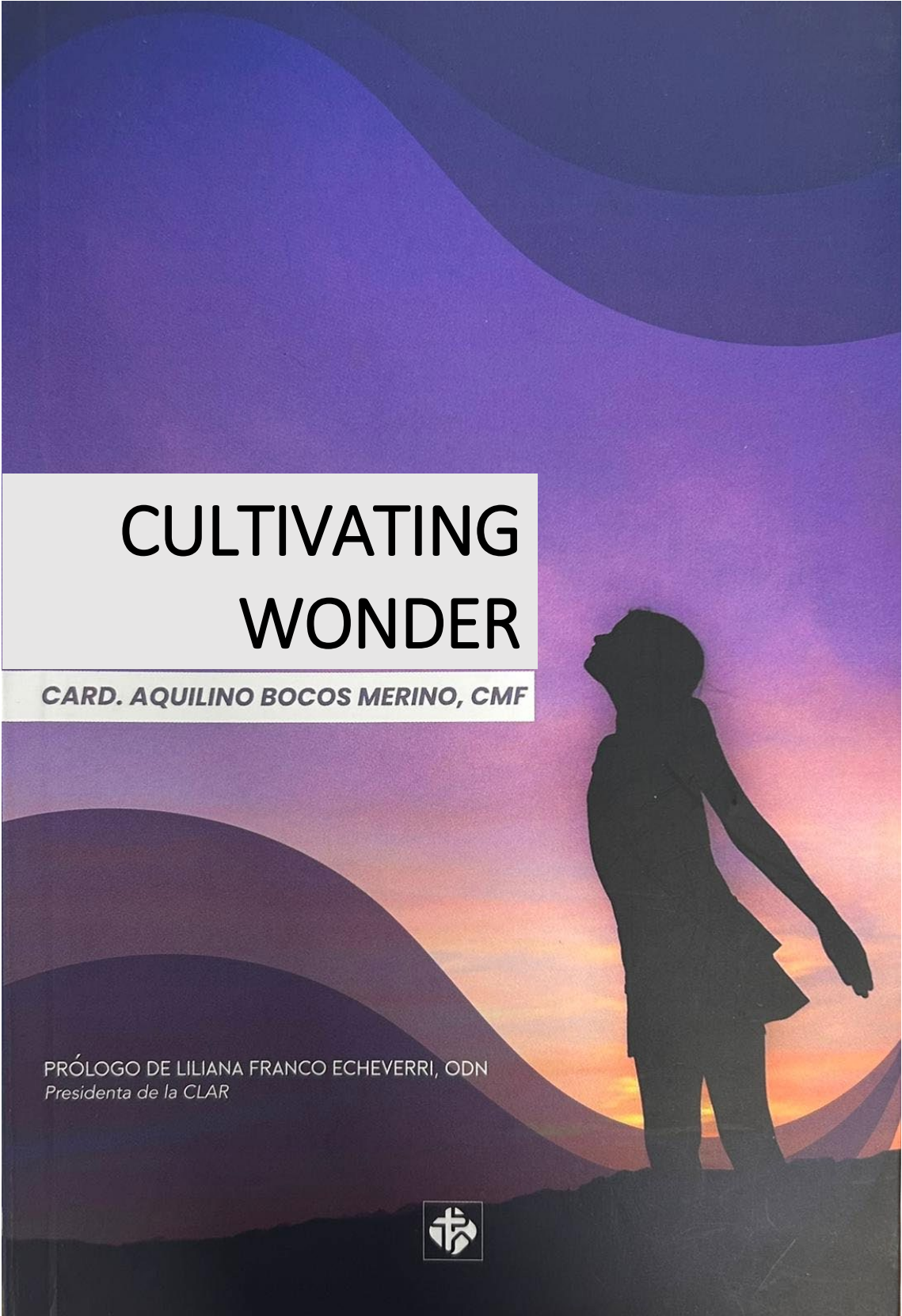




CULTIVATING WONDER

CARD. AQUILINO BOCOS MERINO, CMF

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FOREWORD BY LILIANA FRANCO ECHEVERRI, O.D.N.

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FOREWORD AND EPILOGUE

BY

**Liliana Franco Echeverri, O.D.N.
President of CLAR**

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FOREWORD

A book is not a sum of pages and words. It is always a journey, a path that must be traveled, conscious of the sacred land that is being visited and that is populated by faces, experiences, feelings, criteria, and intuitions. On this journey, Cardinal Aquilino Bocos invites us to “cultivate wonder.”

