

Ecce Mater Tua

A Journal of Mariology

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Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary

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We welcome scholarly contributions from all topics in Mariology, including but not limited to Marian doctrine, Mary in Scripture and the writings of the Fathers, Marian piety and devotion, Mary in the liturgy, Mary in the papal magisterium. Topics in Marian mediation are especially welcome.

Quotations of the Bible should use the RSV-CE, unless the essay necessitates the use of another version. Please include five keywords with your submission (e.g., Mariology, perpetual virginity, John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas, Pope Pius IX). If an article or book review is accepted for publication, authors must verify that the piece conforms to style instructions. Greek and Hebrew do not need to be transliterated, but may be submitted in Unicode format, and the author should attend to making sure that words are spelled correctly with correct diacritical marks.

Book Reviews:

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Introduction to Ecce Mater Tua Vol. 11

THE EDITORS

This tenth issue of *Ecce Mater Tua* has a distinctive Josephite emphasis. As the pure and chaste spouse of the Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph is a most appropriate subject of praise and appreciation by authors and readers of EMT.

The main article section offers two important articles discussing the issue of the “Heart” of St. Joseph. The first article by Dr. Mark Miravalle and Dr. Robert Fastiggi discusses the theology, history, and devotion to the Heart of St. Joseph, which includes commentary on three rather remote statements by 19th century Vatican curial officials which speak against the devotion, but have neither theological rationale nor ecclesiastical promulgation in their negative judgements. The latter Josephite article is a re-publication of an important contribution by the late Msgr. Arthur Calkins on the selfsame subject of St. Joseph’s Heart. The former piece includes a commentary on Msgr. Calkins’ historical analysis of the question.

Other essays in the main article section represent an extended international Mariological flavor which include a treatment on the Mariology of St. Augustine by Nancy McCarthy from Franciscan University of Steubenville with particular examination of his treatment of Marian predestination and free will; as well as a treatment of Our Lady as the “fruit of redemption” by Sr. Tereza Sinishtaj, O.P., an Albanian Dominican Sister, presently studying at the Anglicum Rome;

The earlier *Commentario* section leads off with a serious Mariological clarification request by Dr. Robert Fastiggi made to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith concerning a recent questionable statement that appears to run contrary to the four century papal magisterial teaching on Our Lady as the Mediatrix of all graces. This is followed by a brief Mariological reflection on Our Lady’s relation to the Holy Trinity and consequently in relation to humanity as the Immaculate Mother of all peoples. A helpful analysis on the May 7, 2020

episcopal decision concerning “Our Lady of America” is offered by Carol Morel. One will also read of an antithetical parallelism between the great St. Maximilian Kolbe and the Masonic Giordano Bruno in reference to the date of February 17 by Annamaria Mix, O.V., based in the Polish “City of the Immaculate Virgin,” Niepokalanów. Finally, a profound Christo-Marian poem on the Cross and Our Lady’s coredemption is offered by Fr. Stanislaw Gibinski, a Polish priest presently ministering in England.

The Editors

Commentario

Mary as Mediatrix of Grace: A Request to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith for Clarification

ROBERT FASTIGGI, PhD

On July 5, 2024, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith [DDF], published a Letter to the Bishop of Brescia that affirms that nothing stands in the way (*nihil obstat*) for the faithful to believe in the “Rosa Mystica” apparitions received by Pierina Gilli (1911–1991) at Fontanelle di Montichiari, Italy.¹ The letter brings out many important insights. For example, it says “that everything Mary does in us always directs us toward Jesus Christ.”

There is, though, one paragraph in the Letter that has raised some questions. In seeking to clarify various expressions in Pierina’s *Diaries* such as “Mary of Grace” and “Mary Mediatrix,” the DDF provides this commentary:

At the same time, it must be maintained that only the Lord can act in people’s hearts by bestowing sanctifying grace that uplifts and transforms, because sanctifying grace is “first and foremost the gift of the *Spirit* who justifies and sanctifies us” (CCC, no. 2003; emphasis added), “it is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of *his* own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul” (CCC, no. 1999; emphasis added). **In this action, which only God can do in the depths without overlooking our freedom, there is no other possible mediation, not even that of the Blessed Virgin Mary.** Her cooperation is always to be understood in the sense of her maternal intercession and in the context of her helping to create provisions for us to be open to the action of sanctifying grace. The Second Vatican Council explained that

¹ Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishop of Brescia about the Devotion to Mary the “Rosa Mystica” (Mystical Rose) (Montichiari, Italy)* (July 5, 2024): https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddf_doc_20240705_lettera-devozione-mariarosamistica_en.html

since God “elicits in his creatures a manifold cooperation, which is but a sharing in this one source,” for this reason, “the Church does not hesitate to profess this subordinate role of Mary (LG, 62) [emphasis added].

Certainly, the source of sanctifying grace is God and not Mary. This is what St. Pius X emphasized in his 1904 encyclical when he said that “We are ...very far from attributing to the Mother of God a productive power of grace—a power that belongs to God alone” (Denz.-H, 3370). It is also true that only God is capable of sanctifying souls with his divine grace. How, though, does the action of sanctifying grace exclude Mary’s *mediation* of the divine grace that sanctifies us? The DDF says that “in this action [of sanctifying grace], which only God can do in the depths without overlooking our freedom, there is no other possible mediation, not even that of the Blessed Virgin Mary.” The mediation of divine grace by Mary, though, does not mean that she is the *source* or the power of divine grace. It does, however, mean that she is active in the *mediation* of the divine grace that sanctifies us.

The DDF’s Letter recognizes that the Virgin Mary’s “maternal intercession” helps “to create provisions for us to be open to the action of sanctifying grace.” Mary’s maternal intercession is certainly a form of mediation. Numerous popes, though, have referred to Our Lady as the “Mediatrice of *all* graces.” If Mary is the Mediatrix of *all* graces, then she would also be the Mediatrix of the grace that sanctifies us.

There are different ways of describing the causality of Marian meditation. Some theologians speak of instrumental causality while others prefer to speak of moral causality. Apart from these different theological explanations, numerous popes have affirmed Mary as the Mediatrix of all graces. Here are some examples:

- Pope Benedict XIV in his 1748 Bull, *Gloriosae Dominae*, describes the Blessed Virgin as “a celestial stream through which the flow of all graces and gifts reach the soul of all wretched mortals.”²
- Pope Pius VII, in his 1806 apostolic constitution, *Quod Divino afflata Spiritu*, refers to Mary as the “Dispensatrix of all graces.”³
- Bl. Pope Pius IX, in his 1849 encyclical, *Ubi primum*, writes: “For God has committed to Mary the treasury of all good things, in order that everyone may know that through her are obtained every hope, every grace, and all salvation.”⁴
- Pope Leo XIII, in his 1891 apostolic letter, *Octobri mense*, writes: “Consequently, it may be affirmed with no less truth and justice that absolutely nothing from this immense treasury of all the graces brought forth by the Lord—inasmuch as ‘grace and truth have come from Jesus Christ’ [Jn 1:17]—is imparted to us, by the will of God, except through Mary (*nisi per Mariam*).”⁵
- St. Pius X, in his 1904 encyclical, *Ad diem illum*, speaks of Mary as “the supreme minister of the distribution of graces.”⁶(Denz.-H, 3370).
- In a 1919 decree anticipating the canonization of St. Joan of Arc, Benedict XV refers to Mary as “the Mediatrix of all graces” (*Mediatrix omnium gratiarum*).⁷

² Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758), *Op. Omnia*, v. 16, ed., Prati, 1846, p.428.

³ Pope Pius VII (1800-1823), *Ampliatio privilegiorum ecclesiae B.M. Virginis (Florentiae: 1806)*, § 1.

⁴ Pope Pius IX (1846-1878), encyclical letter, *Ubi Primum*, 1849: <https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-ix/it/documents/enciclica-ubi-primum-2-febbraio-1849.html>.

⁵ Pope Leo XIII, encyclical, *Octobri mense* (September 22, 1891): Denz.-H, 3274.

⁶ Pius X, encyclical, *Ad diem illum* (February 2, 1904): Denz.-H, 3370.

⁷ *La Documentation Catholique* I (1919), 322; see also Fr. Manfred Hauke, *Mary, Mediatrix of Grace* (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2004), 52.

- In 1921 Pope Benedict XV approves the Mass and Office of the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces.⁸
- Pius XI, in his 1932 encyclical, *Caritate Christi compulsi*, points to the powerful patronage of the Virgin Mother of God, “the Mediatrix of all graces” (*Virginis Deiparae, omnium gratiarum Mediatricis*).⁹
- Pius XII, in his apostolic constitution, *Sedes sapientiae* of May 31, 1956, speaks of Mary as “the One who was constituted Mediatrix of all graces regarding sanctification (“... *quae gratiarum omnium ad sanctificationem spectantium Mediatrix constituta est* ...”).¹⁰
- St. John XXIII, in his May 26, 1961 apostolic letter, *Beatissimum Virginem Mariam*, grants the title of Minor Basilica to the Ugandan Church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces, Sultana of Africa. In this letter, he refers to “the Virgin Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces (*Virginem Mariam, Omnium Gratiarum Sequestram*).¹¹
- St. Paul VI, in his 1965 encyclical, *Menso Maio*, says that “we must not forget that ‘the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort,’ (2 Cor 1:3) ... has appointed Mary most holy as the generous administrator (*generosam administram*) of the gifts of his mercy.”¹²

⁸ Hauke, 55–56.

⁹ *AAS* 24 (1932), p.192.

¹⁰ *AAS* 48 (1956), p. 354.

¹¹ *AAS* 54 (1962), p. 150.

¹² *AAS* 57 (1965), p.357.

- St. John Paul II referred to Mary as the Mediatrix of all graces (or its equivalent) at least nine times.¹³ For example, in his Angelus Address of January 17, 1988, he refers to the Egyptian Church of Our Lady in Medai as a shrine where many pilgrims come to entrust their intentions to “the Mediatrix of all graces” (*Mediatrice di tutte le grazie*).¹⁴
- Pope Benedict XVI, in his January 10, 2013 Letter to Archbishop Sigismundo Zimowski (who was representing the Holy See for the celebration of the 21st World Day of the Sick), commends his mission “by imploring the prayers and intercessions of the Blessed Immaculate Virgin Mary, the Mediatrix of all graces” (*implenda precibus comitatur atque intercessioni Beatae Virginis Mariae Immaculatae, Mediatricis omnium gratiarum, commendamus*).¹⁵
- Pope Francis, in his May 13, 2023 Message of Pope Francis to Archbishop Gian Franco Saba of Sassari, Sardinia, Italy, notes that “One of the most ancient titles by which Christians have invoked the Virgin Mary is precisely ‘the Mediatrix of all graces.’”¹⁶

All these references show that numerous popes have recognized Mary as the Mediatrix of *all* graces. How could Mary be the Mediatrix

¹³ Msgr. Arthur B. Calkins, “Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces, in the Papal Magisterium of Pope John Paul II,” in *Mary at the Foot of the Cross—VII: Coredemptrix, Therefore Mediatrix of All Graces* (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2008), 51–54.

¹⁴ John Paul II, Angelus Address (January 17, 1988): https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_ang_19880117.html.

¹⁵ Benedict XVI, letter (January 10, 2013): https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/la/letters/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20130110_card-zimowski.html.

¹⁶ Pope Francis, Message for the “Festa del Voto” in Sassari, Sardinia, Italy (May 13, 2023): <https://www.arcidiocesisassari.it/2023/05/28/festa-del-voto-il-messaggio-del-santo-padre/22881/>.

of all graces yet in the divine action of sanctifying grace in individual souls “there is no other possible mediation, not even that of the Blessed Virgin Mary?”

Perhaps the DDF’s point is that we should not confuse the action of God with the mediation of Mary. This, to be sure, is an important point; but the *mediation* of grace is not the same as the *action* of grace. The mediation of grace can take different forms without compromising the divine action of grace. Pius XII, in his 1954 encyclical, *Ad Caeli Reginam*, raises this question:

For if through His Humanity the divine Word performs miracles and gives graces, if He uses His Sacraments and Saints as instruments for the salvation of men, why should He not make use of the role and work of His most holy Mother in imparting to us the fruits of redemption?¹⁷

According to Pius XII, the sacraments mediate grace because they are used by God as instruments of his grace. The Church, as “the universal sacrament of salvation”¹⁸ is used by God to mediate grace. In a similar way, the Blessed Virgin Mary is used by God as an instrument of the Holy Spirit in the mediation of grace. In his General Audience of November 13, 2024, Pope Francis refers to the Mother of God as “an instrument of the Holy Spirit in His work of sanctification.”¹⁹ The work of sanctification takes place in human souls. If the Mother of God is an instrument of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of souls, then it seems that she is also a Mediatrix of the grace that sanctifies souls.

Mary’s *mediation* of grace is not the same as the divine *action* of grace. Mary’s mediation of grace is united to God’s action in the

¹⁷ Pius XII, encyclical, *Ad Caeli Reginam* (Oct. 11, 1954); *AAS* 46 (1954), p. 636.

¹⁸ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), no. 45.

¹⁹ Pope Francis, General Audience (November 13, 2024).

sanctification of souls, but it is always a subordinate and dependent cooperation with God's action. St. Paul VI, in his 1967 apostolic exhortation, *Signum magnum*, offers this reflection:

Indeed, just as no human mother can limit her task to the generation of a new man but must extend it to the function of nourishing and educating her offspring, thus the blessed Virgin Mary, after participating in the redeeming sacrifice of the Son, and in such an intimate way as to deserve to be proclaimed by Him the Mother not only of His disciple John but—may we be allowed to affirm it—of mankind which he in some way represents, now continues to fulfill from heaven her maternal function **as the cooperator in the birth and development of divine life in the individual souls of redeemed men**. This is a most consoling truth which, by the free consent of God the All-Wise, is an integrating part of the mystery of human salvation; **therefore it must be held as faith by all Christians** (emphasis added).²⁰

Paul VI reaffirms Mary's cooperation in the birth and development of divine life in human souls in his June 30, 1968 *Credo of the People of God*:

Joined by a close and indissoluble bond to the Mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption, the Blessed Virgin, the Immaculate, was at the end of her earthly life raised body and soul to heavenly glory and likened to her risen Son in anticipation of the future lot of all the just; and we believe that the Blessed Mother of God, the New Eve, Mother of the Church, continues in heaven her maternal role with regard to Christ's members, **cooperating with the birth and growth**

²⁰ Paul VI, apostolic exhortation, *Signum magnum* (May 13, 1967), Part I, n.1.

of divine life in the souls of the redeemed (emphasis added).²¹

If Mary cooperates with the birth and growth of divine life in the souls of the redeemed, it seems that she is intimately involved in the mediation of the sanctifying grace of God in individual souls. Her mediation of grace is, as *Lumen gentium*, 62 teaches, a sharing or “participated cooperation” in the one source of Christ’s unique mediation (*participatam ex unico fonte cooperationem*). *Lumen gentium*, 63 states that

The Son whom she [Mary] brought forth is He whom God placed as the first-born among many brethren (cf. Rom 8: 29), that is, the faithful **in whose generation and formation she co-operates with a mother's love** (*Filium autem peperit, quem Deus posuit primogenitum in multis fratribus [cf. Rom 8:29], fidelibus nempe, cooperator ad quos gignendos et educandos materno amore* (emphasis added).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 501 cites *Lumen gentium*, 63 to show that Mary’s “spiritual motherhood extends to all men whom He came to save.” As the spiritual Mother of all the saved, Mary participates and cooperates “in the birth and development of divine life in the individual souls of redeemed men” (as St. Paul VI teaches in *Signum magnum*).

St. John Paul II, in his 1987 encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater*, likewise points to Mary’s intimate union with Christ in the sanctification of souls:

In fact, the Council teaches that the "motherhood of Mary in the order of grace...will last without interruption until the

²¹ Paul VI, *Credo of the People of God* (June 30, 1968), no. 15; *AAS* 60 (1968), p. 439.

eternal fulfillment of all the elect" (*Lumen gentium*, 62). With the redeeming death of her Son, **the maternal mediation of the handmaid of the Lord took on a universal dimension**, for the work of redemption embraces the whole of humanity. Thus there is manifested in a singular way the efficacy of the one and universal mediation of Christ "between God and men." **Mary's cooperation shares, in its subordinate character, in the universality of the mediation of the Redeemer, the one Mediator.** This is clearly indicated by the Council in the words quoted above (emphasis added).²²

If the Virgin Mary's maternal mediation of grace is universal, then it cannot be excluded in the sanctification of souls. St. John Paul II teaches: "Mary's cooperation shares, in its subordinate character, in the universality of the mediation of the Redeemer, the one Mediator."

The exact way in which Mary mediates sanctifying grace with and under her divine Son is a mystery that needs further theological exploration and development. The tradition of the Church, though, seems to affirm that Mary's mediation of grace is not simply that of intercession but also that of *cooperation* in the sanctification of souls. This is why Benedict XVI, in his May 11, 2007 homily for the Mass and canonization of Fr. Antônio de Sant'Ana Galvão in São Paulo, Brazil, stated that "there is no fruit of grace in the history of salvation that does not have as its necessary instrument the mediation of Our Lady."²³ According to Benedict XVI, Mary's mediation of grace, with and under Christ, the one Mediator, is a necessary instrument for the fruit of grace. This means that Mary's mediation *is present with and united to* the action of divine grace in individual souls.

²² John Paul II, encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater* (March 25, 1987), no. 40.

²³ Benedict XVI, homily in, São Paulo, Brazil (May 11, 2007).

Pope Francis, in his August 5, 2024 homily at St. Mary Major's Basilica in celebration of the memorial of Our Lady of the Snows, said that, "she [Mary] is the Mediatrix of the grace that flows always and only through Jesus Christ, by the action of the Holy Spirit (*lei è la mediatrice della grazia che sgorga sempre e solo da Gesù Cristo, per opera dello Spirito Santo*)."²⁴ If Mary is the Mediatix of the grace, which originates in Jesus Christ and comes to us through the power of the Holy Spirt, it seems that she is also the Mediatrix of all sanctifying grace, for this is the only grace that can save and sanctify us. The words of Pope Francis seem difficult to reconcile with the view that "in this action [of sanctifying grace] ... there is no other possible mediation, not even that of the Blessed Virgin Mary." Pope Francis, on the contrary, recognizes Mary as the *Mediatix* of this grace.

In its September 19, 2024 "Note on the Spiritual Experience Connected with Medjugorje," the DDF rightly states that "Mary's mediatory cooperation is 'subordinate' to the mediation of Christ (cf. *Redemptoris Mater*, par. 39)" and Mary's cooperation "neither takes away from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficaciousness of Christ the one Mediator" (*Lumen gentium*, n.62).²⁵ These points are certainly true. The Virgin Mary, though, has been called "mediatrix" since the fifth or sixth century.²⁶ When Vatican II calls Mary Mediatrix in *Lumen gentium*, n. 62, it includes among its citations a passage from St. Andrew of Crete (c. 660-740), who extols Mary as

²⁴ Pope Francis, *Omelià Della Celebrazione Dei Secondi Vespri In Occasione Dell'Anniversario Della Basilica Papale di Santa Maria Maggiore e Della Solennità Della Madonna Delle Neve*, (Homily of the Celebration of Second Vespers on the Occasion of the Anniversary of the Papal Basilica of St. Mary Majors and the Solemnity of the Lady of the Snows), Rome, August 5, 2024.

²⁵ DDF, "The Queen of Peace" Note About the Spiritual Experience Connected with Medjugorje (September 19, 2024):

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddf_d oc_20240919_nota-esperienza-medjugorje_en.html.

²⁶ Cf. Michael O'Carroll, CSSp, *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 240.

the “mediatrix of law and grace” (*Salve legis ac gratiae mediatrix [mesitis]*).²⁷ Such mediation seems to go beyond that of intercession.

I bring forth these references and concerns in accordance with canon 212§ 3 of the *Codex Iuris Canonici* and no. 30 of the 1990 Instruction, *Donum veritatis* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. I am simply trying to understand how what the DDF says about Marian mediation in its July 5, 2024 Letter can be reconciled with what has been previously taught by the Church. I hope and pray the DDF can clarify these matters in the future. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mediatrix of all graces, pray for us.

²⁷ S. Andreas Cret., *In Nat. Mariae, Sermo* IV, PG 97, 865 A; *Acta Synodalia* III, pars 1, 371.

Who Are You, O Immaculate Mother?

MARK MIRAVALLE, S.T.D.

