in turn, is founded on their belief that God's presence, which is holy, needs to be defended from the moral impurities that exist in the world. Hence, lines have to be drawn "not only to safeguard God's presence but also to protect God's people from the consequences of wrongly approaching God."[71] Hence, as Ps 24:3-6 remarks, only those who have "clean hands and pure hearts" may "ascend the hill of the Lord" and "stand in his holy place." The priestly class, as a group set apart and "exalted above his brothers" (Lev 21:10), plays an important role in this regard, for they determine and enforce legislation to help keep these boundaries in place (cf. Lev 10:10).[72]

Ultimately, these rules are put in place for three reasons. First, they are practical; following them protects the Israelites from things that can cause them harm, such as disease and death. Second, their observance serves as a distinct cultural marker that expresses Israel's identity and sets them apart from other pagan cults and groups whom they considered as unclean and whose practices deviate from their way of life. And third, as a nation prone to committing sin and violating their covenant relationship with God, these rules help them become a holy nation – not only ritually pure but also pure of

70 Bandstra, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 152-153.

71 Thiessen, *Jesus and the Forces of Death*, 11.

72 Neyrey, "Idea of Purity in Mark's Gospel," 93.

heart, so that they may be properly disposed to be in contact with him, lest they suffer death.[73]

Holiness and Purity in the Torah

Most of the regulations concerning purity and holiness are found in the Torah, specifically in the priestly laws in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.[74] With respect to touch, direct contact with sources of ritual impurity was the means by which one became ritually impure. These included carcasses or corpses (cf. Num 5:2, 19), people with certain skin diseases that fall under the general category called leprosy (cf. Leviticus 13)[75], and human discharges like blood, seminal emissions, and excrement (cf. Lev 12:1-6, 15:1-5, 16-24, 25-30, Dt 23:15).[76] Eating unclean animals (cf. Lev 11) also made one ritually unclean, since the mouth touched something defiled. In terms of indirect contact, impurity was transmissible through second-hand exposure; a person who touched a corpse can transfer their impurity onto others or onto objects like food and vessels.[77] Here, it can be observed that most sources of ritual impurity are similar to those in ancient Greco-Roman society – blood, sex, and death.

Also, while it is clear that ritual impurity is contagious even through indirect contact, the Old Testament presents conflicting positions on whether ritual purity can be similarly transferred. Ez 44:19 affirms this, while Lam 4:14 and Hag 2:12-13

73 Bandstra, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 151-152.

74 This high regard for maintaining purity and holiness is also evident in extrabiblical writings. For a more complete treatment on this topic, refer to Neyrey, "Idea of Purity in Mark's Gospel," 94-105.

75 Harrington, "Clean and Unclean," 683.

76 Ibid., 682-683.

77 Matthews, *Experiencing Scripture: The Five Senses in Biblical Interpretation*, 113.

argue otherwise, with Matthews noting that their opposing views may have been caused by the latter's negative view of the priestly class during the fall of the Jerusalem Temple in 586 BCE and the post-exilic period.[78]

Finally, for moral impurity, procedures are also in place to get rid of pollution and restore not only cleanliness, but the underlying sense of order it upholds.[79] Purification through rituals such as offering sacrifices, immersing in ritual baths (*miqva'oth*), sprinkling with purgation water, or avoiding contact for a determined period removes one's impurity, purges from the stain of guilt, and allows a person to fully participate again in daily life, especially temple worship.[80]

Seen in this light, touch is not merely a physical gesture; it is deeply symbolic, capable of transferring status, disrupting boundaries, and defining access to the divine. Thus, in Israelite ritual consciousness, touch plays a decisive role in determining and communicating one's readiness or fitness for contact with the holy.

The Place of Touch in the Old Testament

Just as how touch functioned in ancient Greco-Roman societies, so too does it have a crucial role in the life of ancient biblical Israel. First, its conception is found within a broader septasensory framework. Within this sensorium, touch operates both literally and metaphorically. It functions as a medium for human connection as well as an articulation of divine action

78 Ibid. See also Tiemeyer, Lena-Sofia. "The Question of Indirect Touch: Lam 4,14; Ezek 44,19 and Hag 2,12-13." *Biblica* 87 (2006): 64–74.

79 Once again, it is important to distinguish between ritual purity, which is external, and moral purity, which is internal. One is not equivalent to the other, and ritual purity does not automatically equate to moral purity.

80 Harrington, "Clean and Unclean," 683-686.

and intervention. Also, unlike Greco-Roman notions of touch as primarily linked to flesh, Hebrew conceptualizations root it in the hand as its principal organ of touching and feeling.

Second, touch in the Hebrew Bible serves multiple functions: it can express human affection, substitute for impaired senses, facilitate healing and blessing, inflict harm and punishment, enact legal obligations, symbolize ritual actions, transmit and communicate holiness or impurity, and serve as a conduit for divine power and inspiration. The different touch-centric stories in the Old Testament, which were identified above, help concretize these different applications of touch according to their agent, recipient, and underlying motivation.

Third, the Hebrew term *nāgaʿ* encapsulates this diversity in the understanding and use of touch. In particular, divine touch, often represented through the metaphor of the "hand of God", signifies both providence and judgment, underlining God's power to assist or afflict his people.

Fourth, touch becomes especially significant in the priestly purity codes, where contact with corpses, bodily discharges, or unclean animals renders one ritually impure, sometimes even through indirect transmission. While ritual impurity is seen as contagious, the transference of purity remains debated within the biblical texts. These regulations are embedded in a broader theological and ritual framework that distinguishes between the holy and profane, and the pure and impure, and allows for remedies in case these boundaries are crossed. These pairs, while not synonymous, are fundamental to Israelite religious and social order, regulating how people relate with God and one another.

Ultimately, touch in the Old Testament is shaped by a worldview in which divine holiness and otherness demand ritual boundaries. The system of purity laws aims not only to

safeguard the sacred from contamination but also to cultivate a community attuned to God's holiness. Through this lens, touch becomes a vehicle for divine-human interaction, a mediator of social and cultic order, and a symbol of Israel's identity as a holy nation set apart.

In all these, the theology of touch in the Old Testament reveals a worldview that is both concrete and embodied yet symbolic and transcendent. Thus, the practice and place of touch both reflect a divine order in which physical contact is never neutral but always charged with moral, spiritual, and communal significance.

Greco-Roman Antiquity vs. Old Testament Conceptions of Touch

To serve as a synthesis, first, in both traditions, the practice of touch is never neutral. It can sanctify or defile, heal or corrupt, uplift or put down, depending on the context in which it is employed, both sacred and secular.

Second, touch involves both transmission and communication; more importantly, touch expresses power, status, affection, etc., as it transmits these through tactile gestures. In other words, touch is simultaneously performative and communicative. Whether involving the hand, skin, or flesh, tactile acts convey ideas, values, or insights to the agent, recipient, and/or witnesses as these are being performed; abstract notions about one's place in society, state of purity or health, or even relationship with a fellow person or with the divine find embodied articulation through touch.

Third, touch is regulated in both cultures, which are dependent on a particular understanding of cultural hierarchies, such as gender, socio-economic status, state of purity or holiness, or cultic importance. Both also acknowledge the

potency of touch to disrupt these hierarchies, which necessitates the formation of boundaries, both social and sacred, that distinguish between classes of people and things (ex, slave-free, holy-profane, pure-impure). These boundaries, in turn, not only reflect an underlying cultural worldview but, more importantly, help maintain and uphold it.

Now, in terms of differences, if for the Greeks and Romans, touch is one of the five senses, for biblical Israel and early Jewish communities, it forms part of a heptasensory model, with speech and kinaesthesia also considered as distinct senses. The former explicitly relegates touch as one of the lower senses, while the latter does not forward this idea.

Second, touch for the Greco-Roman world sees it closely linked to sensuality and irrationality, since it is a sense shared with other lower life forms like animals. Meanwhile, sensuality does not appear to be an issue for the Old Testament; instead, purity is their chief concern, with touch as a means to either keep or lose it.

Finally, the regulation of touch in Greco-Roman antiquity puts less emphasis on humanity's relationship with the divine, whereas in the Old Testament, this plays a central role. Specifically, God's covenantal relationship with humanity, along with the idea of God's necessary distinction and separation from the forces of impurity found in the world, is the ordering principle behind Israel's conduct of its life, which includes conceptions and practices concerning touch.

In conclusion, both Greco-Roman antiquity and the Old Testament portray touch as a dynamic and meaningful gesture, depending on the specific context in which it is employed. Tactile actions are capable of mediating healing, power, and blessing. They can also express affection and authority, and their practice is regulated by social and cultural conventions.

Their potency lies not only in embodying certain ideas and norms but in defining and redefining boundaries that bring a sense of order to a given community.

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PROTESTANT PRINCIPLE OF *SOLA SCRIPTURA* IN LIGHT OF THE CATHOLIC ARGUMENTS ON THE TEMPORAL PRECEDENCE OF TRADITION AND THE FORMAL INSUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

Salvador G. Agualada, Jr., CMF

Introduction

This paper offers a critique of the Protestant doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) from a Catholic perspective, highlighting the temporal precedence of Tradition over Scripture and the material sufficiency, *but* formal insufficiency, of Scripture. In the end, I will delve deeper into the Catholic position by examining what the great French Dominican theologian, Yves Congar, calls "the whole genius of tradition" in light of the Church's effort to unite Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium in Vatican II's *Dei Verbum* and recognize their inherent and interdependent relationship as being "so closely linked that one cannot be conceived divorced entirely from the two others."[1]

Congar, in his book *The Meaning of Tradition*, asserts that on the question of what constitutes the *norm* for the Church, the disagreement between Protestantism and Catholicism is arguably very deep.[2] On the one side of the abyss is the Protestant

1 Yves Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 101.

2 Ibid., 162.

claim that concerning the true nature and authentic foundation of human beings' relationship with God, "no authority would intervene other than that of *God* in person, expressing himself by his Word, that is, concretely, in the Scriptures."[3] This position, incontestably framed in the classical formulation of *Sola Scriptura*—one of the five *solas* of the Reformation—has been the Reformers' ecclesial battle cry since the 16th century. Briefly, the Protestant theory of *Sola Scriptura*, as described by Congar, asserts that

> Scripture possesses by itself and in itself, that is, without needing the addition of any other principle, the qualities of a real sacrament of salvation, or rather, of saving faith... [I]t possesses efficacy, being the principal—and for some the sole—means of grace; it contains all that is necessary for the Christian; it is clear, explaining itself without help and needing nothing besides itself to make known God's thoughts.[4]

This doctrine "affirms that Scripture is to be understood as the sole source of divine revelation, the only inspired, infallible, final and authoritative norm of faith and practice."[5] For the Protestants, the twofold mode of transmitting the Gospel, the Word of God, or Revelation (which is the Catholic position) has been invalidated by the existence of the Sacred Scripture, insisting that "in laying down a scriptural canon, the Church has forfeited the use of unwritten tradition as a standard reference, with a value comparable to that of Scripture."[6]

On the other side of the doctrinal divide is the Catholic assertion that, aside from the Scripture, the living Tradition and the Church as instituted by God in Christ—with its hierarchical

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 92.

5 https://www.reformationbiblecollege.org/blog/the-five-solas

6 Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition,* 19.

structure of Magisterium—also enter into the very definition of what constitutes an essential element of human relationship with God.[7] Hence, for the Catholics, "[t]o deny [the validity of traditions] would be to disregard and neglect one of the two great ways in which the Church of today and of all times is linked to the apostles" and that "[t]o keep the writings alone would mean keeping only part of this heritage, for the apostles have left us more than this."[8]

Critique of the Protestant Position of *Sola Scriptura*

Temporal Precedence of Tradition Over Scripture

Rene Latourelle, commenting on *Dei Verbum* 7 in his book, *Theology of Revelation*, observes that "Vatican II speaks first of all of Tradition, and then of Scripture (contrary to the order adopted by the Council of Trent)," which for him "follows the actual order of events," since "as a matter of fact, Tradition did precede Scripture."[9] Congar provides a compelling analysis of the temporal precedence of Tradition over Scripture in his work, *Tradition and Traditions*. In the book, he argues that if we confine ourselves to the proclamation and transmission of the Gospel message, we would see that the initial transmission of the divine, salvific truth was primarily oral. "Jesus wrote nothing down: it is worth pausing to reflect on this fact and its meaning.... Jesus gave everything to the apostles, but not in writing."[10] For Congar, "[t]he apostles themselves at first built up the Church by the completest possible communication of

7 Ibid., 162.

8 Ibid., 43-44 and 83-84.

9 Rene Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation* (New York: Alba House, 1987), 474.

10 Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and Theological Essay* (London: Burns & Oates, 1966), 283-284. Henceforth referred to as *Tradition and Traditions.*

the Gospel, by words and actions, preaching and example, by the exercise of authority and organization; not by writing."[11] He asserts that the Gospel in its fullness, which was deemed sufficient for the constitution of the Church, was already in existence before the composition of the canonical Gospels and Epistles. In fact, "the Church was never more itself than when it had the Christian mystery itself alone imprinted in its heart, without any Scripture apart from the prophetic writings."[12]

Congar anticipates this point in his earlier work, *The Meaning of Tradition*. In the book, he points out that during the earliest period of the Church, "there was neither letters by the apostles nor written accounts of what Christ had said and done," for "[t]he Gospel was preached, and the Christian faith was handed on simply by 'tradition.'"[13] Given that Tradition encompasses the totality of the Christian faith, it must be differentiated from Scripture in terms of both its mode of transmission and its content. As John Fisher argues in his 1526 *Confutatio* of Luther (found in Jared Wicks' article), "the apostolic writings, e.g., 2 Thes 2:15; Jn 20:30; 21:25, point to an oral communication of doctrine and rules beyond what is set down in the writings collected in the Bible, and some practices of the universal church derive from this nonwritten source."[14] Thus, when the Catholic Church found itself doctrinally challenged by the *Sola Scriptura* argument of the Reformers, "it trembled at the prospect of losing any part of that which had been handed down by the apostles, not just quantitatively speaking, but from the

11 Ibid., 284.

12 Ibid., 285.

13 Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition*, 15-16.

14 Jared Wicks, "Council of Trent," in R. Latourelle and R. Fisichella (eds.), *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990), 1126.

point of view of the manner in which the inheritance had come down to it through the ages."[15]

In *The Meaning of Tradition*, Congar delineates the distinction between Tradition and Scripture. For him, if an essential aspect of tradition is transmitting an object from one to another, that which exists in writing is not included in the handing on, since what exists in writing does not need to be passed from one to another to be possessed. Hence, "[i]n this stricter sense tradition signifies transmission by some other means other than writing."[16] In trying to understand this non-written mode of transmission, Congar explains that for the first thirty years after Pentecost, the Christians gathered together and celebrated, for instance, the breaking of the bread, even if there was no written text yet on this "sacrament." It sufficed that the apostles witnessed Jesus celebrating it, breaking bread with them, and that from its actual celebration of the apostles and their disciples, the Church gradually understood the meaning of the Eucharist. For Congar, the Gospel and Christianity were propagated by means of this—by means other than writing, by means of Tradition.[17] However, "when we speak of communication by some means other than writing, we think less of an oral transmission of an unwritten teaching than of transmission of the very substance of the Christian faith, which surpasses any written statement."[18] If such a transmission of the Gospel in its entirety was already going on long before the Scripture was written, then Tradition indeed preceded Scripture, and for Congar, it was so because

15 Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 291.

16 Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition*, 14.

17 Ibid., 17-18.

18 Ibid., 20.

> [t]he Church could not wait until the critics were agreed among themselves: she had to live. She lived her own life, which had been handed down to her as such, before the texts and together with them, in the texts and yet not limited to them, independently of them. She did not receive her life from them. She *was* the Church from the time of the apostles and not the product of their writings; she used these writings, not following them word for word... but treating them as a mirror and yardstick to recognize and restore her image, in each new generation.[19]

Indeed, if I may offer an insight that essentially belongs to Part III, *initially*, as pointed out by *Dei Verbum*, the apostles handed on the Gospel "by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received—whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit" (DV 7). *Then*, the apostles and other men associated with them, under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "committed the message of salvation to writing" (DV 7).

Sacred Scripture: Materially Sufficient *But* Formally Insufficient

George Lindbeck, a Lutheran theologian, describes the Bible as "self-interpreting and the *norma normans non normata* ("normative norm not normed")... [whose]... authority is that of God himself, and this cannot be increased by any amount of human reasoning."[20] In this realm of the fundamental insignificance of reason on the whole, Lindbeck includes "all the other supports that could be proposed for the authority of Scripture: tradition, church, theories of inspiration or revelation, or faith

19 Ibid., 22.

20 George Lindbeck, "Lutheranism," in R. Latourelle and R. Fisichella [eds.], *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990), 609.

itself."[21] Indeed, for the Reformers, Scripture is "the supreme and sole norm of doctrine and life and... that Scripture has in itself a self-interpreting capacity (*sacra Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*, according to Luther)."[22]

For Congar, in his *Tradition and Traditions*, the Catholic Church regards the Sacred Scripture as consisting of "inspired" books written under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as the authentic written expression of divine Revelation, and because it is the normative crystallization of the transmission of the Gospel in writing, it must therefore be the constant normative reference point of all handing on of Revelation from the time of its writing. However, Sacred Scripture cannot be an autonomous entity, which means that it cannot be divorced from the living Tradition of the community—the Church—that brought it into being. The best evidence of Scripture's dependence on Tradition and the Church, according to Congar, is the formation of the Scripture canon. While Scripture does not take its authority from the Church, it was nevertheless the Church that exercised the authority to recognize the canonical status of biblical books. In the same way that the Church was necessary for the early Christians to learn which books were of apostolic origin, the Church's Tradition and Magisterium are also necessary to determine which scriptural interpretations are consistent with the apostolic deposit.[23] Hence, for Joseph Ratzinger, "[t]o contrast Scripture strictly with the Church... is not only impossible from the start... because the writings gathered together in the Bible are, and can be, a 'Bible,' 'Scripture,'

21 Ibid., 610.

22 Wicks, "Council of Trent," 1126.

23 Cf. Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 417.

only within the Church."[24] Johann Eck and Johann Cochlaeus, therefore, conclude: "[T]he Protestant use of the Bible as a critical norm against the church was destructive of the Bible itself, since it is the church that, by fixing the biblical canon, identifies and authenticates the books that are normative."[25]

Thus, with the Reformers, "we can admit *Scriptura sola* in the sense of a *material* sufficiency of canonical Scripture... [which means that]... Scripture contains, in one way or another, all truths necessary for salvation."[26] In fact, for Congar, "[a] number of good Catholic authors ... are of the opinion that it is still possible... to hold that all the truths necessary for salvation are contained, in one way or another, in the canonical Scriptures."[27] Nevertheless, for the Catholic Church—and contrary to the Protestant argument of Lindbeck and other Reformers—Sacred Scripture is "formally insufficient" in that it is incapable of being its own herald and interpreter; contrary to the Reformers' position, Catholic theology insists that the Bible cannot interpret itself, for it contains no self-interpreting power or capacity. Thus, after affirming that "much in the Bible is in fact hard to understand, as 2 Pt 3:16 indicates," John Fisher, re-echoed by Wicks, concludes: "The Bible alone, instead of resolving controversies, actually leads to divisions and errors, as the history of heresy confirms."[28] Indeed, determining Christian doctrine and practice demands consulting other theological loci within the Church's Tradition, as "an appeal to the Bible does not suffice by itself," since the meaning of the

24 Joseph Ratzinger, "The Transmission of Divine Revelation," in H. Vorgrimler (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 193.

25 Wicks, "Council of Trent," 1126.

26 Congar, *Tradition and Traditions,* 410.

27 Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition,* 106.

28 Wicks, "Council of Trent," 1126.

Sacred Scripture is interpreted, understood, and expressed through the Church's life and worship.[29] According to Congar:

> The Scriptures do not surrender their meaning by the bare text; they surrender it to a mind that is living, and living in the conditions of the Covenant. This mind, or living subject... is the Church, God's People, the Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit. Thus, in a certain way, Scripture possesses its meaning outside itself.... The place where this is found is precisely tradition as it is understood by the early Fathers; it is there, in this setting and in these conditions, that the holy Scriptures reveal their meaning.[30]

The *Catechism for Filipino Catholics*, in Chapter 2, Section III, Subsection A on *Scripture and Tradition*, affirms this when it says:

> The Scriptures, then, are never to be separated from the people of God, whose life and history (Tradition) formed the context of their writing and development... As Sacred Scripture grew *from* Tradition, so it is interpreted *by* Tradition—the life, worship, and teaching of the Church. Tradition depends on Scripture as its normative record of Christian origins and identity, while Scripture requires the living Tradition of the Church to bring its Scriptural message to the fresh challenges and changing contexts confronting Christians in every age.[31]

Indeed, the Church, in her Tradition and Magisterium, must interpret the Sacred Scripture, spelling it out in Christian life, teaching, and worship. "That is why [even though] the Church verifies and proves her teaching by Scripture... she [nevertheless] interprets Scripture in her tradition and decides controversies by means of her Magisterium, with

29 Ibid., 1127.

30 Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition,* 91.

31 Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (Manila: Word and Life Publications, 1997), nos. 82, 84.

reference to Scripture and Tradition."[32] Hence, if by Scripture we understand "not the materiality of the printed text but the reading and understanding of the sacred Text," then it does not possess a total autonomy with respect to Tradition, as "[t]he unanimous verdict of Christian history is that Scripture must be read within the Church, that is to say, within Tradition."[33] While affirming this, we must also assert that Tradition must listen and be subject always to Scripture, the critical norm for discerning the divine from the human, as "Tradition or the Church has no complete autonomy regarding Scripture."[34] Thus, for Ratzinger, "tradition must not be considered only affirmatively, but also critically; we have Scripture as a criterion for this indispensable criticism of tradition, and tradition must always be related back to it and measured by it."[35] Indeed,

> [t]he truth is that there is no doctrine of the Church based *solely* on Scripture independently of tradition, and none that she holds solely by oral tradition independently of Scripture: because, on the one hand, Scripture has no implications for faith independently of its meaning, given to us in the Church's delivery of it, animated by God's Spirit and, because, on the other hand, tradition possesses many links with Scripture.[36]

"The Whole Genius of Tradition:" The Unity of Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium in *Dei Verbum*

I will now examine the intrinsic relationship between Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium by drawing on the fundamental insights of *Dei Verbum*, nos. 7-10, which deal with

32 Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition,* 101.

33 Congar, *Tradition and Traditions,* 414.

34 Ibid.

35 Ratzinger, "The Transmission of Divine Revelation," 185.

36 Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition,* 106.

the twofold transmission of divine revelation and its relation to the Church's Magisterium, and enriching the discussion with pertinent insights from Yves Congar, René Latourelle, and Karl Rahner on this subject.

René Latourelle notes that *Dei Verbum* 7-10, which comprises Chapter II of the Constitution, tackles the very important topic of "[the] transmission of divine revelation" (the chapter's title) "under the form of Tradition and Scripture, their mutual relationship, and their common relationship to the Church and to the Magisterium."[37]

Dei Verbum 7 commences with the idea that "God graciously arranged that the things he had once revealed for the salvation of all people should remain in their entirety, throughout the ages, and be transmitted to all generations." For Latourelle, the opening sentence of DV 7 communicates the object of the entire chapter: "[I]t is God's will that His revelation *abide* in its full integrity over the course of the centuries and be *handed on* to all generations."[38] Christ's explicit command to his apostles to preach the gospel, the source of all salvific truth and moral life, to all the people was spoken of and promised by the prophets of old and ultimately fulfilled and promulgated by Christ himself. The Risen Lord's great commission to his apostles to proclaim the gospel to all the nations

> was carried out first of all by the preaching and testimony of the apostles themselves. It was understood in a *concrete* manner, including not only words but also examples and ways of acting, usages, institutions, and rites. In a word, it included everything the apostles had *received from Christ through* his conversation and his activity, as well as everything they had *learned from the Holy* Spirit by his promptings concerning the words and works of Christ.

37 Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation,* 473.

38 Ibid.

> The testimony of the apostles thus goes far beyond oral preaching. It also includes the whole domain of cult and sacrament (especially Baptism and Eucharist) and the whole domain of moral conduct and the moral direction of Christian communities.[39]

Tradition and Scripture, two complementary modes through which God has chosen to reveal Himself to humanity, are indeed considered in this paragraph "like a mirror, in which the Church, during its pilgrim journey here on earth, contemplates God, from whom she receives everything, until she is brought to see him face to face as he really is." (DV 7)

On *Dei Verbum* 8, Latourelle offers the following observation: "This is the first time that any document of the extraordinary Magisterium has proposed such an elaborate text on the nature, object, and importance of Tradition."[40] The opening passage of this paragraph not only underscores the necessity of preserving the apostolic preaching, as enshrined in Scripture, in an unbroken line of succession until the end-time, but also urges the faithful to uphold the traditions handed on to them by the apostles. What has been transmitted by the apostles "comprises everything that serves to make the People of God live their lives in holiness and increase their faith," through which the Church "in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, and all that she believes." (DV 8) This handing down not merely of the Church's faith but her very life as well is beautifully expressed by Rahner in his article, "Scripture and Tradition:"

> The Church—we may say quite correctly—in so far as it has Jesus Christ in her midst, i.e., the Church of the apostles, is what is handed on. She is handed on, of course, not only in

39 Ibid., 474.

40 Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation,* 476.

> her teaching, but in what the Church is herself, what she believes and celebrates, the Church in her sacraments, in her concrete life, her experience, her Lord's Supper and of course also in the reflex expression of what she has heard and what she lives herself, in the word of the apostles.[41]

An important assertion in this paragraph of *Dei Verbum* is the idea that in the handing down of Tradition, "[t]here is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on" (DV 8). We can, therefore, say that "Tradition is continually developing in her under the action and assistance of the Holy Spirit... [though]... it is not the apostolic Tradition itself, but rather our penetration of these inherited words and realities which develops and grows."[42] For Congar, "[t]radition is not the simple permanence of a structure, but a continual renewal and fertility *within* this given structure, which is guaranteed by a living and unchanging principle of identity."[43] *Dei Verbum* affirms the reality of "growth in insight" as the whole process of transmission is described as one by which "the Church is always advancing towards the plenitude of divine truth, until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in her" (DV 8). What brings about this growth, according to this paragraph, are contemplation and study by the faithful, the intimate experience of spiritual realities, and the preaching of bishops who possess the sure charism of truth. "It follows that a truth handed down by Tradition could never be known

41 Rahner, "Scripture and Tradition," in *Theological Investigations* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., 1969), Volume VI, 102.

42 Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation,* 477. Towards the end of his commentary on Chapter II, Latourelle touches again on this very significant aspect of Tradition: "What is perfected in the course of the centuries is not revelation itself, but the *understanding* we have of it. It is the successive series of *explanations* which we make in our efforts to discover its inexhaustible riches and in so doing to enlighten future generations" (Ibid., 483).

43 Congar, *Tradition and Traditions,* 264-265.

or understood in its full richness through a single Church document or testimony, but only by the sum total of all the testimony and forms of expression in which it lives: the writings of the Fathers, the liturgy, the practice of the Church, and theological speculation."[44] The last sentence reveals the importance of Tradition in relation to Scripture. According to Latourelle,

> [t]his importance stems from the following facts: a) it is through Tradition that the canon of inspired books is known to us in its *fullness*. On this point, the Council recognizes that the objective content of Tradition surpasses that of Scripture; b) it is also through Tradition that Scripture is more profoundly understood; c) finally, it is through Tradition that Scripture is constantly actual and actualized.[45]

In *Dei Verbum* 9, which explores the mutual relationship between Tradition and Scripture, the paragraph opens with the insight that the two are "bound closely together, and communicate one with the other." (DV 9) It is, thus, an error, according to Latourelle, to regard them as two parallel and independent forms of revelation, to recognize the existence of one and deny the existence of the other, or to disregard their mutual relationship. Brian Johnstone, likewise, has a similar observation: "In the post-Tridentine era, Scripture and Tradition were considered as two separate fonts, and thus the argument from Tradition was considered distinct from the argument from Scripture. After the correction of this position in *Dei Verbum*,

44 Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation,* 477.