Cultivating wonder is only possible when we are barefoot, in that state of freedom reserved for children and the pure of heart. It requires eyes that are open, sensitive to the gift and wonder; it requires ears that can resist murmurs and the constant and challenging echo of reality.

Wonder visits us when we are on our knees, contemplatively expectant, serenely lucid, and naively open to the Mystery. It embraces us right on the shore where we find ourselves devoid of maps and compasses, where intuition is a good teacher, and the presence of the other surprises us with the unimaginable.

Wonder requires a disposition of the heart, an affection capable of impossibilities, and the necessary delight produced by love and beauty. It requires a contemplative gaze, constant attention, and a silence capable of refining with fire until it yields that which is profound, vital, and eternal. Cardinal Aquilino Bocos knows this well. He is such an expert in connections and closeness, in fraternity and in that leadership that protects and brings us closer to that which is human. Through the lines of this book, he brings us closer to the urgent need for wonder. He invites us on a journey that has as its goal the beauty of the immense horizon, in which the only option is to hold on to the promise and let hope shine.

Cardinal Aquilino is accustomed to calling us to travel through history to the rhythm of the Spirit. He knows that life is the phoneme that God uses to manifest his love and that, in different brushstrokes of lines and colors, he draws near to us, so that, full of beauty, he can seduce us. He knows that the quintessential mystery that amazes and moves is the Incarnation. That when life is most fragile and is clothed in diapers and misery, transformation can occur; that the embrace of one's own fragility, the experience of limits and the heaviness of the night, can bring us closer that which is human; that the depth of the wound can be the opening through which the Spirit makes its way to console us.

Five Chapters, like five stops along a single journey, introduce us to the need to cultivate wonder. Cardinal Aquilino immerses us in the certainty that we exist for meaning, reminding us that living requires a plan and that in a dynamic of gratuitousness we become more human. He turns our gaze to Mary as an icon and teacher of wonder. And he challenges us to cultivate it in three ways: humility, childhood, and pulchritudinis.

He invites us to cultivate, as if the unwavering mission, the one we must hold on to with all our strength, is that of being sowers. He motivates us to do so when external conditions are apparently not the most suitable for the seed to bear fruit and in these times that require sowers with identities and internal conditions that make possible the boldness of sowing and the miracle of harvesting.

Perhaps that is why, through the lines of this book, it is confirmed that cultivating wonder requires love and care, a focused heart capable of realizing the reasons for adherence, sincere searching, authentic motivation and courage to freely and meaningfully accept the consequences of love.

To cultivate wonder while paying close attention to the details, styles, attitudes, and criteria that shape each experience and enrich each option means deciding to look at ourselves as God looks at us, recognizing the possibilities that exist in every expression of life and risking leaving our comfort zones and being exposed to the elements, the smallness and the unsuspected on the paths of the Kingdom.

Cultivating wonder means placing ourselves on the other side, where we are required to step outside ourselves and look at others. It is giving a little of our time and a lot of our life; it is yielding and forgiving. It is transcending the past and finally healing the festering wounds that deprive us of mobility and freedom.

Cultivating wonder is letting ourselves be moved to the core, when faced with the situation of our world, which is struggling with fundamentalisms that bleed it dry. We must let ourselves be moved by our people who live the cruelty of poverty and suffer the injustice of a system that crushes and devours. It is deciding on love and kindness as the only possibility of existing as a Christian. It is believing that with Jesus hope is reborn and that Salvation comes to us from the depths of a woman full of grace.

Cultivating wonder means striving for tenderness as the antidote to bring us closer together in our differences, to overcome inevitable conflicts and to seek together horizons of unity and strengthening of identity. Wonder leads us to recognize that God is pleased with our smallness and that, in it, and perhaps through it, he creates and recreates, inviting us to a solidarity that transforms and humanizes.

Wonder is the praise of those who have all the time, precisely because they know that the present moment does not belong to them and this realization brings them closer to the certainty that everything is a gift and grace.

Let us give ourselves “all the time” to walk along the unsuspected paths of this book in the company of Cardinal Aquilino Bocos, and let the call to cultivate wonder become anchored in our hearts.