To appreciate fully who Mary truly is, we must view her, not from the opines of humanity, but from the revelation of divinity.

How does the Holy Trinity view Mary?

We begin with God the Father. God the Father sees Mary as His human masterpiece, His highpoint of creation after the sacred humanity of His Son. Beyond the planetary bodies and the seven natural wonders of the world, Mary is the Father's created masterpiece, in virtue of her unparalleled Immaculate Conception. Here, a human creature experiences a "fullness of grace," the deepest, most sublime participation in the very life and love of the Trinity. God the Father looks upon His Immaculate daughter and sees the creature who most completely, in every way, conformed her free human will to His Divine will. It is first the relationship between the Father and Mary that prepares the way for the coming of the Redeemer. Truly, Mary is the most beloved daughter of God the Father.

Secondly, Mary is Mother of God the Son "made man." Liturgy speaks true when it refers to this "wonderment of nature" where a *creature gives birth to her Creator*. This will happen only once in human history—it will never be repeated. From the time Mary gives *fiat* to being Christ's mother until his birth, the unborn Jesus will be even further sanctifying his immaculate mother for nine uninterrupted months, similar as if we had our Eucharistic Jesus physically within us unceasingly for nine months!

What kind of intimacy, what mystical union of heart, exists between this mother and this Son? St. John Eudes is correct when he says it is as if there is only “one heart” between Jesus and Mary, since the Mother does all to please the Son, and the Son grants all the Mother requests. Do we not see this clearly at Cana? No one obeys the Fourth commandment to “honor thy mother” better than Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, Mary is the human “spouse” of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit overshadows Mary at the Annunciation (just as the Holy Cloud [*Shekinah*] overshadowed the Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament), the Word is conceived in her virginal womb and becomes flesh. Mary is now the new living, breathing Ark of the Covenant who bears the unborn Christ, and where the New Ark goes, the Holy Spirit goes. St. Maximilian Kolbe rightly states that the Holy Spirit *acts only through the Immaculata*, His human spouse— not by divine necessity, but by divine disposition: not because He has not, but because He wants to, since the first fruit of the union between the Holy Spirit and Mary brought us Jesus.

On February 17, 1941, a few hours before he would be taken by the Nazis and eventually martyred at Auschwitz, St. Maximilian Kolbe felt inspired to ask the Mariological question, “Who are you, O Immaculate Conception?” His answer constituted the most sublime insights regarding the intimate relationship between Mary, the “Immaculata” and the Holy Spirit ever written.

In our own times, we may well ask the question, “Who are you, O *Immaculate Mother*?” In an age when most every perennial truth has been seriously questioned or outright denied, the universal appreciation of motherhood remains. Thus, the greatest example of

motherhood in all human history rightly calls for renewed examination and appreciation.

Why do we call Mary *our Mother*?

The gift of Mary's spiritual motherhood, St. John Paul II tells us, is a personal gift given from the crucified Christ at Calvary to every single human being: "Behold, your Mother" (Jn. 19:27, *Redemptoris Mater*, n.45) It is not merely an invitation by Jesus, but rather a statement of fact and a new Christian obligation. All who seek to be "beloved disciples" in imitation of St. John are likewise called to take Mary "into our homes," that is, into our hearts, our inner selves, our spiritual lives. Mary is a spiritual Mother given to each and every human being in order to unite us to Jesus, child to Child, as only a common mother can.

Mary is the *Mother suffering*. As the New Eve with Christ, the New Adam, as human Co-redemptrix with Christ the divine Redeemer, Mary cooperated in the historic accomplishment of Redemption like no other human being. As Pope St. John Paul II teaches, Mary was "spiritually crucified" with her divine Son, and "her role as Co-redemptrix did not cease with the glorification of her Son" (Guayaquil, Ecuador, Jan. 31, 1985). Her weeping statues at places like the Church approved apparitions at Akita indicate her ongoing mystical sufferings as spiritual Mother of a suffering world.

Mary is truly the *Mother nourishing*. Vatican II tells us that she is "a mother to us in the order of grace" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 61), and as a maternal Mediatrix, she intercedes "to bring us the gifts of eternal life" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 62). In virtue of her role as Mediatrix of all graces, each and every redemptive grace we receive from Jesus comes to us through the intercession of his mother, just as Jesus himself

came to us through the intercession of his mother. St. Teresa of Calcutta put it succinctly: “No Mary, no Jesus.” St. John Paul II adds that the role of mediatrix is intrinsic to the word, “mother.” Hence the words of Jesus from Calvary likewise proclaim, “Behold, your Mediatrix.”

Mary is truly the *Mother pleading*. Her most ancient title, dating from the 2nd century, is that of *Advocate*. She is the universal mother who intercedes for the protection and defense of her earthly children. Third century Christians prayed for her protection during the times of the Roman persecution: “We fly to your patronage, O holy Mother of God. Despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us from all dangers, o ever glorious and blessed Virgin!” Today, we have ever-increasing dangers and difficulties as manifest in the family, in society, in the Church and in the world, arguably beyond precedent. Today, we need our Mother’s most powerful intercession like never before for the protection and the restoration of the family, for the protection of the unborn, for unity in the Church, for world peace.

Let us, therefore, embrace and cherish the gift of Jesus to every human heart in *the gift of his mother*.

Let us generously and wholeheartedly bring Mary into our spiritual lives, our inmost homes, to put things of the heart in order, for our ultimate holiness and happiness.

Let us proclaim to all we can, according to our vocations and states of life that, when our global situation seems to need one more than ever, that indeed *the world has a mother*.

Our Lady of America: A Providential Opportunity Toward a More Illuminating Analysis

CAROL MOREL

Introduction

Five years after the conclusion of the investigation into the alleged apparitions of Our Lady of America, the Church issued new procedural norms and classifications for the discernment of alleged supernatural phenomena. These new norms present an opportunity to reexamine the case – this time, with a more coherent methodology and more precise categories for assessing the mystical phenomena experienced by Sister Mildred Neuzil. The investigative commission’s 2019 conclusion (which neither approves nor condemns the events, leaving the door open for reinvestigation) is problematic in two ways. *First*, it seems to conflate two different forms of perception – inner vision and spiritual vision – thus precluding a proper assessment of the phenomena. To avoid such confusion, this case calls for a methodology with the degree of precision modeled by Benedict XVI in his commentary on the Third Secret of Fatima. Not only did he clearly define the different forms of perception, he also thoroughly explained, anthropologically and psychologically, what constitutes an apparition, and how to discern its authenticity as its full depth of meaning unfolds over time. *Second*, the investigative commission’s conclusion overreaches in categorizing as “doctrinal error” a theological difficulty in need of clarification, thus derailing their discernment process. Many sound refutations have already been published defending the theological construct in question, but another significant consideration bears

mentioning: its ecumenical value. A reinvestigation correcting these issues could ultimately result, under the new norms, in the classification *nihil obstat* – potentially releasing unprecedented graces of conversion.

When Bishop Kevin Rhoades et al. concluded the investigation into the alleged apparitions of Our Lady of America to Sister Mildred Neuzil in 2019, the commission left the door open for further evaluation. The conclusion – *non constat de supernaturalitate*,¹ based upon the 1978 norms for discernment – neither condemns nor approves the events.² Providentially, the Church’s new procedural norms and classifications for the discernment of such phenomena (effective May 19, 2024)³ present a twofold opportunity to reinvestigate the case – applying not only the new norms, but also, a more coherent methodology. The primary problem with the commission’s 2019 findings lies in the method of assessing mystical phenomena; the categories implemented lack the necessary theological precision.⁴ A secondary problem lies in categorizing as “doctrinal error” a locution more accurately described as a theological difficulty in need

¹ It is not confirmed to be of supernatural origin.

² Bishop Kevin Rhoades, “Singular Decree,” July 29, 2019, <https://www.ourladyofamerica.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/SINGULAR-DECREE-Sr.-Mildred-Neuzil-CPPS-with-signatures.pdf>

³ Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena,” May 17, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_c_ddf_doc_20240517_norme-fenomeni-soprannaturali_en.html

⁴ This discernment calls for the incomparable degree of precision found in Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger’s “Theological Commentary on the Third Secret of Fatima,” in Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Documents regarding ‘The Message of Fatima,’” June 26, 2000, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html

of clarification. The following commentary explores the validity and integrity of the investigation, in light of these problems.

The primary problem

The study's categories—"subjective inner religious experiences" versus "objective external visions and revelations"⁵—are inaccurately defined. The juxtaposed adjectives – subjective versus objective, and inner versus external – are so lacking in analytical rigor that they cause confusion, precluding a proper assessment of the phenomena.

Bishop Rhoades's Singular Decree cites pages 128 and 130-132 of Fr. Benedict Groeschel's *A Still Small Voice* as evidence that Sister Neuzil's experiences exclude the possibility of "objective private revelation,"⁶ concluding that

Sister Neuzil herself describes her experience as 'inner vision', and we find that her experiences were of a type where her own imagination and intellect were involved in the formation of the events. ... [W]e do not find evidence that these were objective visions and revelations of the type seen at Guadalupe, Fatima and Lourdes."⁷

This conclusion, as stated, is somewhat incoherent; it seems to conflate two types of perception, both of which Sister

⁵ Bishop Kevin Rhoades, "Singular Decree."

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Neuzil experienced: *inner vision* (private revelation) and *spiritual vision* (religious experience). The statement, in fact, directly contradicts Fr. Groeschel's own use of the term *inner vision* in reference to apparitions; on page 51 of the same book, he described the approved apparitions of Our Lady of Lourdes to Saint Bernadette Soubirous as "inner visions."⁸ And in contrast to the categories used in the Singular Decree, Fr. Groeschel's distinction between these two types of phenomena was not "objective" versus "subjective," but rather, "not primarily subjective" versus "highly subjective."⁹ These very same nuances were explicated in thorough detail by Benedict XVI in his "Theological Commentary on the Third Secret of Fatima," eliminating any such confusion.

Benedict XVI categorized approved apparitions such as those at Lourdes and Fatima as inner visions involving a certain necessary degree of subjectivity.¹⁰ In clarifying the anthropological/psychological structure and character of private revelations, he first noted three forms of perception: sensible/bodily vision, inner/interior vision, and spiritual vision. The first form, *sensible/bodily vision*, refers to "normal exterior perception of the senses."¹¹ The second form, *inner vision*, refers to the phenomena of private revelation (e.g., the apparitions of Lourdes and Fatima). The third form, *spiritual vision*, comprises the classical division of spiritual perception (i.e., corporeal, imaginative, and intellectual). His delineation of these categories offers the necessary precision for

⁸ Benedict J. Groeschel, CFR, *A Still Small Voice: A Practical Guide on Reported Revelations* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 51.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 128, 130.

¹⁰ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Theological Commentary."

¹¹ *Ibid.*

discerning a case such as this one, in which both *inner vision* and *spiritual vision* were reported. He emphasized,

It is clear that in the visions [and apparitions¹²] of Lourdes, Fatima and other places it is not a question of normal exterior perception of the senses: the images and forms which are seen are not located spatially, as is the case for example with a tree or a house. This is perfectly obvious, for instance, as regards the vision of hell (described in the first part of the Fatima “secret”) or even the vision described in the third part of the “secret”. But the same can be very easily shown with regard to other visions, especially since not everybody present saw them, but only the “visionaries”. It is also clear that it is not a matter of a “vision” in the mind, without images, as occurs at the higher levels of mysticism. Therefore we are dealing with the middle category, interior perception [i.e., inner vision]. For the visionary, this perception certainly has the force of a presence, equivalent for that person to an external manifestation to the senses.¹³

The investigative commission finds “that [Sister Neuzil’s] experiences were of a type where her own imagination and

¹² Benedict XVI clarified in an interview on the flight to Portugal on May 11, 2010 that these comments published in his “Theological Commentary” in 2000 referred not only to visions within apparitions, but also to the apparitions themselves. (See “Interview of the Holy Father Benedict XVI with the Journalists during the Flight to Portugal,” Papal Flight, May 11, 2010, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100511_portogallo-interview.html.)

¹³ Ratzinger, “Theological Commentary.”

intellect were involved in the formation of the events.”¹⁴ Yet, referring to the apparition of Our Lady of Fatima, Benedict XVI explained,

“Interior vision” is ... a true and valid means of verification. But it also has its limitations. Even in exterior vision the subjective element is always present. We do not see the pure object, but it comes to us through the filter of our senses, which carry out a work of translation. This is still more evident in the case of interior vision, especially when it involves features which in themselves transcend our horizon. The subject, the visionary, is still more powerfully involved. He sees insofar as he is able, in the modes of representation and consciousness available to him. In the case of interior vision, the process of translation is even more extensive than in exterior vision, for the subject shares in an essential way in the formation of the image of what appears. He can arrive at the image only within the bounds of his capacities and possibilities. Such visions therefore are never simple “photographs” of the other world, but are influenced by the potentialities and limitations of the perceiving subject.

... The images ... are ... the result of a real perception of a higher and interior origin. But neither should they be thought of as if for a moment the veil of the other world were drawn back, with heaven appearing in its pure essence.... Rather the images are, in a manner of speaking, a synthesis of the

¹⁴ Bishop Kevin Rhoades, “Singular Decree.”

impulse coming from on high and the capacity to receive this impulse in the visionaries.... For this reason the figurative language of the visions is symbolic. ... The central element of the image is revealed where it coincides with what is the focal point of Christian prophecy itself: the center is found where the vision becomes a summons and a guide to the will of God.¹⁵

Ten years later, Pope Benedict XVI reiterated,

In 2000, in my presentation, I said that an apparition – a supernatural impulse which does not come purely from a person’s imagination but really from the Virgin Mary, from the supernatural – that such an impulse enters into a subject and is expressed according to the capacities of that subject. The subject is determined by his or her historical, personal, temperamental conditions, and so translates the great supernatural impulse into his or her own capabilities for seeing, imagining, expressing; yet these expressions, shaped by the subject, conceal a content which is greater, which goes deeper, and only in the course of history can we see the full depth, which was – let us say – “clothed” in this vision that was accessible to specific individuals.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ratzinger, “Theological Commentary.”

¹⁶ “Interview of the Holy Father Benedict XVI with the Journalists during the Flight to Portugal,” Papal Flight, May 11, 2010, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100511_portogallo-interview.html

Also in this statement, Benedict XVI touched on another criterion for discernment of private revelation: whether prophecy stands the test of time. The full depth of Sister Neuzil's overall message has begun to emerge, as current events and developments in the Church and in the world unfold. By way of example, the very same lamentations and remedies that Sister Neuzil allegedly received from Jesus and Mary from 1954 to 1984 were expressed by Benedict XVI in his 2019 essay, "The Church and the Scandal of Sexual Abuse." The remedy, he emphasized, is our penetration into and co-operation with the Divine Indwelling:

Only obedience and love for our Lord Jesus Christ can point the way. So let us first try to understand anew and *from within* what the Lord wants and *has wanted* with us. ... [T]he Lord has initiated a narrative of love with us and wants to subsume all creation in it. The counterforce against evil, which threatens us and the whole world, can ultimately only consist in our *entering into* this love. It is the real counterforce against evil.¹⁷

His essay clearly reinforces the prophetic content of Sister Neuzil's messages.

Although she experienced a variety of mystical phenomena, two or three of her encounters more closely demonstrate the marks of an *inner vision* (i.e., an apparition) than a *spiritual*

¹⁷ Benedict XVI, "Full Text of Benedict XVI Essay," *Catholic New Agency*, April 10, 2019, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/41013/full-text-of-benedict-xvi-essay-the-church-and-the-scandal-of-sexual-abuse>

vision. This becomes clear through a closer look at what constitutes true and false spiritual visions. Venerable John G. Arinterro, OP explained the difference between an authentic (“divine”) and a false *spiritual vision*:

In themselves the divine visions are usually shorter and clearer, passing like a lightning flash.... False visions, on the other hand, are more or less provoked by the soul itself. They last for a long time and they can be prolonged and examined with curiosity. But they are incomparably less clear and noble and, in spite of their long duration, they leave the soul disturbed and doubtful, disquieted, fickle, proud, and in bad humor.¹⁸

Using these criteria, the alleged appearance of “Our Lady of America” on September 26, 1956 – first during the Community thanksgiving after Mass (from which Sister Neuzil had to excuse herself, out of obedience, to tend to her duties) and then in her room (“She was there waiting for me”)¹⁹ -- was neither a divine nor a false *spiritual vision*. Rather, it more closely fit Benedict XVI’s description of an

¹⁸ Venerable John G. Arinterro, OP, *The Mystical Evolution in the Development and Vitality of the Church, Volume Two*, trans. Jordan Aumann, OP (St. Louis: Herder Book Company, reprinted by TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., Rockford, IL, 1978), 315.

It is of note that Arinterro – like Benedict XVI and Sister Neuzil – was convinced that a serious study of the Divine Indwelling, which by and large had been “utterly forgotten,” constituted “the fulfillment of the needs and the correct remedy for the emergencies of our time ... so that [the faithful] can appreciate, experience, and live as they ought, the life which Jesus brought us from heaven” (John Arinterro, *Mystical Evolution Volume One*, 38-39).

¹⁹ Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, *Our Lady of America*, February 2, 1960, reprinted with new messages October 7, 1993, 11.

inner vision (apparition). (This event also calls to mind Our Lady of Guadalupe's interception of Saint Juan Diego as he sought a priest to minister to his failing uncle.)²⁰ Likewise, the experience of October 13, 1956 and perhaps also that of September 27, 1956 align more closely with *inner visions* (apparitions) than *spiritual visions*.²¹

As noted by the investigative commission, Sister Neuzil did experience various forms of *spiritual vision* in support of her sanctification and her mission for the renewal of souls and the sanctification of the family. However, based on the above considerations, certain of Sister Neuzil's encounters – particularly the *inner visions* of “Our Lady of America” on September 26 and 27 and October 13, 1956 – could be understood as having the character of apparitions. This calls for a new investigation implementing Benedict XVI's more rigorous categories and definitions.

The secondary problem

The conclusion that one of Sister Neuzil's locutions contains doctrinal error is an overreach which ultimately derails the discernment process. The Singular Decree states that the alleged words of Saint Joseph in early October 1956 -- describing his unique role in salvation history -- “must be seen as an error” because this “...claim regarding Saint Joseph ... has never been expressed as Catholic doctrine ... namely, that he was a ‘co-redeemer’ with Christ for the

²⁰ Diana von Glahn, “Juan Diego and Our Lady of Guadalupe, Part I of III,” December 10, 2013, <https://spiritualdirection.com/2013/12/10/juan-diego-lady-guadalupe-part-i-iii>.

²¹ Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, *Our Lady of America*, 12, 14.

salvation of the world.”²² With the many sound arguments that have been published refuting this conclusion, another significant consideration bears mentioning: the ecumenical value of the locution, properly understood.

The whole of the locution from which the statement of concern was extracted is theologically grounded in Saint Joseph’s office within the order of the hypostatic union. Indeed, it aligns with Saint John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortation, *Redemptoris Custos*.²³ With this papal document, John Paul II not only synthesized the Josephology of early Church Fathers, Doctors of the Church, and Popes – he developed it further. He also satisfied an ecumenical problem that ensued from Chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*, which focused on Mary’s role in the economy of salvation *to the exclusion of Saint Joseph*.²⁴

Thus, it would be more accurate to describe the locution not as an error, but as a theological construct most worthy of further evaluation. If the main concern is ecumenical, the investigative commission should be made aware that Protestant theologians have argued in favor of bringing into prominence the role of Joseph. In his article, “Mary and Joseph in the Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos*,”

²² Bishop Kevin Rhoades, “Singular Decree.”

²³ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos*, August 15, 1989, n. 7-8, 20-21,

https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_15081989_redemptoris-custos.html

²⁴ See James J. Davis, OP, “Mary and Joseph in the Apostolic Exhortation: *Redemptoris Custos*,” *Marian Studies* vol. 42, Article 10 (1991), 135–136, 168-170,

https://ecommons.udayton.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1274&context=marian_studies

James J. Davis, OP asserted that one of the effects of Saint John Paul II's proclamation was

...to rectify a misunderstanding deriving from [the omission of Saint Joseph in] Chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium* of Vatican II, where Mary's role in the history of salvation is developed in such a manner as to give the impression, especially to Bible-literate non-Catholics, that she was not a married woman, and, by failing even to mention St. Joseph, the Council may have risked dehumanizing Mary, while exalting her prerogatives, privileges and importance. ... I refer particularly to a 1966 critique by Jean-Jacques von Allmen of the Reformed Church.