45 Ibid., 478.

such a distinction would seem to be no longer valid."[46] Scripture and Tradition are indissolubly bound because they emanate from the same divine wellspring of revelation, coalesce into a unified expression of divine mystery, and converge upon the ultimate goal of human salvation. The third sentence offers the final reason for the mutual relationship between Tradition and Scripture: "[E]ach of them is equally the *word of God*."[47] Scripture is the Word of God, which was committed to writing under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, Tradition is the Word of God, entrusted by Christ and the Holy Spirit to the apostles and faithfully transmitted to their successors who, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, preserve, expound, and disseminate the gospel of salvation (DV 9). Re-echoing the second-to-last sentence of the paragraph, which asserts that "the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone," Latourelle writes:

> It follows from this that the certainty which the Church has concerning everything God has revealed... does not derive from *Sacred Scripture alone*, since the Church never ceases to possess in its entirety... the living word which she received in the beginning. Furthermore, when the Church hesitates to

46 B. V. Johnstone, "The Argument from Tradition in Catholic (Moral) Theology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 69 (2004): 152. Rahner describes the post-Tridentine relationship between Tradition and Scripture in this way: "[I]t undoubtedly looks as if scripture and tradition were two tributaries flowing in a somewhat parallel manner and bringing us materially different contents of faith, so that one can perhaps, to begin with, find and determine certain truths only in scripture and then other truths—and this is the real crux of the problem—only in oral tradition" (Rahner, "Scripture and Tradition," 103). Rahner, however, observes that in post-Tridentine theology, the principal tendency was to maintain, based on the anti-Protestant front, that "there is not only the truth of the inspiration and of the canon of scripture but that there are also other truths of faith which are not to be found in the scripture, so that for them oral tradition is a materially distinct source of faith" (Rahner, "Scripture and Tradition," 107).

47 Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation,* 479.

> pronounce herself on a particular point because Scripture does not seem sufficiently clear and explicit, she can find in the Tradition of which she is the guardian a source of enlightenment and assurance.[48]

Latourelle concludes his commentary on this paragraph by affirming the complementary nature of Tradition and Scripture and positing that they complete and illuminate one another, not so much quantitatively but qualitatively, as both transmit and preserve the same divine revelation and are oriented toward the ultimate goal of human salvation.[49] Consequently, they must be received and venerated "with equal feelings of devotion and reverence" (DV 9).

Dei Verbum 10, the last paragraph of Chapter II, deals with the common relationship of Tradition and Scripture to the Church and Magisterium. The paragraph consists of two parts. The first part, which deals with the relationship of Tradition and Scripture to the whole Church, asserts that "[s]acred Tradition and sacred Scripture make up a single deposit of the Word of God, which is entrusted to the Church" (DV 10). It asserts that the entire people of God, united with their shepherds, preserve and transmit this deposit of revelation through the apostolic teaching, the common life, the breaking of the bread, and prayer, in such a way that a remarkable harmony is maintained between the bishops and the faithful in the practice and profession of the faith. Rahner stresses this dimension of the Church in the transmission of Tradition:

> This tradition, heard, accepted, and believed in his own day... means the community of believers who have directly experienced Jesus Christ at least in their own contemporaries, and who have received this word and testimony of Jesus Christ directly through the living word

48 Ibid., 480.

49 Ibid.

> of the very witnesses who saw and heard him; in short, it signifies the Church... What was heard, celebrated, received, and believed there, is and remains the standard which must be handed on, since it is the eschatological saving event of Jesus Christ himself and since we are speaking here in the true sense of the primitive Church.[50]

Congar, similarly, links the concept of Tradition to the Church as communion. After examining the concept of Tradition as a process of transmission, essentially involving two parties—a transmitter and a receiver—he proceeds to state that "[t]he relations of giving and receiving, dependence and exchange, do not exist merely between isolated individuals, but involve communities too, and essentially... because what is transmitted brings about an incorporation into a communion."[51]

The second part, which delves into the relationship of Tradition and Scripture to the Church's Magisterium, affirms that "the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone" (DV 10). Latourelle, commenting on this part, insists that "[i]t is most important to establish the correct relationship of Tradition and Scripture to the Magisterium, for Protestants frequently have the impression that we subordinate Scripture to Magisterium and that we confuse the Magisterium with Tradition."[52] DV 10 unequivocally affirms that the interpretation of the Word of God, whether in Sacred Scripture or in Tradition, is the purview of "the living teaching office of the Church alone," whose "authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ" (DV 10). In relation to Scripture, DV 12 adds that the manner of scriptural interpretation

50 Rahner, "Scripture and Tradition," 102.

51 Congar, *Tradition and Traditions,* 240, 241.

52 Ibid., 481.

"is ultimately subject to the judgment of the Church which exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the Word of God" (DV 12). Congar expounds on this idea as follows:

> The magisterium is a power of making distinctions, since it has received an authentic teaching mission from Christ. It is not, itself, a source of revelation and enjoys no autonomy in respect of the deposit, of which it is only an agent. The positive theology of the magisterium cannot be separated from the positive theology of the sources of revelation.[53]

Likewise, Johnstone argues that "[p]articular *interpretations* of the Tradition... as distinct from the Tradition itself, are declared to be authentic or not authentic, by the authority of the Magisterium."[54] Nevertheless, "this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant," whose three-fold sacred duty is to devotedly listen to, diligently guard, and faithfully expound the Word (DV 10). It is, in Latourelle's words:

> the servant of God's word, teaching nothing more than what has been handed down to her... The Magisterium, by reason of the express mandate it has received from Christ, and with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, hears with filial devotion, guards as sacred, faithfully explains, and draws from the one and only deposit of faith everything that it proposes for belief as divinely revealed.[55]

The last sentence concludes the paragraph by stating that "in the supremely wise arrangement of God, Sacred Tradition, sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others," as "they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls" (DV 10). Insofar as Tradition and Scripture

53 Congar, *Tradition and Traditions,* 269-270.

54 Johnstone, "The Argument from Tradition in Catholic (Moral) Theology," 140.

55 Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation,* 482-483.

are inseparable from one another, so the two of them are inseparable from the Church's Magisterium.

Conclusion

In light of the arguments presented in this paper about Tradition, Scripture, and Magisterium, and their relationship with each other, with Congar, we must, however, say that "[e]xactly, the same value... should not be attributed to *tradition* and to the holy Scripture,"[56] even if Vatican II argues that "both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal feelings of devotion and reverence" (DV 9). The reason is that "[t]he holy Scriptures have an absolute value that tradition has not, which is why, *without being the absolute rule of every norm*, like the Protestant scriptural principle, *they are the supreme guide to which any others there may be are subjected*."[57] That is why, for Congar, if the Church, in her Tradition and Magisterium, claimed to teach a doctrine that contradicted Scripture, it would surely be false. However, while always being the supreme rule, which is subject to no other objective rule, Scripture is nonetheless "not the *sole* principle regulating the belief and life of the Church,"[58] as God has also established two other principles—Tradition and the Church's Magisterium. This is where we find the reason for the great "doctrinal divide" between Protestantism and Catholicism:

> [Whereas the] Protestant Reformation has unhappily put these three realities in opposition, subjecting one to the other and setting one against the other... the whole genius of tradition consisted in uniting them and recognizing their mutual relations, so closely linked that one cannot be conceived divorced entirely from the two others.[59]

56 Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition,* 100.

57 Ibid. [emphasis mine]

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid., 100-101.

Hence, against the Protestant claim that Sacred Scripture can and does interpret itself, possesses a "self-interpreting capacity," is the sole judge, rule, and guide of faith, and that there is thus no need for Tradition and the Church's Magisterium, the Catholic Church staunchly defends the indispensable role of Tradition in the appropriation of Scripture and the exclusive authority of the Magisterium in its interpretation.

> It follows from this that the certainty which the Church has concerning everything God has revealed... does not derive from *Sacred Scripture alone*, since the Church never ceases to possess in its entirety... the living word which she received in the beginning. Furthermore, when the Church hesitates to pronounce herself on a particular point because Scripture does not seem sufficiently clear and explicit, she can find in the Tradition of which she is the guardian a source of enlightenment and assurance.[60]

60 Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation,* 480.

PEACE, HOPE, AND THE ORDER OF LOVE: AN AUGUSTINIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICAL LIFE

La Thi Thu Trang, CMR

Introduction

Wars, political polarization, and social divisions are not just background noise. They define our current moment. Violence has become entrenched in daily life and has eroded the state's capacity to maintain basic order. Augustine of Hippo confronted the same chaotic worldly issues in his time. He recognized that limited political circumstances are characteristics of an imperfect world. In *The City of God*, Augustine wrote about two realities: the earthly city and the heavenly city. The earthly city is built on love of self and marked by pride, violence, and division, while the heavenly city finds its foundation in the love of God.[1] The earthly city is always unstable by its very nature. Augustine observed in detail how the "lust for domination" ignites violence even within families. While modern theorists sometimes view Augustine as a pessimist, his political philosophy offers a deeper realism that shapes the argument of this paper. Augustine's political theology begins with a stark insight: earthly peace is always partial because human loves are disordered.[2] This insight guards against the belief that political structures alone can secure perfect order. It also shows why peace is the measure of ordered love in

1 Augustine Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* trans. Henry Betterson (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), XIV. 28.

2 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XV. 4.

earthly life, and why its fragility exposes the need for charity and hope.

This essay argues that while Michael Lamb rightly recovers hope as a "functionally necessary"[3] virtue for Augustinian political engagement, his account remains incomplete unless hope is governed by Augustine's theology of rightly ordered love. Lamb shows that hope sustains political endurance between presumption and despair. It counters interpretations of Augustine that encourage withdrawal from public life. Yet when hope's functional role is emphasized apart from *ordo amoris*, it risks encouraging a form of political self-reliance that Augustine consistently resists. By situating hope within the framework of charity, this paper demonstrates how rightly ordered love acts as a moral guardrail that preserves humility, limits political expectations, and ensures that political action remains oriented toward God rather than toward its own endurance or success. The paper contends that Augustine's *ordo amoris* functions as a moral guardrail that preserves hope from collapsing into political self-reliance by reordering political desire toward God.

Augustine's Account of Peace (*Pax* and *Ordo Amoris*)

Metaphysical and theological peace

Augustine views peace as more than a social condition. It is a reality shaped by rightly ordered love (*ordo amoris*). This love establishes a single moral order that connects the individual, the political community, and the divine cosmos. For Augustine, peace is not simply the absence of conflict but the 'tranquility of order.'[4] While perfect peace is eschatological,

3 Michael Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2022), 41.

4 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 13.

the earthly city still seeks a temporal version of this peace (the peace of Babylon) which Christians must make us of. It is the harmony that arises when things remain in their proper relation to God. All creatures naturally desire this peace even when their choices turn them away from it. The peace of the soul, the home, the city, and ultimately the City of God share this pattern of order. For Augustine, the highest, the "peace of the Heavenly City," is not temporal but spiritual and everlasting. This perfect peace is not a goal to be achieved by human effort; rather, it is the resulting fruit of "ordered obedience, in faith," [5] living under God's perfect law. When the soul turns to God as their source and end, it finds a quiet that does not depend on the world, a "mutual fellowship in the enjoyment of God." Augustine makes this ordering plain in City of God, where he calls peace the harmony of all things "ordered and disposed" under God.[6]

This divine order does not remain abstract. It extends into the social and political life of humanity. Human beings, Augustine notes, are social creatures who seek the consolation and fellowship of others. Society itself is a kind of friendship where people strive for a shared good. Temporal peace (*pax terrena*) is thus a genuine, though imperfect, good. It demonstrates our natural desire for order and fellowship, even though it contains fragile and temporal elements if separated from God. This limited peace is driven by *caritas*, which Augustine defines as the love that extends beyond toward the wider community.[7] It is this force that directs us to *pax caelestis*, the eternal peace of the City of God.[8]

---

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 13.

The Moral Quality of the State

To understand a society, we must ask what it loves. Augustine argues that society's strength comes from the loves that unite its members rather than its laws. That is, the moral quality of any political order depends on the loves that activate it. A community that loves justice, virtue, and God will be healthy and well-ordered. But one that loves power and pleasures will fall into disordered, no matter how strong its institutions. Therefore, political analysis is never merely structural or rational; it is fundamentally moral and spiritual.[9] The state's purpose is not salvation, that is the role of the Church, but an "anthropological truth."[10] That is, the state creates a peaceful and just order in which human beings can live according to natural reason and virtue. Peace belongs to trust and love, not merely to structures. Every fragile form of peace we achieve is a witness to the eternal tranquility of order, where all things rest in their proper place under God's love.

Peace, grounded in ordered love, takes form in relationships. Augustine often anchors his thoughts in how we learn, communicate, and live in a community. He shows that peace is conditional: it requires trust and the active decision to seek understanding rather than withdraw into isolation. Augustine grounds this relational peace in the principles: love of God and love of neighbor. From these, he says that a person loves three objects rightly: God, himself, and his neighbor. Because of this, Augustine writes that the believer "will be at peace, as far as lies in him, with all men, in that peace among men,

9 John von Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 13.

10 Augustine regards "anthropological truth" as a transcendent truth of politics instead of soteriological to preserve the dignity of political society and the church. It signifies human beings' proper relation to God as comprehended by natural reason. Cf. Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World,* 79.

that ordered harmony."[11] A city held together by such neighborliness and by the simple measure of the Golden Rule will be more stable than one ruled by suspicion or domination.[12] Civic peace, for Augustine, stands closest to ethical love when it fosters this common life. This moral grounding is also what will shape Augustine's understanding of hope, since hope directs the citizen to pursue peace without mistaking temporal concord for the final good.

The Fragility of Earthly Order

In *The City of God,* Augustine outlines the various forms of peace. He describes "the peace of the body" as the ordered proportion of its parts, "the peace of the irrational soul" as the ordered repose of desire, and "the peace of the rational soul" as the agreement of thought and action. He continues this pattern through the home, society, and finally the Heavenly City, which he calls "a perfectly ordered and harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God."[13] The harmony of body and soul forms the ordered life of a living being. Peace between human beings is an ordered concord of mind with mind. The household has its own order in giving and receiving direction. The peace of the Heavenly City is the perfect fellowship in God's enjoyment, and the peace of the universe is the tranquility of order itself. By setting these levels side by side, Augustine demonstrates how peace pervades creation as a unified pattern, albeit to varying degrees.

Yet the earthly city carries this order only in a fragile way. Human sin disturbs both inward harmony and outward fellowship. Augustine illustrates this fragility by recalling how

11 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 14.

12 John Neville Figgis, *The Political Aspects of St. Augustine's City of God* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 2015), 67.

13 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 13.

wrongs, suspicions, hostility, and even conflict appear again and again in ordinary human life, including friendship and families. He remarks that even peace within the household can be uncertain, because we do not fully know the hearts of those we live with, nor how they may change in time.[14]

Augustine, therefore, speaks plainly about war and the many pressures that break civic life. His reflections on the limits of ownership and the strain that private claims place on communal peace show how easily societies lose their balance. Still, even imperfect peace bears witness to something greater. It gathers moral effort and divine gift together. Human beings seek to align their loves with God, while God sustains the order in which they live. These traces of peace, however incomplete, point toward the fullness of the City of God. In this way, Augustine holds together the theological, the relational, and the civic, all rooted in the order of love. However, because the earthly city carries this order only in a fragile way, constantly threatened by the disordered love of self and the lust for domination (*libido dominandi*), Augustine's realism compels a necessary, though tragic, consideration of political coercion and war as means to restrain sin and preserve minimal civic order.

The Hope for Heavenly Peace – Lamb's Reading

This section considers Lamb's reading of hope while keeping Augustine's order of love in view, since this order shapes how hope can sustain action in the *saeculum*. While charity directs the will toward the love of God and neighbor, it is the virtue of hope that sustains this love within the fragilities of the *saeculum*. Against interpretations that view Augustine as a pessimist who counsels withdrawal from the world, Michael Lamb argues that Augustine offers a robust "virtue of hope"

14 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 5.

that is "functionally necessary" for political engagement.[15] Lamb interprets Augustine's hope not merely as an emotion, but as a disciplined habit that navigates between two opposing vices: presumption and despair.[16] Lamb argues that Augustine views the fallen human condition as a constant source of tension. People are tempted in two opposing directions. They may either presume they can achieve perfection on their own, or they may despair that no good can be achieved at all.[17] This tension is the key lens through which Augustine's political thought is best understood. I believe the virtue of hope provides the necessary resolve to endure the difficulties of the earthly city. This hope prevents individuals from falling into the traps of the illusion of utopian perfection or the paralysis of cynical resignation.

Hope as Functionally Necessary Endurance

Lamb argues that hope is "functionally necessary" in Augustine's thought because it bridges the gap between cognitive belief and active pursuit. While faith provides the conviction that a good is possible, Lamb notes that faith alone can be intellectually static; it is hope that "supplements faith with motivation" and provides the "resolve to endure time's difficulties and delays."[18] Augustine supports this by explaining that even genuine virtues cannot free a person from the miseries of this life, and that happiness belongs only to the life to come. He says that the present life is sustained by hope, because "we are saved in hope," and what is already seen can

15 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 29.

16 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 307.

17 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 71.

18 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 29.

no longer be hoped for.[19] Lamb highlights that for the pilgrim city, which does not yet possess the beatific vision, this movement is essential. Because perfect love is not fully possible in this life, Lamb contends that hope functions as the "middle term" between faith and love, mobilizing the citizen to act despite the "many and grave evils" of the age.[20] Without this functional virtue, the Christian citizen would be unable to bear the "heavy yoke" of the earthly city without collapsing into the inactivity of despair.

Lamb interprets these themes as evidence that Augustine treats hope as a stabilizing moral force within political life. Augustine warns against pride and the desire for domination. Yet he refuses to fall into despair. Hope frees the believers from despair in politics and from utopian illusion. Grounded in humanity, hope acknowledges that peace on earth will always be fragile, but it continues to labor for it as a sign of love's fidelity. Hope provides the resolve necessary to endure the difficulties and delays. Augustine admits the limits of politics, but he also points out that real possibilities remain. Virtue, he teaches, makes good use of both blessings and hardships only by directing them toward the final peace that admits no

19 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 4.

20 In *City of God* books 22.22-23, Augustine lists these many and grave evils: "gnawing cares, disturbances, griefs, fears, insane joys, discords, litigation, wars, treasons, angers, hatreds, falsehood, flattery, fraud, theft, rapine, perfidy, pride, ambition, envy, homicides, parricides, cruelty, ferocity, wickedness, luxury, insolence, immodesty, unchastity, fornications, adulteries, incests, and so many other impure and unnatural acts of both sexes of which it is shameful even to speak: sacrileges, heresies, blasphemies, perjuries, oppression of the innocent, slanders, plots, prevarications, false witness, unrighteous judgments, acts of violence, robberies, and other such evils which do not immediately come to mind, but which are never far away from men in this life." Cf. Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 179; Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XX. 22-23.

further improvement. This perfect peace is the fulfillment of all goods and belongs to the Heavenly City, the true "vision of peace."[21]

Augustine rejects the binary of simple optimism–pessimism. Instead, he offers a hope that acknowledges the "many and grave evils" of this life while refusing to withdraw from the task of seeking peace. It requires awareness of political limits and responsibility. Without this realism, hope would collapse into presumption rather than express rightly ordered desire.[22] Hope finds the good, desirable, and possible things, but not yet fully possessed. The Supreme Good, everlasting and perfect peace in the heavenly city, is the final fulfillment of all goods.[23]

Yet hope is not only about the life to come. It also empowers citizens to seek real, shared goods, like civic peace and justice, which can be enjoyed with non-believers. By anchoring the soul in God's certainty, to Augustine, hope allows Christians to work for the "peace of Babylon" without believing that the earthly city can ever be fully perfected. It is both a realistic and faithful endurance. It directs our action while keeping our eyes fixed on the ultimate fulfillment of all things in God.[24]

The Twofold Hope

Lamb challenges the prevailing view that Augustinian hope is exclusively otherworldly. Augustine himself allows for this wider field of hope. In *City of God* XIX.4, he calls the temporal peace of this life a real good shared by all. These texts show that Augustine does not confine hope to the life to come but regards

21 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 10-11.

22 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 258.

23 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX, 10.

24 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 26.

temporal goods as fitting objects of desire when subordinated to the eternal good. Lamb interprets Augustine as proposing a "twofold object of hope," directed toward both eternal beatitude and temporal goods. In Lamb's reading, Augustine's treatment of the Lord's, particularly in the *Enchiridion*, petitions for "daily bread" and deliverance from evil indicates that temporal goods, such as health, friendship, and civic peace, are legitimate objects of hope. Lamb argues that Augustine encourages citizens to love and hope for these temporal goods, provided they are not viewed as the Supreme Good.[25] According to Lamb, this ordering prevents citizens from falling into either of two vices. Presumption happens when temporal goods are treated as sources of ultimate salvation, while despair arises when temporal goods are seen as wholly without value. By keeping hope in temporal goods as subordinate to God, citizens can act faithfully in the world without overestimating their power of significance.[26]

Lamb also interprets twofold hope as central to Augustine's understanding of political life. Citizens who hope for civic peace, yet recognize that perfect peace is impossible on earth, accept the "stern necessity" of political coercion with a spirit of mourning rather than triumphalism. This virtue allows for "lament" and "groaning" regarding the misery of the world without leading to withdrawal because the citizen is "saved in hope" and thus can "rejoice in hope" while sighing in the present condition.[27] Lamb calls this a form of "tragic hope:" it is neither naive optimism nor despairing passivity.

---

25 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 67–69.

26 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 55.

27 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 161.

Hope motivates active endurance and encourages citizens to work for the peace of Babylon, while it helps us understand that perfect fulfillment belongs only to the Heavenly City. Lamb highlights Augustine's use of Jeremiah 29 to encourage citizens to "seek the welfare of the city" (the peace of Babylon) where they are exiled. Augustine explains this as an approval to build a common life with diverse citizens, not as a command to withdraw. It forms a "tense communion" where citizens are united by their common objects of love, like civic peace.[28] Therefore, Lamb asserts that Augustine's realism is not an obstacle to political engagement. Instead, it stands as a positive framework for responsible action. We can seek and value temporal goods, yet always in the context of the higher ordering of desire toward God. Lamb suggests that hope inspires the citizen to act with prudence, humility, and perseverance, which keeps moral responsibility grounded in reality. While these themes clearly hope's motivating power, I worry that extending this idea of "twofold hope" too far risks ignoring Augustine's own cautions about disordered desire, thereby distorting the proper hierarchy of loves. Yet this twofold account of hope raises a further question that Augustine's theology of rightly ordered love presses sharply: whether hope's sustaining function can remain theologically secure apart from charity as its governing form.

Tragic Hope: Realism without Withdrawal

Caritas is the moral discipline required to act justly in a fallen world. Yet, it is hope (*spes*) that provides the theological virtue necessary to sustain such demanding charity. Augustine's hope avoids the twin dangers of withdrawal and worship. Looking to the City of God is no excuse for inaction.

28 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 261.

Instead, it acts as the true horizon that reorders our loves. This paper takes Augustine's tragic hope to mean a steady desire for the final peace that strengthens the pilgrim without erasing sorrow over the wounds of history.

This hope defines the "pilgrimage" of the heavenly city's citizens.[29] It requires an "accurate assessment of reality,"[30] which is why Augustine's hope is compatible with groaning or lamenting over present reality. Rooted in the tension of the two loves, the tragic character of the pilgrim's situation sharpens moral responsibility. Tragic hope is therefore the interior disposition required for action in a world defined by tragic necessity. This hope itself remains anchored in God's fidelity. However, the pilgrim is compelled to commit to imperfect but necessary acts of mercy because perfect justice remains impossible.

Hope transforms laments into endurance. Political commitment becomes "the operation of this hope in present society," and avoids the twin errors of retreat and worship.[31] To live in hope is to act within the tension of the two cities. Hope joins realism to love. It makes politics humble while teaching that peace on earth is never complete but never futile. Ultimately, the hope for eternal peace (*pax caelestis*) is the engine for action. It instills the pilgrim with "eschatological restlessness" to pursue the "stern necessity" of just war with *caritas* rather than with the very "lust for domination" it seeks to restrain.

It is not incompatible with sorrow but deepened by it, for the soul that groans for God's peace loves the good so intensely

29 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* 18.

30 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 162.

31 Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago and London: The Universitiy of Chicago Press, 2008), 93.

that its absence is a form of prayer. Augustine notes that "complete exemption from pain" in this life is purchased at the "price of inhumanity." [32] Augustine's work models engagement in public life. Eric Gregory in *Politics and the Order of Love* observes that, for Augustine, political discernment is always "fragmentary, ad hoc, piecemeal," a realism that makes hope indispensable. This framework demands patient, humble labor for a provisional peace.[33]

Augustine on War, Coercion and Charity – The Tragic Necessity

To Augustine, war, though tragic, becomes at times a sorrowful necessity, the sign of a heart wounded by sin. It reveals the brokenness of human love, where communion was meant to unite, but domination now divides. Our world is fragile and restless. It turns easily to violence because it is infected by *libido dominandi*, the lust for domination.[34] This lust corrupts both individuals and nations.

The Root of Disorder: Pride and Self-Love

Augustine argues that the lust for domination is from pride, which is a wrong self-love that rejects equality under God. This pride then grows into the desire to rule others. The enduring tragedy of political action stems directly from this unrest of pride. The difficulty is that every remedy for disorder remains marked by the same wound it seeks to restrain. Pride rejects the humble equality of creatures before their Creator. This disordered craving seeks mastery rather than fellowship and drives human beings to grasp temporal goods purely

32 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIV. 9.

33 Ibid.

34 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XV. 7.

for their own purposes.[35] This is the impulse traced back to Adam and Eve's fall when they desired independence rather than communion. Wanting to delight in themselves, they fell away from God. That same impulse lives in us still. Augustine says, pride hates fellowship based on "equality under God and instead seeks to impose its own dominion upon fellow men."[36] Because pride distorts love, earthly peace is always unstable. The earthly city is thus built upon a false peace, rooted in the love of self that extends even to contempt of God.[37]

It is precisely because this *libido dominandi* breaks the bond of peace that political coercion becomes a necessity, albeit a tragic instrument. The state cannot purify the heart, but it must restrain the "unruly and unjust" to preserve a "temporal peace" that even the wicked desire.[38] To preserve the minimal peace, coercion becomes a tragic form of charity, even when true love cannot yet reign. This necessity, though sorrowful, is the political action that tragic hope must sustain. It is done for correction and restraint rather than domination. Augustine recognizes that political restraint can shape conduct but cannot change hearts. He reminds his audience, "Citizenship in the City of God is determined at the individual and not the institutional level."[39] The state can punish outward acts but cannot purify the will. However, Augustine sees in the political order a mysterious participation in God's providence. Coercive political action, rightly intended, curbs the "unruly and unjust men" and compels them toward a semblance of good. Through this discipline, the fragile fabric of earthly life is preserved.

35 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 57.

36 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIV. 13.

37 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIV. 28.

38 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 13.

39 John Mark Mattox, *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War* (London & New York: Continuum, 2006), 30.

Though imperfection, this temporal well-being and civic peace remain a relative good, a mercy that holds chaos at bay. Therefore, the political order stands as both mercy and judgment. Mercy because it restrains sin; judgment because it reveals our incapacity to love without grace. In the temporal stage, peace remains a wound we must tend but cannot heal.