Liliana Franco Echeverri, O.D.N.
President of CLAR

INTRODUCTION

The invitation to cultivate wonder is not only a timely suggestion, but an urgent necessity. It is for the Christian, whose faith revolves around the mystery of Jesus, but it is needed by every person, believer or non-believer, who has to make their way in this current culture marked by dispersion, indifference and banality. No wonder Chesterton said: "The world will never starve for want of wonders; but only for want of wonder."

The reflections I will present have a concrete origin. Pope Francis, in his homily on January 1, 2019, made this exhortation:

Let us implore from Mary the grace to be amazed at the God of surprises. Let us renew the amazement we felt when faith was first born in us. The Mother of God helps us: the Mother who gave birth to the Lord, now presents us, reborn, to the Lord. She is a mother who generates in her children the amazement of faith, because faith is an encounter, not a religion. Without amazement, life becomes dull and routine, and so it is with faith. The Church too needs to renew her amazement at being the dwelling place of the living God, the Bride of the Lord, a Mother who gives birth to her children. Otherwise, she risks turning into a beautiful museum of the past. A "Church museum". Our Lady instead gives the Church the feel of a home, a home in which the God of newness dwells. Let us receive with amazement the mystery of the Mother of God, as the inhabitants of Ephesus did at the time of the Council.¹

This homily raised a series of questions in me. It made me focus my attention on the original capacity for amazement or wonder that is innate to human beings, and I thought of Mary as the woman who is moved and teaches us to live from the perspective of wonder, because she lives in and from the mystery. Mary was constantly in awe because she was *looked upon* by God, who filled her with grace, and throughout her life, she had a sense of the wonders of God in her own Son. *She was perplexed* at the Annunciation (Lk 1:29) and witnessed the wonder of the shepherds (cf. Lk 2:18). With Joseph she was amazed at what they were saying about the child (cf. Lk 2:33). Surely she also marveled at *what he did* (cf. Mt 12:23 and 15:31)² and at *his words* (cf. Lk 4:22).

*** *** ***

The journal *Ephemerides Mariológicae* accepted the reflections that I had been writing and published them successively during the years 2019-2022. Upon learning of the texts, Liliana Franco Echeverri, ODN, President of CLAR (Latin American Confederation of Religious), undertook to review them and prepare them for printing, thinking that they could be useful to readers from broader circles. From her generous disposition sprang the prologue and epilogue that she has given us.

¹ FRANCIS, *Homily* (January 1, 2019).

² Cf. CELAM, *Aparecida Document* (2007), no. 277: "The Lord awakened the deep aspirations of his disciples and drew them to himself, full of astonishment. Following him is fruit of a fascination that responds to the desire for human fulfillment and to the yearning for full life. A disciple is someone who is passionate for Christ, and recognizes him as the master leading and accompanying him."

Note: I have removed quite a few bibliographical references that appeared in the texts published in the journal. If you would like to consult the references please see the originals.

During my conversations with Liliana Franco Echeverri, we have shared concerns and challenges of the moment that we are experiencing in social, ecclesial and consecrated life. When she published her book “*Al eco de su voz renace la esperanza*” [At the Echo of His Voice Hope Is Reborn], I was struck by the opening line:

I saw You,
I knew it was You,
because in your wake
hope was reborn.

A little later I was fortunate enough to read with delight her writing, shared with Gerardo Daniel Ramos, SCJ: *Estamos a tiempo* [We Are on Time]. This poetic and thoughtful way of expressing contemplation, beauty and commitment has been a source I have frequently turned to in order to step outside of myself, to admire and internalize, to pray and hope. “*Estamos a tiempo*” is a complete vademecum of *Latin American Poetic Mysticism*. Liliana's poems are the fruit of her night prayers that already illuminate the dawn. It is a trilogy composed of the books *Tiempo de Creación* [Time of Creation], *Tiempo de Gracia* [Time of Grace] and *Tiempo de Esperanza* [Time of Hope]. Each poem is an invitation to wonder.

I transcribe two of the poems below. One, reflects her fundamental concern:

THIRST FOR THE INFINITE

Break our inertia with beauty,
draw near, in your time,
to our finiteness.
Give us in abundance,
a thirst for the infinite.

And at all times, may we be,
the longing of your heart.

The other is a beautiful song of someone who never ceases to be amazed by tranquility and who feels comforted:

FULFILLED

Knowing that I am in your hands
sheltered by your love,
sustained by your grace,
caressed by your mercy,
that is being fulfilled.

Recognizing that I am small,
simply fragile,
deeply human,

radically in need,
that is being fulfilled.