He writes: Now let us pass on to two questions concerning chapter VIII of *Lumen Gentium*, on the Roman Catholic Marian doctrine, as it is at present. The first concerns terminology. It seems to me to be lacking in rigor....The second question concerns the total absence of Joseph. This omission, particularly palpable in §§ 56 and 57, where there is mention of Elizabeth, the shepherds, the magi, Simeon -- seems to me to be serious especially for Christology... [W]hen one sets Joseph aside, or when one ignores him, is this not tearing Jesus away from his Jewishness, and by this fact compromising his messianity, and perhaps even his historicity? ... To ignore Joseph, is this not, implicitly, to alter the mission of Jesus of Nazareth? ...

Another Protestant theologian, Karl Barth, has been quoted as saying, "If I were a Roman Catholic theologian, I would lift Joseph up. He took care of the Child; he takes care of the Church."²⁵

Indeed, since Vatican II, the role of Saint Joseph *has* been brought into greater prominence with each pontificate. Pope Francis completed Saint John XXIII's insertion of the name of Joseph into the Eucharistic Prayers. More recently -- in fact, subsequent to the Singular Decree -- he formalized what Saint John Paul II had proclaimed in *Redemptoris Custos*, adding to the Litany of Saint Joseph the invocations, "Guardian of the Redeemer," "Servant of Christ," and "Minister of Salvation."²⁶ And his Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde* can be understood as building upon Benedict XVI's explanation of how the faithful become, "according to God's design...

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Shortly thereafter, a faith formation program associated with the Assumptionists explained these titles: "Joseph is, in essence, *a servant*, not only of Jesus, but also of the entire cause of salvation. Through his care of Jesus, he ministers to, provides for, and enables all of salvation history to unfold in the person of Jesus. Granted, this is a rather complicated theological construct. ... In fulfilling [his] role [as protector of the Savior], Joseph also served the greater cause of salvation. Thus, he became a minister to salvation itself." (See Pflaum Faith Formation Program, "Saint Joseph: Minister of Salvation," *Gospel Weeklies*, June 14, 2021, <https://www.pflaumweeklies.com/saint-joseph-minister-of-salvation/>.)

redeemers with the Redeemer,”²⁷ imitating Saint Paul in Col 1:24.²⁸ Pope Francis proclaimed,

Saint Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation. ...

In every situation, Joseph declared his own “fiat”, like those of Mary at the Annunciation and Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. ... All this makes it clear that “Saint Joseph was called by God to serve the person and mission of Jesus directly through the exercise of his fatherhood” and that in this way, “he cooperated

²⁷ Benedict XVI, “Blessing of the Sick,” Papal Mass at the Esplanade of the Shrine of Our Lady of Fátima, May 13, 2010, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100513_fatima.html.

In this, he echoed Saint John Paul II’s Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, February 11, 1984, n. 24: “In so far as man becomes a sharer in Christ’s sufferings—in any part of the world and at any time in history—to that extent *he in his own way completes* the suffering through which Christ accomplished the Redemption of the world.” “Any time in history” includes the life and mission of Saint Joseph – whose share in the sufferings of Christ is situated in the highest order of grace, the order of the hypostatic union. See also Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos*, October 24, 2024, n. 157.

²⁸ “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.” The RSV-CE footnote clarifies, “*what is lacking*: Christ’s sufferings were, of course, sufficient for our redemption, but all of us may add ours to his, in order that the fruits of his redemption be applied to the souls of men.” See also Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, sec. 24: “Christ achieved the Redemption completely and to the very limits but at the same time he did not bring it to a close. In this redemptive suffering, through which the Redemption of the world was accomplished, Christ opened himself from the beginning to every human suffering and constantly does so. Yes, it seems to be part of *the very essence of Christ’s redemptive suffering* that this suffering requires to be unceasingly completed.”

in the fullness of time in the great mystery of salvation and is truly a minister of salvation.”

... In a way, we are all like Joseph: a shadow of the heavenly Father ... a shadow that follows his Son.

... The saints help all the faithful “to strive for the holiness and the perfection of their particular state of life”. Their lives are concrete proof that it is possible to put the Gospel into practice. ... The lives of the saints too are examples to be imitated. Saint Paul explicitly says this: “Be imitators of me!” (1 Cor 4:16). By his eloquent silence, Saint Joseph says the same.²⁹

Sister Neuzil’s locution presents an ecumenical opportunity that merits further study, not only for the reasons stated by the Protestant theologians cited above, but also because Saint Joseph’s role speaks to *all* followers of Jesus. There is much to unpack. What he lived to an incomparable degree, all Christians are called to live in some way, even to the point of the mystical unity with Christ described in Col 1:24.³⁰ Saint Joseph’s unity with Christ -- by way of his holiness, his identity, his role, and his mission – was expressed “through compassion for the *sufferings of Jesus and Mary* [by which he] co-operated, *as no other*, in the salvation of the world.”³¹ As

²⁹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde*, December 8, 2020, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco-lettera-ap_20201208_patris-corde.html#_ftnref17.

³⁰ The footnote in the New American Bible concludes, “[Some Scripture scholars] suggest that Paul’s mystical unity with Christ allowed him to call his own sufferings the afflictions of Christ.”

³¹ Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, *Our Lady of America*, 13. Thus concludes the locution in question.

husband and presumed father united in suffering with the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, this Minister of Salvation's interior martyrdom of love, implicitly revealed in the mystery of the Presentation of Our Lord – in Scripture, in the Liturgy, and in Catholic doctrine³² -- points the way for all Christians to a deeper penetration into the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption. Saint Joseph is an exemplar of devotion to the most Sacred Heart of Jesus – a devotion which Pope Francis has called “a synthesis of the Gospel” and has exhorted the universal Church to embrace, emphasizing that such devotion is not “something only between Jesus and me.”³³ How can the unfathomable degree of intimacy Saint Joseph enjoyed with Jesus through their unique relationship and the resulting depths of the union of their hearts *not* impact all of humanity?

Conclusion

The role of authentic private revelation is not “to complete Christ's definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it

³² For example, as expressed not only in Lk 2:21-36, but also in Lk 2:41-51, Rom 8:29-30, Col 1:12-24, and sections 66, 521, and 618 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Furthermore, “the interior martyrdom of St. Joseph has been ... presented implicitly in the liturgy of the Church in its celebration of the mystery of the Presentation in the Temple” (Fr. Stanley Smolenski, SPMA, “St. Joseph's Greatness in Heaven,” *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, September 7, 2020, <https://www.hprweb.com/2020/09/st-joseph-greatness-in-heaven/>). See also Fr. Frederick L. Miller, *Saint Joseph: Our Father in Faith* (New Haven, CT: Catholic Information Service/Knights of Columbus Supreme Council, 2008), 21-25, <https://www.kofc.org/en/resources/cis/cis328.pdf>.

³³ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos*, October 24, 2024, n. 83, 212 (for further context of the locution in question, see also n. 122, 132, 138, 156-157, 163, 191-194, 206) https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/20241024-enciclica-dilexit-nos.html#_ftnref221

in a certain period of history.”³⁴ The relevance of Sister Neuzil’s prophetic message has only deepened and intensified over the decades, offering a way to live the Gospel robustly in the face of today’s unprecedented challenges – as individuals, as families, as Church -- guiding America and all nations into the way of peace. With the proposed application of more focused and precise categories for discerning Sister Neuzil’s inner visions, and the proposed retraction of the finding of doctrinal error, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith’s new classification of “*nihil obstat*”³⁵ could ultimately be reached. To that end, until the theological difficulty presented by the locution in question is resolved, the new classification of “*prae oculis habeatur*”³⁶ is certainly fitting. In light of these considerations, a re-evaluation of the alleged apparitions of Our Lady of America is not only appropriate and timely, but also right and just.

³⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sec. 67.

³⁵ Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Norms,” sec. I.B.17: “Without expressing any certainty about the supernatural authenticity of the phenomenon itself, many signs of the action of the Holy Spirit are acknowledged ‘in the midst’ of a given spiritual experience, and no aspects that are particularly critical or risky have been detected, at least so far. For this reason, the Diocesan Bishop is encouraged to appreciate the pastoral value of this spiritual proposal, and even to promote its spread, including possibly through pilgrimages to a sacred site.”

³⁶ Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Norms,” sec. I.B.18: “Although important positive signs are recognized, some aspects of confusion or potential risks are also perceived that require the Diocesan Bishop to engage in a careful discernment and dialogue with the recipients of a given spiritual experience. If there were writings or messages, doctrinal clarification might be necessary.”

The February 17 Connection of Two Burning Friars

ANNAMARIA MIX, O.V.

A Dominican Friar

The Friar Giordano Bruno was not burned at the stake for being an original independent thinker. Bruno was a deceitful misanthrope who knew little about science.¹ Fillip Bruno was born in Nola, part of the Kingdom of Naples in 1548. He entered the Dominican Order taking the name Giordano and was ordained a priest at the age of 24 despite never believing in the Catholic faith. His ideas led him to break his vows, leaving the Dominican to travel to other countries to try his fate with the Swiss Calvinists, German Lutherans and the English Anglicans. He was not accepted by them because of his heretical views. The Protestants banished him in Switzerland due to his public criticism of his professor's competence. He was excommunicated in Germany for being charged for harboring Calvinist beliefs, and he was ridiculed in Oxford. He was a nuisance, disliked because of his mean intellectual pretension. He had an excellent memory that he perfected within the school of Dominican preaching, but he lied about it by saying he could instantly get this memory from magic spells. He would say something heretical, deny he said it, and then continue, as in the case against Mary's virginity or the divinity of Jesus or that Jesus was a magician. His was an eclectic mix of philosophy, mystical rationalism, Neo-Platonism, and materialistic monism. He practiced magic as an intellectual and spiritual instrument to transform individuality through a connection to the occult forces of the universe. In other words, it was like a total consecration or

¹ See

<https://historyforatheists.com/2017/03/the-great-myths-3-giordano-bruno-was-a-martyr-for-science/> and

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/the-truth-about-giordano-bruno>

giving of oneself, but to the demonic. His Inquisition trial in Venice and later in Rome was rather happenstance because he had angered the Venitian Giovanni Mocenigo, who had invited Bruno to teach him the art of memory magic. After finding out about Bruno's lies and his flirting with his wife, Mocenigo informed on him to the Inquisition. For seven years, the Church tried to rehabilitate Bruno; they tried to do so through use of reason, not torture. He would first seemingly promise to mend his ways and then refuse. Bruno's necromancy which connected him with the occult may have very well led to his downfall; he returned to Italy where his ego got him arrested and his angry pride prevented his hoped-for conversion. His condemned himself through his own admissions; the ecclesial judges turned him over to the secular authorities in Rome who gave the final verdict of execution by burning at the stake in Campo dei Fiori on February 17, 1600.

Action Reaction²

As 300 years passed, much happened. In June of 1675, the Sacred Heart of Jesus appeared to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque in France. The Lord Jesus wanted the king of France to consecrate France to His Sacred Heart. For 100 years, the kings of France did not obey. In the meantime, the national organized Freemasonry began in 1717 with the founding of the Grand Lodge—an association of Masonic lodges—in England. However, Freemason societies had existed for much longer. The most popular theory is that Freemasonry emerged out of the stonemasonry guilds of the Middle Ages, though many believe it went back further to being a codification of the ancient B.C. Hermetic/Kabbalistic Tradition. On June 17, 1789, King Louis XVI of France was

² <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4025704> Action Reaction
Aristotle/Newton

stripped of his legislative authority in the course of the bloody French Revolution.³ As a prisoner he private consecration of himself and the realm to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1792, vowing to make it public when restored to power, but the guillotine ended all hope of that when he and his wife, Marie Antoinette, were executed. The Catholic Church was persecuted; the Mass was outlawed. In this Reign of Terror 17,000 were officially guillotined. On November 10, 1793 an almost naked opera singer was carried on a palanquin in procession to Notre Dame Cathedral. She portrayed the goddess of Liberty as the gathered crowd sang hymns in her honor – “Thou, Saint Liberty, inhabit this temple, Be of our nation the Goddess”. France’s leading Cathedral dedicated to the Immaculate Mother of God turned into the Revolution’s Temple of Reason.⁴

In 1830, the Immaculate gave Her Miraculous Medal in Paris. She gave an important message at La Salette on September 19, 1846 and the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was proclaimed in 1854. Blessed Pope Pius IX made the feast of the Sacred Heart universal in 1856. On the exhortation of this Pontiff, the Acts of consecration to the Heart of Jesus by the family and nations spread. Chapels, oratories, churches, basilicas and shrines dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus sprang up everywhere. Paintings and prints proliferated; the

³<https://www.vraimagazine.com/joan-of-arc-paris-2024-olympics-opening-ceremony/> This revolution was recalled at the Paris 2024 Olympics. Why was there a strange fire of Notre Dame Cathedral and its strange reconsecration ceremony? A new rooster or phoenix raised from the ashes?

<https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2023-12-16/in-pivotal-moment-notre-dame-cathedral-spire-gets-golden-rooster-weather-vane-a-symbol-of-a-phoenix>

<https://www.juancole.com/2019/04/universalism-muslim-goddess.html>

⁴<https://artifactstravel.com/notre-dame-cathedral-french-revolution-temple-of-reason/>

pious practice of Communion on the first Friday of the month began; and the Litany of the Sacred Heart was composed, dedicating the month of June to its cult. The Immaculate then appeared in 1858 at Lourdes.

The Birth of Secular Italy

The start of the unification process of Italy in 1859 saw a revival in Freemasonry. Giuseppe Garibaldi, a leader of Italian unification, was an active Mason. Bruno had disappeared from history for 300 years, until he was used by them. Italy's unification was conducted by confiscating the centuries-old Papal States, concluding with the seizure of Rome in 1870. The anti-clerical, anti-papal, anti-Christian rioting demonstrations became an ordinary part of Roman life. Donations were gathered from all over secular Europe, and contributions came in from the likes of Victor Hugo of France and Henrik Ibsen in Norway. Bruno was now reinvented as a martyr to science and reason. Bruno provided the Grand Orient with a figurehead whose mission it could universalize by invoking his spirit in the fight against the intolerance of the "universal" church. Bruno became patron of the *massoneria universale*. The Bruno cult has a European dimension. This appeal was evident in the celebrations surrounding the dedication of the memorial to Giordano Bruno on the *Campo dei Fiori* in Rome in 1889. The *Grande Oriente d'Italia* commissioned a monument created by the sculptor Ettore Ferrari (1844–1929), himself later a grand master of the Grand Orient and later grand commander of the supreme council. Flag-carrying representatives of grand lodges from, amongst others, France, Belgium, Hungary, Denmark, the United States and Mexico, as well as from seven German grand lodges, took part in the large procession

through the streets of Rome and the dedication of the monument.⁵

Pentecost is the birth of the Universal Church after the Ascension of the Resurrected Jesus Christ into Heaven.⁶ To mock this, Pentecost Sunday, June 9, 1889 (in the month dedicated to the Sacred Heart) was chosen to serve the freemasons' purposes. Over 2,000 masonic organizations rallied at the erection of the statue of Giordano Bruno. "Today," they announced, "the date of the religion of reason is established."⁷ Within a generation, Italy would be a Fascist state. Campo dei Fiori became the only monumental piazza of Rome without a church. Seen as the opponent of the Papacy, Bruno was also a figure with whom Protestant freemasons could identify, such that the Danish and Prussian grand lodges sent their representatives to Rome. The celebration of June 9, 1889 resembled an international masonic gathering. A transnational movement began developing shortly afterwards in the form of the congresses of grand lodges.

⁵ Conférence Bruxelles (1910) 1912, p. 13f.

⁶ At the first Pentecost, Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, preached his first homily, explaining how the prophet Joel had foretold the coming of the Holy Spirit. After this sermon, Peter, the first pope, converted three thousand people. For this reason, Pentecost is considered the birthday of the church.

<https://www.museumofthebible.org/magazine/featured/happy-pentecost-the-birthday-of-the-church#:~:text=At%20the%20first%20Pentecost%20C%20Peter,the%20birthday%20of%20the%20church.>

⁷<https://www.docdroid.net/0WEJJoeq/prgybeds36-pdf#page=233>



8

Pope Leo XIII who had published five years earlier on April 20, 1884, the encyclical *Humanum genus* which condemns freemasonry, called the Bruno statue the symbol “of the struggle to the bitter end against the Catholic religion.” On October 13, 1884, this pope had seen the future of the Church. That day, Pope Leo XIII had finished celebrating Mass in the Vatican Chapel. He suddenly stopped at the foot of the altar, his face turned white, and he remained there standing for about ten minutes in a trance-like state. Later, Pope Leo XIII said that as he was about to leave the altar, he heard two voices:

⁸June 9, 1889 Dedication of Giordano Bruno Statue Rome
https://www.reddit.com/r/europe/comments/jlfq7g/in_1889_a_monument_to_giordano_bruno_was_erected/?rdt=49019

The voice of Satan boasted to our Lord: "I can destroy your Church." The voice of our Lord Jesus: "You can? Then go ahead and do so." Satan: "To do so, I need more time and more power." Our Lord: "How much time? How much power?" Satan: "75 to 100 years, and a greater power over those who will give themselves over to my service." Our Lord: "You have the time; you will have the power. Do with them what you will." After having the vision, Pope Leo XIII immediately went from the Vatican Chapel to his private office and wrote the "Prayer to Saint Michael".

Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil; May God rebuke him, we humbly pray; And do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan and all evil spirits who wander through the world for the ruin of souls. Amen.⁹

Following Leo XIII's statements condemning Bruno and his latter-day admirers on June 30, 1889, the Giordano Bruno Society subsequently opened an office a short walk from St. Peter's Square to taunt the Pope with its banners. Politicians were heard to shout "Viva Giordano Bruno!" on the floor of Parliament as the battle cry of a new nation. These annual celebrations in honor of Giordano Bruno were stopped only during the time of Benedetto Mussolini (1922 until his overthrow in 1943). After the Vatican Concord, Pope Pius XI asked for the statue of Bruno to be replaced with one of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, but Mussolini refused. After World

⁹ <https://ucatholic.com/blog/the-terrifying-vision-of-pope-leo-xiii/>

War II, every February 17, modern-day Brunisti continue to celebrate Giordano Bruno.¹⁰

“We shall unleash the nihilists and the atheists and we shall provoke a great social cataclysm which in all its horror will show clearly to all nations the effect of absolute atheism; the origins of savagery and of most bloody turmoil. Then everywhere, the people will be forced to defend themselves against the world minority of the world revolutionaries and will exterminate those destroyers of civilization and the multitudes disillusioned with Christianity whose spirits will be from that moment without direction and leadership and anxious for an ideal, but without knowledge where to send its adoration, will receive the true light through the universal manifestation of the pure doctrine of Lucifer brought finally out into public view. A manifestation which will result from a general reactionary movement which will follow the destruction of Christianity and Atheism; both conquered and exterminated at the same time.”

—Freemason Albert Pike, Knights of the Golden Circle Founder Little Rock, Arkansas 1871 ¹¹

¹⁰ February 17, 2025 Rome, „il diritto-dovere di ciascuno a emanciparsi da dogmi/ the right for everyone to be emancipated from dogmas”
<https://www.itagnol.com/2025/02/roma-il-17-febbraio-torna-a-campo-d-e-fiori-la-manifestazione-in-ricordo-di-giordano-bruno/#:~:text=La%20cerimonia%20in%20ricordo%20di,la%20statua%20in%20suo%20omaggio>

¹¹ <http://jessejamesphotoalbum.com/knights-of-the-golden-circle/>

On 25 March 1874, Ecuador became the first country to be consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. On May 25, 1899, Pope Leo XIII consecrated the human race to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and wrote an Act of Consecration of the Human Race to the Sacred Heart in his encyclical letter *Annum sacrum*. This act was proclaimed in every church of the world on June 11, 1899 and is called the "great act" of his pontificate.¹² On June 22, 1902, the Republic of Colombia was consecrated by decree to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. On January 11, 1914, Mexico was also consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Spain was officially consecrated to the Sacred Heart on May 30, 1919; Costa Rica on November 4, 1921; Bolivia was consecrated to the Sacred Heart on August 7, 1925; Brazil was consecrated to the Sacred Heart in 1931. Honduras was consecrated to both the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary on August 16, 1959. On October 28, 1945, Argentina was consecrated to the Sacred Heart; on October 16, 2016 Peru; September 29, 2017, Syria; June 7, 2024, Turkey. Poland was consecrated to the Sacred Heart on July 27, 1920; in 1921, the consecration of Poland was renewed, and a new church erected and consecrated to the Sacred Heart as gratitude for the regained independence after the war. The consecration of Poland was since then renewed in 1951, 1976, 2011 and 2021. March 25, 2020 marked the renewed consecration of Portugal and Spain to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, and added the names of 22 other countries, some of which were consecrated for the first time: Albania, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Slovakia, Guatemala, Hungary, India, Mexico, Moldova, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Kenya, the Dominican Republic,

¹²<https://ucatholic.com/blog/how-this-nun-inspired-pope-leo-xiii-to-do-the-great-act-of-his-papacy/>

Romania, Tanzania, East Timor and Zimbabwe. (France is still not publicly consecrated to the Sacred Heart).¹³

A Franciscan Friar

From 1912-1919, a young Franciscan Conventual from annexed Poland entered the Roman scene. Knowing several languages with a skilled memory and scientific mind for physics, some of his professors thought it was almost a shame he would become a priest because he was a genius. He had ideas for an ether plane spaceship, he thought that there are more than just three dimensions, he believed perhaps scientists would invent a machine to listen to sound waves trapped in rocks to be able to hear voices from the past, and he developed a mathematical formula for holiness. He would use the press to try to bring liberty and happiness to humanity. During these years in Rome, Friar Maximilian Kolbe¹⁴ was certainly likely to hear about or see the annual Brunisti celebrations since he resided at Via San Teodoro, only a half hour walk of three kilometers from Campo dei Fiori. So commonplace and accepted, they were hardly newsworthy events for Roman newspapers. Friar Maximilian wrote about how these people who honored Giordano Bruno

¹³ A summary of these consecrations can be found at:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Act_of_Consecration_to_the_Sacred_Heart_of_Jesus.