Augustine shifted the problem of war from politics to the human heart. He argues that the moral weight of any conflict rests on the interior motive that guides it, not on external acts. The real evils, he says, are "love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, and the lust for power."[40] War is always a sorrow in a world wounded by sin. Thus, Augustine's just-war sense is never an approval of violence but a moral appeal to limit it through charity and humility. War must be governed by love and restraint, not passion or pride.

Charity as the Measure of Justice and Restraint

Charity or *caritas* is the very form of all virtues. Augustine states that virtue itself is "rightly ordered love," noting in *City of God* XV.22 that created goods become harmful only when they are loved without regard to their proper order. When the soul clings to temporal goods above God, its loves fall out of place, and its actions follow the same disorder. This ordered love, rather than any outward act, becomes the first measure of moral judgment.[41] It directs every human act toward God and neighbors. From this perspective, the just-war means only action rooted in rightly ordered love can be considered right and just. Augustine redefines the morality of war by shifting the focus from external action to the interior motive of charity. Since the "order of this concord" requires that a man should

40 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX, 7.

41 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XV. 22.

"harm no one" but also "do good to all," the use of force must be governed by a benevolent intention to correct rather than destroy.[42] War is thus reframed as a stern necessity undertaken to protect the innocent and restrain the wicked from sinking further into sin.

Augustine does not allow any moral neutrality. Love defends the innocents when they are attacked. Yet that same love forbids cruelty even toward the aggressor.[43] Between apathy and wrath is the presence of restraint and charity. Augustine's just-war holds together justice and mercy, punishment and compassion, power and humility. His vision makes war bearable only as a reluctant necessity undertaken as an act of obedience to the law of love.[44]

In this way, Augustine reframes the ancient thinking of justice into a spiritual discipline. Christians who work for justice must act humbly under divine judgment and must be aware that only love can purify violence. Restraint is not weakness but the highest aspect of charity. In such a manner, the sword is used to serve peace rather than as an instrument of domination. For Augustine, the true victory lies merely in the conversion of the will when love overcomes pride. Only then is the world restored to its true order under God.[45]

---

42 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 14.

43 James Turner Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War: A Moral and Historical Inquiry,* Princeton University Press (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), 197.

44 Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Augustine," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Theology,* 2nd ed., ed. William T. Cavanaugh and Peter Manley Scott (John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2019), 50.

45 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 12.

The Goal of Correction, not Destruction

The goal of conflict, when it is a necessity, is not to destroy the enemy but to correct and to restore order without abandoning compassion. Augustine sees God's providence at work even in the painful discipline of nations. God uses war to chasten wrongdoing so that humanity may learn a more righteous way of life. For Augustine, charity shapes the entire moral logic of restraint. And war now becomes a tragic teacher.

Charity shapes the entire moral logic of restraint. This principle transforms the traditional thought of duty. For Augustine, those who defend the weak do not abandon love for the enemy. Charity must embrace both the victim and the aggressor. Even in restraining the violent, one must do so with pity for the one who errs. Here, charity transforms justice from mere duty into moral service. It is a greater evil to allow harm to one's friend when one could prevent it than to inflict harm out of a just defense.[46] Thus, Augustine reframes justice as a work of love rather than domination.

Restraint and Right Intention

The discipline of charity finds its clearest test in Augustine's teaching on right intention. To him, right intention purifies action from the delight in violence and the vanity of revenge. The righteous person never rejoices in the evils of war. Instead, a soldier's virtue is measured not by victory but by sorrow. War must remain a "stern necessity," a burden accepted with mourning. In this way, right intention becomes the inner measure of justice. It guards the heart from the lust for domination, the root of all disorder. Augustine makes this clear when he says that the wise person will grieve the necessity of just war, for its very necessity arises from another's injustice. He notes that

46 Mattox, *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War,* 19.

anyone who reflects on such evils "must acknowledge their misery," and that the one who faces them without sorrow "is in a far more pitiable condition."[47] To act justly in war is to act in penitence with the awareness that sin stains both the aggressor and the defender.[48]

Augustine insists that moral restraint must accompany every act of power. He said, "Both the political authorities who declare the war and the individual soldiers who fight in it should do so in a spirit of benevolence, no matter how severe the action might be required to be."[49] When right intention governs, force becomes disciplined by love. The true victory lies in the conversion of the will, when love overcomes pride. This frames the ancient thinking of justice into a spiritual discipline.

Political Limits: Remedy, not Redemption

Because human loves are disordered, the empire, law, and treaty are provisional and vulnerable. For Augustine, politics belongs to the temporal order, where peace is always partial and passing. Since the earthly city is built upon the loves of fallen creatures, it remains in the disorder of sin. Pride spoils the best intentions, meaning every human effort for peace apart from God bears within it the seed of ruin.

Politics as Remedy for Sin

For Augustine, politics exists because of sin.[50] It heals the disorder but does not redeem the heart. Political authority serves as a medicine that restrains disorder and preserves a

47 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 7.

48 Mattox, *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War,* 54.

49 Mattox, *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War,* 135.

50 Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World,* 5.

fragile civic peace.[51] A clearer line runs through Augustine's thought that political authority belongs to the order of temporal goods, which assist human weakness but cannot reorient desire toward God. Such measures seem to limit harm and cultivate conditions for moral life, but they cannot bring the inward conversion that only grace can effect. Thus, the state's vocation is to prevent evil and sustain space for moral life. It makes public service a necessary labor of love while denying the pretensions of ultimate redemption.

A community that loves justice and God will be ordered toward virtue; one that loves power and pleasure will fall into disorder, no matter how strong its institutions. The health of the society depends not on its strength but on its love. Augustine's critique is clear: political orders collapse when their deepest love is power rather than justice. Pride distorts even strong institutions; that is why earthly peace remains inherently fragile.

History as Divine Pedagogy

Although earthly peace is imperfect and temporary, its fragility does not imply despair. For Augustine, history is not a simple story of human progress. It is rather God's approach to teaching. He holds that all temporal affairs, from wars and empires to the rulers, are governed by the one God, who directs them *sicut ei placet*, as He wills.[52] Rome's greatness is less a triumph and more a lesson, because Providence uses its glory and downfall as moral instruction. We see in the history of empires that the rise and fall demonstrate the limits of human virtue and show how temporary earthly peace is.

51 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 11.

52 Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World,* 136.

History acts as a discipline through disorder.[53] Politics, therefore, reflects the human condition while continuously forcing us to confront its deep flaws. This is where we see the tension between *caritas* (charity) and *cupiditas* (lust to dominate). *When these two forces conflict, we understand* that only love can sustain the fragile peace of the earthly city.

This moral fragility makes political life necessary and humble. It is necessary because it restrains harm and is humble because it acknowledges its inability to heal the heart. Hence, Augustine's tragic hope refuses political arrogance while energizing faithful love. Within this fragility, he discovers the birth of hope, a hope both tragic and transcendent, that teaches the soul to seek its true peace beyond history without abandoning love within it. These limits of history set the stage for Augustine's account of hope, since hope steadies the pilgrim within a world where providence instructs through both order and disorder.

Critical Evaluation of Michael Lamb's Reading of Augustine

Lamb's emphasis on hope as a functionally necessary virtue is a valuable corrective to readings of Augustine that incline toward political withdrawal.[54] This evaluation proceeds in continuity with Lamb's constructive project of recovering Augustine as a thinker of political hope and resisting interpretations that collapse his realism into pessimism or withdrawal. By framing hope as a resolve that sustains action amid the limits and delays of the *saeculum*, Lamb shows how Augustine's hope guards against both presumption and despair. Yet this emphasis remains insufficient unless hope is governed by Augustine's theology of rightly ordered love. Augustine

53 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* III. 19.

54 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought*, 41.

repeatedly warns that virtues severed from charity become distorted, and political goods pursued without rightly ordered desire easily slide into self-reliance.[55]

By "political self-reliance," this critique does not mean Pelagian activism or naïve confidence in political progress. Rather, it names a subtler displacement in which the sustaining function of hope is tacitly trusted to secure moral stability apart from the ordering of desire toward God. In this sense, endurance itself risks being treated as a substitute for rightly ordered love rather than as an expression formed by it. Hope sustains political labor precisely by directing it beyond itself. Without the moral primacy of charity, the endurance hope provides can subtly shift into confidence in political effort rather than patient trust in divine grace. As Eric Gregory observes, Augustinian political judgment is always "fragmentary, ad hoc, and piecemeal," a realism that confirms that hope can sustain political action only when it remains disciplined by *charity* and ordered toward God rather than invested in the coherence or success of political effort itself.[56] Likewise, John Burnaby emphasizes in *Amor Dei*, for Augustine, the order of love is the very condition of moral freedom, without which even theological virtues risk distortion.[57]

In Augustinian terms, the "guardrail" for hope is not an external limit imposed on political action but the *ordo amoris* that orders desire toward God. Formed by *caritas* as the shape of all virtue, this ordering preserves humility by situating political goods within their proper place rather than allowing them to claim ultimate significance. Hope may sustain endurance

55 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 20.

56 Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship,* 23–24.

57 John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), 233.

amid the limits of the *saeculum*, but it remains theologically secure only when governed by rightly ordered love. In this way, charity disciplines political desire without negating political responsibility and ensures that action remains receptive to grace rather than invested in its own success.

The interdependence of charity and hope is the true safeguard against the over-politicization of hope. While hope provides the resolve to endure the limitations of political life, charity supplies the moral measure that guides this endurance toward God and the good of one's neighbor. By referring love to God, charity also protects the neighbor from becoming a means to the self's moral or political projects. It releases political action from the temptation of self-righteous possession of the good.[58] Without hope, charity would falter under the weight of the *saeculum*'s persistent disorder. Augustine's theology of rightly ordered love thus ensures that hope remains humble, patient, and receptive to grace, sustaining political action without allowing it to become self-justifying or self-reliant.

Conclusion

Augustine's vision addresses our contemporary crises through what this paper has described as a "tragic hope," a hope that sustains action within the limits of the *saeculum* without surrendering to despair or illusion. This hope is tragic not in its object, which remains the eternal peace of the City of God, but in its field of operation, where coercion, conflict, and restraint persist as sorrowful necessities. Augustine's realism thus rejects the notion that political structures can guarantee lasting peace, while affirming that temporal peace remains a genuine good when pursued with humility and rightly ordered love.

58 Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship,* 46–47.

This study has argued that hope is indispensable to Augustine's political vision, a point rightly emphasized by Michael Lamb in his account of hope as functionally necessary for political endurance. Yet it has also shown that hope, when emphasized apart from Augustine's theology of rightly ordered love, becomes vulnerable to a subtle form of political self-reliance. Augustine consistently resists such confidence by insisting that political action must remain measured by charity, which orders desire, disciplines power, and preserves humility before God. Charity does not weaken hope; it safeguards its theological depth by keeping its object fixed on God rather than on the coherence or success of political effort itself.

Thus, charity and hope are a practical way to sustain political engagement without being naïve or withdrawn. Hope bears the weight of history, while charity orders desire and restrains presumption. Through this lens, Augustine reframes political life as a field of patient labor marked by restraint, lament, and perseverance. Though earthly peace remains fragile, it still matters. It is worth our effort because it is oriented toward the final peace that God alone gives. To hope in this Augustinian sense is to work faithfully within history, with humility of action and confidence not in politics, but in grace.

THE HUMAN PERSON AS *RELATIO* IN JOSEPH RATZINGER'S *LOGOS-DIALOGOS* THEOLOGY

Junmar Cris N. Caputolan

Introduction

The quest towards understanding the human person has always been a primal endeavor of a humanity that seeks. Disciplines of any kind, ranging from philosophy to psychology, even to biology and other scientific schools, grapple with this quest. The quest speaks of the desire for the truth. The human person wants to understand and dig deeper into the reality of his/her humanity. Theology, for its part, centers this anthropological inquiry not into the object of philosophy and the rest of the sciences. Any endeavor to understand the human person from theology's vantage point does not rest on the reality of the human being alone, whether as a unique individual or as a species full of potentials, but a comprehension intertwined with the understanding of the person of the One revealed in space and time, the One revealed in history, Jesus Christ.

What theology provides to this kind of quest is beyond the grasp of philosophy and the sciences. The latter only deals, collectively taken, with the empirical. It is worth noting that this study has a distinctive character from the outset, defining the path it is taking. The question of the human person, with reference to the Person revealed in history as a way of God's communication of himself, is the primary element of the study. The subsequent point, rooted in this, is the reality of relations, a quality of the human person that the sciences cannot fully

capture and that philosophy can only attempt to explicate. This is the other aspect that concerns us.

In the aforementioned context, this theological inquiry into the human person falls into two theological areas: Christology and Anthropology. In this theological undertaking, we cannot fail to mention the implications of this inquiry into the reality of the Christian today. Relations among believers spring from a better understanding of who a human person is. With this conviction, the human person as a *being with others* is better understood. In the process, the community of these human persons, the Church, will be able to understand herself as well. This encounter is the basic point of *relatio*. No relationship is born without an encounter. The incarnation of the Son of God, his revelation in flesh, concretizes this quality of relations: God never hesitated to be with people, to stay with people, to live with people, to put himself in space, if only to express his love for us. No other person in history could serve as our reference point to this *relatio* than Jesus Christ himself.

Joseph Ratzinger's Understanding of the Human Person

In a homily delivered before the conclave that elected him to the papacy, Joseph Ratzinger devotes a paragraph to a scathing personal critique of relativism. One line still reverberates until now: "We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and the ultimate goal consists solely of one's ego and desires."[1] He decried the crisis faced by the Church in the new millennium. Ultimately, the crisis is about truth, which becomes an existential problem. Ratzinger grew up in a Europe that was experiencing the

1 Joseph Ratzinger, *Mass Pro-Eligendo Romano Pontifice,* Homilies, 18 April 2005, https://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html.

decline of faith, and as described by Peter Seewald, Ratzinger has seen the "insanity of a world without God, creating a 'new man.'"[2] Ratzinger's anthropology is one that goes back to the original concept of a human being as *person* against the relativistic tide that has crept into the West. Relativism is a threat to this precious conception, and it is something Ratzinger has fought against throughout. His theology grounds his critique.

The Concept *Person* in Christian Theology

Augustine's Concept of *Person*

Augustine is perhaps the most popular theologian across centuries. To date, his theology is celebrated. We know that Augustine's influence is not only within the realm of the academe. His influence extends to the simplest of lives because of his conversion experience. It is very personal and existential. Is his understanding of a *person* rooted in his own experience as well? Paul Collins writes that "it is generally accepted that Augustine is the original protagonist of such a concept of personhood."[3] The articulation in the early Councils on the relationship between the *hypostaseis* of the Trinity, to use the terminology of the Cappadocian fathers (Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzen), does not provide any definition of *person* even in the most general sense. Person, as a theological term, is born when the early Church struggles to explain the Trinitarian doctrine of *one God in three persons*. Augustine, O'Donnell writes, "had to face the problem of how to translate the Greek phrase, one *ousia*, three *hypostaseis,* into Latin."[4]

2 Benedict XVI, *The Last Testament,* with Peter Seewald, trans. Jacob Phillips (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), x-xi.

3 Paul Collins, *Trinitarian Theology: West and East* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2005), 118-119.

4 John O'Donnell, *The Mystery of the Triune God* (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1998), 101.

Hypostasis, according to O'Donnell, would have been translated as *substantia* in Latin, and Augustine may have feared the possible implications of the use of the term.[5] Using the term 'persons' would confuse the faithful. Yet, with the desire to say something about God's nature, he ends up using *person*, "not to say what the three in God are but rather to avoid being silent altogether."[6] So, how does Augustine understand *person*?

We begin with Augustine's understanding of the human being. Some scholars have a negative reception of Augustine's take on the human being. Take this interpretation of Peter Burnell: "For Augustine, the divine beauty in us has been largely (of course not completely) lost, and Christ has restored it to us on the Cross by giving up his innate beauty in order to take upon himself our lack of beauty *(Sermon 27.6)*... [and] we are so extensively damaged that the similarity is not restored as long as we are in this world *(De Trinitate, 4.2.4)*."[7] The tone of it really comes from Augustine's experience. And how he interprets God's love transforming him becomes the ground of his conviction. If this is his understanding of the human being, how does this affect his definition of human nature?

For Augustine, the *imago Dei* is in the soul.[8] This is an important point to bring up, for with this supposition, he contextualizes human nature. His understanding of human nature is even based on a literal interpretation of Genesis arguing that "in paradise, man was endowed with all sorts of privileges: he was virtually immortal; he never experienced the revolt

5 O'Donnell, *The Mystery of the Triune God,* 101.

6 O'Donnell, *The Mystery of the Triune God,* 101.

7 Peter Burnell, *The Augustinian Person* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 174.

8 Henri Rondet, *Original Sin: The Patristic and Theological Background,* trans. Cajetan Finegan (Shannon, Ireland: Ecclessia Press, 1972), 115.

of the senses; he possessed wonderful knowledge and enjoyed greater freedom" but that human being's pride destroyed everything so that sin was a consequence of it and the "children of Adam come into the world in a state of sin."[9] This negative understanding of human nature is contrasted with the nature of God. With all the positive superlatives attributed to God on the one hand, the negative notion of human nature calls for redemption on the other. If human nature is taken that badly, how could Augustine define a human person? Is the definition on human person to be presented negatively as well? Interestingly, Augustine did not start by defining a person from the human perspective. If he did, the configuration may have swiftly changed. We have said that Augustine's *imago Dei* is in the soul. This *being an image of God* is directly referred to *person*. And this person, for the doctor of grace, is one who is constitutive of substance. A person can therefore be denoted as both human and divine.

In this attempt to synthesize Augustine's understanding of *person,* which can now be applied to both God and man, our starting point is Genesis 1:26: the human being as *imago Dei*. While *imago Dei* itself does not define *person*, it projects relations. The debate that the Cappadocians do not fully resolve is given a new dimension: relation. The *mia ousia, treis hypostaseis* to describe the Trinity, did not put to rest the clamor to define *person*. Augustine has contributed much to the conversation because his starting point in understanding the person is *relatio*. This relation is not only seen in the Triune God but also in God in relation to the human being, the creature. And so, Collins would interpret Augustine as using Aristotle's *relatio* category as a basis in understanding personhood and [another interpreter] would even go further to contend that

9 Rondet, *Original Sin,* 120-121.

the theologian "elevates the category of relation to the level of substance."[10]

Boethius' *Person*: A Development from Augustine

While the theologian has contributed much to the definition of *person*, the focus of the definition is still on the Trinity. Decades after Augustine's death, Anicius Severinus Manlius Boethius (c. 475-526) came into the picture.[11] It is the figure of Boethius that caught sight of the concept *person* and made possible its development into the philosophical conversation.[12] Boethius develops the concept by giving his own definition. What the Cappadocians greatly miss and what Augustine lacks, Boethius tries to fill in.

Boethius' attempt to define a person fits the medieval understanding of a human being. Boethius, though, seems to depart from any of the sources and focuses on the *individual* itself. Collins shares an observation: the definition given by Boethius is "the expression of both an individualistic and a substantialist understanding of personhood."[13] In his *Treatise Against Eutyches and Nestorius,* Boethius admits that he has difficulty in defining *person*.[14] He considers *nature* to be a part of the definition, and that person is to be understood within

10 Collins, *Trinitarian Theology,* 119.

11 John Marenbon, "Anicius Severinus Manlius Boethius," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Winter 2021 Edition, ed. Edward Zalta, accessed March 2, 2025, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021//entries/boethius/.

12 O'Donnell, *The Mystery of the Triune God,* 101.

13 Collins, *Trinitarian Theology,* 120.

14 Anicius Severinus Manlius Boethius, *A Treatise Against Eutyches and Nestorius,* trans. H.F. Stewart and E.K. Rand, Logos Library, http://www.logoslibrary.org/boethius/eutyches/2.html (accessed March 3, 2025).

the context of substance.[15] Boethius' problem lies in the nature of substance itself. Understandably, substance can be anything, like bodily or not, sensitive or not, rational or irrational, but what he is convinced of is that *person* does not apply to anything that has no life and living things that lack sense, and on living beings that do not use mind or reason.[16] What he directly affirms is the *person* of a human being, of an angel, and of God, and he contends that it can only be applied to an individual.[17] Boethius thus writes, "Wherefore if *person* belongs to substances alone, and these are rational, and if every nature is a substance, existing not in universals but in individuals, we have found the definition of *person*: 'The individual substance of a rational creature.'"[18]

Boethius' *person* is defined by the individuality of a rational creature, and *that* individuality is itself *substance*. This rendering sets the human being apart from other creatures because the latter's nature is *irrational,* and with that irrationality, their substance is not to be called *person*. Applied to the persons in the Trinity, the correct term to employ would be *rational nature* because God is not categorized as a creature. What is the implication of this understanding for their issue with the persons in the Trinity? When *person* is taken as an individual substance, the three persons in the Trinity would therefore be understood as *three substances*, matching the *tres hypostaseis* of the Greeks. Boethius is fully aware that the Church forbids this.[19] He leaves it to the Church to decide which to employ.[20] All he wishes to

15 Boethius, *A Treatise,* Chapter 2.

16 Boethius, *A Treatise,* Chapter 2.

17 Boethius, *A Treatise,* Chapter 2.

18 Boethius, *A Treatise,* Chapter 3.

19 Boethius, *A Treatise,* Chapter 3.

20 Boethius, *A Treatise,* Chapter 4.

arrive at is the distinction between nature and person, wherein nature is the "specific property of any substance" and person is the "individual substance of a rational nature."[21] While Boethius has provided the Church and the medieval academe with an official ontological definition of *person*, questions have not ceased surfacing. His definition does not appeal to the theologians following him. Centuries later, the understanding of *person* becomes more refined, thanks to a theologian deeply engaged in spiritual mysticism and the Augustinian tradition, Richard of St. Victor.

Richard of St. Victor: Refining Augustine's *Person*

Richard of St. Victor is a native of Scotland and a monk (d.1173).[22] He is called "of St. Victor" after the School of St. Victor in Paris.[23] Richard is a twelfth-century theologian, centuries apart from Augustine and Boethius. We purposely take into account Richard's theological view because of his contribution to refining the definition of person. Richard's milieu attests to the popularity of the subject of *human love* not only in theology but also in the arts.[24] He, like any theologian of the time, considers love as God's revelation, that God is found and is able to be understood in the human language of love.[25] This may mean a renaissance of Augustine's theology. Richard and his contemporaries, albeit Augustinian in orientation,

21 Boethius, *A Treatise,* Chapter 4.

22 Alfred Sharpe, "Richard of St Victor," *The Catholic Encyclopedia,* Vol. 13 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13045c.htm (accessed March 4, 2025).

23 Sharpe, "Richard of St. Victor."

24 Richard of St. Victor, *On the Trinity,* trans. with intro. Aage Rydstrom-Poulsen (Belgium: Brepols Publisher, 2021), accessed March 5, 2025, DOI10.1484/M.BLCS-EB.5.123003, 11. This is the Introduction of Aage Rydstrom-Poulsen.

25 Richard of St. Victor, *On the Trinity,* 11-12.

developed a more dynamic understanding of the Trinity since the Augustinian doctrine "had a rather static image" of divine nature.[26] Augustine's *relatio* is not fully developed. While he writes on love *vis-à-vis* his understanding of the persons in the Trinity, this love is predicated on the unity of divine nature.[27] Richard takes a different direction. He finds an answer to the question of relations among the persons in the Trinity in *plurality*. Aage Rydstrom-Poulsen differentiates Richard's understanding of charity as "the love that requires a plurality of persons" from Augustine's "unity of nature."[28]

In Book Three of the Trinity, Richard writes that "where there is fullness of all goodness, true and supreme charity cannot be lacking" because "nothing is better than charity; nothing is more perfect than charity."[29] God alone possesses what he calls *supreme charity*. Interestingly, Richard makes his stance unambiguous when he writes in all directness that no one can claim that s/he loves when the object and loving is just her/himself because for love to be *charity,* then it has to be other-oriented.[30] He thus contends that when plurality is lacking, "charity cannot exist."[31] This is what he calls *condilectio,* the greatest form of loving the other.[32] Richard develops Augustine's *relatio* while accommodating Boethius' notion. God is therefore understood, in Richard's thinking, as the supreme charity, and that this supreme charity necessarily contains

26 Richard of St. Victor, *On the Trinity,* 14.

27 Richard of St. Victor, *On the Trinity,* 15.

28 Richard of St. Victor, *On the Trinity,* 15.

29 Richard of St. Victor, *The Twelve Patriarchs, The Mystical Ark, Book Three of the Trinity,* trans. Grover A. Zinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), book iii, chapter 2, 374.

30 Richard of St.Victor, *Book Three of the Trinity,* 374.

31 Richard of St.Victor, *Book Three of the Trinity,* 374.

32 Richard of St. Victor, *On the Trinity,* 41.

relation, without which it cannot be called charity. In describing the "character of love," Richard feels convinced that "love is always confessing love" (chapter xii).[33] It can only be *confessing* when the object, an *other,* exists; otherwise, it remains a self-contained love.

While Augustine's understanding of the Trinity is psychological, Richard's is interpersonal.[34] While Boethius speaks more of *person* as an individual substance that possesses rationality, Richard places his focus more on love and the necessity of the other. This is the highest form of love which, when applied to the Trinity, is understood as the "mutual love between two persons," a love that births out another.[35] His *condilectio* is valid for both God and human beings. With this interpersonal character of loving, the human experience of love reflects the love found in the Trinity.[36] What, in other words, constitutes *personhood* is *condilectio*, a *relatio* that is not mere connection and unification in nature but the expression of the loving that finds its fulfillment in the persons of the Trinity. Richard's definition of person as "an incommunicable existence of an intellectual nature"[37] means that it is *incommunicable* because it is individually unique, and that this *existence* of the person "has its being in itself and not in another."[38] What is its relation with condilectio? The individuality is incommunicable, but it can only find its meaning in its relation with the *other* in *caritas.* The *relatio* in the Trinity extends to the human experience. It is

33 Richard of St. Victor, *Contemplation*, 90.

34 Richard of St. Victor, *On the Trinity,* 15.

35 Richard of St. Victor, *On the Trinity,* 42.

36 Richard of St. Victor, *On the Trinity,* 43.

37 O'Donnell, *The Mystery of the Triune God,* 101.

38 O'Donnell, *The Mystery of the Triune God,* 101.

this *relatio* that does not stop at Boethius' rational nature but necessarily expands to mean *condilectio.*

Ratzinger's *Person* as *Relatio*

The turn of the century following scholasticism has witnessed a newfound understanding of person. As we traced the Augustinian tradition that influenced Ratzinger, we have established that the question of the concept of *person* is originally a Church-question arising from the difficulties in comprehending the essence of God. For many centuries after the early councils, the concept has developed and its definition refined. The dawn of the period of post-scholasticism transformed the concept, together with the rise of scientific inquiry. The question on *person* has never ceased to be raised, but new problems have also arisen, problems that the Church of this particular period in history had to face. Both modern and contemporary thoughts grapple with understanding the concept. These thoughts are contradictory, depending on their respective emphasis, but most of them, if not all, are uniform in a single aspect: the concept is no longer attached to the question of God. From this fact about the face of history lies Ratzinger's frustration. The crusader for the truth decries society's behavior of turning away from God. This turning away from God necessarily results in turning away from the truth.

Ratzinger's *person* can help us deepen our understanding of this concept. Ratzinger's understanding aligns with the Augustinian tradition. Alluding to the persons in the Trinity, he writes: "Person is the pure relation of being related, nothing else."[39] The concept of person in God is thus incomprehensi-

39 Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* trans. J. R. Foster and Michael J. Miller, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 183.

ble without *relatio*. Echoing Augustine, *relatio* becomes God's substance as "relation is discovered as an equally valid primordial mode of reality."[40] As a primordial mode of reality, *relatio* itself is constitutive to God's being. Without it, the concept of God may not be comprehensible. Without it, the cosmos would never have taken shape. Without it, revelation would be impossible because the human being, its recipient, would never have existed. *Relatio* thus plays a very significant role in history.