Feeling unfinished,
always in process,
made for listening
and considered an apprentice,
that is being fulfilled.

Seeing myself beyond the molds
of efficiency and perfection,
in the pottery of humility,
where I can taste gratuitousness,
that is being fulfilled.

I have also included a third poem: “*Hágase*” [Let it Be Done], which reveals Liliana's rich poetic and Marian sensitivity. This is not surprising since she is happy to be recognized as a woman, a disciple and a religious sister of the Order of the Company of Mary.

I sincerely thank Liliana Franco for her availability and help. I thank her for being what she is: pure transparency and willingness to help, according to the many gifts that the Spirit has placed in her, in the Church and in the people. This is what CLAR and the Ecclesial Synod are doing. Her efforts to create a “synodal Church” are admirable.

*** *** ***

There is a precise intention in offering these reflections. I would like to add my voice to those who cry out to the world: “Wake up and be aware of the wonders that surround us.” The Mystery of God surrounds us. He eclipses our idols. Let us cultivate wonder and enter into the light, beauty and love that break our Hermeticism and annihilate our self-sufficiency. In silence and contemplation we will savor the truth that leads us to justice, peace and brotherhood.

On the eve of the ecclesial Jubilee, which bears the title of “*Hope does not disappoint*” (Rom 5:5), I dedicate these pages to all those who will be kind enough to give them some time, with the hope that they may receive “new eyes” to marvel at the beauty of God. This beauty is an inexhaustible source of hope.

Aquilino, Card. Bocos Merino, CMF.

CHAPTER I

WONDER – AWE: SCOPE AND CHALLENGES

“These fundamental elements of knowledge spring from the wonder awakened in [human beings] by the contemplation of creation: human beings are astonished to discover themselves as part of the world, in a relationship with others like them, all sharing a common destiny. Here begins, then, the journey which will lead them to discover ever new frontiers of knowledge. Without wonder, men and women would lapse into deadening routine and little by little would become incapable of a life which is genuinely personal.”³

1. WONDER: ITS MULTIPLE REFERENCES

Wonder, awe and amazement are three words used interchangeably by thinkers, essayists, educators and writers on Christian spiritual life:

This concept has a much broader range of meanings in the Bible than in our modern languages; it implies both ecstasy and fear. In the Old Testament, wonder is, first of all, people’s attitude towards something that surpasses their understanding, that comes from God: wonder is produced before the glory of God and the splendor of the temple, before the works of creation, before the covenant, before the interventions of God in people’s lives or in history, from which follows the establishment of law and justice. In the New Testament, wonder describes people’s reaction to the powerful words and actions of Jesus.⁴

The word “wonder” brings to mind synonyms such as: awe, amazement, fright, surprise, dazzlement, shock, stupefaction, dizziness, astonishment, enchantment, fascination, rapture, perturbation, stupor, bewilderment...; or verbs such as: to marvel, to be awestruck, to be surprised, to be enraptured, to be astonished, to be fascinated, to be stunned, to be amazed, to be frightened, to be disconcerted... In all these terms there is restlessness, longing, inner fire, vibration, inspiration, freshness and meaning. They refer to the roots of human beings; they are related to the candor of our early years, because humans are eccentric and open beings, designed for fulfillment. We are beggars for the absolute.

The language surrounding wonder is elusive and full of fluctuating nuances, depending on whether positive or negative aspects are emphasized.⁵ When talking about wonder it is difficult not to mix intuition, lucid and plastic language, and metaphor. Sometimes they are very distant, like ecstasy and terror; the dissipation of the shadow and the unveiling of the truth. In wonder the senses are sharpened, especially hearing and sight. Wonder is linked to the unexpected, to surprise, to the discovery of something

³ JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et ratio*, no. 4.

⁴ E. BECK, “Asombro” in A. GRABNER-HAIDER, *Vocabulario práctico de la Biblia* (Herder, 1974), 119, translator’s version.

⁵ Cf. J. A. MARINA – M. LÓPEZ PENAS, *Diccionario de los sentimientos* (Anagrama, 2000). In this work can be seen the oscillation in the meaning of words such as astonishment, admiration, surprise, etc.

unusual and wonderful that overwhelms us. It is an eruption of the unexpected. It is also linked to the charm of new things that surprise and please us.