¹⁴<https://niepokalanow.pl/dziedzictwo-kolbianskie/maksymilian-kolbe/publikacje/artykuly/tylko-milosc-jest-tworcza> Before going to Italy, novice Friar Kolbe in the Minor Seminary of Lwow had vowed to fight for the Immaculate as a soldier having considered leaving the religious life. His confessor changed that vow to praying daily the Under Your Protection prayer of which Friar Kolbe did everyday of his life. This prayer is very important in the history of Poland: Under thy protection we seek refuge, O Holy Mother of God, In our needs, despise not our petitions, but deliver us always from all dangers, O Glorious and Blessed Virgin. Our Lady, Our Advocate, Our Mediatrix, Our Consolatrix, Reconcile us to your Son, Recommend us to your Son, Represent us to your Son.

had had leaflets distributed stating that the Italian police were duty-bound to raid the Vatican. At St. Peter's Square under the Pope's window, they waved a black banner with the effigy of St. Michael the Archangel under the feet of Lucifer and banners extolling Satan with one inscription, "Satan will rule in the Vatican and the Pope will serve him as a Swiss guard."¹⁵ Friar Maximilian was a follower of St. Francis of Assisi, the saint closest to Jesus' Heart. In the Chapel of the Seraphicum College, then on Via San Teodoro, was a painting depicting this scene of Jesus showing St. Francis to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. The Conventual Franciscans are consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and have always defended the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Here Kolbe, a doctor of Philosophy in 1915 and later a doctor of Theology in 1919, reacted to these occult ideas by using Reason. World War I (1914-1918) raged and the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia during the October Revolution 1917. In May 1917, the Immaculate appeared in Fatima Portugal asking for consecration of the world to Her Heart to protect the world, and the Miracle of the Sun happened on October 13, 1917. Kolbe almost died spitting up blood from his first bout with lifelong tuberculosis. After a month's recovery, on October 16, 1917, Friar Maximilian Maria Kolbe, with six other friars, founded the Militia/ Knights of the Immaculate, an international association. From 1917 to 1919, Kolbe asked Fr Rector Stefano Ignudi for permission to visit the Freemason Green Palace lodge but was told no every time. Though he was refused permission to go, he prayed fervently for them, and if ever encountered them on the streets, Friar Kolbe would reason with anyone. Fellow MI Father Joseph Pal OFMConv remembers how Kolbe got into a discussion with a freethinker, who, becoming frustrated with Kolbe's

¹⁵ Kolbe Writings Volume II nr 1222 page 2107,nr 1277 page 2222 ,nr 1278 page 2225 , nr 1328 page 2311

reasoning, tried to silence him by saying condescendingly, "Young Friar, I am a Doctor of Philosophy" while Kolbe smiled kindly and responded, "Signore, so am I". On April 28, 1918, he was ordained priest at age 24 at San Andrea delle Valle. He had already taken the oath four years before on June 24, 1914; this was the 1910 Oath against the Errors of Modernism mandated by Saint Pius X to be sworn to by all clergy, pastors, confessors, preachers, religious superiors, and professors in philosophical-theological seminaries:

I firmly embrace and accept each and every definition that has been set forth and declared by the unerring teaching authority of the Church, especially those principal truths which are directly opposed to the errors of this day. And first of all, I profess that God, the origin and end of all things, can be known with certainty by the natural light of reason from the created world (see Rom. 1:19), that is, from the visible works of creation, as a cause from its effects, and that, therefore, his existence can also be demonstrated: Secondly, I accept and acknowledge the external proofs of revelation, that is, divine acts and especially miracles and prophecies as the surest signs of the divine origin of the Christian religion and I hold that these same proofs are well adapted to the understanding of all eras and all men, even of this time. Thirdly, I believe with equally firm faith that the Church, the guardian and teacher of the revealed word, was personally instituted by the real and historical Christ when he lived among us, and that the Church was built upon Peter, the prince of the apostolic hierarchy, and his successors for the duration of time. Fourthly, I sincerely hold that the doctrine of faith was handed down to us from the apostles through the orthodox Fathers in exactly the

same meaning and always in the same purport. Therefore, I entirely reject the heretical misrepresentation that dogmas evolve and change from one meaning to another different from the one which the Church held previously. I also condemn every error according to which, in place of the divine deposit which has been given to the spouse of Christ to be carefully guarded by her, there is put a philosophical figment or product of a human conscience that has gradually been developed by human effort and will continue to develop indefinitely. Fifthly, I hold with certainty and sincerely confess that faith is not a blind sentiment of religion welling up from the depths of the subconscious under the impulse of the heart and the motion of a will trained to morality; but faith is a genuine assent of the intellect to truth received by hearing from an external source. By this assent, because of the authority of the supremely truthful God, we believe to be true that which has been revealed and attested to by a personal God, our creator and lord. Furthermore, with due reverence, I submit and adhere with my whole heart to the condemnations, declarations, and all the prescripts contained in the encyclical *Pascendi* and in the decree *Lamentabili*, especially those concerning what is known as the history of dogmas. I also reject the error of those who say that the faith held by the Church can contradict history, and that Catholic dogmas, in the sense in which they are now understood, are irreconcilable with a more realistic view of the origins of the Christian religion. I also condemn and reject the opinion of those who say that a well-educated Christian assumes a dual personality—that of a believer and at the same time of

a historian, as if it were permissible for a historian to hold things that contradict the faith of the believer, or to establish premises which, provided there be no direct denial of dogmas, would lead to the conclusion that dogmas are either false or doubtful. Likewise, I reject that method of judging and interpreting Sacred Scripture which, departing from the tradition of the Church, the analogy of faith, and the norms of the Apostolic See, embraces the misrepresentations of the rationalists and with no prudence or restraint adopts textual criticism as the one and supreme norm. Furthermore, I reject the opinion of those who hold that a professor lecturing or writing on a historico-theological subject should first put aside any preconceived opinion about the supernatural origin of Catholic tradition or about the divine promise of help to preserve all revealed truth forever; and that they should then interpret the writings of each of the Fathers solely by scientific principles, excluding all sacred authority, and with the same liberty of judgment that is common in the investigation of all ordinary historical documents. Finally, I declare that I am completely opposed to the error of the modernists who hold that there is nothing divine in sacred tradition; or what is far worse, say that there is, but in a pantheistic sense, with the result that there would remain nothing but this plain simple fact—one to be put on a par with the ordinary facts of history—the fact, namely, that a group of men by their own labor, skill, and talent have continued through subsequent ages a school begun by Christ and his apostles. I firmly hold, then, and shall hold to my dying breath the belief of the Fathers in the charism of truth, which certainly is, was, and always will be in

the succession of the episcopacy from the apostles. The purpose of this is, then, not that dogma may be tailored according to what seems better and more suited to the culture of each age; rather, that the absolute and immutable truth preached by the apostles from the beginning may never be believed to be different, may never be understood in any other way. I promise that I shall keep all these articles faithfully, entirely, and sincerely, and guard them inviolate, in no way deviating from them in teaching or in any way in word or in writing. Thus I promise, this I swear, so help me God.¹⁶

Using the Miraculous Medal as the outward sign of individual transformation of total connectedness of reason and will through the Immaculate Conception for the Kingdom of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, he returned to his nation's newly regained liberty in 1919 as a professor to teach philosophy in Krakow. On March 19, 1920 a regular lodge "Kopernik" was opened in Poland as the mother lodge for subsequent workshops. The Supreme Council of Poland was supervised by Andrew Struga and the National Grand Lodge "Poles United" was established. Meanwhile the Militia Immaculate kept uniting Poles and other nations. The monthly Knight of the Immaculate magazine started in 1922 with the purpose of using all licit means to win the world for the Sacred Heart through the Immaculate. Kolbe visited the mason Andrew Struga in 1927 and 1928 with the intent of winning his heart for Jesus Christ. Here at the first meeting, Mr. Struga accepted the Miraculous Medal from Kolbe. Not only did Friar Kolbe travel Europe, but also the Far East. The largest Friary and Catholic printing center in the world,

¹⁶ Pius X, Oath against the Errors of Modernism (September 1, 1910): <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius10/p10moath.htm>.

Niepokalanow was founded in 1927 in Poland, then Friar Maximilian journeyed to found another in Japan in 1930. He returned to his homeland, and from 1936-1939, Niepokalanow grew to be more than 780 Franciscan hearts working for the maximum glory of God and the salvation of souls. On September 1, 1939 the German Occult “Inquisition” invaded Poland for take over. On February 17, 1941 Kolbe was arrested with four other Franciscan Knights of the Immaculate,¹⁷ taken to Pawiak prison and then to *il campo di Auschwitz*. Kolbe never renounced his beliefs despite torture. He asked to take the place of another prisoner sentenced to the starvation bunker. On August 14, 1941 he was executed. August 15, 1941 Kolbe's body was burnt in the Auschwitz camp oven fires.

The Heart is the Seat of Reason and Will¹⁸

August 14th and 15th are also connected to the Victory of 1920. In the Battle at the Vistula,¹⁹ on August 14th Poland broke through the Bolsheviks' northern line sabotaging their radio tower by transmitting conflicting morse code over the same frequency, reciting the book of Genesis in Polish and Latin. The Bolsheviks missed the command to turn south and advanced west, where on August 15th the Polish army won at the Vistula River in 1920. From the accounts of captured

¹⁷ Blessed Martyrs Fr. Pius Bartosik and Fr. Antonin Bajewski, and Fr. Justin Nazim, Fr. Urban Cieślak . Fathers Justin and Urban of holy memory survived the camps.

¹⁸<https://richardessimmons3.com/the-mind-and-the-heart-part-2/?srsltid=AfmBOooWZBK6OQIdtRiYUG7sYHfLyPl0HbZUWM-ZPqBsp0DaWw0CqL8r>

¹⁹ Cardinal Achille Ratti, the future Pope Pius XI. Ratti organized a perpetual prayer for deliverance and, with monstrosity held high, he led a Eucharistic procession through Warsaw's streets as the Bolshevik shells rained down. <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/miracle-of-vistula>
https://www.inyourpocket.com/warsaw/miracle-on-the-vistula-the-1920-battle-of-warsaw_78007f

Bolshevik prisoners, they said that they unexpectedly saw a huge, powerful female figure in the dark sky, from which light shone. There was a luminous halo around her head; in one hand she was holding something like a shield against which deflected the shells fired at the Poles which then returned to explode in the Bolshevik positions.²⁰ As for Fr. Kolbe, he mathematically applied logic, drawing valid conclusions, with the aim of seeking the truth which brings lasting happiness, this way sabotaging the enemy's plan by breaking the occult codes with the Word of Genesis 3:15. The Assumption of Mary was declared dogma in 1950. One hundred years after 1884, when Satan had boasted to destroy the Church, the great St. John Paul II²¹ had this to say on September 18, 1984:

The Heart of Jesus was conceived beneath the heart of the Virgin Mother, and its earthly life ceased at the moment Jesus died on the Cross. This is testified to by the Roman soldier who pierced the side of Jesus with a lance. During the whole of Jesus' earthly life, this Heart was the center in which was manifested, in a human way, the love of God: the love of God the Son, and, through the Son, the love of God the Father. What constitutes the greatest fruit of this love in creation? We read it in the Gospel: "He came to his own domain and his own people did not accept him. But to all who did accept him he gave power to become children of God . . ." ²²

All hearts from the beginning of time to the end are in this action-reaction, united with the Immaculate Heart and the Sacred Heart - Perfect Seats of Reason and Will for the

²⁰<https://catholicinsight.com/2023/08/14/the-miracle-on-the-vistula-an-untold-story/>

²¹ St John Paul was born in Poland in May of that year of Victory 1920. Imagine if the Bolsheviks had won instead? Would there have been a St. Friar Kolbe Martyr of Charity in 1982? Would the entire world have been consecrated to Divine Mercy on August 17, 2002?

²² John 1:11-12

Redemption of Humanity. Just a seventeen-minute walk from the Statue of Friar Bruno stands a statue of the Martyr Philosopher in the flower garden of Santi Apostoli. There are so many statues worldwide in Friar Kolbe's honor that Campo dei Fiori would be too small to fit them all. The seats of reason and will, these two hearts of two friars, two Catholic priests, both burned in a *Campo*, both freely chose.²³

Annamaria Mix O.V.

MI-3 Knight of the Immaculate

²³ <https://niepokalanow.pl/klasztor/archiwum> wrote this article in response to an email inquiry of January 2025: *Greetings. I am a masonic researcher specializing in conspiracy theories about freemasonry. One of the things that often shows up on theorists' pages mixed with flat earth beliefs, black pope/ Grey pope and a lot of other weird ideas is the name Maximilian Kolbe. I have the highest respect for Mr Kolbes actions that made him a Saint, but I have tried, in vain, to find valid information about the event witnessed by Mr Kolbe at st Peter's square in 1917. I've gone through records of recognized Italian lodges, newspaper archives and countless sources, both outside the internet and on it, but it seems that Mr Kolbe was the only eyewitness to this event. Would you happen to have any open known sources about the event? Perhaps newspapers, photos, other witness reports?*

The Cross: Two Hearts, One Sacrifice

FR. STANISŁAW GIBZIŃSKI

Westminster Cathedral's Great Cross

There are two sides to the Cross,
like two sides of a tapestry.

The side of suffering and the side of glory,
the unveiling of sin and the manifestation of love,
the tearing apart and the binding together.

One side seen, the other hidden.
The side revealed and the side concealed.
The visible and the veiled,
where love made its dwelling:

the priestly side of Jesus,
the feminine side of Mary,
the Lord and the Woman,
the Gebir and the Gebirah,
the King and the Queen Mother,
each offering, each reigning—
on earth and in heaven,
in every place where love is enthroned.

Two of them,
and one Cross—
not between them,
but uniting them;
the place where love is offered and received,
where the path to heaven is carved in sacrifice.

The Lamb and the Ewe Lamb,
bound in one offering,
one led to slaughter, the other surrendering,
the Victim and the Mother,

the Priest and the Altar,
where flesh and spirit break open
to let grace flood the world.

In the same place, on both sides,
two hearts are pierced—
the Son by the spear, the Mother by the sword.
Love flows inward and outward,
rising to the Father, pouring upon us,
a single offering of mercy and surrender.

A bridge between earth and eternity,
a throne of mercy,
the altar where divinity and humanity embrace,
where Jesus, the Redeemer,
and Mary, the Co-redemptrix, partake in one mission,
giving all they are, all they have,
so that love may triumph beyond death.

A union so deep
it bleeds into fulfillment,
togetherness sealed
where heaven and earth break open.

A heart torn by spear and sorrow,
Jesus - Mary:
Love that bows to death,
only to reign beyond it,
the King and the Queen,
crowned in sorrow,
enthroned in love.

The Cross,
a place where sacrifice and love are woven together,
where two hearts beat as one,
leading us through suffering
into life unending.

Jesus and Mary,
the Incarnate God and the purest humanity,
two bound as one—
in the Annunciation, in life, and on the Cross,
she drinking deeply from the well of love and mercy,
leading all hearts toward the unveiled radiance of the Trinity,
where the dawn of Easter shines upon each one of us, living
and dead.

Articles

The Heart of Joseph: A Synthesized Theology, History, and Devotion

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St. Joseph, husband of the Immaculate Mother of God and virginal father¹ of Jesus Christ, exceeds all creatures in holiness excepting his wife,² and is rightly proclaimed by Bl. Pius IX as “Patron of the Universal Church.”³ He appropriately receives the unique devotion of *protodulia*, as first among the saints and subordinate to the *hyperdulia*, which is exclusive to Mary, the Immaculate Co-redemptrix and spiritual Mother of all peoples. Both *hyperdulia* and *protodulia* fall infinitely below the *latria* attributed only to God and to the God-man, Jesus Christ.⁴

The rich history of Catholic Spirituality gradually developed the specific devotions to the Sacred “Heart” of Jesus⁵ and the Immaculate “Heart” of Mary,⁶ accurately revered on

¹ See Augustine, *Sermon* 51. In 1906 St. Pius X, approved an indulgenced prayer invoking St. Joseph as “virgin father of Jesus” (*virgo pater Jesu*): see Francis L. Filas, S.J., *Joseph and Jesus: A Theological Study of Their Relationship* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1952), 4 and 119. See also John Paul II, apostolic exhortation, *Redemptoris Custos* (August 15, 1989), no. 20. For a summary of sources supporting St. Joseph as a virginal father going back to St. Augustine, see Donald H. Calloway, MIC, *Consecration to St. Joseph: The Wonders of Our Spiritual Father* (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 2020), 134–136.

² Leo XIII, encyclical, *Quamquam Pluries* (Aug. 15, 1889), no. 3.

³ Bl. Pius IX, Declaration of Dec. 8, 1870: *Acta Sanctae Sedis* 2, 193.

⁴ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 103, a. 3 and 4; III, Q. 325, a. 5.

⁵ See Pope Francis, encyclical, *Dilexit Nos* (October 24, 2024) and Timothy O'Donnell, *Heart of the Redeemer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989 and 2018).

⁶ For example, St. John Eudes, *The Admirable Heart of Mary*, (Loretto Publications, 2008); the Message of Fatima, cf. *Documents on Fatima and the Memoirs of Sr. Lucia*, Father Anotonio Maria Martins, S.J., originally published in Portuguese, 1984, English Publication, Fatima Family Apostolate, South Dakota, 1992; Bertrand de Margerie, S.J., *Heart of Mary*,

their respective levels of *latria* and *hyperdulia*. The contemporary question remains: *is it theologically acceptable to have devotion to the pure and chaste “Heart” of St. Joseph on the fitting level of protodulia?* Let us begin with a theological examination of the term, “heart” as it is used biblically and anthropologically.

Scripturally, the word “heart” indicates far more than just a body part. “Heart” signifies the core of the person, his or her “inner self,” and in some cases represents the entirety of the person in question. The term *heart* represents the fullness of the human being, the seat of the faculties of the soul, which, along with being the source of his desires and emotions, also include the higher faculties of the human soul, that is, the human person’s capacity to think, as exercised through the intellect, and his or her ability to love, as manifest through the will. As Timothy O’Donnell notes:

The heart is the spiritual center of man’s soul, the core of all his volitional and emotional and intellectual activity. It therefore represents the whole person...this symbolic understanding of the heart as the “center of man” has a firm foundation in scripture. It is in fact the most important and most frequent word in Old Testament anthropology. *Leb* and *lebab* occur over 858 times in the Old Testament...In semitic thought, it signifies the entire inner life of the person.⁷

New Testament references to “heart” continue the same meaning as the Greek denotations of *kardia*, *koilia* and *splancha*, as the true directive source from which a human

Heart of the Church: A Theological Synthesis (New Jersey, AMI Press, 1991), pp. 1-44.