The *imago Dei* creature encounters God in the most personal way. While philosophy can reduce the human being to an *individual*, our theological understanding is not content with it. Christianity, Ratzinger believes, transforms this philosophical understanding, for it considers the human being not as a mere individual but as a *person*.[41] In a more defined manner, Ratzinger makes it clear that there are two significant points of transition in the understanding of *person* in theology. As the scholar Bogumil Gacka summarizes, these transitions are formed out of the passage from substance to subsistence and from subsistence to relations.[42] We have said that the theologians of the medieval ages understood *person* within the definition of a substance. The problem lies in the strict Aristotelian separation between substance and accidents. *Relatio* is an accident of the substance. Ratzinger, though, considers theology not as something that develops within the confines of Aristotelian philosophy and logic. When we think of substance alone, we are in the world of ideas. There has to be an existential element that is not only accidental but constitutive of a definition. Person as subsistence is born.

40 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 184.

41 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 160.

42 Gacka, "Relational Personalism," 38.

This concept of subsistence derives from the belief that the human being, as God's creature is an *imago Dei*. What is even more interesting in Ratzinger's understanding is that "God only comes to a human being through other human beings."[43] The concept *relatio* is expanded. The *relatio* innate in the human being is the *relatio* that connects him/her to others and, through others, connects him/her to God. The *relatio* Augustine talks about in the Trinitarian doctrine is the same *relatio* that interweaves all the rational beings concerned: God, each individual, and others. Ratzinger is not only preserving the faith in the Trinity; he is defending the truth of our beings as *persons*. The reality is simply bare: we are human *persons*.

We must remember that this understanding is only possible because we never lose our spirituality. In this context, Richard of St. Victor comes close to us. His mystical writings on love help him arrive at a refined definition of *person*. This relationship between faith and reason, therefore, produces a spirituality that is not estranged from reality. Ratzinger therefore claims that if our faith is denigrated to "a spirituality that has no connection with reality, we first strip faith itself of its reality, but then we also rob human fellowship of its most precious dimension."[44] His understanding of *person,* therefore, is from faith understood by reason, informed by reality, thus a faith that embraces what is actual and real. Truth is unveiled. The *new man* envisioned by relativism is a false god. Without any ounce of fear from the bashing of the relativistic current in the contemporary world, Ratzinger can exclaim: "In reality, such a mistaken quest of an imagined divinization leads to self-destruction, for even God himself... does not exist in isolated self-sufficiency" and that the human beings can be like God

43 Joseph Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching,* trans. Matthew O'Connell (Chicago, Illinois: Franciscan Herald Press, 1985), 26.

44 Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching,* 26.

"when they stop trying to create themselves and, instead, allow God to create them."[45] It is God's love that reveals itself and is thus experienced by the human being as *relatio* with one another. We can be in a *relatio* with others because, first of all, we experience it as God reveals himself as love. Ratzinger appreciates Richard's refined definition because it does not "lie on the level of essence but rather on the level of existence."[46] The existentialist theology that interests him begins with the understanding of person. Without this clear grasp of the definition, a theology of existence would not be developed.

Considering Ratzinger from an Augustinian perspective helps us see the thought patterns prevalent in his theology. But the actual reading of Ratzinger's writing helps us understand his ground: love of faith. The only ground for him is nothing more than his love of the faith. He is standing as a Christian. He defends the truth as a Christian. He dialogues with culture as a Christian. This is the Ratzinger influenced by Augustine. Faith is Ratzinger's base. Without the Christian faith, *person* is understood very differently. It is faith that leads Augustine to a more profound understanding of *person*. It is faith that develops the notion, which, up until now, remains decisively convincing in the world of the academe. Ratzinger does not allow modern currents to go unchecked and unchallenged. This disposition gives him the courage to dialogue with his contemporary milieu. Ratzinger's theology is an existential one. Substance alone cannot define existence. Aristotle's substance would have to come down from above to be able to contribute to an existential theology. Aquinas writes something about subsistence in his *Summa*. He defines subsistence as something that

45 Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching,* 25.

46 Vincent Anyama, *The Primacy of Christ: The Patristic Patrimony in Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI's Analogy in Theology* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 156.

exists in itself and not in others (q29, art2).[47] That if something does not exist in itself, it is not a subsistent being. This agrees with Boethius' individuality, but his emphasis is just on substance. Ratzinger wants to add the concept of subsistence to the definition. This is why he appreciates Richard's definition. When the concept of subsistence is present, existence becomes defined. When existence is present, the nature of the human being is easily understood.

We can now express with conviction that since the persons in the Trinity are in a *relatio* and *relatio* is itself God's substance, the human *person* as a subsistent being, a subsistence that comes from God, is also a being in *relatio*. By this, the understanding of the Trinity becomes even more developed. Others may think that the doctrine of the Trinity is in the world of ideas alone because when we speak of the persons in the Godhead, we can only speak of the one substance (*una substantia*). We must not forget that the Second Person of the Trinity concretizes the thought in the mind. Here, the truth Ratzinger is concerned about finds its real meaning. The incarnation is a turning point both in salvation history and in the understanding of God. The Trinity does not remain a doctrine we can debate endlessly. The *Logos* changes the configuration of history.

Person as *Relatio* in Ratzinger's *Logos-Dialogos* Theology

The truth of the human being, not only as an individual but as a *person,* is our object of inquiry. The primary question of existence has led us to realize that the human *person* only becomes truly itself when it is in *relatio*. It comes from the Trinitarian understanding of *person* and becomes constitutive

47 New Advent, "Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae:* Question 29, Article 2," https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1029.htm#art2 (accessed 4 May 2025).

in the human being. The postmodernist relativistic tide criticized by Ratzinger wants to make a *new man* out of its own understanding. The theologian proposes a different perspective: the human *person* does not have to create a *new man* but only to return to the *Logos*, the incarnate one.

A. *Logos* in Ratzinger's Theology

Logos, as both word and thought (reason), is synthesized in a person, in history, and in faith. Ratzinger's theology is not only focused on the *Logos* but is grounded in it and always returns to it. The Christian faith is centered on the *Logos* and is understood by the *logos* (reasoned thought). We wish to examine Ratzinger's theology under three categories: the *Logos* as Person, the *Logos* in history, and the *Logos* of faith.

The *Logos* as Person

The *Logos, made flesh,* is a *person,* and this person is Jesus Christ. Existence is at the heart of this theological statement. We recall Ratzinger's understanding of *person*. Following Augustine and his disciples, this understanding primarily affirms the reality of existence. Existence is not an idea, a useless universal among others. Without existence, *person* is nowhere to be found as a reality. The tricky part of the *logos-en-sarx* theology as a whole is its being a mystery. It is not only difficult to assert; it is, first of all, difficult to comprehend. The incarnation becomes the central mystery of Christianity through the lens of intellectual inquiry. The scientific and the philosophical minds cannot comprehend the *Word* that exists from eternity that has now become subjected to space and time. Yet, the mystery that boggles the mind is what actually gives meaning. That existence itself defines meaning. As Ratzinger himself writes, "the meaning that sustains all being has become flesh; that is, it has entered history and become

one individual in it."[48] It is precisely this encounter of the *logos* and *sarx* that both disturbs and gives meaning to existence. Without this encounter, God remains someone beyond the blue sky, far from the human being, and out of touch with the reality of humanity. By this encounter, the *sarx* finds its meaning. The meaning is found because the first "work" of the *Logos* is the "giving of himself."[49] Ratzinger contends that this Jesus Christ is the "one in whom person and work are identical."[50] It is his person that gives.

The *person* of the *Logos* who *was made flesh* is witnessed to by many people. We can know him through these witnesses. The written accounts, the scriptures, are our guide. More profoundly, the scriptures do not only record the witness of individuals or groups of people; they also reveal the *person* of the *Logos*. For Ratzinger, "the teachings and deeds of the historical Jesus are not as such important but that the mere fact of his having existed is sufficient — so long as one realizes that this 'fact' implies the whole reality of the person who as such is his own teaching, who as such coincides with his deeds and thereby possesses his unparalleled individuality and uniqueness."[51] The *Logos* that became a person is therefore to be encountered in the most personal way. We can here see the spirituality present in Ratzinger's theology. He is not only explicating the *Logos*; he wants us to encounter the *Logos*. That encounter is only possible with the language of receiving — "the acceptance of this person who is his word; of the word as person and of the person as word."[52]

48 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 195.

49 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 204.

50 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 210.

51 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 205.

52 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 205.

The identity of the person is found in that *word*. But what's in that word? Ratzinger brings us to the "dynamic character of existence, its pure *actualitas*" to be able to comprehend this *word* as person, which in his writings he also calls *son*.[53] For Ratzinger, the *Word* does not "stand on its own" for "it comes from someone" and is therefore "meant for others."[54] This dynamic of existence is only understood within "this totality of 'from' and 'for.'"[55] This is the nature of the *Logos* that became flesh. While the fathers of the Church wrestled to answer the questions raised about Jesus' nature, the simplest form by which the theology of the *logos* as person is expressed is through this dynamic. The first *work* of God that produces the encounter between *logos* and *sarx* is the giving of Godself in this dynamic of *from and for*. From this is born *relatio*. Ratzinger wonderfully describes this work of self-giving in expounding the Christological dogma on *divine man*: "he who does not cling to himself but is pure relatedness coincides in this with the absolute and thus becomes lord," and the "Lord before whom the universe bows is the slaughtered Lamb, the symbol of existence that is pure act, pure 'for.'"[56] We are reminded of scholasticism's *actus purus (pure act)* to describe God. This philosophical, and very impersonal, understanding of God is transformed by Ratzinger into a pure *for*. It is as if Ratzinger were saying that the pure *for* in God is itself his pure act. Only in the incarnation does the pure act take a concrete relational grounding. This pure *for* defines what *relatio* is all about. The *Logos* as person, as pure *for*, becomes the *Logos* that is *relatio.*

53 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 210.

54 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 210.

55 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 210.

56 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 221.

The *Logos* in History

As we now reflect on the significance of history in Christianity, we are reminded of the traditional teaching on salvation history. The basic supposition is simply this: *there is* a story of how salvation comes about. This, in itself, is true. The Old Testament attests to this. We can think of the many figures in the Old Testament who contribute to the story of Israel's conception of salvation. Various stories individually narrate moments of salvation. Let us recall some of these stories. After the fall, there is the famous story of Noah's ark that saved him and his family from the flood's wrath (Genesis 7:1-12). The figure of Abraham comes after, perhaps, the most celebrated figure among the Israelites, who is called the *father of many nations* (Gen 17:5-6). Isaac, Abraham's son, reminds us of that sacrificial offering story (Gen 22:1-14), like a silent lamb who entrusts himself to his own father. Jacob, Isaac's son, later to be called Israel (Gen 32:29), becomes the father of twelve sons, the roots of the twelve tribes. This is followed by the moving and inspiring story of Joseph, who saved the Israelites from famine (Gen 45:1-15). Their recourse to Egypt became their own suffering as they fell into slavery in the hands of the Egyptians (Exodus 1:8-14). The figure of Moses then emerged as a monumental figure in Israelite history, leading the *exodus* event (Ex 14:1-30). By these selected scenes from scriptures, we are led to reflect on how salvation comes about. Ratzinger makes clear that when we speak of salvation history, we are not putting emphasis on the stories themselves, but we zero in on the fact that "salvation comes through history."[57]

This phrase – *salvation comes through history* – only makes sense within the *logos-en-sarx*, within incarnation theology.

57 Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology,* trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco, California: Ignatius Press, 1987), 154.

The stories that narrate salvation in Israelite history are, in the incarnation theology, transformed into a salvific act of God himself within the limits of history. By the salvific act of God, we mean God himself entering into the contingency of history, and by his actual existence, doing the saving. Ratzinger thus understands history as the home of existence for "it gives existence its true character," and since this history is "divinely established," it is in the "historical that that which transcends history – the eternal – becomes present."[58] How is this *Logos* in history understood? How is this saving expressed? We can only explicate this *Logos* in history when we go back to the dynamic of existence we took up above: the dynamics of *from* to *for*. In the *logos-en-sarx*, this dynamic corresponds to the central theme of the relationship between *descent* and *ascent*. We now put the *Logos* in the historical context using this theme.

We can certainly recall the stories and reckon that the entire life of Jesus Christ speaks of this *descent.* An artist's imagined annunciation alone could produce Christ's literal coming down from heaven. The biblical account in Luke's annunciation to Mary talks of the Holy Spirit overshadowing her (1:35). Mary's conception of Jesus itself gives us a literal image of God's descent. The many stories of Jesus that describe his encounter with the Gentiles (Mark 7:24-30, Luke 7:1-10, Matthew 9:18-26) are a descent into the inferiority of the lowly race. His engagements with the tax collectors and sinners (Luke 5:27-32, 7:36-50) are a descent into the experience of the religious outcast. By healing the lepers (Matthew 8:1-4, Luke 17:11-19), he descends into the experience of the separated, into the experience of being set apart and far from a community. These scenes of descent are nothing more than an encounter with what is human. It is through this descent that the

58 Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology,* 154.

dynamic of existence, that *from* to *for*, becomes concrete. The *Logos* in history is therefore embodying the *relatio*. His descent is nothing but pure *for*, a pure *relatio*. In the gospel narratives, despite the onlookers' blindness and misunderstanding, the *Logos* that became *sarx* has concretely transformed himself: the *logos* as spoken in words of preaching and the *sarx* as deeds of encounter.

These scenes of descent culminate and find their fullest expression on the Cross. For Ratzinger, the Cross is Christianity's point of departure, it is its birthplace.[59] In the Cross, the vulnerability of love descends. The *Logos* that has become the Christ is himself the salvation we have been talking about. We can say that the salvation that comes through history, as Ratzinger claims, takes the form of love. The scenes of descent we have enumerated above are taken for granted by the onlookers. They are expressive of that love already. A "death sentence of history,"[60] which is not supposed to be needed, makes itself necessary if only for love to be concretely encountered in sacrificial dying. Ratzinger describes the crucifixion as Jesus Christ's "coronation," and his kingship as a "surrender" of himself for the sake of the human being, and this act figures his word, his mission, and his existence.[61] Ratzinger surmises that in this self-surrender, "his existence is thus his word" and "he is word because he is love," a *person* "who is his word and his work," a *person* who is the meaning that sustains.[62] This is the salvation that comes through history, not simply a factual story that is merely recounted by witnesses. It is a story that chooses to reveal that salvific act for the other, an act that is pure *for*, an

59 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 205.

60 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 206.

61 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 206.

62 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 206.

act that defines *relatio*. In this context, it is this *relatio* that gives more meaning, and it is this *relatio* that sustains.

The *Logos* of Faith

The Church has always affirmed that faith is our response to God's revelation of himself. As the *Logos was made flesh*, the response in faith has been configured. While the Jews may have expected that the Messiah was to come, none from among the chosen race thought that the one who was supposed to save them would come from a lowly place. This reminds us of Nathanael's doubtful question, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Even by this experience, Israel was challenged by the *person* of Jesus Christ. The Christ in their minds was not the Jesus they saw and observed, challenging order and norms. Yet, faith is not about an idea of what should be. Faith, for Ratzinger, is that which "expresses the abandonment of oneself to what we can neither make nor need to make, to the ground of the world as meaning, which first of all discloses to [each one] the freedom to make."[63] This is the faith of their own Nicodemus (John 3:2), of Jairus (Mark 5:22-24), of a centurion (Luke 7: 6-8), to name a few. An invisible God who makes himself visible in the *Logos* has made the response in faith, that abandonment, easier. We acknowledge, though, that the human being is in the continuous journey of finding meaning, and along the way, the challenge in believing could be more heightened. Ratzinger is convinced of that one aspect of belief that should go with that journey: rationality.

We have considered above the *logos* as reason. For a reason to have a real utility, it must be directed to something. Ratzinger refers to this as *truth*. If the *Logos* who made his descent into the poverty of our humanity gives meaning, the *Logos* that

63 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 75.

we believe in must have that meaning."[64] The meaning we are referring to is the Truth[65] of the *Logos* to which we focus our reflection. Ratzinger centers his understanding of faith in the *Logos.* By this conviction, he writes: "Christian faith is word-oriented."[66] It is *word-oriented* because it is faith in the Word as person and faith in the word as reason. As *person*, "the confession of Jesus Christ as *Logos (Word)* means that in him God himself is revealed, the truth of all things."[67] As reason, the Christian faith is in search for the whole Truth for it "wants to free man from his apathy because it knows that he is a creature of God and an image of him who is the *Logos,* the Truth."[68] This is what Ratzinger is most convinced about: the abandonment in faith is not a "blind surrender to the irrational."[69] If belief becomes a plain abandonment that tolerates superstition and is comfortable with the absence of reason, it is not Christian faith.

Ratzinger proposes a movement in faith. He calls it a "movement toward the *logos*, the *ratio*."[70] We may doubt if reason's role is truly indispensable since faith is full of mystery, something that reason cannot arrive at an answer to. This cannot stand as a factual statement, though, because the use of reason does not endeavor to achieve all answers about any mystery. This particular goal is not the goal of faith that moves toward the *ratio*. Something mysterious does not necessarily constitute irrationality when left unanswered. Reason endeavors to arrive

64 Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology,* 337.

65 Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology,* 337.

66 Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology,* 338.

67 Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology,* 338.

68 Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology,* 340.

69 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 75.

70 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 75.

at the truth even if that truth is mysterious. When it cannot arrive at a complete answer, it does not mean that the quest for understanding is irrational. Ratzinger is right when he calls it a *movement towards the logos*, for a movement is a progressive action that does not promise certainty. It may or may not find the answer at the time being. More importantly, the movement directed towards the *logos,* the *ratio*, is, for Ratzinger, a movement towards the *truth*.[71] This understanding affirms what is human in one who believes, in one who responds in faith. No truthful believer achieves the search for the truth in a blink of an eye. Even if conviction is present already, the search for the truth does not end. This must be the ground of Ratzinger's contention that as faith moves towards *ratio*, it also moves towards meaning[72] because meaning is only found in truth, and ultimately in the Truth. The *Logos* of faith is therefore the Truth. This is the Truth that contradicts the modern demand of a *new man*, the new form of the golden calf.

But the reality of this movement would have to go back to the *Logos* himself. If the human response in faith is moving towards *ratio*, here understood as meaning in Truth, the human being should not forget that the Truth that is supposed to have been found has first found the seeker. Encounter is thus born, an "encounter with the man Jesus, and in this encounter [faith] experiences the meaning of the world as person."[73] This meaning only becomes present because of Jesus' "unconditional devotion to men," a devotion that assures the believer that this "meaning knows me and loves me, that I can entrust myself to it."[74] This encounter has a precedence and

71 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 75.

72 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 75.

73 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 79.

74 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 79-80.

a definition: *relatio.* It is this *Logos* who has found the believer first and foremost before the believer responds in faith. The desire to be in a *relatio* with the recipient called human being precedes the encounter, and the encounter that is born concretizes *relatio.* In this *relatio,* abandonment of oneself to the *Logos* of faith becomes real.

B. *Dialogos*

When we look for a direct translation of the Greek *dialogos*, the internet's ready answer is *dialogue*. Let us begin, then, with the simplicity of this translation. The term *dialogue* refers to a mode of communication that requires two or more individuals. In speech, an individual speaker who speaks alone, speaks with the self, without the presence of another, is called a monologue. If God were not Trinitarian, he would be in a constant monologue. He speaks, and he hears himself. Is this possible? In our imagination, it is. But not in our faith. The Church's Trinitarian belief confirms the centrality of *dialogos* in our faith. *Dialogos,* therefore, begins with the persons in the Trinity. How can we say this to be so? We have to go back to our basic understanding of God as basic as the translation of the Greek term into the language that we are using. We will not deal with the complexity of God's nature or any impersonal understanding; we turn to the most basic one: the God of love.

Ratzinger's contention on the transformation of the God of the philosophers to the God of faith begins with the Christian faith naming this transition and thus giving it a new meaning: from *thought* to *agape* (love).[75] Both thought and love are the content of *dialogos*. A thought that is not only thought but a thought transformed in love is what defines our faith.

75 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 143.

Ratzinger calls this *creative love.*[76] This is the *dialogos* itself. That creative love only makes so much sense in light of the *Logos* becoming *flesh*. With this, Ratzinger writes, the "transformation of the purely philosophical thinking" becomes clear: the God who is merely thought of before "has emotions as a man does, he rejoices, he seeks, he waits, he goes to meet."[77] God has therefore become personal. Since God becomes personal, his presence is felt, his love is experienced. The *logos* thus becomes *dialogos,* and faith becomes dialogical. The synthesis of the two is found in the Christian faith as faith in the *logos* (thought/*ratio* and love). Ratzinger can say that this *logos* "means nothing else than that creative thinking we found to be the precondition and ground of all being is truly conscious thinking," "that it knows not only itself but also its whole thought" and "that this thinking not only knows but loves; that it is creative because it is love."[78] This is how *dialogos* is understood.

With all this, we are led towards a definition of the God we believe in. The transition from the philosophers' understanding to the understanding of faith gives us a definitive interpretation that "the God of faith is [thus] basically defined by the category of relationship."[79] *Relatio* is what defines the *logos* that *was made flesh*. Ratzinger thus summarizes his theology: "The highest mode of Being includes the element of relationship... the supreme Being [that] no longer appears as absolute, enclosed autarchy but turns out to be at the same time involvement, creative power, which creates and bears and loves other things."[80] How does this Being show this *relatio?*

76 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 143.

77 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 145.

78 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 159.

79 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 147.

80 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 148.

Ratzinger quotes Friedrich Hölderlin's preface to his *Hyperion*: "Not to be encompassed by the greatest, but to let oneself be encompassed by the smallest – that is divine."[81] This is the creative love in concrete. This is how *dialogos* has come to be. *Dialogos* as a form of *relatio* and as itself *relatio,* that is *ratio* and *agape,* is embodied by the *Logos*.

C. *Logos-Dialogos* and the Human Person

Christ, the *Exemplary Man*

Ratzinger challenges us to dare exclaim: "Christian faith believes in Jesus of Nazareth as the exemplary man."[82] How are we supposed to interpret this? Ratzinger clarifies that in "overstep[ping] the bounds of humanity," Christ becomes this exemplary man and through it the transformation of humanity can take place, and the example is found in *relatio* "for man is the more himself the more he is with 'the other'."[83] Only in the context of being with the other can the human being find meaning. This is the meaning found also in the *Logos*. With the self-surrender of the *logos-en-sarx,* the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, what seems non-doable is made doable. The *Person* of the *Logos* is "moving away from himself"[84] to be in a *relatio* with the *other,* and this is what the exemplary man does. The human *person,* free to choose to be fully human, "only comes to himself by moving away from himself" and only "through the other and through being with the other does he come to himself."[85]

81 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 146.

82 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 234.

83 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 234.

84 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 234.

85 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 234.

The *Logos,* that is also *dialogos,* is the person of Jesus Christ. The Jesus Christ that we encounter in faith, in the most personal way in each of our own historical journeys, is the *person* we can become. This is the relationship made concrete in the descent and ascent. Christ is the category. He is the criterion. *Relatio* is not simply the capacity to relate with others; it is the likeness of God in us as *persons*. How is this likeness embodied? Let us go back to Christ: Christ is the *pure for* in existence, the one who descends into the poverty of our humanity, the one who has found us, and surrenders himself for us. *Relatio* in the *logos-dialogos* theology of Ratzinger is, therefore, nothing more than *self-communication*, in thought and in love, in *ratio* and in *agape*.

Christ, the *Last Man*

Ratzinger's Christ as the *last man* highlights the figure of Adam, both the *old Adam* and the *New Adam*. He writes: "If Jesus is the exemplary man, in whom the true figure of man, God's intention for him, comes fully to light, then he cannot be destined to be merely an absolute exception, a curiosity, in which God demonstrates to us what sorts of things are possible. His existence concerns all mankind."[86] The exemplary man is the New Adam. The *logos-en-sarx* in the New Adam, whose dynamics of existence concern everyone, is the figure that can help transform the mere human. What does this imply? "So," he contends, "if Jesus is called 'Adam,' this implies that he is intended to gather the whole creature 'Adam' in himself."[87]

The transformation brought by the incarnation of the *Logos* needs a response. The human *person* is a free person, and it is within this freedom that full human meaning is attained. The *dialogos* (self-communication) of the *Logos* has made possible the

86 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 236.

87 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 236.

unification of oneself with the divine. In Ratzinger's language, the human person as a creature had a "belonging to a 'super-I' that encompasses him" and could "bring out the form of the future man, in which humanity will achieve complete fulfillment of itself."[88] This is the ultimate goal of the incarnation. This is the ascent we are talking about. The human person as *relatio* in the *likeness* of Christ is headed towards experiencing self-fulfillment by being with the *other.* This kind of response is the response of the *super-I* that is already transformed, an *I* that is free from itself, an *I* that is not absorbed in self-preservation, and an *I* that experiences freedom as it is in itself.

When the human person attains this, faith is able to figure out the human being seen in the person of Jesus Christ.[89] This "Christ as the man to come is not man for himself but essentially man for others," and if this is so, the future human being is only expected from the dynamic of its *being for.*[90] This is "the man in whom perfect unity... and perfect individuality are one," in "whom humanity comes into contact with its future... makes contact with God himself, shares in him, and thus realizes its most intrinsic potential."[91] For Ratzinger, our faith in the *Logos* allows us to see the gathering together of humanity into the "one single Adam."[92] The incarnation of the *Logos,* which is itself *dialogos,* thus remains at the center of history. The Christ who is to come is understood within the Christ who is at the center of history. It is in this same Christ that the *future man* is also envisioned. This is the Christ of the

88 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christainity,* 239.

89 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 239.

90 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 240.

91 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 239.

92 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 239.

eschaton, the *last man*, who takes the center stage of history as the *Logos-Dialogos.*

The *Eschaton* and the Human *Person*

Ratzinger's Christology is not complete without the *eschaton*. We try to look into the eschatological dimension of the human *person*. The *Logos* that communicates himself as love, the *Logos* made love, whom we are called to emulate, also allows us to anticipate that which is to come. We should never forget that even the Christ who gave himself for us has experienced the normal human death. Ratzinger writes that "Christology reaches beyond the Cross, the moment when divine love is tangible, into the death, the silence and the eclipse of God."[93] It is through his death that love becomes even more visible, for it has attained the apex of its expression. It is that love that plunges itself into the abyss of emptiness. The reality of death awaits the human *person*. Death is to be anticipated, and it is something that the human being is certain about. So how does this *Logos-Dialogos* theology help us understand this one last reality of the human *person*?

The *Logos-en-Sarx* hangs on the Cross, and it is this image that not only symbolizes ultimate loving but also the struggle of the human *person*. In that Cross is the immediacy of death. In that Cross, death is imminent. We are convinced that the human *person* is a *relatio,* and it is the *Logos-Dialogos* dynamic of love that perfects this constitutive quality. Yet, the *Logos* that wants to show love on the Cross experiences what is contrary to a *person* in *relatio*. The Christ on the Cross and the Christ that is subsequently laid in the tomb takes for himself the loneliness of humanity. Ratzinger wonderfully describes the "innermost heart of his Passion" in these words: "not physical

93 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 297.

pain but radical loneliness, complete abandonment."[94] What does this tell us? Ratzinger contends that "what comes to light here is simply the abyss of loneliness of man in general, of man who is alone in his innermost being," and this, for him, is a "fundamental contradiction with the nature of man, who cannot exist alone."[95]

And so, the *Logos* who is in dialogue with the human being, who communicates himself to the human *person*, wills to descend into this final reality of humanity. Doing so forever changes the human understanding of death. Doing so forever alters the negative conception of dying. Doing so forever changes humanity's disposition. It is precisely in this descent that *dialogos* is felt, that *dialogos* proves to have never ceased. What does this mean? This final descent of the *Logos* means that humanity, even in death, is not alone. Christ continuously makes his presence felt within this reality of the human *person*. For Ratzinger, this fear of death is not "overcome by reason but only by the presence of someone who loves him (or her)."[96] He movingly describes Christ's presence in this finality: "Where no voice can reach us any longer, there is he. Hell is thereby overcome, or, to be more accurate, death, which was previously hell, is hell no longer. Neither is the same any longer because there is life in the midst of death, because love dwells in it."[97] The human *person*, even in death, is a recipient of Christ's love. The *Logos* still communicates himself as *Dialogos*. Fear of death is therefore extinguished for the fire of the *Logos*-made-love is what is to be anticipated in hope.

94 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 298.

95 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 298.

96 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 300.

97 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 301.

Finally, where death is imminent, the promise of the resurrection is imminent as well. The mortality of the human *person* is experienced by the *Logos*. It is this descent that completes the self-giving *dialogos*. The love which makes the descent possible is the same love that makes the ascent a reality. This ascent in the mystery of the resurrection speaks of immortality. Ratzinger wants to remind us that love is *that* same foundation of immortality, for "immortality proceeds from love alone."[98] The *Logos-Dialogos* cannot remain in the realm of mortality. The ascent fulfills the entire event, and that fulfillment makes possible the ascent of the human *person* as well. Through the *Logos*' descent, the world of sin and death is overcome. In his ascent, the human *person* is given assurance of a life that is everlasting.

Resurrection simply speaks of the reality of salvation. The *Logos*' descent and ascent is the movement of salvation. This salvation is itself found in the dynamic of the *dialogos* expressed fully in the love that Ratzinger describes as a "total exodus from himself, a going-out-from-himself toward the other."[99] This is also the definition of human existence. With this, Ratzinger gives us a complete picture of salvation: "a liberation from isolation into subjectivity."[100] This *faith in hope* is a "rejection of the individualization of man, the ordering of the 'I' to the 'we.'"[101] What is to be fully anticipated is nothing more than the ultimate *relatio,* a *relatio* that is a fulfillment in the vision of God, where truth is a *Person*, where love is a *Person*, and freedom is fulfilled. Ratzinger argues that "if it is true that at the end stands the triumph of spirit, that is the triumph

98 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 306.

99 Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology,* 189.

100 Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology,* 188.

101 Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology,* 187.

of truth, freedom, and love, then it is not just some force or other that finally ends up victorious; what stands at the end is a countenance," a countenance that is "the omega of the world," and that omega is a "you,"[102] and, the ultimate Omega, we would like to add, is God's *You*.

Conclusion

Our study always brings us back to the mystery of the incarnation. The *Logos* that existed from the beginning became flesh. With this creed of faith, we readily affirm that the *Logos* is the *Logos*-incarnate, and by the actual incarnation, the *Logos* is a person. By affirming that the *Logos* is a person, we consequently affirm its existence in time and space; therefore, the *Logos* is historical. Affirming both convictions allows us to preach this person in history as the *Logos* of faith. This, I believe, is the gamut of Joseph Ratzinger's theology. The search for the truth and for the Truth as God leads him to the person of Jesus Christ.

The quest to arrive at a comprehensive answer to the anthropological inquiries in theology leads us to the basic premise of reality: human existence. The underlying value of this seeking is found in the one who seeks — the human person. When the conviction of faith does not have a clear grasp of this reality, of personhood, and of humanity, the truth of human existence becomes relativized. This propels us to seek *that* truth of the human being. That truth is found in the constitutive element of this being's humanity: *person*. We have established that this *person* is an *imago Dei,* and it is in being an *imago Deo* that the human person is inherently relational. The human person only becomes a *person* because of his/her being an *imago Dei*. We are then led to the definition of *person* as *relatio*, a definition that is not accidental but, in itself, the substance of a person. The Trinitarian doctrine on *relatio* appears in the definition of the

102 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 322.

human person. This anthropological inquiry is not content with mere definitions. Why? Because of the mystery of the incarnation, the divine person who became flesh embraces the reality of the *anthropos*.

By consistently leading us back to the person of Jesus Christ, the truth of the *anthropos* becomes clearer. The *Logos* who became flesh does not remain within the plane of the *anthropos*. The *Logos*, who became flesh in love, becomes a *Dialogos* himself, the concrete *dialogos*, a *dialogos* that goes beyond speech, a *dialogos* that communicates his person. It is in this person as *relatio* that the being itself of the *Logos* is communicated. The human person's freedom to respond allows him/her to transform his/her being into a *logos-dialogos* patterned after that *Logos* who gives himself. *Dialogos,* therefore, is not simply a dialogue in speech so that communication is effected; it is a dialogue of one's being. The *Logos* as a person becomes the exemplar. To become that *logos-dialogos*, we have to go back to the person of the *Logos* of faith, the person of the *Logos* of history, who encounters us as a human being.

The *Logos-Dialogos* is a person we desire to become. The oneness in that person speaks of the *Logos* of faith and history, which finds fulfillment in the *Logos* as person, the person who was incarnate, who became human, who suffered with humanity, who died with humanity, but who passed over from death to life in the resurrection. The *You* of the *Logos* is the omega point that goes beyond time and space, of systems and structures. It is this *You* who loves and communicates in love, and who accepts the beloved as his own precisely as a beloved. As the theologian so convincingly preaches, "only the love that takes up the beloved in itself, into its own being, could make possible this existence in the other."[103]

103 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* 305.

BUDDHA'S *DHAMMAPADA* AND JESUS CHRIST'S PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS: EVIL, FREEDOM, AND DIVINE JUSTICE

Kevin Stephon R. Centeno, SJ

Problem of Evil?

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur accurately states that "both philosophy and theology encounter evil as a challenge unlike any other."[1] Debates and discussions have ensued in both disciplines to make sense of, if not solve, the paradox of evil. In the context of theistic religions, the existence of evil contradicts the nature of God as omnipresent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient. In the philosophical sphere, evil seems to lead humans to non-being, thereby existentially disturbing them. Whether one believes in God or not, evil remains a conundrum, an inexplicable force that finite humans are attempting to comprehend and get rid of. Ricoeur distinguishes between "evil as wrongdoing and evil as suffering."[2] Despite their interconnection, these "belong to two heterogeneous categories, that of blame and that of lament."[3] Free human beings are blamed whenever they commit moral evil, while the victim suffers, eliciting lament. In many instances, these two phenomena are intertwined, further complicating the problem of evil.[4] For example, someone who commits a grievous deed can be

1 Paul Ricoeur, "Evil, A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 249.

2 Ricoeur, "Evil," 250.

3 Ricoeur, "Evil," 250.

4 Ricoeur, "Evil," 250.

a victim of internal and external forces that pushed them to do so. Another case is a morally upright and innocent person who tragically suffers and dies, e.g., a random accident killing a baby. Humans are both guilty of causing evil and becoming victims of it.

According to the philosopher of religion John Hick, evil has three fundamental meanings: physical pain, mental suffering, and moral wickedness. For Hick, this is a better way to define evil than merely to contrast it immediately with God's good will.[5] Pain is experienced in the mind and body for a variety of reasons. One major and obvious reason is human moral wickedness, which leads individuals to inflict pain and suffering on other beings. Social ills such as poverty, war, persecution, abuse, and injustice, as well as individual crimes and misdeeds, derive from people's inhumanity and misuse of freedom. In addition, human pain and suffering stem from natural evils over which humans lack full control, such as natural disasters.[6] Weaving together Ricoeur's and Hick's ideas on evil, we can infer that evil is experienced in the world and is caused by forces beyond our control and by our irresponsible exercise of freedom. *This mystery of evil confronting us daily provokes lamentation, whether for God or for reality, and calls for justice.*

The so-called "problem of evil" is called, in philosophy of religion, "theodicy." Theodicy, coined by the philosopher and mathematician Gottfried Leibniz, is the attempt to reconcile the existence of an all-powerful and all-loving God with the existence of evil. Why does an omnipotent God allow both natural and moral evil to exist in the world? The problem is famously formulated as follows: "if God is perfectly loving,

5 John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion,* 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 39.

6 Hick, *Philosophy of Religion,* 39.

God must wish to abolish all evil; and if God is all-powerful, God must be able to abolish all evil. But evil exists; therefore God cannot be both omnipotent and perfectly loving."[7] The question that theodicy raises is operative in monotheistic religions. A classic example is the story of Job found in the Old Testament of the Holy Bible. Job protests his innocence in the face of suffering and evil he is experiencing before God and his friends. At the end of the narrative, he bowed down before the divine majesty of God and his designs, which he cannot fully comprehend with his limited mind.[8]

How about in non-theistic philosophical systems, such as Buddhism, is theodicy applicable? If God is eliminated from the bigger picture, will the problem of evil cease? Interestingly, in the context of Buddhism, Amber Carpenter argues "that the Buddhists, on the whole, did not have the problem of evil and, in particular, they often did not use the doctrine of karma to justify suffering or render it explicable and tolerable to reason."[9] Karma, which will be elaborated later, basically means that every intentional, good or bad, action has consequences in this life and in future lives. The doctrine of karma is misconstrued as the complete solution to the problem of evil in Buddhism. It is not intended to serve as a rational justification for all forms of evil. However, this does not mean that Buddhism takes suffering and evil for granted. On the contrary, it accepts as a fundamental truth the reality of suffering, impermanence, and

---

7 Hick, *Philosophy of Religion,* 39-40.

8 Gustavo Gutierrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).

9 Amber Carpenter, *"Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People? 'And None of Us Deserving the Cruelty or the Grace:' Buddhism and the Problem of Evil,"* in Philosophy's Big Questions: Comparing Buddhist and Western Approaches, edited by Steven Emmanuel (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 167.

dissatisfaction as taught by the First Noble Truth on *dukkha*.[10] Walpola Rahula describes Buddhism as "neither pessimistic nor optimistic. If anything, it is realistic, for it takes a realistic view of life and the world. It looks at things objectively."[11] But Buddhism doesn't resort to blame and lament since evil and suffering are part of *paticca-samuppada* or interdependent origination – the important Buddhist teaching that nothing is independent; every phenomenon is interrelated.[12]

Moving away from speculation about the origin of evil and attempts to explain it rationally, Buddhism and Christianity share the understanding that moral evil has corresponding negative consequences here on earth and beyond. In other words, both systems believe in justice within a moral universe. This paper aims to engage in a Buddhist-Christian dialogue on moral evil and divine justice despite their stark differences. Perhaps in the domain of moral responsibility, the two belief systems can find common ground and enrich one another. The two primary texts that will be interpreted in this paper are *Dhammapada* chapter 9 (*Pāpa-vagga*)[13] and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).[14] The paper will argue,

10 "The term *dukkha* as the First Noble Truth, which represents the Buddha's view of life and the world, has a deeper philosophical meaning and connotes enormously wider senses. It is admitted that the term dukkha in the First Noble Truth contains, quite obviously, the ordinary meaning of 'suffering', but in addition it also includes deeper ideas such as 'imperfection,' 'impermanence,' 'emptiness,' 'insubstantiality.'" Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, rev. ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1974), 17.

11 Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 17.

12 Carpenter, *Buddhism and the Problem of Evil*, 189-190.

13 All verse citations from the *Dhammapada* will come from *The Dhammapada, trans.* by Gils Fronsdal (Boston & London: Shambala, 2005) abbreviated as *Dhp.*

14 All verse citations from the Holy Bible will come from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version 5th edition.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

toward the end, that karmic justice and Christian divine justice lead to a spirituality of responsible freedom.

Buddhist Karma, Moral Evil, and Justice (*Dhammapada* chapter 9)

The *Dhammapada*, a collection of the Buddha's teachings, is considered a sacred text of early Buddhism. Etymologically, *Dhammapada* is a combination of two Pali words: *dhamma* and *pada*. *Dhamma* is a rich word that can mean "truth," "law," "virtue," and "teaching," while *pada* can mean either "foot or "way." Therefore, *Dhammapada* can be translated as "The Way of Truth," reflecting its ethical dimension.[15] Primarily, the teachings of the Buddha in the Dhammapada constitute a path to liberation, or a spirituality, albeit nontheistic. The two main goals emphasized in the *Dhammapada* are attaining happiness and well-being in the present and the future, and attaining spiritual liberation – liberation from the cycle of *samsara* or rebirth or *nirvana*, the indescribable experience of total bliss and peace.[16] In living out the Buddha's moral teachings to attain enlightenment, the individual doesn't rely on the Buddha's intervention or divine assistance, for the Buddha serves as a model to imitate. Buddhist ethics reinforces individual moral empowerment: "Oneself, indeed, is one's own protector. One does, indeed, [make] one's own destiny." (Dhp. 380) In terms

15 *Dhammapada: The Way of Truth*, trans. and comm. by Peter Feldmeier (Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2013), viii. Gil Fronsdal says that the title *Dhammapada* is difficult to translate because of its multiple meanings. "If we translate the title based on how the term dhammapada is used in the verses, it should probably be translated 'Sayings of the Dharma,' 'Verses of the Dharma,' or 'Teachings of the Dharma.' However, if we construe pada as 'path,' as in verse 21 (where amatapada is translated 'the path to the Deathless'), the title could be 'The Path of the Dharma.' Ultimately, as many translators clearly concur, it may be best not to translate the title at all." *The Dhammapada*, xiv.

16 D*hammapada*, xix-xxii.

of moral evil, we carry the same responsibility: "Evil is done by oneself alone; by oneself is one defiled. Evil is avoided by oneself; by oneself alone is one purified. Purity and impurity depend on oneself; no one can purify another." (Dhp. 165)

The ninth chapter of the *Dhammapada* is titled *Pāpa-vagga*, or "Evil" (verses 116-128). Although the Buddha's teachings on evil are scattered throughout the text, this chapter is distinctive for its powerful emphasis on the connection between moral evil and justice. The original Pali word for evil, "*pāpa,*" means "a violation of the universe's moral fabric, a violation of Dhamma."[17] What is presupposed here is the existence of a moral universe. In a moral universe, human actions, both good and bad, have consequences in contrast to an amoral universe devoid of a moral compass. The opening line of this chapter encapsulates Buddha's significant teaching on the role of the mind in ethical living: "Be quick to do good, restrain your mind from evil. When one is slow to make merit, one's mind delights in evil." (Dhp. 116) According to Stephen Laumakis, "the single most important or most basic insight of the historical Buddha is the claim that who we are and what we think exists is a function of our mind and its cognitive powers. In other words, it is our mind and our use of it that determine how we see and understand ourselves, the world, and other things."[18] In another *Dhammapada* verse, the purification of the mind along with doing good or skillful deeds is given importance: "Doing no evil, engaging in what's skillful, and purifying one's mind: This is the teaching of the buddhas." (Dhp. 183) Buddhism is not solely a black-and-white morality of doing good and avoiding evil in obedience to precepts, for it prioritizes cultivating right

17 Feldmeier, *Dhammapada*, 50.

18 Stephen Laumakis, *An Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy 2nd ed.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 41.

view, which takes precedence in the Eightfold Path.[19] Hence, the *Dhammapada*'s very first verse is all about the all-encompassing function of the mind: "All experience is preceded by mind, led by mind, made by mind. Speak or act with a corrupted mind, and suffering follows as the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox." (Dhp. 1)

A foundational concept in Buddhism elucidated in this chapter on evil is the law of karma (*kamma* in Pali). Generally, *karma*, meaning "action" in Sanskrit, is an essential ethical concept in Indian philosophy, though it has varied meanings. Buddhism particularly understands karma as mental in nature, though not limited to it, because the emphasis is on the volitional impulse or intention underlying the action: "It is volition (*cetanā*), O monks, that I call karma; willing, one acts through body, speech or mind," teaches Buddha.[20] Karma is intentional action. Actions done unintentionally do not bear karmic results, for example, accidentally stepping on a bug. Karmic actions have intrinsic consequences depending on their ethical qualities. "*Puñña*," in the Pali language, refers to meritorious actions, while the opposite, "*apuñña,*" refers to harmful actions.[21] This principle of karmic fruitfulness and how merits are accumulated is clearly stated in the *Dhammapada*: "Having done something evil, don't repeat it, don't wish for it: evil piled up brings suffering. Having done something meritorious, repeat it, wish for it: merit piled up brings happiness." (Dhp. 117-118) Karma is often compared

19 "In Buddhism, 'right view' is seen as the foundation of moral and spiritual development." Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values, and Issues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 11.

20 Peter Harvey, "*Karma*," in The Oxford Handbook of Buddhist Ethics, edited by Daniel Cozort and James Mark Shields (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 8.

21 Harvey, *Karma*, 13-14.

to a seed. As a seed grows into a plant or a tree, it will soon bear fruit. The process is similar to what the apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians: "...you reap whatever you sow." (Galatians 6:7)[22] Karma cannot be completely understood and appreciated without the Buddhist belief in rebirth. Our present and next life is subjected to the cycle of rebirth, and the process of undergoing good and bad rebirths is determined by one's accumulated karma.[23] The Buddha describes rebirth in the *Dhammapada* as follows: "Some are reborn in a womb; evildoers are reborn in hell. People of good conduct go to heaven; those without toxins are fully released in Nirvana." (Dhp. 126) The cycle of rebirth ends with the perfect state of nirvana, the *summum bonum* of Buddhism, where there is no more birth, death, or suffering. It must be noted that a good rebirth does not automatically entail nirvana. The heavenly spheres in Buddhist cosmology are still conditioned, meaning that suffering and death are possible; nirvana lies beyond suffering and rebirth. Not all *kusala*[24] (wholesome actions) lead to nirvana; only wholesome actions free from hatred, greed, and delusion.[25]

The law of karma is not identical to our usual religious understanding of "reward and punishment" meted out by a Supreme Being. Strictly speaking, the law of karma is not

22 Peter Harvey, *Buddhism and Monotheism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 8.

23 Harvey, *Buddhism and Monotheism*, 8.

24 *Kusala* (Pali for "skillful") refers to wholesome action. *Kusala* is informed by wisdom and brings goodness towards the self and others. The opposite is *akusala* which is unwholesome actions. Actions devoid of hatred, greed, and delusion are *kusala*. While *kusala* and *puñña* are somehow synonymous and closely intertwined, the latter focuses on the merits or karmic fruits than the positive quality of the action. Harvey, *Karma*, 11-12.

25 Harvey, *Karma*, 26.

a divine law decreed by God or by an external force.[26] First, Buddhism is not a theistic religion. The Great Brahmā in Buddhism is not a Creator God. Ironically, he mistook himself for one according to the Buddha's story.[27] If this is the case, what ensures justice in the Buddhist worldview? The law of karma may be better compared to the law of physics or natural law. The good and bad consequences of one's karmic action naturally arise from the action itself.[28] Simply put, "there are no evil consequences for one who does no evil." (Dhp. 124) Karma is the "force at work which can satisfy our demand for moral justice,"[29] explains Bhikku Bodhi. The law of karma is inexorable. Bodhi further explains that it "ensures that our morally-determinate actions do not disappear into nothingness, but rather continue as traces in the deep hidden layers of the mind, where they function in such a way that our good deeds eventually issue in happiness and success, our evil deeds in suffering and misery."[30] Humans cannot escape the law of karma: "You will not find a spot in the world – not in the sky, not in the ocean, not inside a mountain cave – where you will be free from your evil karma." (Dhp. 127) Going back to the seed analogy, the effects of karma mature over time, in the present, in the next rebirth, and in possible future rebirths. Karmic fruit ripens unpredictably, but in a just manner.[31] "When the evil has matured, the evildoer will meet with misfortune... But when the good has matured, the doer of good will meet

26 Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 32. Not every evil experience is directly caused by karma. Buddha does not deny natural evil and other factors outside the law of karma which can inflict evil.

27 Harvey, *Buddhism and Monotheism*, 26.

28 Harvey, *Buddhist Ethics*, 16.

29 Bhikku Bodhi, *The Living Message of the Dhammapada* (Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1993), 12.

30 Bodhi, *Dhammapada*, 12-13.

31 Feldmeier, *Dhammapada*, 53.

with good fortune." (Dhp. 119-120) Faithful to the spirit of the *Dhammapada*, the law of karma stresses personal responsibility. Buddhist ethics, as demonstrated in the law of karma, is not fatalistic or deterministic. Human freedom and action are extremely important. Karma governs the effects of our good or bad intentional actions. Humans shape their destiny, personality, and social environment through their actions. Past karma doesn't control present karma; freedom of choice allows humans to overcome their present condition.[32] Karma and moral justice are inseparable and strengthen each other.

Christian Ethics, Moral Evil, and Justice (Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus)

Jesus of Nazareth is the central figure of Christianity. Catholics and other Christian denominations believe that Jesus Christ is fully human and fully divine – both human and God, unlike Buddha.[33] Jesus is the revelation of God's love. Christians do not merely believe in an abstract and invisible God; to know Jesus Christ is to know God. In the faith proclamation "Jesus is God," "the known term shedding light on the other is Jesus, his history, and his activity."[34] Bible scholars and theologians distinguish between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. The former refers to the earthly Jesus, who walked on earth and preached the Reign of God, and the latter refers to the risen, exalted Christ, the Son of God, worshipped by Christians.

32 Harvey, *Buddhist Ethics*, 23.

33 In the dogmatic proclamation of the Council of Chalcedon which is essential in Christian doctrine, Jesus is "truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and a body; consubstantial with the Father as regards his divinity, and the same consubstantial with us as regards his humanity, like us in all things but sin." Thomas Rausch, *I Believe in God: A Reflection on the Apostle's Creed* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 72.

34 Juan Luis Segundo, *The Christ of the Ignatian Exercises* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 24.

Our primary access to the mystery of Jesus Christ is the Sacred Scriptures, most especially the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which record the words and deeds of Jesus. The Gospels are not read and studied as mere historical documents, for they belong to the community of faith, the Church, authorized to interpret their message. Hence, the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith are complementary criteria in identifying the real Jesus.[35]

At the heart of the life and mission of Jesus Christ is the Reign of God. Jesus began his ministry in Galilee, proclaiming the Good News, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." (Mark 1:15) The word "reign" is now preferred over "kingdom" to avoid misinterpreting the Reign of God as purely geographical, similar to monarchies on earth. The Reign of God is God's will as revealed in the teaching and action of Jesus Christ in the Gospels. Jesus embodied the values of the Reign of God by healing the sick, siding with the poor and the oppressed, communing with sinners and the marginalized, and teaching through parables and discourses. The Reign of God concerns human flourishing.[36] Jesus himself, according to the Church Father Origen, is *auto-Basileia*, the Reign of God in person.[37] Christian ethics is based on the values of the Reign of God exemplified by Jesus. Following Jesus entails reenacting his wondrous deeds in history. Lest Christians reduce the Reign of God to a project of humanity, they must be aware of the nature of the Reign as God's gift. Christianity, as a theistic religion, acknowledges

35 Christology, the study of Christ, is dialectical. Thomas Rausch, *Who is Jesus? An Introduction to Christology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 7-8.

36 Roger Haight, *The Future of Christology* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 137.

37 John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 220.

that God is the guarantor of moral order. Therefore, the Reign of God is both divine and human. Gerhard Lohfink says, "where the reign of God grows, it is entirely God's work and at the same time altogether human work."[38] God acts through our human freedom. Christians participate in making present the Reign of God, and this "can only happen when we let God act, when we are entirely transparent to what God wants to do through us."[39] This is why Christians pray the prayer taught by Jesus: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (Luke 6:10) God's divine grace is needed, since human efforts are insufficient.

Moral evil is any action in opposition to the Reign of God, what Jon Sobrino calls the forces of "anti-Kingdom" or "anti-Reign."[40] Whenever human dignity is violated, the rights of the poor are trampled, and different types of people are marginalized from society, the anti-Reign is at work. Human freedom is capable of going against God's will. In the face of the pervasiveness of moral evil, is there divine justice somewhere out there? As mentioned, Jesus taught using parables. Living in a narrative culture, Jesus valued and used the power of stories to shock his listeners, disclose new possibilities in life, offer a new vision beyond the conventional, and convey God's saving action.[41] One of these parables, which explicitly speaks of divine justice, is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in

38 Gerhard Lohfink, "*The Biology of the Reign of God*," in Between Heaven and Earth: New Explorations of Great Biblical Texts (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2022), 306.

39 Lohfink, "*The Biology of the Reign of God,*" 306.

40 The conflict between Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the anti-Kingdom is a major theme in Jon Sobrino's book *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

41 Edward Schillebeeckx, *"Jesus' Story of God,"* in God Among Us: The Gospel Proclaimed (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 28-29.

Luke 16:19-31. In the parable, the rich man lived a luxurious life, neglecting the poor Lazarus who suffered near his gate. After their deaths, a great reversal occurred: the rich man went to the netherworld and was tormented, whereas Lazarus was consoled in the presence of Abraham. For Roger Haight, the parable points out that "our universe and our world share a just moral structure. Punishment awaits those who fail to listen and to act according to the responsibilities of the covenant that, in Jesus's presentation, the rule of God symbolizes. An ultimate destiny of comfort and fulfillment awaits those whose lives seem meaningless because they are consumed by suffering."[42] In other words, divine justice is not an illusion. In the imagery of Pope Benedict XVI, "Evildoers, in the end, do not sit at table at the eternal banquet beside their victims without distinction, as though nothing had happened."[43] The eternal torment of the rich man in hell was a consequence of his indifference and failure to live in accordance with the values of the Reign of God. The parable aims to shock its listeners by showing how seriously God takes human freedom and personal responsibility. Human destiny is not predetermined; God empowers humans to create the world with history guided by God's Reign.[44]

In Christian eschatology, the theological study of last things, hell awaits those who have died and lived morally evil lives on earth, leading to their separation from God. Hell is the negation of heaven – eternal communion with God and the saints. Thus, hell is the state of being cut off from all life-giving

42 Roger Haight, *Faith and Evolution: A Grace-Filled Naturalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019), 172.

43 Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html.

44 Haight, *Faith and Evolution*, 172-173.

and loving relationships.[45] The New Testament vividly imagines hell as a place of unquenchable fire (Mark 9:43), a pit into which the wicked are cast (Matt 5:29; Mark 9:45), and a "pool of fire" for the excluded from the book of life, thus facing a "second death" (Rev 20:14-15). Hell is also the opposite of the Reign of God, where sinners have no share and are punished with everlasting destruction. (2 Thess 1:9; 1 Cor 6:10; Gal 5:19-21) The metaphorical and graphic images of hell are not meant to be interpreted literally; hell is a state, not a place located in our world.[46] Returning to the theodicy question, how to reconcile an all-loving God proclaimed by Jesus Christ with the reality of hell? Is God punishing? No, hell must not be understood as "a product of divine vindictiveness. Rather, it is God's yielding to our freedom. To reject God is to reject life in community. Conversely, it is to choose life in isolation. Hell is absolute isolation. The radical sinner chooses that. God does not impose it as a punishment."[47] Hell is a testament to the God of love respecting and valuing human freedom. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is a parable of divine justice; the victimizers will not triumph over the victims.[48] The Reign of God "entails a moral universe despite all the evidence to the

45 Peter Phan, *Living Into Death, Dying Into Life: A Christian Theology of Death and Life Eternal* (Florida: Lectio Publishing, 2014), 89.

46 Thomas Rausch, *Eschatology, Liturgy, and Christology: Toward Recovering an Eschatological Imagination* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 107-108.