⁷ Timothy O’Donnell, *Heart of the Redeemer*, (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2018), 3.; Aerled Watkins, *The Heart of the World*, (London, Burns and Oates, 1954), p. 6; Malatesta and Solano, *The Heart of Christ and the Heart of Man*, (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1978), p. 2; J. MacKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, (Milwaukee, Bruce Publishing, 1965)p. 343.

being derives thoughts, feelings, and his very self.⁸ It is, in fact with the image of the heart that Jesus Christ reveals himself in expressions such as “My heart goes out to my people” (Mt. 15:32) and “Come to me all you who labor and are overburdened, take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart” (Mt. 11:28).⁹

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger confirms here the centrality of the heart and its appropriateness in Christian piety:

All of this comes to show that Christian piety must involve the senses, which receive their order and unity from the heart, and also the feelings, which have their seat in the heart. It is clear that such piety, centered in the heart, corresponds to the image of the Christian God, who has a heart.¹⁰

Therefore, when we discuss devotion to the “heart” of someone, we mean something well beyond only a physical organ, but rather the source of who he or she is in their very being, in an expression—all that a person is and all that a person does. In the Western world, a human person often thinks of himself or herself as a “mind,” perhaps due to the post-enlightenment rationalism; but in Eastern cultures, as in Scripture, a human being is more typically described as a “heart.”

In short, *heart* signifies *person*.

This is why in traditional Catholic devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the adoration given to his physical heart of Jesus goes beyond his physical organ and ultimately reaches his very divine Person. In the great mystery of his Eucharistic

⁸ Ibid, p. 36. Cf. Hugo Rahner, *Heart of the Savior*, J. Stierli, ed (New York, Herder Publishing, 1958), pp. 20-21.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 36-50;

¹⁰ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “The Paschal Mystery as Core and Foundation of Devotion to the Sacred Heart” in *Towards a Civilization of Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), pp. 156, 159.

Heart, God did not hesitate to unite his Eucharistic presence with the image of his sacred human heart.

Following the great model of St. John Eudes and his historic contribution to the theology and devotion to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, we can further say that we also worship the “spiritual” aspect of Jesus’ Heart, i.e., his human faculties of reason and will, memory and emotions which, hypostatically united to his divine Person, merits our authentic acts of adoring love. We also identify the “divine” aspect of his Sacred Heart, where the human nature experiences the divine nature uniquely in one divine person. This is why the Sacred Heart of Jesus is alone worthy of “*latria*,” in virtue of his sole divinity and his consequent infinite lordship and dominion over all creation.

The Catholic Church also joyfully venerates the Immaculate Heart of Mary. St. John Eudes likewise speaks of these three aspects of Mary’s Heart and why it merits a devotion superior in nature and degree to all other creatures. The physical aspect of Mary’s heart is worthy of our veneration, just as a physical bodily relic of any saint deserves our special respect and devotion in light of its physical unity with a sanctified soul. In Our Lady’s case, this Heart, as part of her physical body, would never experience material corruption due to her Immaculate Conception, which led to Mary’s preservation from Original Sin and all of its effects.

The “spiritual” aspect of Mary’s Heart contained her unparalleled sanctified intellect and will, memory and emotions, in virtue of Our Lady’s unique prerogative of being entirely “full of grace” (Lk. 1:28). St. John Eudes also identifies the “divine” aspect of Mary’s human Heart, not because Mary was herself divine, but rather in light of her fullness of sanctifying grace, which is precisely to participate in the life and the love of the Trinity. Eudes also speaks of

Mary's divine Heart as Jesus living in her.¹¹ The saints excelled in grace, but Mary alone experienced that plenitude of grace, which led to a greater participation by Our Lady in the divine life— a greater divine presence of the Trinity in her Immaculate Heart than any other creature.

The same three elements of physical, spiritual, and even divine aspects present within a human heart may be predicated of the Heart of St. Joseph, albeit on its own distinctly subordinate level to that of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. The physical dimension of St. Joseph's Heart is most worthy of our devotion, as would any relic of a saint's body, in as much as it housed a soul which, according to the best of Josephite theology and tradition, was pre-sanctified in the womb.¹² Surely, for the greatest saint after Mary, the body of St. Joseph, which was hylemorphically united to his pure and chaste soul, would be deserving of our protodulic veneration.

The heart of St. Joseph also contains its "spiritual" dimension, which was the anthropological source of his extraordinarily "just" (biblically, "righteous") mind and will, passions, and memory. Certainly, this spiritual core of his exceptional heart which so loved, adored, and protected his divine son, and which at the same time so loved and honored his Immaculate wife, rightfully merits our special respect and veneration, let alone the reciprocal love and devotion his

¹¹ See *Oeuvres Complètes de St. Jean Eudes*, Vol VI, 37–38. These *Oeuvres* were published between 1905 and 1909 in anticipation of John Eudes's beatification. The *Oeuvres Complètes* are now available online at: http://www.doctoratsaintjeaneudes.com/ecrits-de-saint-jean-eudes/oeuvres_completes/.

OC, Volume VI, pp.37–38

¹² Among those holding to St. Joseph's purification from original sin in the womb are Jean Gerson, Isidoro Isolani, Bernardine of Busti, St. Francis de Sales, St. Alphonsus Liguori, and St. John Henry Newman. See Cardinal A. H.-M. Lépiciér, O.S.M., *Saint Joseph: Époux de la Très Sainte Vierge* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1932), 148; St. Francis de Sales, *Sermon 25 for the Feast of St. Peter*; and St. John Henry Newman, *Meditation for the Triduum of St. Joseph*.

heart received from the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts. Because St. Joseph's life constituted a pre-eminent example of the Christian virtues of purity and chastity, it is most appropriate that these Christian virtues should be showcased and underscored in the heart of one who had the closest external relation to the Hypostatic Union and hence to the Two Great Hearts.

The human Heart of Joseph, moreover, possesses a truly "divine" aspect, in so far as it was a living temple of the divine presence, the indwelling Trinity. It was St. Joseph's heightened and anointed awareness of the Divine Indwelling that sustained his exceptional sanctity and probable preservation from all actual sin.

The most chaste Heart of St. Joseph can thus appropriately be seen as *the signification of his entire person in all its dimensions of sanctification: physical, spiritual and divine*. As legitimate to devotion to the person of St. Joseph is, so too is devotion to his heart, signifying his person. It does not require belief in the bodily assumption of St. Joseph (however acceptable this is as a theological position¹³) to see the legitimacy of devotion to his heart. As in a possible application of the Theology of the Body, the body expresses the person, and in this case, the heart expresses the person.

Devotion to the Heart of St. Joseph came into full display during the late 17th century. The Oratorians in Portugal established it in 1688, and a festival developed honoring the "created Trinity", both under the symbols of the hearts of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and under that of the Flight into Egypt. The devotion spread to Spain, Italy, France, Germany,

¹³ In his homily of May 26, 1960, St. John XXIII makes reference to Matthew 27:52–53, and he states we can piously believe that St. John the Baptist and St. Joseph had their bodies raised and taken to heaven after the death of Jesus:
https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/it/homilies/1960/documents/hf_j-xxiii_hom_19600526.html.

Mexico, Brazil, and Burma. The great Josephologist, Fr. Tarcisio Stramare, OSJ (1928–2020), offers this summary:

This festival was very popular in Porto, and Pope Benedict XIV in 1754 had permitted the Oratorians to celebrate it solemnly on the fourth Sunday of April. ... The devotion to the Most Sacred Hearts of the Sovereigns, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, is testified since 1733 by a sanctuary in Porto (Portugal) and a Confraternity in Ouro Preto (Brazil) present in 1785. In Seville (Spain) a Confraternity in 1744 professed Slavery to the Sacred Heart of the most glorious Lord Saint Joseph. Devotion to the Heart of Saint Joseph spread to Mexico in 1747. A Pious Union of the Pure Heart of Saint Joseph was promoted in 1846 by Father Michele Bocco O.M.V., and it spread to Italy, France, Austria, Germany and Burma, reaching 30,000 members.¹⁴

For reasons that remain unexplained, the *cultus* of the heart of St. Joseph was not supported by several late nineteenth century rulings of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. After Bl. Pius IX declared St. Joseph the Patron of the Universal Church in 1870, people began to honor the heart of Joseph with the prayer: “Most pure heart of Joseph pray for us” (*Cor sancti Joseph purissimum, ora pro nobis*). The Bishop of Nantes in France wrote to the Sacred Congregation of Rites to see whether this invocation could be used in non-liturgical functions. The Congregation responded on June 14, 1870

¹⁴ Our translation from Fr. Tarcisio Stramare, OSJ, *San Giuseppe. Dignità, Privilegi, Devozioni*, Editrice Shalom, Camerata Picena (AN) 2008), found on this website: <https://movimentogiuseppino.wordpress.com/devozioni-a-san-giuseppe/>.

letting the Bishop know that “the *cultus* of the heart of St. Joseph is not approved by the Holy See.”¹⁵

A second negative judgment was issued by the Sacred Congregation of Rites on February 19, 1879. The Archbishop of Chambéry was told that medals that show the Heart of St. Joseph along with the Hearts of Jesus and Mary are prohibited.¹⁶

The third prohibition came not from the Sacred Congregation of Rites but the Vicariate of Rome. The editor of *Analecta Ecclesiastica* asked the Vicar of Rome whether images or statues of the Holy Family could be displayed showing the Hearts of the Child Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and St. Joseph. The response was that it is not expedient with regard to the Hearts of the Child Jesus and the Blessed Virgin, and it is not licit (*non licere*) with regard to the Heart of St. Joseph.¹⁷

In light of the significant history of widespread international devotion to the Heart of St. Joseph by the People of God, how then should these little known and minimally promulgated nineteenth prohibitions be understood?

Because these prohibitions are barely known, it seems they cannot claim to have the force of law in light of the lack of a clear and universal promulgation. St. Thomas Aquinas is correct when he states that a positive law, to have the force of binding law, must be promulgated to its subjects.¹⁸ In fact, the above-mentioned prohibitions to devotion to the Heart of St. Joseph constituted communications of the Sacred

¹⁵ Blaine Burkey, O.F.M. Cap., *Pontificia Josephina* C558 [197-198] in *Cahiers de Joséphologie* 12 (1964) 377-378.

¹⁶ Blaine Burkey, O.F.M. Cap., *Pontificia Josephina* D45 [263] in *Cahiers de Joséphologie* 17 (1969) 339.

¹⁷ Blaine Burkey, O.F.M. Cap., *Pontificia Josephina* D487 [426-427] in *Cahiers de Joséphologie* 20 (1972) 168-169.

¹⁸ ST, I-II, Q. 90, a. 4.

Congregation of Rites to individual bishops, and—in the case of the 1893 prohibition—a communication of the Vicariate of Rome to a local editor. Beyond the particular research of Msgr. Calkins and a few other French publications, they are generally unknown amidst the international theological community and universal episcopate. This, then, seems to indicate an absence of major concern by the 20th and 21st century Magisterium.

There is also the case of the ecclesiastical law issued under Pope St. John XXIII mandating the use of Latin in all seminary course instruction, which was simply not enforced and hence fell out of practice under the pontificate of St. Paul VI. Clearly, such a Latin law for seminary instruction is in no sense binding today. Even an originally promulgated law which is not practically enforced can lose its binding power.¹⁹

Moreover, St. Alphonsus Liguori, the great master of Moral Theology, teaches that in the case of equal doubt as to the fact of a given law, the conscience is therefore not bound to that particular law.²⁰

There are also several examples of public veneration to the Heart of St. Joseph in sacred art and liturgy which in themselves presuppose ecclesiastical approval. For example,

¹⁹ See John XXIII's apostolic constitution, *Veterum Sapientia* (Feb. 22, 1962):

https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/la/apost_constitutions/1962/documents/hf_j-xxiii_apc_19620222_veterum-sapientia.html.

https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/la/apost_constitutions/1962/documents/hf_j-xxiii_apc_19620222_veterum-sapientia.html. John

XXIII's requirement for seminary classes to be taught in Latin was not continued by Paul VI, who, in his Nov. 4, 1963 apostolic letter, *Summi Dei Verbum*, directed seminarians to acquire an adequate knowledge of Latin without mentioning the need for classes to be taught in Latin:

https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19631104_summi-dei-verbum.html

²⁰ See Dominic M. Prümmer, *Handbook of Moral Theology*, translated by Rev. Gerald W. Shelton (Ft. Collins, CO: Roman Catholic Books, 1957), no. 153, p.65.

in the great Polish Shrine of the Mediatrix of all Graces in Niepokalanow, a minor basilica in Poland, there is an icon of the Heart of St. Joseph which rests on the side altar of St. Joseph, which includes mosaics of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This icon is venerated by the Christian faithful, and on occasion brought to the homes of parishioners. Further, Bishop Gerard Battersby of the Diocese of La Crosse, Wisconsin has as part of his episcopal coat of arms the images of the “Three Hearts,” the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and the pure Heart of St. Joseph.²¹

We therefore arrive at the following conclusions:

1. In light of the sound biblical theology whereby “heart” signifies the entirety of the person as well as the inner self, devotion to St. Joseph’s heart ultimately constitutes devotion to the person of St. Joseph and his pre-eminent sanctity, which is second in degree only to Our Lady.
2. While we should always be obedient to legitimate Church authority, it is doubtful that the remote 19th century curial prohibitions of devotion to the Heart of St. Joseph are still binding. The lack of any clear ecclesiastical confirmation of these 19th century prohibitions into the 20th and 21st centuries seems to remove any obligation to follow them in contemporary Church faith and practice.
3. A balanced devotion of *protodulia* to the Heart of St. Joseph, with proper distinctions as to its unquestionable subordination to the proper latrial devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the hyperdulial devotion to the Immaculate Heart of

²¹ Bishop Battersby’s Coat of Arms can be found here:
<https://diolc.org/communications/our-bishops-2/bishop-battersby/>.

Mary would appropriately serve a unified devotion to the Three Hearts who have immediate relation to the hypostatic order. Thus, it would serve the truth of and devotion to the Holy Family under the personal signification of their respective hearts.

The Cultus of the Heart of St. Joseph: An Inquiry into the *Status Quaestionis*

MSGR. ARTHUR BURTON CALKINS

Marian apparitions have played an important role in the life of the Church.¹ We only need think of how the 1531 apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe to St. Juan Diego—along with Mary’s miraculous image on his tilma—led to the conversion of over nine million Aztecs to the Catholic faith.² Shrines that have been erected because of Marian apparitions continue to draw millions of pilgrims each year. About 20 million pilgrims visit the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe annually; about 6 million go to Lourdes; 6–8 million to Fatima; and about 10 million to the Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health in Vailankanni, which is recognized as “the Lourdes of the East”(John Paul II, Angelus address, July 31, 1988).

Marian apparitions as private revelations

Marian apparitions fall into the category of “private revelations” to distinguish them from the public revelation of Scripture and apostolic tradition. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains,

Throughout the ages, there have been so-called "private" revelations, some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ's definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history. Guided by the Magisterium

¹ See Robert Fastiggi, “Mary and Our Pilgrimage to Heaven” *The Priest* (September, 2024):

<https://thepriest.com/2024/06/16/mary-and-our-pilgrimage-to-heaven/>.

² Francis Johnson, *The Wonder of Guadalupe* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1981), 56.

of the Church, the *sensus fidelium* knows how to discern and welcome in these revelations whatever constitutes an authentic call of Christ or his saints to the Church (no. 67).

The distinction between the deposit of faith and the messages of private revelations is important to keep in mind when discerning the validity of reported apparitions. The Catechism, though, also recognizes how the *sensus fidelium*, guided by the Magisterium, “knows how to discern and welcome in these revelations whatever constitutes an authentic call of Christ or his saints to the Church.” If the *sensus fidelium*—the supernatural sense of the faithful—can discern and welcome authentic calls from Christ or his saints to the Church, does this not suggest the ability to discern whether or not reported Marian apparitions are supernatural?

The New Norms of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF)

I raise this question in light of the cautious approach to the validity of private revelations provided by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith [DDF] in the new *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena* of May 17, 2024.³ The DDF is concerned that direct affirmations of the supernatural character of apparitions or phenomena will give the faithful the impression that they are obliged to believe in them as supernatural. Because of this concern, the DDF will not allow bishops to issue statements affirming the supernatural character of apparitions or miraculous events. The highest form of episcopal approval now permitted is a declaration of *nihil obstat*, which means that nothing stands in the way for the faithful to believe in the reported apparitions or miraculous event. But even with the *nihil obstat*, the diocesan bishop is asked to “clearly indicate,

³ These Norms can be found on the Vatican website:
https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddf_doc_20240517_norme-fenomeni-soprannaturali_en.html.

through a decree, the nature of the authorization and the limits of any permitted veneration, specifying that the faithful ‘are authorized to give to it their adherence in a prudent manner’” (Art. 22 § 1). Moreover, “The Diocesan Bishop will also take care to ensure that the faithful do not consider any of the determinations as an approval of the supernatural nature of the phenomenon itself (Art. 22 § 2).

In support of this cautious approach, the DDF cites this 2010 statement of Pope Benedict XVI:

Ecclesiastical approval of a private revelation essentially means that its message contains nothing contrary to faith and morals; it is licit to make it public and the faithful are authorized to give to it their adherence in a prudent manner. [...] It is a help which is proffered, but its use is not obligatory. In any event, it must be a matter of nourishing faith, hope and love, which are for everyone the permanent path of salvation.⁴

The Church for centuries has taught that the faithful are not obliged to believe in private revelations—even those approved by the Church. The question can be asked, though, whether the non-obligatory character of a private revelation should prevent a bishop from making a personal affirmation of it as supernatural. According to the 1978 *Norms Regarding the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions or Revelations* issued by the then Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith [CDF], it was possible for the diocesan

⁴ Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (30 September 2010), no. 14: *AAS* 102 (2010), p. 696; this exhortation is also available on the Vatican website: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html.

bishop “to express a judgment regarding the authenticity and supernatural character if the case so merits.”⁵

The 1978 Norms were sent to Catholic bishops in Latin to guide them in discerning reported apparitions. There were, though, many unauthorized translations that made their way into the public domain. Because of this, the CDF published its own official translations of the Norms in a number of languages in 2012 along with a preface by Cardinal William Levada, the prefect of the CDF.⁶ In his preface, Cardinal Levada cites Benedict XVI’s *Verbum Domini* on the nature and purpose of private revelations and their non-obligatory character. The 1978 Norms, though, still allows bishops “to express a judgment regarding the authenticity and supernatural character” of the apparition.

As we have seen, the May 17, 2024 DDF Norms no longer allow the diocesan bishop to issue a statement affirming the supernatural character of the apparition. Instead, the most positive judgment a bishop can offer is a *nihil obstat* in consultation with the DDF. The reason for this cautious approach is to avoid giving the impression that belief in an approved apparition is obligatory. The new Norms make this clear:

Whenever a *Nihil obstat* is granted by the Dicastery (cf. Par. 17, below), such phenomena do not become objects of faith, which means the faithful are not obliged to give an assent of faith to them. Rather, as in the case of charisms recognized by the Church,

⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Norms Regarding the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions or Revelations (Feb. 25, 1978), no. 2c, available at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/r_c_con_cfaith_doc_19780225_norme-apparizioni_en.html.

⁶ Cardinal Levada’s Preface is dated December 14, 2011, and it can be found on the Vatican website: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/r_c_con_cfaith_doc_20111214_prefazione-levada_en.html.

they are “ways to deepen one’s knowledge of Christ and to give oneself more generously to him, while rooting oneself more and more deeply in communion with the entire Christian people.” (no. 12).

The DDF, therefore, believes bishops should avoid declaring an apparition or event supernatural. This explanation is given:

In the past, the Holy See seemed to accept that Bishops would make statements such as, “*Les fidèles sont fondés à la croire indubitable et certaine*” [The faithful have grounds to believe it as indubitable and certain]: Decree of the Bishop of Grenoble, 19 September 1851) and “one cannot doubt the reality of the tears” (Decree of the Bishops of Sicily, 12 December 1953). However, these expressions conflicted with the Church’s own conviction that the faithful did not have to accept the authenticity of these events. Therefore, a few months after the latter case, the Holy Office explained that it had “not yet made any decision regarding the *Madonna delle Lacrime*” ([Syracuse, Sicily] 2 October 1954). More recently, in reference to Fatima, the then Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith explained that ecclesiastical approval of a private revelation highlights that “the message contains nothing contrary to faith or morals” (26 June 2000).

The DDF is rightly concerned that the faithful should not feel obliged to believe in apparitions that have received Church approval. Private revelations—even those that have been approved—cannot demand the assent of faith as do truths set forth by the Church as revealed by God. In the past it was generally understood that belief in approved apparitions was not obligatory. This was handled by proper catechesis. The DDF, though, now feels the need to be very cautious in this regard. Thus, it instructs bishops not to make

statements affirming apparitions or miraculous events as supernatural.