47 Richard McBrien, *Catholicism: New Edition* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 1176.

48 "A world history in which the murderers triumph over their innocent victims, in which the ruthless are justified and the betrayed remain so forever would be absurd in the extreme," says Gerhard Lohfink. *Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted, Who He Was* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 163.

contrary," and it is no other than God "who guarantees justice in the end."[49]

A Buddhist and Christian Spirituality of Responsible Freedom

A quick survey of Buddhist and Christian perspectives on moral evil and justice reveals significant differences between the two belief systems. The greatest gap between Buddhism and Christianity is the question of God. Buddhism is non-theistic, while Christianity is theistic. Postulating the existence of a personal God, who is all-powerful and all-loving, affects the entire body of teachings and doctrines of a particular religion or philosophy. Buddhism does not need to problematize reconciling God with evil, unlike Christianity, which necessitates theodicy. Moral justice in the Buddhist sense is intrinsically tied to the law of karma, operating naturally without recourse to a divine law-giver, while justice in the Christian sense is divine justice – God, as the source of goodness, ensures moral justice. In Christianity, the afterlife is linear and permanent: judgment occurs immediately after death, whereas in Buddhism, human life is cyclical, with multiple rebirths until Nirvana ends the cycle.

In the two sacred texts compared, a notable difference lies in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus's emphasis on the sin of omission. Clearly, there is no evidence in the parable that the rich man directly caused the miserable situation of Lazarus. The sin of the rich man is called in the Christian tradition the sin of omission. He knew Lazarus personally, yet neglected to uplift his social condition by providing any help.[50] His moral indifference damned him. For the Jesuit moral theologian

49 Haight, *Faith and Evolution,* 175.

50 Amy-Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014), 272.

James Keenan, this parable captures the dimension of sin as the "failure to bother to love."[51] In Christian ethics, it is not enough to avoid committing evil; one must practice compassionate love, especially for the poor and marginalized. Although there is no explicit articulation of the sin of omission in Buddhist ethics, its karmic ethics can be further deepened by treating intentional inaction as resulting in bad karma. Intentionally neglecting the needy out of hatred, greed, or delusion can fall under the category of *akusala*, or unwholesome, action.

Notwithstanding the seemingly irreconcilable beliefs between Buddhism and Christianity, they have great potential to converge on ethical issues, particularly regarding human freedom and responsibility. Both karmic ethics and God as ultimate reality assure humans that they live in a moral universe. Human freedom entails responsibility. Buddha never interferes in one's free choice, and the Creator God empowers with grace. Authentic freedom means every action has consequences; it comes with a cost, for it can be either creative or destructive. Even if evil looks victorious over goodness in this world, a time of reckoning is inevitable. For the *Dhammapada* and Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus, "the ultimate resolution of the inequities of suffering is eschatological: good and evil will bring reward and punishment, respectively, whether in this lifetime or in a future form of existence."[52] A futuristic conception of justice doesn't erase the present. Rather, eschatological justice correlates with a spirituality of responsible freedom. Buddhist and Christian spirituality don't promote passivity. Living a spirituality of responsible freedom

51 James Keenan, *Moral Wisdom: Lessons and Texts from the Catholic Tradition 2nd ed.* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 55.

52 Leo Lefebure and Peter Feldmeier, *The Path of Wisdom: A Christian Commentary on the Dhammapada* (Belgium: Peeters Publishers, 2011), 142.

for Buddha and Jesus requires overcoming self-centeredness or egocentricity, a source of moral evil, to prevent one from instrumentalizing others for personal gain.[53]

The Indian theologian Felix Wilfred[54] observes that inter-religious dialogue (and by extension comparative theology) is more focused on debates over revelation, the absoluteness of truth, moral imperatives, universality, and related topics than on the shared mission of all religions. He proposes that the converging point of the mission of diverse religions must be the future of the earth, the well-being of humans, and creation. Dialogue among religions should be oriented towards the flourishing and integral salvation of all: "The crisis humankind faces today has made us all aware of the need to pursue a joint mission by all believers. It is the mission of salvation, namely, making everything whole, integral, and sane. It is a call to a mission to re-establish broken relationships and disharmony within the human community and the relationship of humans with nature."[55] The mission of salvation encompasses ethics and spirituality, and this paper's attempt to analytically compare Buddhism and Christianity on evil, freedom, and divine justice was undertaken in this spirit. After the significant interreligious event held in Thailand from November 13-16, 2023, titled "The Seventh Buddhist-Christian Colloquium" with the

53 Paul Knitter and Roger Haight, *Jesus and Buddha: Friends in Conversation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 132.

54 Sadly, Felix Wilfred, an Asian theological giant, passed away on January 7, 2025. The author deeply admires his prodigious theological output on Asian theology and commitment to the liberation of the victims of oppressive socio-political and cultural systems. The author dedicates this paper in his memory. For a short tribute from a Jesuit theologian see Jojo Fung, "Felix Wilfred: A Globally Esteemed Theologian From Asia," *Asia Pacific Mission Studies* 7, no. 1 (2025): 152-154. https://doi.org/10.13185/2704-3339.1103.

55 Felix Wilfred, *For a Socially Engaged Faith* (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2024), 47.

theme "Karunā and Agape in Dialogue for Healing a Wounded Humanity and the Earth," organized by The Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Mahamakut Buddhist University, Chinese Buddhist Order of Sangha in Thailand, Wat Phra Chetuphon, the Sirivadhanabhakdi Foundation, and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand, a final statement was released by the Dicastery affirming the relevance of the ethical teachings of the Buddha and Jesus Christ in our world today:

> Yet, in these troubled times, we refuse to give in to despair, for we strongly believe that in the midst of dark clouds, those who are deeply rooted in their respective religious traditions and willing to work together with everyone can bring a ray of hope to a desperate humanity. As Buddhists and Christians, we see the Buddha and Jesus as Great Healers. The Buddha pointed to greed and Jesus to sin as the cause of suffering. On many levels, Jesus and the Buddha proposed love and compassion as medicine to drive out the darkness in the human heart and the world. Nourished by their respective spiritual teachings, Buddhists and Christians, for thousands of years, have adopted compassionate ways of living to address the suffering of life.[56]

56 *Final Declaration of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue at the End of the VII Buddhist-Christian Conference,* 13-16 November 2023, https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2023/11/16/0801/01752.html.

THE EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN'S DIGNITY IN THE ANGOLAN SYNODAL CHURCH: A PASTORAL CRITICAL RE-READING OF *MULIERIS DIGNITATEM* FROM ANGOLAN COSMOLOGY

José Abílio Praia, SJ

Introduction

In Angolan cultural cosmology, womanhood is understood not primarily through abstraction or function, but through life-giving presence, moral authority, and relational responsibility. Across many Angolan communities, women—particularly mothers—are traditionally revered as bearers of life, guardians of memory, and mediators of social cohesion. Motherhood is valued not only for biological fertility but for its ethical and communal significance: women transmit values, sustain families through hardship, and embody resilience amid social instability. This cultural reverence situates women at the heart of communal survival and identity.[1]

Yet this affirmation of women's life-giving role coexists with a persistent and painful contradiction. In both society and the Church, Angolan women continue to experience structural marginalization, economic precarity, gender-based violence, and limited participation in decision-making processes.[2] Patriarchy, reinforced by cultural expectations and ecclesial

1 Teresia Mbari Hinga, *African, Christian, Feminist: The Enduring Search for What Matters* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 45–52.

2 Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 12–18.

practices, often transforms reverence into control and honor into silence. As a result, women's dignity is frequently celebrated symbolically while being undermined concretely in daily life. This paradox—between cultural affirmation and lived suffering—demands a theological response that is at once critical, pastoral, and liberative.

It is within this tension that this article undertakes a pastoral and feminist ecclesial re-reading of *Mulieris Dignitatem*. Rather than approaching the apostolic letter as a closed magisterial synthesis, the study treats it as a theological text whose meaning unfolds through contextual reception. When read through Angolan cultural values that honor women as sources of life and continuity, *Mulieris Dignitatem* offers genuine theological resources for affirming women's equal dignity, grounded in Christology, Trinitarian anthropology, and relationality.[3] At the same time, an honest engagement with women's lived experiences exposes unresolved tensions within the text, including essentialist constructions of sexual difference, insufficient attention to structural injustice, and Marian interpretations that risk spiritualizing suffering and legitimizing asymmetrical power.[4]

Situated within Angola's postcolonial and ecclesial context, this article also responds to the Church's current Synodal journey, which calls for a renewed culture of listening, participation, and shared discernment. The Synod on Synodality has explicitly recognized the exclusion of women from decision-making as a wound to ecclesial credibility and a contradiction of baptismal equality. However, in the Angolan Church,

3 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988), nos. 6–7, 18.

4 Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, ed., *Feminist Catholic Theological Ethics: Conversations in the World Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 89–97.

the reception of Synodality remains fragile. Clericalism, patriarchal norms, and selective pastoral interpretations continue to marginalize women's voices in ministry, leadership, and theological reflection.[5]

Angolan Cultural Cosmology on Women's Value, Identity, and Dignity

Angolan cultural cosmology, rooted in the lived memory and practices of diverse ethnic communities, holds women as relational agents of life, moral continuity, and communal sustenance. Before colonial disruption, women in many central African contexts — including regions that today constitute Angola — occupied roles not reducible to biological reproduction alone, but also extended to spiritual mediation, political strategy, and social cohesion. Indigenous conceptions of personhood in Central African and Ovimbundu traditional societies often articulate women's dignity in terms of their relational contributions to the community's flourishing rather than in terms of autonomous individualism. Such cosmologies regard life-giving bodies, moral labor, and communal nurturing as essential to the survival and identity of the people.[6]

In Angolan traditional societies, the figure of the woman and mother is endowed with moral authority, functioning as a custodian of intergenerational knowledge and social memory. This cultural valuation persists in proverbs, ritual practices, and social roles, in which women are accorded honor for sustaining families, mediating conflict, and transmitting values across generations. Even within patriarchal structures,

---

5 General Secretariat of the Synod, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission—Synthesis Report* (Vatican City, 2023), 9–11, 46–48.

6 Teresia Mbari Hinga, *African, Christian, Feminist: The Enduring Search for What Matters* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 45–52.

cultural rituals often require women's participation for legitimacy and continuity, signaling an enduring cultural respect for women's relational dignity.[7]

However, the prevailing colonial and postcolonial patriarchy has reduced these indigenous appraisals into forms of symbolic reverence that mask structural inequity. Decades of war, legal constraints, and socio-economic transformation have deeply challenged women's full participation in public and ecclesial life. Angolan women suffered disproportionately during the thirty-year civil war, as civilians but in roles as leaders, peacemakers, and agents of reconstruction, whose contributions have often been not only minimized or rendered invisible in dominant historical narratives.[8]

In contemporary Angola, despite constitutional provisions for equality, women continue to face systemic marginalization in decision-making, governance, and economic empowerment. National data and policy reviews highlight how inequalities in education, employment, and political representation persist, revealing a disconnect between cultural affirmations of women's moral value and their actual dignity in social structures.[9]

Feminist theological voices in the African context — particularly those emerging from the Circle of Concerned

7 Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 12–18; The historical evaluation of women's roles in pre-colonial African communities and dignity in Louise du Toit, "African Conceptions of Human Dignity and Violence Against Women in South Africa," in *Human Dignity in an African Context,* ed. Motsamai Molefe and Christopher Allsobrook (Cham: Springer, 2023), 155–185.

8 Henda Ducados, "Angolan Women in the Aftermath of Conflict," *Conciliation Resources Report*, 2024, http://www.c-r.org (Accessed on 10 December 2025).

9 United Nations, *Angolan Women Require Special Attention in Effort to Achieve Equality* (UN Press Release, 2004), 1–3.

African Women Theologians — offer vital tools for reengaging this cosmology within Christian theology. Founded to address the absence of women in theological leadership and to reclaim African cultural resources, the Circle argues for a theology that accounts for women's experiences of both oppression and empowerment.[10] Their work challenges the Church and society to move beyond token acknowledgment of women's value toward structural transformation that honors women as full subjects of faith, discernment, and mission.

Angolan Catholic leaders echo this call. Recent pastoral statements by the Association for the Promotion of Women in the Catholic Church in Angola (*PROMAICA*) emphasize women's crucial role in transmitting faith, catechesis, and community leadership, suggesting a theological anthropology that centers women's agency rather than subsumes it under patriarchal norms.[11]

Thus, the cosmological foundation of women's dignity in Angola — grounded in communal life, life-giving labor, and moral agency — becomes a critical resource for theological reflection. It challenges the Church to reconcile symbolic honor with lived equality, affirming women's identity and dignity in both cultural and ecclesial spheres.

Mulieris Dignitatem in Angolan Feminist Reception

Mulieris Dignitatem affirms the ontological dignity of women as *imago Dei* and emphasizes the relational anthropology

10 "Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circle_of_Concerned_African_Women_Theologians (Accessed on 10 December 2025).

11 Julieta Araújo, "Catholic Women Leader in Angola Highlights Women's Mission, Role in Church and Society as 'Crucial,'" *ACI Africa* (March 16, 2025), https://www.aciafrica.org/news/14703/catholic-women-leader-in-angola-highlights-womens-mission-role-in-church-and-society-as-crucial (Accessed on 10 December 2025).

of mutuality between women and men.[12] However, African feminist theologians have rightly questioned the document's tendency toward symbolic exaltation without structural critique. Mercy Amba Oduyoye argues that theological discourses that praise women's "genius" while leaving intact patriarchal power relations risk becoming "spiritualized captivity."[13]

In the Angolan context, this critique acquires acute relevance. Women are exalted rhetorically as mothers of the nation, custodians of morality, and bearers of life, yet they remain disproportionately affected by poverty, domestic violence, limited access to theological education, and exclusion from ecclesial decision-making.[14] A feminist hermeneutic must therefore interrogate how Marian symbolism and maternal metaphors—central to *Mulieris Dignitatem*—are received and operationalized within Angolan Catholic culture.

Musa Dube's postcolonial feminist hermeneutics offers a crucial corrective here. She insists that texts must be read with attention to empire, silence, and survival, particularly in African contexts shaped by conquest and extraction.[15] Reading *Mulieris Dignitatem* through Angolan women's experiences of war, displacement, and economic precarity reveals both its theological promise and its limitations.

---

12 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988), no. 6.

13 Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 34–36.

14 Isabel Apawo Phiri, "African Women's Theologies in the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 150 (2014): 5–7.

15 Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 112–118.

Angolan Cultural Horizons and the Silencing of Women's Knowledge

One of the most urgent tasks of feminist theology in Angola is the recovery of women's epistemic authority. Angolan poet and cultural thinker Ana Paula Tavares has shown how women's voices were systematically excluded from the official narratives of nationhood, even as they sustained communal memory and resistance through oral traditions, ritual practices, and everyday labor.[16] While not writing as a theologian, Tavares's work exposes the theological significance of cultural memory, especially for women whose faith is embodied rather than textual.

African feminist theologians such as Isabel Apawo Phiri and Musimbi Kanyoro have emphasized that African women's theology must begin with women's stories, rituals, and ethical struggles, rather than with doctrinal texts alone.[17] This methodological commitment aligns profoundly with Gadamer's insistence that understanding arises from lived tradition rather than abstract systems.

In Angola, where Christianity is deeply woven into cultural identity, the failure to take women's lived faith seriously results in a distorted ecclesiology—one that celebrates women's presence while denying their interpretive authority. The fusion of horizons proposed here, therefore, requires a conversion of theological method, recognizing Angolan women not as objects of pastoral care but as subjects of theological knowledge.

---

16 Ana Paula Tavares, *O Sangue da Buganvília* (Lisbon: Caminho, 1998), 9–14.

17 Isabel Apawo, "African Women's Theologies in the 21st century," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 150 (2014): 4-18 and Musimbi R.A. Kangaro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

Marian Anthropology: From Symbolic Exaltation to Ecclesial Agency

Marian devotion occupies a privileged place in Angolan Catholic spirituality. Women's associations, popular catechesis, and liturgical imagination frequently elevate Mary as the ideal of Christian womanhood. *Mulieris Dignitatem* presents Mary as the fullest realization of redeemed humanity, emphasizing her active consent (*fiat*) as a moment of profound theological agency.[18]

Yet African feminist theologians caution that Marian symbolism becomes theologically dangerous when it is detached from women's lived struggles. Mercy Amba Oduyoye argues that idealized representations of womanhood—obedient, sacrificial, and silent—can function as instruments of ecclesial control when they are abstracted from women's suffering and resistance.[19] In Angola, Marian devotion has at times reinforced expectations that women endure injustice quietly, particularly in contexts of domestic violence, poverty, and ecclesial marginalization.

A reconstructed ecclesial anthropology must therefore reclaim Mary not as a symbol of passive submission but as a disruptive theological figure, whose consent reshapes history. Such a reading aligns *Mulieris Dignitatem* with Angolan women's resilience rather than with their romanticized endurance.

Toward a Synodal Ecclesial Anthropology

Synodality, if taken seriously, requires a reconfiguration of ecclesial anthropology. Pope Francis' vision of a listening Church exposes the inadequacy of anthropologies that separate

18 Ibid., no. 18.

19 Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 35–38.

baptismal dignity from decision-making authority.[20] In Angola, women already practice Synodality at the grassroots—through communal discernment, pastoral mediation, and moral leadership—yet remain largely absent from theological formation and ecclesial governance.

African feminist anthropologists such as Isabel Phiri insist that women's moral authority, historically exercised in relational and communal forms, must be recognized as theologically normative.[21] *Mulieris Dignitatem* implicitly affirms this claim by identifying women's attentiveness to life and vulnerability as a privileged site of ethical discernment.[22] To exclude this wisdom from ecclesial deliberation is to impoverish the Church's capacity to read the signs of the times.

Priestly Formation and Seminaries in Angola: The Crucial Horizon

The credibility of this reconstructed anthropology ultimately depends on priestly formation. Angolan seminaries remain among the most decisive yet least examined sites in which patriarchal ecclesiology is reproduced. Curricula often prioritize sacramental functionality and canonical discipline while marginalizing feminist theology, African women's theologies, and Synodal ecclesiology.

If future priests are formed without sustained engagement with *Mulieris Dignitatem*, African feminist anthropology, and women's lived ecclesial experience, Synodality risks becoming rhetorical rather than transformative. As Orobator argues,

---

20 Francis, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission* (Vatican City: Synod of Bishops, 2021), 8–10.

21 Isabel Apawo Phiri, "African Women's Theologies in the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 150 (2014): 7–10.

22 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 30.

ecclesial renewal in Africa will fail unless formation institutions become spaces of anthropological conversion.[23]

This reconstruction of ecclesial anthropology confronts African theologies with a shared challenge: theology can no longer be credible if it speaks about women without listening to them. *Mulieris Dignitatem* does not resolve this tension; it intensifies it. By affirming women's dignity as constitutive of humanity and the Church, it exposes ecclesiologies that rely on women's faith while excluding their voices. In Angola—still healing from war, inequality, and colonial legacies—the Church's witness depends on whether it dares to embody the anthropology it proclaims. Synodality will remain hollow unless it transforms priestly formation, ecclesial structures, and theological method itself. The dignity of Angolan women is thus not a peripheral issue but a decisive locus for the future of Catholic ecclesiology in the Global South.

Strengths and Weaknesses of *Mulieris Dignitatem* in the Context and Experience of Women's Dignity in the Angolan Church and Society

Any theological retrieval of *Mulieris Dignitatem* within the Angolan Church must resist two temptations: uncritical celebration and wholesale dismissal. The apostolic letter remains one of the most substantial magisterial texts on women's dignity in Catholic tradition, yet its reception in Angola has been ambivalent, selective, and at times pastorally counterproductive. A critical feminist analysis must therefore examine both its generative potential and its structural silences when confronted with the lived realities of Angolan women shaped by patriarchy, post-war trauma, economic precarity, and ecclesial marginalization.

23 Orobator, *The Church as Family*, 143–147.

Strengths: Ontological Dignity as a Theological Resource for Resistance

One of the most significant strengths of *Mulieris Dignitatem* lies in its uncompromising affirmation that women's dignity is ontological rather than functional. John Paul II grounds women's worth in creation and redemption, insisting that woman and man equally image God and participate in the divine economy of salvation.[24] In the Angolan context—where women's value is often measured by marital status, reproductive capacity, or social usefulness—this theological claim carries emancipatory potential.

For Angolan Catholic women who sustain ecclesial life through catechesis, pastoral care, and communal leadership yet remain excluded from formal authority, *Mulieris Dignitatem* provides a doctrinal language to contest their invisibilization. By asserting that the dignity of women is constitutive of humanity itself, the document implicitly delegitimizes ecclesial practices that treat women as auxiliaries rather than co-subjects of the Church's mission.[25]

Moreover, the text's emphasis on relational anthropology—mutuality rather than domination—offers a theological counter-narrative to deeply entrenched patriarchal norms in Angolan society. In contexts of domestic violence, economic dependency, and normalized gender asymmetry, *Mulieris Dignitatem* can function as a resource for pastoral resistance, affirming that any relationship that negates reciprocity violates divine intention.[26]

---

24 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 6.

25 Ibid., no. 7.

26 Ibid., no. 10.

Marian Anthropology: Symbolic Power and Pastoral Ambiguity

Another strength of *Mulieris Dignitatem* is its Marian anthropology, which presents Mary as the fullest realization of human dignity and freedom. The document's insistence that Mary's *fiat* is an act of conscious, courageous consent challenges interpretations that reduce her to passive obedience.[27] For Angolan women—many of whom make daily life-sustaining decisions under conditions of constraint—this portrayal resonates deeply.

Yet this same Marian emphasis becomes a weakness when uncritically received within Angolan pastoral practice. African feminist theologians have long warned that Marian symbolism, when detached from women's lived suffering, risks reinforcing idealized expectations of silence, endurance, and self-sacrifice.[28] In Angola, Marian devotion has at times been mobilized to spiritualize women's pain rather than confront its structural causes, particularly in cases of domestic abuse and ecclesial exclusion.

Thus, while *Mulieris Dignitatem* offers a potentially liberative Marian theology, its reception requires critical mediation. Without feminist hermeneutics attentive to power, Mary becomes less a model of agency and more a theological instrument for maintaining gendered submission.

Weaknesses: Symbolic Affirmation without Structural Conversion

The most serious limitation of *Mulieris Dignitatem* in the Angolan context lies in its failure to address ecclesial structures

27 Ibid., no. 18.

28 Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 35–38.

explicitly. While the document speaks eloquently of women's dignity and vocation, it remains largely silent on how ecclesial authority, governance, and theological production systematically exclude women.[29] This silence has concrete consequences in Angola, where women form the backbone of parish life yet remain absent from decision-making bodies, theological faculties, and seminary formation.

African ecclesiologist Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator argues that ecclesiology cannot be evaluated solely on doctrinal coherence but must be judged by its capacity to generate just relationships.[30] From this perspective, *Mulieris Dignitatem* risks functioning as a text of symbolic inclusion that leaves untouched the patriarchal ecclesial imagination inherited from colonial missionary models.

This limitation becomes particularly acute in post-war Angola, where the Church has positioned itself as a moral voice for reconciliation and justice. A Church that denounces social injustice while tolerating internal gender injustice undermines its own prophetic credibility. Feminist theology insists that ecclesial anthropology is never neutral; it either reinforces or resists systems of domination.

Cultural Memory, Women's Identity, and Ecclesial Continuity in Angola

Angolan women's ecclesial presence cannot be understood apart from their cultural identity as bearers of memory, life, and communal continuity. Anthropological and historical studies of Angolan society consistently highlight women as custodians of lineage, ritual knowledge, and moral formation,

29 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, nos. 29–30.

30 Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *The Church as Family: African Ecclesiology in Its Social Context* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000), 143–147.

particularly during periods of social fragmentation and violence. During Angola's long civil war, it was women who preserved family cohesion, transmitted values, and sustained religious practice in displaced and traumatized communities.[31]

This cultural role has profoundly shaped the Angolan Church. Women's faith is not abstract or doctrinally detached; it is embodied, narrative, and relational. Yet ecclesial structures—largely inherited from colonial missionary models—have struggled to translate this lived authority into theological recognition. As Laurindo Kiala observes, Angolan Catholicism often reproduces a hierarchical ecclesiology that benefits from women's participation while simultaneously rendering them invisible at the level of deliberation and doctrine.[32] It is precisely here that *Mulieris Dignitatem* enters as both a resource and a provocation.

Toward a Theology of Communion

John Paul II's *Mulieris Dignitatem* profoundly illuminates the concept of communion as the cornerstone of human relationality. Drawing from the Genesis narrative, the Pope underscores that the creation of man and woman signifies individual dignity and a relational call to live in mutual self-giving. The "unity of the two," as articulated in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, reflects Trinitarian communion—a relational reality where equality and distinction coexist harmoniously. This theological vision dismantles patriarchal models by positioning men and women not as hierarchical entities but as co-stewards of creation.[33]

---

31 Ana Paula Tavares, *O Sangue da Buganvília* (Lisbon: Caminho, 1998), 9–15.

32 Laurindo Kiala, "Igreja, Cultura e Reconciliação em Angola," *Revista Angolana de Teologia* 12 (2016): 41–45.

33 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 30.

The notion of communion also critiques and transcends the historical subjugation of women. As *Mulieris Dignitatem* emphasizes, the "help" described in Genesis is reciprocal, signifying equality rather than subordination. Women, therefore, embody a distinct but complementary genius that enriches humanity's collective vocation. This theological anthropology demands a shift from domination to collaboration, which resonates with modern feminist theology while remaining rooted in Christian revelation.[34]

John Paul II's interpretation of Ephesians 5 offers a radical re-reading of spousal roles that further enriches this discussion. Mutual submission, a term used to describe the mutual respect and deference that each partner should have for the other, as advocated in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, transforms marriage into a space of shared discipleship rather than dominance. Here, communion becomes both a relational ideal and a moral imperative, challenging men and women alike to embody Christlike selflessness in their interactions.[35]

The Pope's assertion that "the dignity of women is measured by order of love" analyzes systems that reduce women to objects or confine them to utilitarian roles. Instead, he envisions a world in which women's capacity for self-giving love serves as a model for humanity's redemption. This is not a sentimental idealization but a theological mandate for justice and equality, underscoring that women's dignity is inseparable from their agency and autonomy.[36]

Furthermore, as *Mulieris Dignitatem* highlights, the Gospel narratives exemplify Christ's revolutionary approach to women. From the Samaritan woman at the well to Mary

34 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 6.

35 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 24.

36 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 29.

Magdalene, the first witness to the Resurrection, women are portrayed not as passive recipients but as active participants in salvation history.[37] This portrayal challenges the Church and society to reimagine structures that marginalize women and embrace their prophetic voices in shaping the future. Finally, the document's eschatological vision, a theological concept referring to humanity's ultimate destiny as revealed in the Scriptures, points toward a redeemed humanity in which the mutual complementarity of men and women reflects God's original plan. As articulated in *Mulieris Dignitatem* (§31), this vision is both a challenge and an invitation: a challenge to confront entrenched injustices and to build a culture of encounter where women's dignity is celebrated, not contested.[38]

Men and women "are called to live in a communion of love, and in this way to mirror in the world the communion of love that is in God, through which the Three Persons love each other in the intimate mystery of the one divine life." John Paul II, therefore, takes up and reaffirms this interpretation of the human couple as being made in the *image* of God, not so much in terms of the rational and spiritual component of the human being, but instead because of their fundamental and radical need for a relationship, just as the relationship between the Divine Persons constitutes the essence of the mystery of the Trinity.[39]

Sexual Differences: A Divine Gift and Mystery

Central to John Paul II's reflections in *Mulieris Dignitatem* is the assertion that sexual differentiation is a divine gift imbued with profound meaning. The creation narrative in Genesis

37 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 29.

38 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 29.

39 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 6.

serves as the theological foundation for this teaching, where humanity is created in the image of God as "male and female" (Gen 1:27). John Paul II interprets this as a revelation of both equality and distinction, emphasizing that sexual difference is not merely biological but encompasses the totality of the human person—body, mind, and spirit.[40] This understanding challenges both reductionist and dualistic approaches to gender. Reductionism, which limits sexual differences to biology or reproductive function, fails to capture its holistic and relational nature. Conversely, dualism, which denies the integration of body and soul, disregards the unity of the human person. For John Paul II, the embodied nature of humanity reflects God's creative intention and invites men and women to live their identities as gifts to one another. He states, "The human body includes right from the beginning...the capacity of expressing love."[41]

Moreover, John Paul II's theology of sexual difference transcends societal constructs of gender, positing instead that masculinity and femininity are essential dimensions of human nature. This insight is particularly significant in contemporary debates surrounding gender identity and roles, providing a theological framework that upholds equality and difference as complementary rather than contradictory.

Beyond Opposites: Celebrating Gender Complementarity

The concept of complementarity in *Mulieris Dignitatem* extends beyond a functional division of tasks to highlight the relational and interpersonal nature of human existence. John

40 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 2.

41 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 7.

Paul II's phrase "a unity of the two"[42] encapsulates this vision, which affirms that men and women are called to a mutual self-gift that enriches their shared humanity. Complementarity is not rigid roles or hierarchical structures but the dynamic interplay of equality and distinction that fosters communion.

By grounding complementarity in the spousal meaning of the body, John Paul II offers a theological response to critiques of gender essentialism, the belief that the differences between men and women are not merely cultural constructs but reflect God's design for relationality and love. This distinction is particularly evident in the nuptial analogy, where the mutual self-gift of husband and wife mirrors the covenantal love of Christ and the Church. This analogy underscores the sacred dimension of complementarity, which extends beyond marriage to all human relationships. Additionally, John Paul II's teaching challenges societal tendencies to stereotype or reduce gender roles. For instance, while traditional roles may reflect cultural practices, the Pope emphasizes that genuine complementarity is rooted in the shared vocation to love and serve.[43]

The Practical Implications of Complementarity

John Paul II's vision of complementarity has significant practical implications for contemporary discussions on gender equality and societal roles. One of the central themes in *Mulieris Dignitatem* is the affirmation of women's equal dignity and their unique contributions to the human community. This affirmation challenges both patriarchal structures that marginalize women and radical feminist ideologies, which are

42 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no.7.

43 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 23.

extreme and often divisive beliefs that deny the value of sexual difference and seek to eliminate gender roles.

In practical terms, complementarity calls for women's full participation in all aspects of society, including leadership, education, and public life. John Paul II's concept of the "genius of women" highlights the distinctive qualities that women bring to these roles, such as empathy, relationality, and a capacity for nurturing life. This "genius of women" is not intended to confine women to specific roles but rather to enrich the broader human community by emphasizing women's unique contributions to society. Furthermore, the Pope's teaching on complementarity offers a framework for addressing contemporary challenges such as gender-based violence, discrimination, and the objectification of women. By affirming the sacredness of the human person and the relational nature of complementarity, John Paul II provides a moral foundation for promoting justice and equality in personal relationships and societal structures.[44]

A Pastoral Call: Complementarity in Action

John Paul II's vision of complementarity is not merely a theoretical framework but a pastoral call to action. His writings challenge individuals and communities to rediscover the sacredness of human relationships and foster a culture of mutual respect and collaboration. This call is urgent, demanding immediate attention and action in addressing the challenges of contemporary society, where gender conflicts and misunderstandings often undermine the dignity of the human person.

In the context of the Church, the Pope's teaching invites a renewed commitment to promoting women's participation in

44 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 30.

all aspects of ecclesial life. As he writes in *Mulieris Dignitatem,* "The Church desires to give thanks for all the manifestations of the feminine 'genius.'" This gratitude must translate into concrete actions that recognize and celebrate women's unique contributions to the Church's mission. In society, John Paul II's emphasis on complementarity calls for policies and practices that uphold the dignity of men and women. We can build a world that reflects the divine plan for human relationships by fostering a culture of mutual respect and collaboration, which is crucial for a harmonious and just society.[45]

John Paul II's writings on complementarity provide a profound and transformative vision of human relationships. By affirming the equal dignity and distinctiveness of men and women, he offers a theological framework that challenges patriarchal distortions and radical egalitarianism. This vision calls for a rediscovery of the sacred bond of complementarity, manifesting in the vocation to love and communion. Through scholarly engagement and pastoral action, the teachings of *Mulieris Dignitatem* continue to inspire efforts to promote justice, equality, and the flourishing of all humanity.

Essentialism and Feminist Critiques on Gender Complementarity

One major feminist critique of *Mulieris Dignitatem* concerns its essentialist conception of womanhood.[46] The document privileges motherhood and relational roles as defining aspects of women's identity, suggesting that a woman's highest fulfillment derives from her capacity to nurture and complement

45 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 31.

46 Anna Maria Gruenfelder, "Women and the Church: A Critique of *Mulieris Dignitatem*," Concilium 5 (1989): 12–18.

men.[47] Feminist theologians such as Anna Maria Gruenfelder argue that this framework marginalizes women whose lives and vocations fall outside this model.[48]

Such essentialism reinforces patriarchal structures, promoting fixed, complementary roles for men and women.[49] Consequently, women's potential for leadership, professional achievement, and political participation is often minimized.[50] Critics argue that a theological vision of women should embrace diverse vocations and identities rather than prescribing a singular, biologically derived ideal.[51]

Marian Idealization and the Feminine Model in *Mulieris Dignitatem*

Within the magisterial corpus of Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988) occupies a central position in his theological anthropology of woman. Emerging from the Pope's broader vision of the "theology of the body," it seeks to articulate the ontological and spiritual dignity of women as co-bearers of the *Imago Dei*.[52] In this encyclical, John Paul II identifies the Virgin Mary as the preeminent model of Christian womanhood, the "highest expression of the feminine genius," whose *fiat*—her total and trusting consent to the divine will—embodies the vocation of all women to self-giving love and service.[53] This Mariological anthropology intends to elevate the status of

47 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

48 Maryanne Stevens, "The Human Person, Women, and *Mulieris Dignitatem*," Horizons 17, no. 2 (1990): 276–281.

49 Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands.*

50 Kanyoro and Njoroge, eds., *Groaning in Faith: African Women in the Household of God* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1996).

51 Phiri, "Doing Theology in Community," 68–76.

52 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 1.

53 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* nos. 4–5.

women by inscribing their being within the redemptive history of salvation. Yet, while its purpose is affirming, its theological framework has provoked intense scholarly debate, particularly regarding the relationship between symbolic idealizations and lived female experience in daily life within Angolan society and beyond. From a feminist theological standpoint, this exaltation of Mary operates as a double-edged hermeneutical construct. On one hand, it magnifies feminine dignity; on the other, it confines it to a narrow typology of virginity, maternity, and obedience.[54] As Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza notes, typological Mariology can both glorify and silence women by projecting an ideal that detaches the theological image from the social realities of women's lives.[55]

Mary Daly and Rosemary Radford Ruether extend this critique, arguing that the fusion of virginity and motherhood as a singular ideal of holiness constructs an unattainable standard—one that risks sanctifying passivity and spiritualizing subordination.[56] Consequently, Marian idealization becomes not merely a devotional framework but a theological mechanism that legitimizes hierarchical gender roles in both Church and society. Nevertheless, feminist theologians have not rejected Mary but rather reinterpreted her. Elizabeth Johnson reclaims the *fiat* not as passive submission but as a radical act of prophetic agency and faith within patriarchal structures. In this rereading, Mary emerges not as the silent handmaiden of the patriarchal order of a society but as the courageous disciple who consents freely to God's salvific

54 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* nos. 18–20.

55 Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 45.

56 Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 69–70; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 157–58.

mission—an act of partnership rather than subordination. This reinterpretation reframes Marian symbolism as an icon of spiritual empowerment and moral courage, capable of inspiring women toward active discipleship and transformative faith.[57] This hermeneutical shift acquires particular significance in the African context, especially within Angola society, where Marian devotion permeates Catholic spirituality and culture. The image of Mary as the humble, devoted mother resonates deeply with local gender expectations that prize maternal sacrifice, domestic virtue, and religious fidelity.[58] Nevertheless, as Angolan theologian Teresa Henda observes, this resonance often reinforces the invisibility of women in decision-making and ecclesial leadership.[59] The Marian ideal, when interpreted narrowly, can therefore perpetuate pastoral structures that revere women's service while resisting their inclusion in governance and sacramental ministry. Julieta Araújo, coordinator of *PROMAICA* (Association for the Promotion of Women in the Angolan Catholic Church), emphasizes that women are the "heart of catechesis and evangelization in local communities," yet remain underrepresented in formal leadership.[60]

Herein lies the pastoral paradox: Mary is invoked to affirm women's worth, yet her idealization can simultaneously constrain their ecclesial agency. A contextual theological response must therefore move from idealization to incarnation—from venerating Mary as a distant exemplar to engaging her as a living symbol of solidarity and liberation. African

57 Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 89–91.

58 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 27.

59 Teresa Henda, "Mulheres e Liderança na Igreja Angolana," *Revista Eclesiástica de Angola* 12 (2015): 23–24.

60 Julieta Araújo, "O Papel da Mulher na Igreja Católica em Angola," (public address, Luanda, 2019).

feminist theologians such as Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike and Teresa Okure propose this move precisely, reading Mary not as an abstract moral archetype but as a "woman of liberation" whose discipleship speaks to women's historical struggles against oppression and exclusion.[61] Within this optic, the *Magnificat* becomes not a song of submission but a proclamation of divine justice, exalting the lowly and challenging unjust structures—both sacred and social.

Such a liberative hermeneutic has profound pastoral implications for the Church in Angola. It decouples moral virtue from gendered stereotypes, reframes Mary's holiness as courageous faith-in-action, and situates her as a companion in women's struggle for dignity amid poverty, displacement, and social marginalization.[62] For Angolan women, whose daily resilience embodies the tension between faith and survival, this reinterpretation opens theological space for agency, participation, and leadership. Mary thus becomes not a measure of female conformity but a mirror of divine partnership in history—a call to prophetic discipleship that integrates contemplation and action.

Ultimately, feminist and contextual critiques reveal that while *Mulieris Dignitatem* aims to uplift women, its anthropology risks reifying essentialist categories of femininity—rooted in biological or symbolic determinism—unless reinterpreted through pastoral praxis.[63] The challenge for the Angolan Church, therefore, is to translate Marian devotion into structures of

61 Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, "Mary in African Christianity," in *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*, ed. Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi Kanyoro (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 77–78; Teresa Okure, "Feminist Interpretations and African Contexts," *Theology Today* 55, no. 2 (1998): 194–96.

62 Nasimiyu-Wasike, "Mary in African Christianity," 197.

63 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 22.

inclusion and participation. To honor Mary authentically is not to confine her image within pious abstraction, but to embody her courage, her justice, and her prophetic voice in the lived experience of women who continue to build the Church with unrecognized fidelity.[64] A truly Marian Church does not glorify feminine passivity, but one that incarnates Mary's dynamic faith—her "yes" to God's transforming love—in the social, theological, and pastoral life of the community.

Women's Empowerment: Reclaiming Agency Within Church and Society

Integral human development in Catholic theology is rooted in the conviction that every baptized person participates in Christ's mission. Empowerment is not merely sociological but theological: it expresses the logic of God's self-giving that restores human agency and co-responsibility in the divine mission of communion.[65] However, in the Angolan Church, there remains a persistent disjunction between the indispensable work women do and their structural authority within ecclesial governance and theological formation.

Angolan women sustain liturgical life, catechesis, pastoral care, and family formation, yet they remain underrepresented in formal church councils, theological faculties, and diocesan leadership bodies.[66] This structural gap challenges the Church's integrity, for a theology that proclaims dignity must also institute it. Pope John Paul II's *Mulieris Dignitatem* affirms women's

64 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 31.

65 Catholic social teaching on human dignity and participation; see *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, nos. 160–164.

66 João Vissesse, *Catholic Women Leader in Angola Highlights Women's Mission, Role in Church and Society as 'Crucial'*, ACI Africa, 16 March 2025.

indispensable contributions to the Church and the world.[67] Yet this affirmation becomes vacuous when not translated into institutional structures that grant women genuine authority, visibility, and voice. Scholarly feminist theologians emphasize that true empowerment arises when women's agency is recognized not only in praxis but also in ecclesial decision-making.[68]

Genuine empowerment initiatives might include diocesan women's councils with consultative and deliberative roles, theological education programs for women, and economic empowerment initiatives that foster real autonomy. Empowerment here is not antagonistic toward male leadership but participatory and reciprocal, reflecting the giftedness of all members of the Body of Christ for the common good.

Pastoral Care and Counseling: Healing Women's Wounds Through Prophetic Compassion

Pastoral care in Angola must move decisively from charity to justice-oriented accompaniment. Pope Francis' description of the Church as a "field hospital" compels ministries that address the wounds and structures of suffering.[69] In Angola, women continue to endure genderbased violence, economic vulnerability, and cultural marginalization, often compounded by the legacies of war. These realities call for a pastoral theology that is gendersensitive, trauma-informed, and prophetic.

Clergy and pastoral agents should receive formation in gender awareness, psychological accompaniment, and trauma ministry, such that pastoral responses genuinely support women's healing and empowerment. Recent calls from

67 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, nos. 6–7.

68 Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 22–23, 86.

69 Pope Francis, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission* (Vatican City: Synod of Bishops, 2021), 8–10.

Catholic educators in Angola argue that priestly formation must integrate human dignity, gender justice, and contextual social analysis to equip future pastors for authentic accompaniment.[70] Establishing diocesan centers for women's pastoral care and counseling would signify a concrete commitment to addressing women's wounds not as peripheral issues but as central to the Church's mission of healing and justice.

Such ministries embody Christ's incarnational compassion, which heals wounds and confronts the systems that produce them. When the Church listens to women's stories, accompanies their struggles, and advocates for systemic change, its proclamation of human dignity becomes credible and incarnational.

Toward a Synodal, Trinitarian, and Contextual Ecclesiology

The culmination of this research affirms that gender justice in Angola is a theological mandate, grounded in the Trinitarian communion that defines the Church's very being. The liberative rereading of *Mulieris Dignitatem* reveals that anthropology and ecclesiology must converge in the service of relational redemption, in which woman and man reflect the divine image not in isolation but in communion.

This study, therefore, proposes a Trinitarian model of ecclesial renewal in which the Father's justice, the Son's solidarity, and the Spirit's creativity converge to inspire a pastoral conversion of the Angolan Church and beyond. The Father invites the Church to reimagine authority as stewardship for the common good; the Son calls for incarnational solidarity with the marginalized; and the Spirit empowers creative,

70 "Human Rights Must Shape Future Priests: Catholic Official in Angola Calls for Rethinking Seminary Formation," *ACI Africa*, 23 July 2025.

inclusive participation that transcends gender hierarchies.[71] Such a Trinitarian framework grounds Synodality not merely in governance but in spiritual ontology—the being-with of God reflected in the being-with of the Church.

As Bujo contends, African ethics thrives on the principle of "vital participation," a dynamic communion of life where moral responsibility is shared.[72] The same participatory ethos must animate the Church in Angola: a Church that listens, includes, and acts as a family of God in solidarity with the wounded and the excluded. Ultimately, this study stands as a prophetic contribution to African contextual theology, calling the Angolan Church to embody a pastoral imagination that is Eucharistic, liberative, and Synodal. It envisions a Church that does not merely preach about justice but becomes a sacrament of justice itself—a living witness that communion with Christ entails communion with the suffering and the silenced.

In this renewed vision, women are not auxiliary to the mission of the church but integral to revelation; their stories, bodies, and wisdom constitute sacred spaces in which God's Spirit continues to create, redeem, and sanctify. The future of the Church, therefore, depends on her capacity to integrate theological insight with social transformation—to move from *orthodoxy* to *orthopraxis*, from hierarchy to co-responsibility, from exclusion to Eucharistic communion. In the spirit of Pope Francis' Synodal invitation, the Church in Angola is summoned to walk together as a reconciled community of disciples rooted and inspired by the Gospel, and animated by the Spirit to

71 Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 118–123.

72 Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 68–74.

become, in the words of Orobator, "a Church that smells of Africa's dust and dreams of God's justice."[73]

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that reclaiming and safeguarding women's dignity in the Angolan Church requires a critical theological engagement that is simultaneously contextual, relational, and transformative. Drawing on *Mulieris Dignitatem* and a broad constellation of feminist theological voices, it has argued that genuine complementarity—rooted in Christian communion—must be embodied in ecclesial structures, practices, and relationships rather than confined to doctrinal affirmations or pastoral rhetoric.

Crucially, the integration of African and Asian feminist theological perspectives enriches this ecclesiological task by revealing convergences in the lived experiences of women across the Global South. African feminist theologians such as Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Isabel Apawo Phiri insist that theology begins with the bodily, social, and historical realities of women, rather than with abstract systems.[74] Their work underscores that ecclesial dignity is not merely ontological but embodied and enacted in struggle, survival, leadership, and resistance.

Parallel insights emerge from Asian feminist theology. Chung Hyun Kyung critiques theological discourses that reproduce imperial and patriarchal structures, calling instead for a theology that resists domination and embraces embodied

---

73 Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa: Confessions of an Animist* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 172.

74 Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 22–23, 86; and Isabel Apawo Phiri, "African Women's Theologies in the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 150 (2014): 4–18.

solidarity with the poor and marginalized.[75] Her notion of "political spirituality" affirms that theological reflection must be grounded in real struggles against violence—structural, cultural, and ecclesial. Likewise, Filipino theologian Virginia Fabella foregrounds the interconnectedness of gender, class, and culture, urging that Christian witness must articulate a feminist praxis of liberation that addresses both personal sin and systemic injustice.[76] These voices resonate deeply with Angolan women's experiences of post-war trauma, economic marginalization, and ecclesial marginality.

Asian feminist theologians also highlight the importance of communal discernment and narrative theology. Elaine M. Fan, for example, emphasizes that theology emerges from the intersection of lived experience, community memory, and spiritual resilience.[77] This resonates with Angolan women whose faith is not merely doctrinal but lived in communities that have endured war, displacement, and social rupture. In these contexts, theological wisdom is not only taught but also constructed through testimony, survival, and communal resilience.

Together, African and Asian feminist analyses illuminate how ecclesial traditions can inadvertently perpetuate gendered exclusion when they fail to take women's lived realities seriously. In Angola, women sustain the Church's life at every level yet remain underrepresented in theological faculties, diocesan

75 Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 33–48; Chung Hyun Kyung, *Globalization and the Recolonization of Asia: Imperialism, Neocolonialism, and Resistance* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 101–123.

76 Virginia Fabella, *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2020), 12–35.

77 Elaine M. Fan, "Reframing Theology as Diasporic and Feminist," *Asian Journal of Theology* 34, no. 1 (2020): 21–45.

councils, and Synodal deliberations. This contradiction reveals not a peripheral pastoral issue but a core ecclesiological problem: a Church that proclaims dignity but limits agency risks diminishing the credibility of its own witness.

Moreover, the ongoing Synod on Synodality (2021–2024) exposes a global ecclesial tension: consultation without co-responsibility. Continental reports from Africa and Asia alike emphasize the persistence of gendered asymmetries in ecclesial participation.[78] A genuinely Synodal Church must move beyond tokenistic inclusion toward co-responsible discernment, in which women's voices shape ecclesial consciousness and decision-making. This is not simply a procedural reform but an ontological conversion of ecclesiology—from clerical hierarchy to baptismal co-responsibility.

The implications of such a conversion extend beyond the Angolan context to the broader Global South, where postcolonial histories, economic inequalities, and entrenched patriarchy intersect with ecclesial life. The integration of Asian feminist theological insights strengthens this project by offering methodological resources that complement African feminist approaches. Both traditions insist that theology must be grounded in lived experience, critical of structures of domination, and oriented toward liberation. Thus, an African–Asian feminist ecclesiology offers a model of Christian witness that is at once prophetic, contextual, and communal.

Therefore, the future of a just and inclusive Church—whether in Angola, the Philippines, or beyond—depends on its capacity to embody theological insight with social

78 General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, *Continental Stage Synthesis Document* (Vatican City, 2023), 14–16; see also Asian continental synthesis contributions in *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission* (Vatican City: Synod of Bishops, 2021), 35–42.

transformation. Women are not adjuncts to the Church's mission; they are co-bearers of its identity and creativity. Their stories, bodies, and wisdom constitute sacred archives where the Spirit continues to create, redeem, and sanctify. A Church that listens to these voices and acts on them moves beyond theological abstraction to authentic communion, structural justice, and credible witness. To accomplish this, the Church must commit concretely to:

1. Empowering women in leadership and theological formation at all levels of ecclesial life.
2. Integrating women's perspectives into Synodal discernment and decision-making structures.
3. Developing pastoral practices that accompany, heal, and liberate women whose dignity has been compromised.
4. Cultivating an ecclesiological imagination that affirms baptismal co-responsibility as constitutive of the Church's identity.

Such a Church reflects the Trinitarian communion it proclaims—mutual, participatory, and inclusive—and becomes a sacrament of justice in a world that yearns for credible witnesses of God's love, mercy, and liberation.

BACCALAUREATE IN SACRED THEOLOGY CAPSTONE PAPERS

WHERE CHRIST SUFFERS TODAY: A CHRISTOLOGICAL, ECCLESIOLOGICAL, AND MISSIOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON HUMAN SUFFERING FROM WAR

Christian R. del Mundo, AA

Introduction

As someone who served as a volunteer in various refugee centers across Europe, particularly in France and Germany, I encountered people whose lives have been deeply marked by suffering, displacement, and loss. They came from different corners of the world: war-torn Ukraine, bomb-stricken Syria, impoverished Bulgaria, politically persecuted Turkey, and even genocide survivors from Sudan. They were different in nationality, language, and culture, yet united in one common condition: human anguish and vulnerability.

One unforgettable moment took place during my visit to the Museum of the Reformation in Geneva, Switzerland. There, I saw an artwork created by displaced children from Kyiv, Ukraine. It was a simple drawing of the crucifixion. But instead of an adult Christ hanging on the cross, it was an infant. Instead of nails and a hammer, there were guns and bullets. Instead of the soldier's lance, there was a rifle. That image pierced me deeply. It was not just a representation of the crucifixion; it was a theological cry, a lamentation, a visual expression of innocent suffering. In that image, Christ was not only on Calvary; Christ was in Kyiv, in Aleppo, in Khartoum, in the camps, in the boats, and in every displaced child who carries the cross of violence, fear, and abandonment.

That image has stayed with me. It often returns during prayer and meditation, challenging me, provoking me, and calling me to deeper discipleship. I have listened to stories. I have seen tears. I have walked with them, shared bread with them, and sat in silence with them. Yet I ask myself: *After hearing so much, seeing so much, what now? What is my responsibility?*

Nathalia, one of my classmates in the language program at the University of Strasbourg, used to work in one of the top companies in Kyiv. When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, she was forced to leave her home country with her son, Bohdan, because of the escalating conflict and the fear that they would inevitably be affected. Unprepared, they fled with only a few euros, some clothes, and a great deal of fear. They left behind her husband, who had joined the military to fight against the Russian invaders, and Nathalia's aging mother, who could no longer travel because of her age and illness. They sought refuge in the nearest country, Poland. But while they were trying to settle down, Nathalia received a call from Ukraine informing her that her mother had passed away due to depression. A month later, her husband was killed while fighting at the front. Because of the danger, she had no opportunity to return home to say goodbye to her mother or her husband. Still traumatized, she decided to move forward and later relocated to France with the help of various organizations like Caritas Alsace, where I served as a volunteer. A practicing Catholic, she shared with me that she questioned God many times, but she never lost her hope that this conflict would eventually come to an end.

As a missionary, I did not only promise to work for the Kingdom of God in the comfort of the pulpit or within the walls of our community. I promised to proclaim Christ, especially in the wounded, the displaced, and the forgotten. I promised not

just to speak about the Gospel but to embody it to become, in some small way, a sacrament of God's presence. My responsibility, therefore, is not only to listen to their stories but to recognize in them the crucified Christ, to respond with compassion, and to walk with them toward healing and hope. It is to help the Church not only uphold doctrine but also to live mercy. It is to help transform lament into prayer, despair into solidarity, and suffering into encounter with the God who still bears wounds.

In their faces, I saw theology not written in books, but etched in human hearts. In their tears, I heard a kind of Gospel fragile, silent, yet profoundly true. And in that moment before the crucified Child of Kyiv, I understood: to be a missionary is to stand at the foot of the cross in whatever form it takes today and to remain there with faith, compassion, and hope.

Christological Aspect

Christ and the Wounded People of Ukraine

The image described in the depiction of the crucifixion and the story of Nathalia are of the same essence, narrating the modern-day passion and death of Christ, with the hope of resurrection. It is not only a piece of art or another story to tell, but a deep act of theological revelation. It is a visual interpretation that Christ is present in the contemporary suffering of every innocent victim, especially the children and the vulnerable ones. John Sobrino, SJ said in his book Christology at the Crossroads, that "God continues to be the real cross of the oppressed" because "oppressed persons are the meditation of God."[1] These refugees are what Sobrino calls the meditation of God's face because it is through them that the cross of Christ is made visible to the world. With this, another Jesuit theologian,

1 Jon Sobrino, SJ, *Christology at the Crossroads* (New York: Orbis Books, 1978), 222-223.

Avery Dulles, wrote in his book, Models of the Church, "that the Church is permanently marked with the image of the Crucified."[2] This strongly affirms the Church's Christological essence by asserting that it does not regard the passion and death of Christ as merely historical events but recognizes that Christ is united with every person, especially those who are suffering, displaced, and forgotten.

Jürgen Moltmann's "The Crucified God" wrote that "the crucified Christ became the brother of the despised, abandoned, and oppressed."[3] This underscores that Christ is never separated from, but deeply involved in, their suffering. The experiences of refugees like Nathalia and the children of Kyiv are similar in that they are "brothers and sisters" of the crucified Christ because of their suffering. Thus, every encounter with them is more than personal but indeed a sacred service and encounter with God Himself, the Crucified.

In this regard, the humiliation of the cross, however painful, was not merely a symbol of embarrassment but companionship for the oppressed, and in this case, with the war refugees and survivors because "the pain of God heals (their) pain."[4]

The Christological conviction of these situations is that it redefined the concept of crucifixion as suffering because of the hope that God is present amidst war and persecution. In effect, the anguish of Natalia and the children is not a cry of weakness and doubts but a legitimate encounter with God. "Christology must be done in the light of the cross"[5] because the glory of

2 Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church,* (Colorado: PRH Christian Publishing, 2002), 188.

3 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991).

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

God is not revealed in its might and power but through the passion and crucifixion of Christ.

Church Teachings

"The one who has hope lives differently, the one who hopes has been granted the gift of new life."[6] The encyclical letter of the late Benedict XVI echoes the pleas of the numerous children from Kyiv and of Nathalia as they hold onto hope. This is not to invalidate or discredit their suffering and grief, but to set a clear message for the world that resurrection is born out of crucifixion. In addition, the predecessor of Benedict XVI stressed that "in every child that is born and in every person who lives or dies we see the image of God's glory."[7] The children of Kyiv, who portrayed a young Christ on the cross, made a strong theological declaration that Christ suffers alongside all people, regardless of age, race, or color.

On the other side, Pope Francis cautioned against embracing immigrants because some nations have closed their doors to them, believing that doing so would put them in a safer environment. In his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti,* it is said, "immigrants are seen as usurpers who have nothing to offer. This leads to the simplistic belief that the poor are dangerous and useless, while the powerful are generous benefactors."[8] This gives rise to the oversimplified notion that the powerful are kind donors

6 Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi,* Encyclicals, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html (Accessed October 19, 2025), 2.