The DDF provides two examples of episcopal statements judged to conflict “with the Church’s own conviction that the faithful did not have to accept the authenticity of these events.” It should be noted, though, that the 1851 approval of the La Salette apparition by Bishop Philibert de Bruillard does not explicitly say that the faithful *are obliged* to believe in it as supernatural. Instead the Bishop says: “The apparition of the Holy Virgin to the two shepherds on the mountain of La Salette [...] bears in itself all the characteristics of truth and the faithful have grounds to believe it as indubitable and certain” (*“L’apparition de la Sainte Vierge à deux bergers sur la montagne de La Salette [...] porte en elle-même tous les caractères de la vérité et que les fidèles sont fondés à la croire indubitable et certaine”*).⁷ The Bishop does not say that the apparition is indubitable and certain but the faithful have grounds (or are justified) in believing it as such. The DDF, though, believes that even this type of approval conflicts “with the Church’s own conviction that the faithful did not have to accept the authenticity of these events.”

Episcopal approvals as worthy of belief and supernatural

What type of episcopal approval, then, would be acceptable to the DDF? In the history of the Church, some apparitions seem to have been approved with the type of cautious language that the DDF now prefers. For example, the 1877 Marian apparitions received by two young Polish girls in Gietzswald, Poland were given indirect approval by Bishop Filip Krementz of the Diocese Warmia (Ermland), Poland in 1878. Bishop Krementz did not issue a decree approving the apparitions as supernatural. Instead, “he promoted the publication in German and in Polish of the study by Father

⁷ My translation taken from the French text cited on the website of La Salette <https://lasalette.cef.fr/lhistoire/>.

Franciszek Hipler entitled ‘The Apparitions of Our Lady in Gietrzwałd to the Catholic People According to the Official Documents’.⁸ On September 11, 1977, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the apparitions, Bishop Julian Wojtowski, issued a decree recognizing the apparitions as “worthy of credibility.”⁹ This would seem to be the type of approval that DDF now prefers. Bishop Wojtowski in 1977 did not declare the 1877 apparitions to be supernatural. He simply said they were worthy of belief as such. In other words, nothing prevents (*nihil obstat*) the faithful from believing in these apparitions.

There have also been episcopal declarations on Marian apparitions and miraculous events that have affirmed the supernatural while also making it clear that the faithful are not obliged to believe in the apparitions. One example of this type of declaration is that of Most. Rev. John Shojiro Ito, the Bishop of Niigata, Japan, who issued a pastoral letter on April 22, 1984 in which he states:

I recognize the supernatural character of a series of mysterious events concerning the statue of the Holy Mother Mary which is found in the convent of the Institute of the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist at Yuzawadai, Soegawa, Akita. I do not find in these events any elements which are contrary to Catholic faith and morals.¹⁰

⁸ See the outline of events provided by Michael O’Neill in his Miracle Hunter website:
https://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/approved_apparitions/gietrzwald/index.html.

⁹ *Dictionnaire des “Apparitions” de La Vierge Marie*, edited by René Laurentin and Patrick Sbalchiero (Paris:: Libraire Arthème Fayard, 2007), 389.

¹⁰ The text of Bishop Ito’s Pastoral letter of April 22, 1984 can be found at:
https://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/statements/akita_statement_01.html.

Bishop Ito's recognition of the supernatural character of the events, however, is followed by this explanation and qualification:

Consequently, I authorize, throughout the entire diocese, the veneration of the Holy Mother of Akita, while awaiting that the Holy See publishes definitive judgment on this matter. And I ask that it be remembered that even if the Holy See later publishes a favorable judgment with regard to the events of Akita, it is a question only of a private Divine revelation. Christians are bound to believe only content of public Divine revelation (closed after the death of the last Apostle) which contains all that is necessary for salvation.¹¹

As can be seen, Bishop Ito recognizes the supernatural character of the events of Akita, but he makes it clear that the faithful are not obliged to believe in these events as supernatural. This is because it concerns a private revelation, which is distinct from public divine revelation.

In terms of Catholic history, there seem to be numerous examples of bishops making explicit affirmations of the supernatural character of various Marian apparitions. Here are some examples.

In July of 1836 Archbishop Hyacinthe-Louis de Quélen of Paris approved the supernatural character of the Miraculous Medal, based on the 1830 apparitions to St. Catherine Labouré, with these words:

... [T]he prodigious number of medals that have been stamped and distributed, the stunning benefits and singular graces ... truly seem to be the signs by which heaven has wished to confirm the reality of the

¹¹ Ibid.

apparitions, the truth of the report of the visionary and the diffusion of the medal.¹²

Archbishop de Quélen does not appeal to his own authority to confirm the supernatural nature of the apparitions received by the visionary (at that time not named). Instead, he appeals to the signs of heaven that confirm the reality of the apparitions. Behind his statement, though, is the belief that he, as the Archbishop, can discern the signs given by heaven.

On January 18, 1862, Bishop Bertrand-Sévère Mascarou-*Laurence* of Tarbes, France, published a letter confirming the validity of the apparitions of Lourdes. He did not hesitate to say: “The Immaculate Mother of God has really appeared to Bernandette” (“*L’Immaculée Mère de Dieu a réellement apparu à Bernadette*”).¹³

On February 2, 1872, Bishop Casimir-Alexis-Joseph Wicart of Laval, France, issued his official judgment on the 1871 apparition of the Virgin Mary in Pontmain, France. In approving the apparition, he said: “The Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God, truly appeared on January 17, 1871 to Eugène Barbedette, Joseph Barbedette, Françoise Richer and Jeanne-Marie Lebossé, in the hamlet of Pontmain” (“*L’Immaculée Vierge Marie, Mère de Dieu, a véritablement apparu, le 17 janvier 1871, à Eugène Barbedette, Joseph Barbedette, Françoise Richer et Jeanne-Marie Lebossé, dans le hameau de Pontmain*”).¹⁴

On November 21, 1987, Bishop Pio Bello Ricardo of Los Teques, Venezuela, issued a pastoral instruction on the apparitions of Our Lady to Maria Esperanza Medrano de Bianchini, which began in Betania in 1976. In approving these apparitions, the Bishop stated: “I declare that in my judgment

¹² As cited in Robert L. Fastiggi and Michael O’Neill, *Virgin, Mother, Queen: Encountering Mary in Time and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2019), 89. The French text is found in Nicole Vray, *Un autre regard sur Marie: Histoire et religion* (Lyon: Olivetan, 2008), 86.

¹³ Laurentin and Sbalchiero I, 564.

¹⁴ Laurentin and Sbalchiero I, 749–750.

the aforesaid apparitions are authentic and have a supernatural character. I therefore officially approve that the place where they were produced be considered sacred.”¹⁵

On June 29, 2001, Bishop Augustin Misago of Gikongoro, Rwanda, issued a declaration affirming the Marian apparitions that took place in Kibeho, Rwanda in 1981–1982. The full text of the French original was released by the Holy See on July 2, 2001, and key parts of this declaration were published in *L’Osservatore Romano* English edition of July 11, 2001.¹⁶

In affirming the apparitions Bishop Misago is quite explicit: “Yes, the Virgin Mary appeared at Kibeho on 28 November 1981 and in the months that followed. There are more reasons to believe in the apparitions than to deny them.”¹⁷ Even though Bishop Misago states clearly that the Virgin Mary did appear at Kibeho, he offers this qualification:

The recognition or negation of the authenticity of an apparition does not guarantee infallibility; it is based on proofs of probability more than on apodictic arguments". In the sphere of the apparitions there is then no absolute certainty for the witnesses, except perhaps for the visionary. The definitive judgement about the Apparitions of Kibeho should be interpreted in this spirit. The recognition of these apparitions should not be considered a requirement

¹⁵ Laurentin and Sbalchiero II,1056.

¹⁶ The full text of the July 11, 2001 *L’Osservatore Romano* article can be found on the Miracle Hunter website:
https://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/statements/kibeho_statement_01.html.

¹⁷ The translation is from the *L’Osservatore Romano* Eng. ed. article of July 11, 2001. French original is given in Laurentin and Sbalchiero,II,1056: “*Oui, La Vierge Marie est apparue à Kibeho dans la journée du November 1981 [...]. Il y a plus des bonnes raisons d’y croire que de le nier.*”

of faith. Therefore each Christian is free to believe or not.¹⁸

Bishop Misago's qualification is similar to the one given by Bishop Ito in 1984. His explicit statement that the Virgin Mary did appear at Kibeho is balanced with a reminder that belief in the apparitions is not a requirement of the faith.

During Mass on May 4, 2008—with officials of the Roman Curia present— Bishop Jean-Michel di Falco of the Diocese of Gap and Embrun, announced his approval of the Marian apparitions of Laus received by Benoîte Rencurel, between 1664 and 1718. In his words of approval, he clearly affirms the supernatural character of the apparitions:

After having carefully studied the facts and taken counsel from competent people, I recognize the supernatural origin of the apparitions and events experienced and related by Benoîte Rencurel between 1664 and 1718. The testimony of her life is a guarantee of the truth of her statements. I encourage the faithful to come and pray and renew themselves spiritually in this sanctuary.¹⁹

After having recognized the supernatural origin of the apparitions, Bishop di Falco then adds this qualification: “Nobody is obliged to believe in apparitions, even in those

¹⁸ This text is found on the Miracle Hunter website:

https://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/statements/kibeho_statement_01.html.

¹⁹ My translation of the French, which reads: “*Après avoir soigneusement étudié les faits et pris conseil auprès des personnes compétentes, je reconnais l'origine surnaturelle des apparitions et faits vécus et relatés par Benoîte Rencurel, entre 1664 et 1718. Le témoignage de sa vie est une garantie de la vérité de ses dires. J'encourage les fidèles à venir prier et à se ressourcer.*” This passage from the French text is found

at: https://www.la-croix.com/Religion/Actualite/Les-apparitions-de-Notre-Dame-du-Laus-officiellement-reconnues-_NG_-2008-05-05-671012.

officially recognized, but if they help us in our faith and our daily lives, why should we reject them?”²⁰

Here we see an approach similar to that of Bishop Ito with regard to Akita and Bishop Misago with regard to Kibeho. The Bishop affirms the supernatural character of the apparitions, but he makes it clear that the faithful are not obliged to believe in apparitions, even those officially recognized by the Church.

On December 8, 2010, Bishop David L. Ricken of Green Bay, WI issued a “Decree on the Authenticity of the Marian Apparitions of 1859 at the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help Diocese of Green Bay.” The key part of his Decree reads as follows:

I declare with moral certainty and in accord with the norms of the Church that the events, apparitions and locutions given to Adele Brise in October of 1859 do exhibit the substance of supernatural character, and I do hereby approve these apparitions as worthy of belief (although not obligatory) by the Christian faithful.²¹

Here we see another example of an affirmation of “supernatural character” along with the qualification that belief in the approved apparition is not obligatory.

On May 22, 2016, Bishop Hector Cardelli of St. Nicolas, Argentina formally declared that the apparitions of Our Lady of the Rosary to Gladys Quiroga de Motta were “supernatural in character” and “worthy of belief.” He approved the

²⁰ This part of his discourse is found at:

https://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/approved_apparitions/laus/index.html.

²¹ Bishop Ricken’s 2010 Decree can be found at:

<chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://championshrine.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Shrine-of-Our-Lady-of-Good-Help-Declaration.pdf>.

apparitions—which were mostly from Mary but some from Jesus—for the period from 1983 to 1990.²² Bishop Cardelli announced his approval in a homily of May 22, 2016, but his more formal approval was by means of Decree issued that same day entitled “The Spiritual School of Holy Mary of the Rosary of San Nicolas” (*La Escuela Espiritual de Santa Maria del Rosario de San Nicolas*).²³ In this Decree, Bishop Cardelli carefully reviews the 1978 CDF Norms for Discerning Apparitions. He also cites the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 67 to make the distinction between public revelation and private revelation. After ruling out a natural or a diabolical origin of the apparitions, he concludes that the origin is beyond the natural. Following the 1978 CDF Norms he notes that no negative criteria apply but only positive criteria. Therefore, he issues his judgment that the case “exhibits a supernatural character and is worthy of belief. Consequently, for us, it is *constat de supernaturalitate*” (*exhibe carácter sobrenatural y es digno de creencia. Consecuentamente, para nosotros, constat de supernaturalitate*).

Bishop Cardelli’s Decree is a model of how a bishop would arrive at a judgment according to the 1978 CDF Norms. He carefully distinguishes between the assent owed to public revelation and the assent owed to private revelation. Nevertheless, he believes that the evidence points to a supernatural origin, and he ends his Decree giving thanks to God and encouraging devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary.

Final Reflections

²² See this June 4, 2016 article from the *Catholic News Agency*: <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/33982/a-marian-apparition-has-been-approved-in-argentina-and-its-a-big-deal>.

²³ The Spanish text of this Decree can be found at Michael O’Neill’s Miracle Hunter website: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnnibpcajpcglefindmkaj/https://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/statements/la-escuela-espiritual-de-santa-maria-del-rosario-de-san-nicolas.pdf.

In light of the examples given above, it's clear that many bishops have made formal declarations of the supernatural character of Marian apparitions. In many of these formal statements, the bishops have also been careful to note that belief in approved Marian apparitions is not obligatory because these apparitions pertain to private rather than public revelation. If the major concern of the new DDF Norms is to make it clear that the faithful are not obliged to believe in even approved apparitions, then it seems that many bishops have already stressed this point. The question is whether a formal declaration of the supernatural character of a Marian apparition necessarily conflicts with the Church's conviction that the faithful are not obliged to accept the authenticity of the approved apparition or event. A deeper issue is whether bishops, by virtue of their office as successors to the apostles, have the capacity and the authority to declare that an apparition or miraculous event is supernatural. The new DDF Norms allow for the Pope, in rare cases, to declare an apparition to be supernatural. The Dicastery for the Causes of the Saints, which operates under the authority of the Roman Pontiff, clearly has the authority to affirm miracles as supernatural interventions. Why, though, do bishops lack this authority?

Perhaps the DDF is not denying the capacity of individual bishops to recognize the supernatural. The Dicastery might be operating more out of prudential caution than denying the episcopal ability to discern the supernatural. As Catholics we must respect the new Norms of the DDF, but we must also realize that they are more disciplinary rather than doctrinal in nature. In abiding by these new Norms, bishops will need to approve Marian apparitions judged to be worthy of belief by means of a *nihil obstat* rather than a judgment that they are supernatural in character. If a *nihil obstat* is issued, the faithful would have the right to discern for themselves whether an apparition is supernatural.

Bishops, though, are members of the faithful. Nothing, therefore, would stand in the way for a bishop to say something like: “I personally believe this apparition is supernatural, and I approve it as worthy of belief as such. The faithful, however, are not obliged to believe in this apparition as supernatural, but nothing stands in their way to believe it is.” As long as these new Norms remain in force, this might be the proper way for a bishop to affirm an apparition or event as supernatural.

The Blessed Virgin Mary as the Fruit of Redemption

Sr. Tereza M. Sinishtaj, O.P.

Introduction

In the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Church finds an image of what she herself will become in eternal glory. The movement from grace to glory cannot be brought about apart from the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, by which He redeemed the world once and for all. His victory over sin and death wrought the *fruits of redemption* for mankind, namely the healing and elevation of our nature through grace, granting access to eternal life. As the exemplary member and *typus* of the Church, the Blessed Virgin Mary proceeds all of mankind in the redeemed life in a most sublime manner. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* articulates it in this way,

In celebrating this annual cycle of Christ's mysteries, holy Church honors with special love the Blessed Mary, Mother of God, who is joined by an inseparable bond to the saving work of her Son. In her the Church holds up and admires the most excellent fruit of the redemption, and joyfully contemplates, as in a faultless image, that which she herself desires and hopes wholly to be.¹

As noted in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, the excellency of Mary includes the special unity she enjoys with her Son and his salvific work by being the Mother of God. Free from all stain of original sin, the work of redemption was completed in her by the merits of her Son as no other human being would experience before or thereafter. Dogmatically defined in 1854 with the Papal Decree *Ineffabilis Deus*, the Church holds as divinely revealed the sacred truth of Mary's sinless humanity, which enabled her to participate

¹ Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 4 December 1963: AAS 56 (1964), 102.

in the saving plan of God, being the most fitting instrument of grace for the Incarnation of Christ.²

In order to understand Mary as the *fruit of redemption*, we must first look at various aspects of the concept, beginning with its biblical origins. Used in his letter to the early Christian community in Rome, St. Paul links it to the work of the Holy Spirit,

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience (Rom. 8:22-25).

The ‘first fruits’ here refer to the fulfillment of Christ’s promise to send the Holy Spirit upon the Church at Pentecost. Having received the grace of baptism and thereby the life of grace, the nascent Church now prays in hope for the final redemption of the body. Through the Dogmatic declaration of Mary’s Assumption, the Church confirmed that the Blessed Virgin preceded the Church in having already attained this state of glory,

She, by an entirely unique privilege, completely overcame sin by her Immaculate Conception, and as a result she was not subject to the law of remaining in the corruption of the grave, and she did not have to wait until the end of time for the redemption of her body.³

² See Pius IX, Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*, 1854. At the Holy See, <https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-ix/it/documents/18541208-costituzione-apostolica-ineffabilis-deus.html>.

³ Pope Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*, 1950, 5, At the Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19501101_munificentissimus-deus.html

Mary therefore lives in the fulfillment of the hope for which the Church on earth prays. The particular phrase ‘fruit of redemption’ is also found in the liturgical prayers of the Church, within the rite of Eucharistic Benediction,

O God, who in this wonderful sacrament, has left us a memorial of your passion, grant us, we pray, so to revere the sacred mysteries of your Body and Blood, that we may ever experience in ourselves the fruits of your redemption, through Christ our Lord.

The sequence of this prayer follows a clear logic: by His passion and death, without which the Church would not have His Eucharistic presence, we recall the saving merits of the Savior who at once liberated and justified fallen man from the bondage of sin and death. Just as His redeeming merits are made manifest in the Blessed Virgin, so likewise does the Church pray to participate in them in its struggle against the world, the flesh, and the Devil. By consequence, our wounded nature necessitates a different mode of participation from that of Mary. In his commentary on the Angelic Salutation, Aquinas compares the ‘fruit of Eve’ to the ‘fruit of Mary’,

Eve looked for pleasure in the fruit of the tree because it was good to eat. But she did not find this pleasure in it, and, on the contrary, she at once discovered she was naked and stricken with sorrow. In the fruit of the Blessed Virgin, we find sweetness and salvation, ‘He who eats my flesh...has eternal life.’⁴

⁴ C.f., Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio Salutationis Angelicae* which outlines how the Blessed Virgin Mary exceeded the angels in dignity, “[...] in fructu suo Eva desideravit delectationem, quia bonus ad edendum; sed non invenit, quia statim cognovit se nudam, et habuit dolorem. Sed in fructu virginis suavitatem invenimus et salutem. Ioan. VI, 55: ‘qui manducat meam carnem, habet vitam aeternam.’”

By contrasting Eve and Mary, Aquinas touches on a key distinction: the fruit of Redemption is *first* Christ and the life of grace, then the effects being the fruits we experience or what we referred to earlier as the healing and elevation of our nature. With this distinction in mind, we come to the focus of this study which is to address the question: what does it mean to call Mary the fruit of redemption? We will proceed in four parts. First, we will address the meaning of redemption and man's need for it due to original sin. Next, a broader discussion on the fruits of the redemption will follow. This will then bring us to the final section and a more direct commentary on the principal question of inquiry: what it means to call Mary the fruit of redemption. With these foundations in mind, we may begin our inquiry.

I. The Need for Redemption

In Chapter three of the book of Genesis, we read of the primeval event in which Adam and Eve lost friendship with God through their disobedience. Before this moment, they enjoyed the state of *original justice* by which they lived in harmony with God, themselves, and all of creation. Indeed, through this original sin, death and disorder entered the world.⁵ Sin ruptured this relationship of grace by which Adam and Eve enjoyed with God the harmonious ordering of their passions, inclination to virtue, and a share in the preternatural gifts. While this certainly does not mean that man's nature is not corrupt or evil, it is indeed wounded as a result. Effects of the woundedness in human nature can be plainly seen through the weakened will in its ability to choose the good, ignorance of the mind, death, and our inclination to evil. This fallen nature makes choosing the good difficult, as St. Paul exclaims,

⁵ See Augustine's commentary in *De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia* "the deliberate sin of the First man is the cause of original sin" (PL II, XXVI, 43).

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me (Rom. 7:15-30).

St. Paul's account in the letter to the Romans vividly expresses the consequences of sin and death by which man stood in need of a redeemer. Pursuing virtue and living according to God's law would require more than what our fallen nature could accomplish on its own.⁶ In God's love for man whom He created in His image and likeness, He would send His Son to respond to this need for grace whereby man would be able to once more live in harmony with God. Simply stated, man's sin incurred a debt he could not pay, which Jesus Christ would take upon Himself (though He Himself was sinless) and thereby give the definitive response to sin and all of its detrimental effects through His Paschal mystery.

Aquinas called the merits of Christ's suffering death his *superabundant atonement*⁷, meaning that the debt owed to God because of sin was canceled and *more than enough* to make reparation for man. This is because of the excellence and innocence of Christ in his suffering,

[...] though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied

⁶ Condemning the heresy of Pelagianism, the Council of Orange declared in 529: "Man can by only forces of nature, without the enlightenment and inspiration of the Holy Spirit conceive as it is fitting, a good thought concerning eternal salvation or choose it, that is, to give his assent to the Gospel message. (C.f. DH 180, 1791, 104, 797.)

⁷ *ST*, III, q. 48, a. 2.

himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:6-8).

It is therefore clearly Christ's perfect atonement which wrought redemption. The faithful may thus rejoice with St. Paul, since 'while sin increased, grace abounded all the more' (Rom. 5:20), sin and death do not have the final word. Though always called to repentance and reparation, the tradition of the Church's liturgy at Easter recalls original sin the *felix culpa*, the happy fault which brought the grace of Christ to man, "O truly necessary sin of Adam, which the death of Christ has blotted out! O happy fault that merited such and so great a Redeemer!"⁸

As the one mediator between God and man, Christ obtained for us access to His own Divine life. Christians may therefore recall their need for redemption, already obtained through Jesus Christ, and respond to the grace to experience its effects. As the famous Augustinian maxim expresses it, "God created us without us: but he did not will to save us without us."⁹ While the redemption of man is thus objectively complete in Christ, it is held out to each man and requires a response of active acceptance and cooperation with grace. In this regard, the Blessed Virgin Mary is the exemplar.

Before proceeding, it is important to note here that while Mary was preserved by God from all stain of original sin, she was not exempt from the need for redemption. Indeed, to say this would make her co-equal to God and super-human. This would be a great error. Between the Redeemer and the redeemed there is always a great distance, since as the

⁸ From the *Praeconium Paschale* (or *Exultet*) on the Liturgy of Holy Saturday. See also Aquinas' commentary on the greater good which came about through sin, *ST* III, q. 1, a. 3.

⁹ Augustine, *Sermo 169*, 11, 13: PL 38, 923.

Word-made-flesh Jesus Christ alone enjoys the grace of the hypostatic union, himself the *origin of all grace* in the human soul.¹⁰ This distinction must be clear: Christ's human nature, perfectly united yet distinct from His Divine nature, is the only example of human nature which was *never* in need of redemption. The Church is able to hold Mary up as a model precisely because of her exceptional and exemplary redeemed state¹¹, the uniqueness of which will be further discussed in the following sections.

II. The Fruits of Redemption

In the previous section, we discussed the consequences of original sin by which all of mankind share in the effects of Adam and Eve's disobedience. Just as man experienced consequences of a wounded nature after original sin because of Adam, so likewise does he have access to the remedy in experiencing the fruit of redemption obtained by Jesus Christ. We therefore turn to address the topic of the fruits of redemption in two ways: first, in the life of grace and second in the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Since the sacred humanity of Christ is the instrument of man's salvation, it is fitting to first consider Christ's grace as the first and primary fruit of the redemption.¹² We also find a helpful explanation in St. Paul's use of the phrase,

¹⁰ *ST I*, q. 112, a. 1.

¹¹ See *Lumen Gentium* 52-54 for further explanation, i.e., "Because of this gift of sublime grace she far surpasses all creatures, both in heaven and on earth. At the same time, however, because she belongs to the offspring of Adam she is one with all those who are to be saved. She is 'the mother of the members of Christ . . . having cooperated by charity that faithful might be born in the Church, who are members of that Head.' Wherefore she is hailed as a pre-eminent and singular member of the Church, and as its type and excellent exemplar in faith and charity."

¹² In this essay, the distinctions between uncreated grace and created grace will not be considered. Grace will instead be spoken of more generally as man's participation in God's life.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. (1 Cor. 15:20-25).

The patristic development of Christ as the “new Adam” develops precisely from this and other Pauline passages. Where Adam broke friendship with God through sin, the one sinless man grants access to the human race to be once more restored to right relationship with God. As St. Paul notes, Christ’s own resurrection precedes the Church in glory. Indeed, it is precisely in reference to His resurrection that He Himself may be called the first fruit of redemption; in that it is the fullness of *His life* which is now lies open to man. Later in the aforementioned passage of 1 Corinthians 15:23, St. Paul says regarding the faithful, “but each one in his own order: Christ the first fruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.” The coming of the Holy Spirit which followed Christ’s resurrection and ascension brought the fruit of the gifts, enabling the faithful to live according to grace, particularly through the sacramental life of the Church which Christ initiated. The purpose of grace is to restore man’s nature to what he lost by original sin. Garrigou-Lagrange points out the grace-glory connection through his commentary on Aquinas, *De Gratia*, relating that glory is grace consummated. This means that by grace, man may begin to live the life of glory here-and-now.¹³ In order to

¹³ See Réginald Marie Garrigou-Lagrange, *Grace: A Commentary on the Summa Theologica of St. Thomas, Ia IIae, Q. 109-14* (South Bend: Ex Fontibus Company, Cop, 2015). Taken from Article IV, Whether Habitual Grace is the Essence of the Soul in a Subject? First Corollary: “Glory, taken as the root of the light of glory and of charity, is likewise in the essence of the

allow man to be divinized (*gratia elevans*), he must first be healed (*gratia sanans*) and restored to friendship with God which is charity.

In Mary, the Church finds its most sublime creaturely witness as a result of Christ's redemptive act. Just as some saints are more revered in the Church, Aquinas says,

Greater dignity was preordained by God to some saints, and hence he infused grace more abundantly into them. For example, he imparted a unique grace to Christ as man when he assumed [the humanity] into the unity of the [Second] Person. He endowed with special graces in both her body and soul, the glorious Virgin Mary whom he chose to be his mother. Similarly, those God called to a unique dignity, the Apostles, were gifted with a corresponding favor of grace. Thus the Apostle states in Romans 8:23: 'ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit.' And a Gloss comments: 'their share is first in time and more copious than others.'

Since Mary is queen of all saints, it can be said that by her dignity and fullness of grace, her share in the 'first fruits of the Spirit' exceeds all others. Through her heavenly intercession, Mary continues to obtain grace for us on earth. In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas asks whether one man can merit for another.¹⁴ He explains that because God is always acting in the movement of grace that occurs within us, we can merit by cooperating with Him freely to choose the virtuous response in a given circumstance, such as praying for the needs of another, or sacrificing a good and thereby practicing temperance. When we live virtuously, this is ultimately the

soul; for it is grace consummated. It is also an entitative habit, for St. Thomas says in several places that habitual grace, the seed of glory, is a certain beginning of eternal life, for it is the same habit. On the contrary, infused faith, which is obscure, is not a certain beginning of the beatific vision."

¹⁴ *ST*, Ia IIae, q. 114, a. 6.

mystery of Jesus Christ who lives in His members on earth, enabling us to merit, which though mysterious, is our real participation in the economy of grace. The Church, therefore, looks to Mary who freely cooperated with her Son in the work of salvation.

The Virgin received her dignity and noble vocation from God. In a most fitting manner, at the hour of the Church's atonement, she offered everything she received back to God. She united herself with that most sublime charity of co-suffering when she stood beneath the Cross. She watched her Son give His life for the ransom of the world. Jesus exemplifies the perfect love that suffers as God, and Mary participates in this perfect love as creature and as His most perfect mother. The primitive Church understood the exceeding value of the redemption, and early Christians embraced their own call to freely participate in the work of redemption by taking up their Cross and following the Lord. Indeed, Mary became the *Mater Ecclesiae*, beginning with Christ's entrustment of John to her and her to John. Just before Christ uttered *Consummatum est* and redeemed mankind through His suffering and death, His dying words were the entrustment of His mother to the representative of the Church and His priest, John the Beloved. In her proximity to the mystery of Christ's Paschal Mystery under the Cross, the Church continues to see in Mary the heavenly model of redeemed life while also accompanying the Church on earth which continues to struggle against temptation and sin. Indeed, the Church finds in the Spouse of the Holy Spirit the response to Christ's promise that He will not leave the disciples desolate, but through Mary console and ever strengthen them in their expectation of the coming of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:18).

III. Mary as the First Among the Redeemed

Having already addressed man's need for redemption and the fruits that came about through the salvific work of Christ, we may more closely address what it means to call Mary the fruit of redemption. In the Papal bull *Aperite Portas Redentori*, Pope John Paul II recalls both the words of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and the tradition of referring to Mary as the first among the redeemed,

Never as in this new season of her history, in Mary the Church "admires and exalts the most sublime fruit of the Redemption, and in her she contemplates with joy, as in a most pure image, what she desires and hopes to be" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 103); in Mary he recognizes, venerates and invokes the "*first redeemed*" and, at the same time, the first to have been most closely associated with the work of redemption.¹⁵

In His Mother, Christ gave us an exemplar in the life of grace who never experienced the effects of original sin. As the New Eve, she is obedient to the will of God and "full of grace" (Luke 1:28), becoming the model of holiness for each Christian, worthy of admiration and exaltation, as noted above. God's mercy bestowed on Mary the singular privilege of the Immaculate Conception, meaning that she was never subject to the evil of sin and therefore redeemed most sublimely of all creatures. Through her, God fulfills His "promise of mercy" (Luke 1:54) given after the fall of Adam and Eve in the *protoevangelium* (Gen. 3:15). "God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law..." (Gal 4:4). Four years later,

¹⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Papal Bull Aperite Portas Redemptori*, 1983, 9., At the Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/jubilee/documents/hf_jp-ii_doc_19830106_bolla-redenzione.html, Emphasis added.

in his Encyclical letter *Redemptoris Mater*, John Paul II reaffirms,

If he has eternally willed to call man to share in the divine nature (cf. 2 Pt. 1:4), it can be said that he has matched the "divinization" of man to humanity's historical conditions, so that even after sin he is ready to restore at a great price the eternal plan of his love through the "humanization" of his Son, who is of the same being as himself. The whole of creation, and more directly man himself, cannot fail to be amazed at this gift in which he has become a sharer, in the Holy Spirit: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn. 3:16). At the center of this mystery, in the midst of this wonderment of faith, stands Mary. As the loving Mother of the Redeemer, she was the first to experience it [...]¹⁶

While man's divinization can only come about through grace, Mary's sanctification was carried out when she was conceived purely in the womb of St. Anne, marking not only a unique experience of redemption but likewise an exemplary one. God's salvific intervention in human history therefore had two extraordinary moments: first in the immaculate conception of Mary, which historically precedes his death on the Cross, and second in the Incarnation whereby the redemption of mankind is completed through the paschal mystery.

Understanding Mary as a fruit of the redemption likewise serves to underscore her subordinate role in the work of salvation with her Son. Indeed, many have attempted to criticize Mary's title of Co-Redemptrix precisely for misunderstanding this point. *Sacrosanctum Concilium's* rendering of Mary as *the most sublime fruit of the redemption* and John Paul

¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Redemptoris Mater*, 1987, 52, At the Holy See
https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031987_redemptoris-mater.html.

II's subsequent theological commentary provides a response to the concern that "Co-Redemptrix" implies Mary co-equally redeeming the world with Christ. In reality, the theological explanations explaining the title have done so in light of Tradition and what is already known of Mary from Sacred Scripture, as well as doctrines which have been dogmatically defined. For example, tradition has ascribed the "woman" who crushes the head of the evil one in Genesis 3:15 to be the Mother of God. As mentioned previously, this remains the first announcement, *protoevangelium*, of the Savior who will defeat Satan through the seed of a woman. We find types of Mary in the feminine figures of Esther and Judith, who each advocate on behalf of their people.¹⁷ In the New Testament, the full type of the *woman* is revealed in Mary, completely unique in holiness, who becomes a *cause of salvation*¹⁸ through the Incarnation of Christ. These brief Scriptural references and their interpretation by the Church in her doctrine and liturgy are among a multitude of examples. Thus, through God's Divine initiative, Mary plays a singular, subordinate, and cooperative role in the story of salvation, being in this sense *the first fruit of her Son's redemptive work*. Pius XII affirmed this when he dogmatically defined the Assumption in 1950:

Christ's faithful, through the teaching and the leadership of their pastors, ... have contemplated in an ever clearer light the wonderful harmony and order of those privileges which the most provident God has lavished upon this loving associate of our Redeemer, privileges which reach such an exalted plane that,

¹⁷ See Esth. 7 and Jud. 13.

¹⁸ This comes from the Irenaean axiom and must be understood as a kind of secondary or instrumental causality with respect to Christ's first and efficient causality. It is only through Mary's obedience to God that she becomes a cause of salvation. Thus, Mary's role clearly cannot be understood as equal to Christ, and such explanations have never been accepted or articulated by magisterial authorities.

except for her, nothing created by God other than the human nature of Jesus Christ has ever reached this level.¹⁹

This 'exalted plane' is essentially Mary's 'fullness of grace' through which she was able to share with her Son the mystery of His rejection through the sword that pierces her soul, as prophesied by Simeon in the temple (Lk 2:34). Calling Mary an *associate* further serves the theological explanation of her being called a fruit of redemption, the first creature to be redeemed, though most exalted; the one at once receptively subservient and perfectly cooperative with God. Once these aspects are understood within the larger context of Scripture and tradition, the title of Co-Redemptrix cannot be said to obscure the role of Christ as the one mediator, but instead highlights the primacy of God's action through grace and man's calling to participate through grace, just as Mary did. Therefore, through her participation, Mary may be called not only the fruit of redemption but also mother of the faithful in the order of grace and the Co-Redemptrix. The Catechism reiterates *Lumen Gentium's* teaching on her participatory role in salvation by affirming,

This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation [...].²⁰

Here one clearly sees the singular choice of God who predestined Mary (the new Eve) to be full of grace in her Divine maternity, inviting her free cooperation and making

¹⁹ Pius XII, *Apostolic Constitution Munificentissimus Deus* (November 1, 1950), no. 14.

²⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 969; cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 62.

her a model unprecedented and unrepeatable privileges in the story of salvation. Mary's spiritual maternity of the elect reveals that her privilege as the first to be redeemed is not an isolated and solitary experience, but a gift which accompanies the Church through the end of time.

Conclusion

In this brief study, our aim was to answer the question of what it means to call Mary the fruit of redemption which we preceded to answer in three parts. First, we looked at the effects of original sin and man's need for redemption. We saw how this state had ramifications for the rupture of our relationship with God, ourselves, and others. The victory of Christ's death on the cross ultimately atoned above and beyond what was merely necessary, having restored us to grace and friendship with Him. As the one mediator between God and man, some essential distinctions were also made regarding Christ as the source of all grace and Mary as the chosen instrument of God. We then proceeded to discuss the fruits of the redemption wrought by Christ in a twofold way: primarily through God's grace and secondarily in Mary. Finally we shifted to focus more specifically on the meaning of Mary as a fruit of the redemption and why she is called the first among the redeemed. Her singular privilege of the Immaculate Conception rendered her the perfect dwelling for the Lord, who redeemed her in view of the saving merits of her Son. Counted among the creatures Christ came to save, she forever holds her place as the exemplar and perfect model of what the Church seeks to become in glory through grace. Journet summarized it pointedly, "the entire Church is Marian."²¹ In this preliminary analysis on the question of what it means to call Mary the fruit of redemption, it is hoped that clarity may be given to how she is the image of what the

²¹ Charles Journet, *The Apostolic Hierarchy: The Church of the Word Incarnate*, First Edition (London: Sheed & Ward, 1955), 428.

Church hopes to be, since Mary ultimately exemplifies the redeemed state each human being is called to attain through the grace and merits of her Son. Since she enjoys the splendor of the beatific vision, she ever intercedes for the Church in loving subordination to her Son, the One Redeemer.

Chosen: A Theological Reflection of St. Augustine's Mariology

NANCY M. MCCARTHY

St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (354-430), is regarded as one of the greatest theologians in the Western civilized world. He has been merited with the title of Doctor of Grace and was responsible for the early doctrinal understandings of original sin and the complexities of the Trinity. An emotional thinker with an apophatic appreciation of the God for whom he spent a lifetime searching and representing when found, he saw God as the creator of the cosmos who wished to cultivate a continued harmony, always remaining in relation to the creatures he loved. To that end, Augustine appreciated the tremendous gift God gave mankind by elevating one of its own, a humble, poor Jewish girl who would affect the greatest gift God could bestow on his creation: salvation through himself in the form of Perfect Man.

St. Augustine, with regard to Mary's purpose in redemption history, highlighted the concept of predestination, taken in its proper, divinely revealed understanding. He studied her role of Mother of God in which Mary's Immaculate Conception, her freedom from original sin, and sanctifying grace awarded her privilege even above the angels. Also, he detailed how her perpetual virginity reflects God's brilliance in advocating an entrance into humanity by accommodating the Word to flesh; and finally, Augustine detailed Mary as a type of the Church, as both virgin and mother, and her roles as Co-Redeemer with her Son, Mediatrix of all graces, and Advocate. All these Mary was graced with while embracing her responsibilities to serve God obediently but with a complete understanding of her free will within this plan.

Yet all things Mary for Augustine stem from all things Christ. St. Augustine, maturing into adulthood and leaving behind the entrapment of his spiritual endeavors in Manichaeism, sought God fervently but resisted the idea of baptism, until

he could no longer reject the obvious. For the God that Augustine hungered for was the one his mother, St. Monica, and his mentor St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, had been advocating; this was the true God that Augustine finally surrendered to as he says in his autobiography *Confessions*, “Our heart is restless until it rests in You.”¹

Totus Christus was the necessary centering element that pushed Augustine, now in his thirties, to the baptismal sacrament, entry into the Church, and in 391, the priesthood which was followed four years later by the legacy role as Bishop of Hippo. Mary was the instrumental, essential conduit necessary for God's intention that humanity would participate in its own salvation alongside Christ. For as Augustine once stated, “God created us without us, but he will not save us without us.”² Yet Augustine's approach in culminating understanding was unique.

In the history of the Church, certain theologians, saints, and mystics instantly come to mind when one thinks of Mariology. While it is appropriate to state that all these faithful men and women, by first instinct, follow Christ (*Sequela Christi*), they are noted for their approach to Jesus through Mary; included are such persons as St. Louis de Montfort and Pope St. John Paul II, as well as St. Bernadette Soubirous, and the three visionary children of Fatima. Augustine of Hippo does not naturally surface from within that list. Indeed, he has a wealth of writing regarding the Blessed Mother, but that wealth stems from the treasure that is Triune.

Beginning with Christ is where Augustine built arguably the greatest doctrinal study on the Holy Trinity. It is from this root understanding that all other life springs forth bearing endless fruit. In his work, *De Trinitate*, he creates an exegesis

¹ St. Augustine. *Confessions*. Book 1.1.

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. (New York: Doubleday, 1995) #1847, citing St. Augustine's Sermon 169.

of New Testament scriptural passages where Christ or the Gospel writers addressed the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.³ From this perspective, Augustine also uses the genius of his mind as one in a lifelong relationship with words. Without a doubt, he was a talented, pithy rhetorician, and this practice created an avenue for him to naturally appreciate God. He attributes to God a triad of mind, knowledge, love (*mens, notitia, amor*) to imply the lover, the beloved, and love itself. The lover is the Father, who is the mind; from him comes all knowledge and this Wisdom is begotten in the Beloved, the Eternal Word, the Son; and from this union flows all love as inspired in the Holy Spirit.⁴

Therefore, it is the unwrapping of this immense spiritually generated epiphany for Augustine that all other knowledge of God, including those humans God had chosen to participate in his salvific history, is understood. Thus, Augustine's approach for Mary far surpasses any relationship he had with women in his own personal life. A strong-willed Christian mother and a concubine with whom he had relations for thirteen years would not be sufficient for his approach to not only understanding but cherishing the Blessed Mother without this mind-knowledge-love pathway. For Augustine, only by focusing on God's intent is Mary's purpose revealed, and from this mindset does the Bishop culminate the concepts of Mariology.