7 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae,* Encyclicals, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html (accessed October 19, 2025), 84.

8 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti,* Encyclicals, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html (accessed October 19, 2021), 141.

and the impoverished are dangerous and worthless. Traveling with people like Nathalia is akin to traveling with Christ in exile or on his way to Calvary.

Ecclesiology

In times of conflict, the Catholic Church always welcomes those in need of help, such as shelter, food, and clothing. In one of the Angelus at the Vatican, Pope Francis asked parishes across Europe to open their doors to refugees. He said "Faced with the tragedy of tens of thousands of refugees fleeing death on account of war and hunger, and who are traveling toward a hope for life, the Gospel calls us to be 'neighbors' to the smallest and abandoned, (and) to give them a concrete hope,"[9] he added that it is not enough that as a church would simply say, have "courage (and) patience because hope is combative, with the tenacity of those who go toward a safe destination."[10]

Karl Rahner states in his book *The Church and the Sacraments* that "she herself [the Church] attains the highest degree of actualization of what she always is: the presence of redemptive grace for men, historically visible and manifest as the sign of the eschatologically victorious grace of God in the world." [11] This indicates that the church finds a way to welcome the displaced people as a visible presence of grace during times of conflict and insurgency. Caritas is an example of humanitarian and ecclesiastical assistance for those in need through its numerous programs. It goes without saying that Caritas helps people of all races, religions, and beliefs. For war victims and

9 "Pope: All European churches to welcome refugees," *Catholic News Agency,* September 6, 2025 (Accessed October 19, 2025).

10 Ibid.

11 Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 22.

refugees, in order to survive, hope is not just a naïve optimism but a brave and tenacious act in order to live.

In building the church, Cyril Hovorun wrote that "the structures of the church were designed to contain tensions" [12] because the church has never been completed and is forever under construction, especially in times of insurrections. This ecclesiological dimension helps establish the "hope" that is within the Church.

Hovorun went on to say that "it will be all the more able to hear and respond to the anguished cry of the unparalleled human suffering in the world today[13] because 'ecclesiology from below' is more grounded and flexible in accepting the realities of the world."[14] There may be a more structured "ideal church," but what matters is that it be concrete in facing human reality and embracing the situations, including their flaws.

Lumen Gentium, one of the Church's official documents, stated unequivocally that "since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race"[15] demonstrating the church's constant pursuit of unity and the restoration of the dignity that the victims typically lost when they fled abroad. Additionally, "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of

---

12 Cyril Hovorun, *Scaffolds of the Church* (Cambridge: Cascade Books), 2.

13 Ibid. quoted from Gerard Mannion, *Comparative Ecclesiology: Critical Investigations* (NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008).

14 Ibid.

15 Second Vatican Council, *"Lumen Gentium,"* in *Documents of Vatican Council II,* ed. James H. Kroeger (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 2008), 1.

Christ."[16] The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* encourages the whole church to help alleviate the burden and effects of the war.

In the end, the members of the Church, together with its leaders, must have authentic zeal for this particular mission. John Paul II wrote that "solidarity.... is the path to peace and at the same time to development,"[17] and thus, everyone must have the fidelity to be missionary because the Church is a "missionary by her very nature."[18] As heralds of hope to the suffering, Dulles proposes to have the "courage, hope, and readiness to risk and sacrifice that should follow from a living Christian faith are much needed by the world in our day."[19] This is a clear message to the Church and an invitation that She must learn to serve and even to risk for the sake of the vulnerable ones so as not to diminish Her missionary nature.

Theology Becoming a Mission

The encounters with people who struggle to cope with traumatic experiences, such as those from Ukraine, are holy yet can become vague and hollow unless they lead to meaningful action. But beyond its sanctity, true understanding must lead to action, and theology must be lived to become a genuine mission. The stories of faith, rooted in suffering, are a call that the Church's teachings cannot remain abstract; they must be

16 Second Vatican Council, *"Gaudium et Spes,"* in *Documents of Vatican Council II,* ed. James H. Kroeger (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 2008), 1.

17 Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 1987), 39.

18 Second Vatican Council, *"Lumen Gentium,"* in *Documents of Vatican Council II,* ed. James H. Kroeger (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 2008), 2.

19 Dulles, *Models of the Church,* 131.

incarnational, aware of the realities of human pain, hope, and resilience.

David Bosch emphasizes that "mission was no longer merely an activity of the church, but an expression of the very being of the church."[20] This insight captures the precise context of the mission's identity, and the Church must always go where Christ stands and remain in communion with those who are crucified in various forms throughout the history of Christendom. Bosch adds that

> one could no longer think of the church except as being both called out of the world and sent forth into the world. The world could no longer be divided into 'missionizing' and 'missionary' territories. The whole world was a mission field, which meant that Western theology, too, had to be practiced in a missionary situation.[21]

Christian mission is always responding directly to the needs of the Church, such as the victims of natural and man-made tragedies. For Gustavo Gutiérrez, mission is participation in God's liberating work. In his book, A Theology of Liberation, he said, "In liberation Theology, faith and life are inseparable. This unity accounts for its prophetic vigor and potentialities." [22] This impels us all the more that the mission also requires confronting the causes of suffering while evangelizing with hope. Like his predecessor, Pope Leo XIV called for an end to all armed conflicts in one of his first major addresses after his election as head of the Catholic Church. He said, "I, too, address

20 David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 592-593.

21 Ibid.

22 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 13.

the world's great powers by repeating the ever-present call, 'never again war.'" [23]

The Church, in its missionary nature, must also challenge all forms of armed conflict, insurgency, discrimination, slavery, ecological abuse, corruption, and other injustices that further oppress the vulnerable, especially refugees of war. Another strong and compelling message from Bosch, deeply relevant to the signs of the times, is his definition of mission, which exposes the Church's responsibility to confront these realities and stand in solidarity with those who suffer. He narrated that "missiology acts as a gadfly in the house of theology, creating unrest and resisting complacency, opposing every ecclesiastical impulse to self-preservation."[24] Truly, a mission is being practical, relevant, provocative, and challenging of traditions by going beyond the context and comfort of religious homes.

Conclusion

Journeying with people like Nathalia and the war-displaced children of Kyiv has taught me that theology becomes most real not in reading books, not in classrooms, not in an abstract context, but in the fragile but sacred spaces where human suffering meets compassion. Seeing the reality war in their eyes, their anguish and wounds became, for me, a place of revelation of what Sobrino meant by "meditation of God." In my encounters, I understood in a deeper sense that Christ is not only remembered in the Calvary but continues to be crucified in the lives of the vulnerable of today's world, as it is written in Salvifici Doloris, "in the Cross of Christ not only

23 "Pope Leo calls for peace in Ukraine in first Sunday Address," *The Guardian,* https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/11/pope-leo-peace-ukraine-first-sunday-address-never-again-war#:~:text=Pope%20Leo%20XIV%20has%20called,third%20world%20war%20in%20pieces%E2%80%9D. (Accessed October 19, 2025).

24 David Bosch, *Transforming Mission,* 596.

is the Redemption accomplished through suffering but also human suffering itself has been redeemed."[25]

This experience also clarified what Dulles meant when he wrote, "the Church is permanently marked with the image of the Crucified." The Church's identity might not be fulfilled unless it stands beside those who carry modern crosses, be it in the presence of armed conflicts, poverty, and all kinds of injustices. Rahner's selection of words profoundly resonates the same message: the Church must become "the presence of redemptive grace." In my encounters with them, I realized that, despite our language differences, my simple service and companionship became a source of hope for them. Moreover, mission became clearer to me after this experience, especially through Bosch's insight that mission is not "merely an activity of the Church, but an expression of the very being of the Church." Their cries push us to be authentic and zealous in our work, as Bosch warns that "missiology acts as gadfly" whenever we become complacent, comfortable, and entitled. Their anguish must disrupt us to act with courage and fidelity.

Yet, amid the trauma, I personally witnessed hope as well; quiet, fearful, but real. The resilience of those who lost almost everything taught me that Christian hope is not a naïve optimism. It does not disappoint, certainly[26]. It is a courageous decision to flee, trusting that God is present in the shattered pieces of their lives, as Nathalia does. Hope allows them to

25 Pope John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris,* Apostolic Letters, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1984/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_11021984_salvifici-doloris.html (accessed October 19, 2025), 19.

26 Pope Francis, quotation from Romans 5:5, in *Spes non Confundit,* Papal Bulls, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/20240509_spes-non-confundit_bolla-giubileo2025.html (accessed November 15, 2025), 1.

believe in the resurrection even in the darkness of the crucifixion. And so do I.

Ultimately, these experiences have shaped my own vocation and drawn me back to what our Rule of Life demands. As an Assumptionist, I am compelled to work and "embrace the great causes of God and of man, and to go wherever God is threatened in man and man threatened as the image of God." [27] Hence, this taught me to become more selfless, so that I may serve and defend God's truth and the dignity of humanity. *Adveniat Regnum Tuum! Que Ton Règne Vienne! Mapasaamin ang Kaharian Mo!*

27 Rule of Life of AA, 2.

FROM REFUGE TO COMMUNION: A THEOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS OF A MISSIONARY EXPERIENCE IN GUATEMALA

Nollen Jed D. Mendoza, MJ

Introduction – The Landscape of Encounter

When I first arrived in Guatemala, everything felt foreign: the language, the food, even the rhythm of everyday life. Though I had come as a missionary, I felt more like a refugee searching for a place where I could find comfort and a sense of belonging. Amid those uncertainties and struggles, I discovered that the mission begins not with confidence but with dependence. My heart clung to the words, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). This experience led me to what I now call a *theology of refuge*, of *kanlungan*. An understanding that the missionary must first learn to take shelter in God before becoming a shelter for others. Like many other missionaries, I arrived bringing God in a book, with everything I had learned from the four corners of the classroom, plus my own image of God; instead, I found God, who has never left the land.

The Guatemalan landscape, together with its volcanic surface, the relentless sun, the sudden rains, old cities, and ruins, became a primary scripture, the very revelation of God who is present and intimately involved in the chaos and the messy, yet beautiful, process of growth and decay. Like the early Christian community, which "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship" (Acts 2:42), I learned

that God gathers the fearful and forms them into communion before sending them forth.

Refuge, therefore, is not merely physical safety but a spiritual dwelling in God's faithfulness. It is the first movement of the mission, a sacred pause where the heart learns to rest and trust. Pope Francis reminds us that missionary discipleship begins when we allow ourselves to be renewed by the Lord's love (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 3). In my early days in Guatemala, the chapel became that refuge where I met the God who understood my doubts and fears.

Yet refuge was not the end of the story. As I delved deeper into the lives of the people, their struggles, faith, and hospitality, I encountered the beauty of communion, or *koinonia*. Rooted in the life of the Trinity, this communion fulfills the prayer of Jesus "that they may all be one... as you, Father, are in me and I am in you" (John 17:21). Communion is not only about unity but about participating in God's own relational love. The Church is essentially a reciprocity shaped by dialogue. Just as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in relatedness to each other, and thereby one, so it must be *communio* that establishes the unity of the Church.[1] In the laughter of children, in shared meals, and in collective prayers, I saw that communion is both God's gift and God's mission.

What began as my search for refuge became an invitation to communion. God transformed my fears and vulnerabilities into a relationship and my isolation into a sense of belonging. The movement from refuge to communion is the missionary path itself, a journey from isolation to solidarity, from questioning to listening, from fear to trust, from self-protection to

1 Peter Neuner, "The Church as *Koinonia*: A Central Theme of Vatican II," https://www.theway.org.uk/back/30Neuner.pdf (accessed October 2025).

shared life. I have learned that a person who seeks refuge in God eventually becomes a testimony of communion for others.

The Theology and Practice of "Refuge"

The "Theology of Refuge" is not without its biblical and theological merit. Scripture frequently portrays God as a "refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."[2] The early Church, facing persecution, found refuge in domestic communities, devoting itself "to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."[3] This model emphasizes the Church as Ecclesia, a people "called out" from the world, a holy sanctuary set apart for God.[4] In missiology, this can manifest as a focus on preserving doctrinal purity and providing a safe haven from the perceived chaos of a non-Christian or suffering world. In the Guatemalan context, this theology took practical, tangible forms:

The Mission Compound Mentality: The physical space of the mission house often became a symbolic fortress for us. Within its walls, we spoke our own language, cooked and ate familiar food, and debriefed about "the field" as a place we entered and exited. It was a base of operations, a place to retreat from the overwhelming sensory and emotional stimuli of profound poverty and the challenges of the mission.

The Service-Delivery Model of Mission: Our initial work was largely transactional. Like many other missionaries, we

2 Psalm 46:1 (New International Version).

3 Acts 2:42 (NIV). For a discussion of the early Church's community life as a form of koinonia, see Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 290.

4 "Does the NT Word 'Church' Mean 'Called Out Ones?' Not Really..." *The Reformed Reader Blog,* https://reformedreader.wordpress.com/2025/02/24/does-the-nt-word-church-mean-called-out-ones-not-really/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (accessed November 2025).

arrived with pre-determined projects: building chapels, forming communities and ministries, and teaching catechism. While these actions were beneficial, the underlying dynamic or primary relationship is that of provider and recipient. We were the active subjects possessing resources; the communities were the passive objects of our charity. As missiologist Robert Schreiter critiqued, this model risks reducing the Gospel to a commodity, a pre-packaged product from another culture that fails to become truly incarnate.[5] Although it can offer vital short-term relief, its natural tendency to foster dependency, to weaken local communities, and to lack sustainability limits its long-term effectiveness.

Defensive Evangelism: Our proclamation, at first, was a monologue. Eager to share theological concepts without understanding their preexisting worldview, their interrelated faith, and their profound, often unspoken trust in Divine Providence, we developed solutions to questions they had not always raised.

Indeed, this Refuge model provided an essential initial structure. It offered a psychological and spiritual foothold in an unfamiliar place and culture. However, its walls, designed for protection, soon began to feel like an excuse or, even worse, a limitation.

The Cracks in the Walls: The Limitations of a Refuge-Only Model

Theologically, a mission strategy rooted exclusively in *refuge* stands in tension with the central Christian mystery of the Incarnation. God did not remain in the safe refuge of heaven, dispensing salvation from a distance. Instead, God "emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the

5 Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 112.

likeness of men."[6] Through my own experiences, I have come to see that any model of mission that resembles a "Refuge," where we primarily provide services from a place of perceived superiority, can unintentionally foster a clericalist or elitist mindset. It is the very attitude Pope Francis constantly warns us against, where the missionary, perhaps without even realizing it, positions themselves as "above and afar" from those they serve, rather than walking alongside them as a humble brother or sister. [7]This contradicts the very *missio Dei* (the mission of God), which is an outward movement into the world God so loved.[8]

Practically, the limitations became evident in the relational dynamics. The service-delivery model fostered a subtle paternalism that undermined the dignity and agency of the local community. It is subtly implying, "We have what you need, and you are incapable of obtaining it yourselves." This prevented the possibility of reciprocal evangelization. A profound truth is that the missionaries themselves are also evangelized by the poor. The things they had to offer me—their perseverance, their steadfast faith in the face of adversity, and their strong sense of community, and yes, even the very image of Christ were missing in me because I was too concentrated and too busy doing things for them to just be with.

Furthermore, the Refuge model proved inadequate for addressing systemic injustice. I became aware of a risk in our work: if we merely addressed the symptoms of poverty and focused on providing immediate, sympathetic relief, we risked becoming a pacifying force. This was managing poverty, not a

6 Philippians 2:7 (NRSV).

7 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 2013), p. 93-97.

8 John 3:16 (NRSV).

true mission. Frequently in Latin America today, certain priests are considered "subversive". For the defenders of the status quo, "priestly subversion" is surprising. But we know that in exposing the deep causes of these injustices, many priests and religious had to confront the great economic and political forces of their countries.[9] As Pope Benedict XVI reminded us, "Charity goes beyond justice, because to love is to give, to offer what is 'mine' to the other; but it never lacks justice, which prompts us to give the other what is 'his' ...I cannot 'give' what is mine to the other, without first giving him what pertains to him in justice."[10]

True mission must also raise the prophetic question, "Why are we poor?" and work together to find solutions. Although the refuge was an essential place to begin, remaining there would constitute an abandonment of the Christian faith's fundamental incarnational call to action.

The Theological Foundation of "Communion" (*Koinonia*)

The alternative to refuge is not a rootless immersion in the world, but a deep grounding in the theology of Communion (*Koinonia*). This concept derives from the inner life of the Trinity—a perfect, dynamic communion of love among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. [11]Jesus prayed that his disciples would share in this unity: "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you...

9 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation,* rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), p.106.

10 Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate,* Encyclicals, June 29, 2009, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html, 6.

11 Vatican II, "Lumen Gentium," in *Documents of Vatican Council II*, edited by James H. Kroeger (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 2011), 4.

that they may be one as we are one."[12] The early Church made this reality tangible, sharing life and possessions so that "there were no needy persons among them."[13]

The practical path to achieving this communion is the Incarnational Mission, modeled on Christ's *Kenosis*. For the missionary, this means a deliberate "self-emptying" of one's cultural superiority, pre-packaged solutions, and the need to be in control. It is to enter into the world of the other, not as a benefactor, but as someone willing to learn, a guest, and even as a friend. This aligns perfectly with Pope Francis's call for a "culture of encounter," where we step out from behind our walls to meet the other, to share their life, and to see the face of Christ among them - going forth from our own comfort zone to reach all the "peripheries" in need of the light of the Gospel.[14]

From this communion perspective, the preferential option for the poor is no longer a paternalistic charity but rather a form of solidarity and friendship. The poor—indeed the "crucified peoples" produced by unjust structures—are not merely objects of mission but a privileged place where God discloses the Kingdom in history. As Jon Sobrino says, the crucified peoples are the principal "signs of the times" of God's presence in our world.[15] To be in communion with them is to participate in the school of their faith and to struggle alongside them for a more just world. With this change, the ultimate objective shifts from a project to a relationship.

---

12 John 17:21-22 (NRSV). For a deep theological exploration, see John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985). p.36-41.

13 Acts 4:34-35 (NRSV).

14 Pope Francis, *Evangelli Gaudium,* 21-24.

15 Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 69.

The Practice of Communion in the Guatemalan Context

The theory of Communion took flesh and became concrete in a series of "sacramental awakenings" that dismantled and opened my eyes beyond the walls of my Refuge mindset. Although it was never easy. I had to convince myself many times and remove the prejudices I had.

The first was seeing Christ in the faces of the poor. I recall sitting with a middle-aged father, Don Agustin, when I visited their home. We were not building anything or distributing goods. We were simply drinking *un vaso de cafecito*. As he spoke and shared about losing his child while crossing the Mexico-US border and his unwavering trust that "*God would provide and maybe God has another plan for my child*," his face, etched with years of struggle, was transfigured. In that moment, he was not an object of my mission; he was my teacher, a great storyteller, evangelizing me about a profound, tested faith. That very moment, I was receiving a gospel revelation from him. That even in great loss and suffering, God does not erase God's presence. It can even become an opportunity to see His face closer and most revealed. Indeed, Don Agustin's story highlighted one aspect of the "crucified peoples," making it a privileged location where Christ is present.

The second awakening was recognizing God's presence in the beauty of the Guatemalan landscape. Watching the mist rise over Lago Atitlán, surrounded by majestic volcanoes, and walking among the bricks, ruins, and beautiful churches of Antigua became for me deeply theological experiences. This was not a "God-forsaken" land I had come to save. These were God's glorious creations, and the indigenous people I had talked with, lived with, laughed with, and dined with had been reading this "first book of revelation" long before my arrival. My "mission" shifted from one who brings God to being one

who discovers that God has always been present with and in them. This led directly to new practices:

From Service to Solidarity: Solidarity finds concrete expression in service, which can take a variety of forms in an effort to care for others.[16] From assigning work to asking how we could help with community-identified needs. This often meant doing less "visible" work and spending more time in shared meals and conversations, the building blocks of *koinonia*. Solidarity is a word that means much more than an occasional gesture of generosity. It is thinking and acting in terms of community.[17]

From Monologue to Dialogue: We began to listen to their stories, pray how they are praying, practice their devotions to local saints, most especially to La Guadalupana (the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe), and their blending of Catholic and Mayan spirituality and traditions. This was not a threat to orthodoxy but an invitation to see the many-colored wisdom of God.[18]

From Charity to Justice: Hearing stories of corruption, discrimination, oppression, land dispossession, and economic exploitation moved our community from building *capillas* to empowering and accompanying our lay leaders and elders of the indigenous group to meetings with local officials. Our mission became more concrete and clearer about being with them and walking with them in their struggle for human life and dignity.

---

16 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 2020), 115.

17 Pope Francis, *To participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements,* Speeches, 28 October 2014, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141028_incontro-mondiale-movimenti-popolari.html (accessed November 2025).

18 Ephesians 3:10 (NRSV).

Synthesis – The Dynamic Journey and a Renewed Missionary Identity

The transition from Refuge to Communion is a dynamic integration rather than a straightforward renunciation of one for the other. The Christian community must always be a haven, a place where individuals are molded, healed, and fed by the Word and Sacrament. However, it is a school that prepares disciples for service in the world, a hospital that returns cured patients to the battlefield,[19] and a haven for communion. The ultimate representation of this is seen in the Eucharist, when we go to the altar to be fed in order to be broken and shared for the rest of humanity.

This synthesis transforms our missionaries' identity. We are no longer parachutists, dropping in with solutions, but pilgrims and guests. We are pilgrims on a shared journey of discipleship, and we are guests who humbly receive the hospitality, wisdom, and faith of our hosts. My own identity was fundamentally converted. I arrived as a "missionary" but left as a co-walker, a *compañero*—a term derived from *cum panis*, "with bread," your companions were the ones you ate with, the ones you broke bread with, the ones you shared a common table.[20] This identity, forged in the humility of communion, is the only sustainable and authentic posture for mission, perfectly reflecting David Bosch's insight that mission as "the mother of theology," is first and foremost:

---

19 Antonio Spadaro, *Interview with Pope Francis,* Speeches, 21 September 2013, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html.

20 "'With Bread:' The Etymology & Theology of Companionship," *Missio Alliance,* https://missioalliance.org/with-bread-the-etymology-theology-of-companionship/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (accessed November 2025).

> the *missio Dei*, that is, God's self-revelation as the One who loves the world, God's involvement in and with the world, the nature and activity of God, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church is privileged to participate. *Missio Dei* enunciates the good news that God is a God-for-people.[21]

Conclusion and Implications

This theological synthesis of missionary experience in Guatemala concludes that the heart of mission is a conversion from a self-referential Theology of Refuge to a mutually transformative Theology of Communion. This journey, catalyzed by a sacramental awakening to God's prior presence, redefines mission as participation, not propagation. It is about joining the *missio Dei* already underway in the world. Rooted in the Trinity's self-giving life, shaped by the kenosis of Christ, and embodied as a Church of *koinonia*, mission becomes communion that constantly widens its circle.

The implications of this synthesis are significant. For the global Church, it is a call to self-examination: Are our parishes and ministries fortresses of comfort or wells of encounter that send people out in solidarity? For missionary formation, it underscores that the primary preparation is not logistical but spiritual and anthropological—forming hearts capable of kenosis, listening, and receiving.

My final, lasting image is not of a building or a beautiful church that we all "love" to construct, but of a shared meal after a long day of work. Sitting on a dirty floor, passing a bowl of black beans and hot tortillas, laughing in broken Spanish and Q'eqchi,' the barriers dissolved. In that simple, eucharistic

21 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, 20th anniversary edition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 10, 15.

moment, we were no longer missionary and poor. We were simply the Body of Christ, taken, blessed, broken, and shared for one another. It was a fleeting yet profound foretaste of the heavenly banquet, the ultimate communion toward which all mission is oriented. This is the hope that compels us to continually move from refuge into the risky, beautiful space of communion - communion with God and His people. May every refuge we build become a doorway into communion, and every communion a renewed participation in God's mission.

CONTRIBUTORS

Salvador G. Agualada Jr., CMF is a Claretian priest who earned his Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology from the Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University, and his Master's degree in Theology also from the Ateneo. He completed his Licentiate and Doctorate in Systematic Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Currently, he serves as the Dean of the Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia (ICLA) and teaches Systematic Theology at both LST and ICLA in Quezon City, Philippines. He is the author of six books and numerous scholarly articles.

Dom Joseph B. Bulan, SJ, entered the Society of Jesus in 2015 and is expected to graduate in 2026 with a Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology and a Master of Arts in Theological Studies from LST and Ateneo de Manila University. He is currently the associate director of the Jesuit Music Ministry and has also written songs for Himig Heswita, including *Kabanal-banalang Puso ni Hesus*, *Aba Ginoong Maria*, and *Ponme con tu Hijo*. He recently won Best Recording by a Child or for Children at the *38th Awit Awards* for his composition "Jesus, Best Friend," performed by the Ateneo Boys Choir.

Junmar Cris N. Caputolan is a seminarian from the Archdiocese of Cebu. He is currently in his final Configuration Year of formation at San Jose Seminary.

Kevin Stephon R. Centeno, SJ is a Jesuit scholastic from the Philippines. He earned his AB in Philosophy from St. Augustine Seminary in Calapan City. He joined the Society of Jesus on August 1, 2021. He is about to finish his First Studies at the

Loyola House of Studies. He has published articles in Rappler, The Windhover, and The Way.

La Thi Thu Trang, CMR is a religious of the Missionary Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of the World. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in English language from Ho Chi Minh City Open University, Vietnam, in 2019, and her Master of Arts in Theology (Major in Theological Studies) from Maryhill School of Theology, Quezon City, in 2023. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Theology, specializing in Systematic Theology, at the Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University.

Nollen Jed Distor Mendoza, MJ is a professed brother of the Missionaries of Jesus. He began his seminary formation with the Missionaries of Jesus in 2016 and graduated with an AB in Philosophy in 2019. He started his theological studies during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. After two years of study, he was sent to Guatemala for the Missionary Training Program, where he immersed himself among Hispanic and Indigenous communities served by his confreres for many years. This program significantly deepened his understanding of the language, cross-cultural relationships, and the essence of being a missionary. He is currently enrolled in both the Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology and Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry programs at Loyola School of Theology and Ateneo de Manila University.

Christian Rejano del Mundo, AA is a perpetually professed brother of the Augustinians of the Assumption and is currently finishing his Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology. He began his studies in 2020, at the height of the global health crisis. After two years of study, he was sent to France for language training and pastoral immersion. While in France, he worked closely with refugees and migrants at Caritas Alsace and at "Diakonie" in Kehl, Germany, as a volunteer in épicerie *solidaire*

and soup kitchen. His pastoral immersion shaped him as a true Assumptionist, working for the extension of God's reign "in us and around us."

José Abílio Praia, SJ is a Jesuit priest from Angola, ordained in 2015. He completed his B.A. Honors at Arrupe Jesuit University and the University of Zimbabwe. He pursued theological studies at Hekima University College in Nairobi and a Certificate in Leadership and Management, as well as a First Dan Black Belt in Shotokan Karate. His academic training is complemented by teaching experience in Tanzania and South Sudan, where he integrated language education with pastoral accompaniment. He later served as Vice-Rector of a diocesan seminary in Angola before being missioned to the Philippines for studies at the Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University. He recently completed his Licentiate in Sacred Theology (STL) in Moral Theology, graduating *cum laude*, with a thesis titled "Pope John Paul II's Vision in *Mulieris Dignitatem* and *Ubuntu* Philosophy: A Path to Decolonizing Women in Angolan Patriarchal Society." He speaks English, French, Portuguese, and Umbundu, and reads Spanish, Arabic, Kiswahili, and Kikongo.


IHS