Predestination

The first concept of Augustine Mariology is predestination. Augustine, in his earliest writing, held to a strong Neo-Platonist perspective and thought that evil was not of God but simply a privation from God's goodness. Moreover, evil stems from the human will to deny God while seeking

³ Mt 3:13, 28:19; 1 Pet 1:2; 2 Cor 3:17; 2 Cor 13:14.

⁴ St. Augustine. *De Trinitate*. Book VIII, 14; Book IX, 2, 8, 18.

the consolation of the flesh, be that in self-gratification or in vice towards others. He matured in his writing and religious understanding, especially when battling the heresy of Pelagianism, promoted by the British theologian Pelagius, who denied God's saving grace, teaching instead that man could choose his destiny solely by his actions.

Augustine encountered that God's grace was salvation's protection and that is when he started using the word "predestination" to explain how God, omniscient and omnibenevolent, knew what man could not.⁵ Augustine was writing from personal experience regarding his understanding of God's grace, as he knew only by grace was he elevated and healed in divine friendship with the Trinity. This allowed Augustine, as chronicled in *Confessions* and later in his writing against Pelagius, an actual participation in God's divine nature.⁶

However, the divine grace God bestowed on Mary had a superior purpose: that of Mother of God, and from this stance, co-redeemer of humanity, for God willed her conjoined effort in his plan. Thus, it would be fitting to assume that her sanctity was higher than that of Adam and Eve, pre-fall. Augustine wrote, "Even before He was born of her, He knew his mother when He predestined her. He knew his mother before He, as God, created her, from whom He would be created as man."⁷

Yet Augustine's predestination doctrine never inferred that man was helpless in his reaching for God or this was a hopeless dream to be saved if not in God's plan, as was later

⁵ Brandon Petersen. "Augustine: Advocate of Free Will, Defender of Predestination." July 2014. <https://www.sites.nd.edu/ujournal/files/2014/07/Petersen-05-06>.

⁶ St. Augustine. *Selected Writings on Grace and Pelagianism*. (New York: New York City Press, 2011) 42.

⁷ Brian K. Reynolds. *Gateway to Heaven*. (New York: New City Press, 2012). Ch. 3, 116.

taught in the limiting reinterpretation of John Calvin during the Protestant Reformation. Rather, predestination is not at odds with free will. God, in Augustine's view, chooses for whom mercy is offered, writing, "He decides who are not to be offered mercy by the standard of equity which is most secret and far removed from human powers of understanding."⁸ In other words, since God only wills the good, he is not responsible for sinners who choose to be unredeemed. While God knows how man will choose to live his life, this does not mean God willfully predetermines how that life is led.⁹

It is from this mindset that all other points of theology of Augustine follow because Mary, too, was predestined by God to serve in carrying the Son of God yet she also, at any moment in her life, could have declined. However, the *kecharitomene*, the grace-filled Daughter of Zion, chose her destiny to be the handmaid of the Lord.¹⁰ This was the beginning of her conscious participation, although still in early days of her true growth in understanding the complex and vibrant intentions that God had for his divine salvific response. Her fiat to God's request would lead to thousands of moments that would grace the lowly handmaid as she moved in tandem with her only Son, who kept his mother close during his three-year temporal mission.

Found in the Gospel of John is the first public miracle at the Wedding Feast of Cana (Jn 2:1-4) when Mary suggests her Son's help with the issue of the wine. Jesus addresses her, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." Augustine writes, "... in predestination... He knew her

⁸ St. Augustine. *De Libero Arbitrio*. Cited in Gerald Bonner *God's Decree and Man's Destiny: Studies on the Thought of Augustine of Hippo*. (London: Variorum Reprints, 1987) 17.

⁹ Tom Nash. "Augustine Had It Right and Calvin Did Not." *Catholic Answers*.

<https://www.catholic.com/qa/augustine-had-it-right-and-calvin-did-not>.

¹⁰ Luke 1:38.

as His mother; but at a certain hour in a mystery He did not recognize her; and at a certain hour which had not yet come, again in mystery, He does recognize her. For then did He recognize her, when that to which she gave birth was a-dying.”¹¹

Thus, the first miracle proceeds, as if to start the clock ticking for when the hour would indeed come. Augustine is showing Mary's participation not only as Jesus's mother but also as his first disciple. Her loyalty and dedication could not be challenged, her trust in God is fathomless. Augustine points out that Jesus is the Lord of Mary and the Son of Mary, the creator of Mary and the created from Mary.¹² Augustine's writing also shows that as Divine Revelation dictates: all moments lead to Calvary.

Theotokos

The second concept of Augustine's Mariology is her title as Mother of God. “He chose the Mother He created; He created the Mother He had chosen.”¹³ Mary's entrance into Sacred Scripture appears in prophecy in Genesis immediately after the fall of Adam and Eve. Original justice had been shattered into original sin as Adam, head of the human race and solely responsible for all of human nature, had disobeyed God's command not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. He lost habitual sanctifying grace (the participation in the divine nature given to each person) and subordinating preternatural gifts of immortality, integrity, and impassibility, with his infused knowledge now muddled. Adam gave away obedience through his falling to temptation by the serpent, leading all his descendants including Mary, to destruction. And he did so with culpability.

¹¹ St. Augustine. “Tractate VIII of the Gospel of John.” Ch. 2, 1-4, pt. 9.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ St. Augustine. “Sermon 69,” 3.

<https://homeofthemothert.org/en/resources/virgen-mary/fathers/8477>.

At no time was any of this unknown to God, for he already had a plan in place to redeem the rational creatures he so deeply loved. Yet to atone to God was impossible for fallen man. Only one equal to God could possibly make reparations for such a dire situation, and therefore, the Son of God took upon himself perfected human nature, accompanied to his divinity. To do this required a human female but one who must be elevated above the now broken nature inherited. Thus, predestination unfolds its first reveal in Genesis 3:15 when God declares to the serpent that he will put enmity between him and the woman, between their offspring, between their intentions, prophesizing that Christ would destroy sin and death, knowing that he would do it with the help of a pregnant virgin.

Since the first five books of the Torah were established inerrantly, with God as the lead author and Moses as the instrumental author, its history teaches Eve's decline was Mary's ascent. The theologians in the Catholic Church from its apostolic era to the present have always compared these two women. Eve never fares well. However, the comparisons are obvious and necessary because God needs mankind to see that decisions matter. Mary is the pinnacle example of a person in total obedience, operating within the sanctifying grace granted her. She and the Messiah are so deeply connected both physically and spiritually as to allegorically share one heart between them. Therefore, her allegiance should be unquestionable.

From Genesis to Isaiah 7:14, the Old Testament echoes refrains of the virgin's pending role although the fullness of the prophecy is withheld until the right moment, or as Augustine famously put it: "The New Testament is the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed."¹⁴ Then in the

¹⁴ St. Augustine. *Quaest. In Hept.* 2,73. ("7 Questions Concerning the Heptateuch"); cf. *On the Spirit and the Letter*, Ch. 27. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1502.htm>.

New Testament, the Archangel Gabriel's visit in Luke 1:28 begins the awakening of promise. Augustine depends fully on Sacred Scripture to prove the mysterious claims set forth regarding the Incarnation, writing, "We believe that Christ was born of the Virgin Mary because it is written thus in the Gospels; we believe that He was crucified and died, because it is written thus in the Gospel; we believe that He was truly born and truly died because the Gospel is the truth."¹⁵

Also relevant to this point is from Mariologist Dr. Mark Miravalle, who addresses Augustine's understanding of how the virgin conceived a child not by desire but by faith, and that Mary's role in the Incarnation safeguards the true faith. The truth of her virginity protects the hypostatic union of Christ's dual natures, both divine and human. Mary's body gives the flesh to accommodate the Word. Her virginity is indispensable as a condition for orthodoxy.¹⁶

While Augustine believed that Mary was virginal at the Incarnation, he did not fully proclaim her own conception as immaculate but rather, infers her sinlessness is contrary to what he supposes on the rest of humanity due to concupiscence, where he believed original sin passed through procreation. However, his original speculations to this point, while shrouded somewhat in his unknowing, does offer light to future theologians who would take the suggestion of immaculate conception and interpret its full meaning. What the Bishop did know was that all was done in God's grace.

Augustine, in his wranglings against the heresy of Pelagianism, writes in his book *Nature and Grace* that the Virgin Mary had abundant grace conferred on her by God because she was to conceive and bear him "in whom there is

¹⁵ Brian K. Reynolds. *Gateway to Heaven*. [Augustine's Sermon 186] (New York: New City Press, 2012) 23.

¹⁶ Dr. Mark Miravalle. *Mary in the Modern World*. (Week 6, Video 3) Franciscan University of Steubenville.

no sin.”¹⁷ Augustine uses the understanding of grace in nature to promote Mary's fulfillment as the Mother of God and from this, her work in co-redemption, mediation, and advocacy. In his Sermon 72 regarding Mary's focus, Augustine writes, “Christ as truth was in Mary's mind, Christ as flesh in Mary's womb; that which is in the mind is greater than that is carried in the womb.”¹⁸ He speaks from the Gospel passage of Luke 11:27-28 regarding the woman who speaks to Jesus saying, blessed is the woman who bore you. So too is Mary blessed not only because she bore him but rather, she heard the Word of God and kept it. Keeping her thoughts in her mind totally integral to God was as critical as bringing him into life. She was the first to show true discipleship, beginning with her mind.

Virgo Concepit...

Virgo Perperit...post-partum, Virgo Permansit¹⁹

The third concept of Saint Augustine's Mariology is her virginity. Augustine in his *De Sancta Virginitate* wrote adamantly about Mary's perpetual virginity throughout her lifetime. He was one of the Patriarchal Fathers who agreed with the apocryphal stance of James the Lesser, who wrote from the oral tradition that Mary, as a very young child, pledged her life to God and this would include her virginity at some point.²⁰ Augustine speaks of Mary's identity, “A virgin conceives, yet remains a virgin: a virgin is heavy with child; a virgin brings forth her child, yet she is always a virgin. Why

¹⁷ St. Augustine. *Nature and Grace* (as cited in *Selected Writings on Grace and Pelagianism*, Boniface Ramsey ed., New York: New City Press, 2011) 36:45.

¹⁸ St. Augustine. “Sermon 72.”

https://www.vatican.va/spirit/documents/spirit_20001208_agostino_en.html.

¹⁹ St. Augustine. *Sermons for Christmas and Epiphany* [Christmas Sermon 9] (ed. and trans. J. Quasten, Island Road, NJ: Paulus Press, 1952).

²⁰ James the Lesser. *The Protoevangelium Jacobi*. c.150 A.D.

are you amazed at this, O man? It was fitting for God to be born thus when he deigned to become man.”²¹

The Archangel Gabriel comes to Mary as revealed in Luke's Gospel. After he explains God's desire for her to carry the promised savior, she asks simply, “How can this be since I know not man?” (1:34). This sentence, in the original Greek in which Luke wrote (*epei andra ou ginosko*) infers that Mary's virginity is in her own mind as not only in the present tense but is meant as a permanent fixture in her life.²² Augustine agrees, qualifying Mary's determination to have remained a virgin throughout her lifetime, married or not. For no betrothed woman would question what she knew: generation of children was the expected pathway. Mary would also have been well versed in the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah, who speak both of a virgin conceiving, and the branch of the stump of Jesse.²³ Mary, in her humility, would know a virgin was prophesized but could never have anticipated that it was she who was selected. Therefore, her pondering is legitimate and respectful.

It also suggests that her alignment with Joseph was one secured in mutual understanding of a permanence of chastity. Augustine acknowledges that the norm among the Jews in her time did not consider virginity customary and so even in being betrothed to Joseph, Augustine writes, “she had chosen a just man who would not have used violence to take away what she had vowed to God... it was she herself who consecrated her virginity to God when she did not yet know whom she would conceive.”²⁴

²¹ St. Augustine. “Sermon 186.”

https://www.vatican.va/spirit/documents/spirit_20001222_agostino_en.html.

²² Brant Pitre. *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary*. (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018) 105-106.

²³ Isaiah 7:14, 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5-6.

²⁴ St. Augustine. *De Sancta Virginitate*, 4,4.

Mary's perpetual virginity has been challenged both in the Christian and secular worlds because many find it hard to comprehend firstly, how the woman can give birth in mystery without pain and rupture, and secondly, how she can remain a virgin afterwards in marriage, especially since Scripture seems to reference Jesus's brothers and sisters.²⁵ This, however, can be refuted with basic understanding of both Hebrew and Aramaic languages that do not use the conclusive word for "cousin" or similar relation.

Augustine addresses this issue when he states that her virginity is both pleasing and acceptable to God, who was conceived in her and therefore would have protected her from a spouse who would then violate her promise. Since Jesus, through his sacrifice on the Cross, merited grace beyond measure for humanity, he also would have pre-divinized Mary's own immaculate conception in her mother's womb and with her father's seed, that she would continue in a lifetime of this protection. Thus, Jesus knew the right husband for Mary because he also chose Joseph to be his own protective human parent. Augustine, re-echoing the theme of freedom that pervades all his theological doctrinal workings, writes, "Thus Christ being born of a virgin, who, before she knew Who was to be born of her, had determined to continue a virgin, chose rather to approve, than to command, only virginity. And thus, even in the female herself, in whom He took the form of a servant, He willed that virginity should be free."²⁶

It is from this stance of free will conjoined in obedience to divine will that the historical legacy of the Church established formally from Tradition the acceptance of Mary's purity. The Catholic Church stands by the dogmatic papal bull of Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, (1854) declaring Mary's Immaculate Conception. She was conceived free of original sin and would

²⁵ Mt 12:46; 13:55-56.

²⁶ St. Augustine. *De Sancta Virginitate*, 4.

not commit venial or mortal sin within her lifetime. Her intention as an adult to remain chaste was honored in her marriage to Joseph, and so the liturgy of the Church, as established in the Eastern Rite, refers to her as *Aeiparthenos* or ever-virgin. Therefore, “the deepening of the faith in the virginal motherhood led the Church to confess Mary's real and perpetual virginity even in the act of giving birth to the Son of God made man...Christ's birth did not diminish his mother's virginal integrity but sanctified it.”²⁷

The Church Reflects Mary as Virgin and Mother

The fourth concept of Augustine's Mariology is Mary as type for the Church. Regarding the hour and its fixed place in time at Calvary, Augustine writes that hour had now come, establishing the transition, the final gift Jesus can give before his death, that of awarding his mother to the universal Church. “He commends His Mother to the care of the disciple, commends His Mother, as about to die before her, and to rise again before her death.”²⁸ As all moments in Christ's mission led to Calvary, so also did the culmination of Mary's participation in the objective redemption given by Christ's death on the Cross, the Sacrificial Lamb atoning for all.

It was in his death that the Blessed Mother's second birthing was allowed: the first to birth her son painlessly, the second to suffer immensely in travail for the Church's reveal. Her anguish in every moment with Christ as co-redeemer afforded the graces poured upon her for the beginning of the infant Church. Augustine is also the first to refer to Mary as

²⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995) #499; #154.

²⁸ St. Augustine. “Tractate VIII of the Gospel of John.” Ch. 2 1-4, pt.9.

the “co-operatrix” in the redemption as noted by Pope St. John Paul II.²⁹

It was at Calvary where Christ divinely merited beyond human understanding the graces willingly offered from his love to the Father and of creation. All these graces would be given to Mary to provide to the world in her new role as mediatrix. She, from her fiat at the Annunciation, to witnessing the lance thrown into her dead Son's side, releasing the last blood and water from his heart, would transpire the prophecy of St. Simeon, “and a sword will pierce your very soul” to reveal the knowledge of all mankind.³⁰ Mary as first disciple would continue her mission on earth with the remaining Apostles and received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to begin the Body of Christ, the Church.

The Vatican II Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, included a final chapter solely dedicated to Mary from her physical and spiritual capacity as virgin and mother, representing her as a typology for the Church. The Council stated, “By reason of the gift and role of divine maternity, by which she is united with her Son, the Redeemer, and with His singular graces and functions, the Blessed Virgin is also intimately united with the Church.”³¹ The document extends the teachings of St. Ambrose regarding how Mary is a type of the Church in her perfect union with her Son, in the order of faith and charity. It is through this mystery that the Church established by Christ and protected perpetually by the Holy Spirit, can be rightly identified as Mother and Virgin. The Blessed Virgin and Holy Mother Mary stands out as its perfect model.

²⁹ Dr. Mark Miravalle. *With Jesus, the Story of Mary Co-Redemptrix*. (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing, 2003) 71; cf. Augustine's *De Sancta Virginitate*, 6; Pope John Paul II, General Audience, April 9, 1997.

³⁰ Luke 2:35.

³¹ Vatican II Council. *Lumen Gentium*. 63.

https://vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii-const_19641121_lumen_gentium.

Augustine surely influenced the Vatican II Council when he expounded on Mary's typology. He speaks of Mary as the mother of the Church not only in spirit but also in flesh—not of the head of the Church which is, of course, Christ himself, “but clearly the mother of His members, which we are: in that she wrought together by charity, the faithful ones should be born in the Church.”³²

The Bishop's sermon on how Mary is a disciple in Christ, also references her place in the Church in a manner somewhat contentious from the usual way Augustine defended her. He acknowledges that Mary is indeed holy and blessed but that the Church is collectively something more significant than she. He explains that Mary, while being a holy member—in fact, the holiest member—of the Church, is still simply a member of the whole body. Augustine argues that therefore it follows that the body must be something greater than any individual member. For he says that the Lord is the head, and the whole Christ is head and body.³³

It is from this position of faith that Augustine sees how the Trinity continues its harmonious effects, now through the created Church, still within the vibrant mind-knowledge-love mindset to use the Blessed Mother as a model for inspiration. In Book VIII of *De Trinitate* Augustine muses as to those who ponder what Mary looked like, or for that matter, Lazarus' rising from the dead or the tomb from which Christ himself was laid. Augustine speculates it does not matter. The 'how' is not relevant; the 'why' is the purpose because it is from this that faith begins to take hold.

He writes, “What a virgin is, and what being born is, and what a proper name is we do not believe, we just know. And so, without prejudice to faith, it is permissible to say ‘Perhaps she

³² St. Augustine. *De Sancta Virginitate*, 6.

³³ St. Augustine. “Sermon 72,” 7.

https://www.vatican.va/spirit/document/spirit_20001208_agostino_en.html.

had a face like this, perhaps she did not.' But nobody can say, 'Perhaps Christ was born of a virgin' without prejudice to his Christian faith...and since we must believe before we can understand, we must take care our faith is not fabricated.”³⁴

Therefore, faith is the position that the Church, as Mother, holds, relying on the Blessed Mother as the quintessential model of advocacy. Faith is also the position that the Church, as Virgin, rests under the continual protection of the Spirit and remains unviolated and pristine, regardless of the sinful nature still facing fallen man. To that end, the apparent purpose of Mary as both virgin and mother manifests a deeper understanding of her humility as the faithful servant of God; her obedience merits her role as Mediatrix of all graces equal to her position as loving advocate to her spiritual children.

It is from this understanding Augustine wrote, “Oh blessed Virgin Mary, who can worthily repay thee thy just dues of praise and thanksgiving, thou who by the wondrous ascent of thy will didst rescue a fallen world?...Be thou ever ready to assist us when we pray, and bring back to us the answers to our prayers. Make it thy continual care to pray for the people of God, thou who, blessed by God, didst merit to bear the Redeemer of the world, who liveth and reigneth, world without end.”³⁵

Therefore Augustine, through his consideration of the complexities of the Triune Godhead, was allowed by grace of genius to broaden mankind's understanding of the divinely mysterious. He took the path through the mind to comprehend God's knowledge and love. Beginning with Christ, he strove to seek the Trinity and from that, those

³⁴ St. Augustine. *De Trinitate*. Book VIII, 7-8.

³⁵ St. Augustine. “A Prayer of St. Augustine to the Blessed Virgin.” *ThoughtCo*. August 25, 2020.

<https://www.learnreligions.com/pray/a-prayer-of-st-augustine-to-the-blessed-virgin>.

persons so deeply graced by God as to participate in the redemptive salvation of man through Christ's Paschal Mystery. Mary was one such person. Through predestination, she was predetermined to be immaculately conceived, perpetually virgin, sinless, charitable, holy and a model for the true Church established by Christ. Through her own will, totally aligned with the Almighty, she proved her true discipleship in every decision professed towards God's designs.