2. WONDER AND GRATUITOUSNESS

We are amazed by “what there is”, by what already exists.⁶ What really surprises or astonishes us is that things exist.⁷ Gabriel Marcel said: “Deep down in me there is something other than me, something further within me than I am myself.”⁸ People are not beings “thrown out” into the world, but rather we are “sent.” We have a mission.⁹ Vocation, project and mission go hand in hand. As well as destiny. This mission is freely given and implies that it is possible to be done and needs to be done. It has the gift of freedom.¹⁰ Human beings move between what they have received and their meaningful life plans. We have been given the ability to recognize “what has been given” and to sing of the gifts we have received.¹¹ Our condition of being in the world and being linked to everything that exists enables us to achieve our destiny in an interactive way. Our vocation is revealed in dialogue with objective values, which challenge us. But it is not uncommon for our vocation to be revealed to us in a moment of special wonder.

We have been, not only called, but *gathered together*, and we live encountering and relating with one another. To live is to live together. The personal world is open, correlative and co-executive. The interrelation and “I-you” reciprocity are facts based on gratuitousness. Grace comes first. “Everything is presence and grace” (as a liturgical hymn in Spanish says). There is only wonder according to the gratuitousness of God’s

⁶ Cf. C. DÍAZ, *Del hay al doy. ¡Ay si nadie diera! (La urgencia de la gratuidad)*, (San Esteban, 2013); G. MARCEL, *The Mystery of Being* (St. Augustine Press, 2001); M. NÉDONCELLE, *La reciprocidad de las conciencias* (Caparrós, 1996); P. LAÍN ENTRALGO, *Teoría y realidad del otro* (Alianza, 1983); E. LEVINAS, *Totalidad e infinito* (Sígueme, 1977); ÍBID., *Ética e infinito* (Visor, 1982); ÍBID., *Alteridad y trascendencia* (Arenas, 1995); X. M. DOMÍNGUEZ PRIETO, *Eres luz. La alegría de ser persona* (San Pablo, 2010); G. AMENGUAL, *Antropología filosófica* (Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos [BAC], 2007).

⁷ “Only because the nothing is manifest in the ground of Dasein can the total strangeness of beings overwhelm us. Only when the strangeness of beings oppresses us does it arouse and evoke wonder. Only on the ground of wonder—the revelation of the nothing— does the ‘why?’ loom before us. Only because the ‘why’ is possible as such can we in a definite way inquire into grounds, and ground them. Only because we can inquire and ground is the destiny of our existence placed in the hands of the researcher.” M. HEIDEGGER, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1961), 109; R. SAFRANSKI, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. Ewald Osers (Harvard University Press, 1998), 105: “Astonishment at the mysterious ‘that something is there at all’ contains a question that cannot be satisfied by any possible answer, because any answer that explains that ‘That’ with a ‘why’ finds itself in infinite regression—each why can be followed by another why.”

⁸ Cited by A. LÓPEZ QUINTÁS, *Inteligencia creativa* (BAC, 2002), 171. [For English quote, see Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, trans. Katherine Farrer (Harper Torchback-Harper and Row, 1965), 125.] Before that A. LÓPEZ QUINTÁS had said: “A person can only be grateful if they are simple and know how to embrace everything that is valuable. Actively embracing what is valuable means being overwhelmed by its greatness. To be overwhelmed, you need to have the capacity to *wonder and awe*” (*ibid.*, translator’s version).

⁹ “A mission is just this: the consciousness that every man has of his most authentic being, of that which he is called upon to realize. The idea of mission is, therefore, a constitutive ingredient of the human condition; and as I said a while ago, without man, there is no mission. We may now add that without mission there is no man.” (J. ORTEGA Y GASSET, “*Mission of the Librarian*”, trans. James Lewis and Ray Carpenter, *The Antioch Review*, 21, no. 2 (Summer, 1961): 133-154.

¹⁰ Cf. G. AMENGUAL, *Antropología filosófica*, 276.

¹¹ See a broad description of the *course of human life* in X. ZUBIRI, *Sobre el hombre* (Alianza, 1986), 545-671.

creative gaze. He is all self-giving and surprises us at every moment and in every encounter. We are links in a chain of giving and recognition forged through the exercise of freedom. Wonder puts us to the test.

In a Promethean, possessive and pragmatic culture like ours, it is difficult to accept gratuitousness as a starting point of wonder. But nothing and no one has made themselves. We are fruits of love. Hence the urgency of recovering awe before the wonder of creation (its forms, its colors, its movements) and of human fertility; of what man creates by transforming nature, offering works of music, painting, architecture, literature, new life, etc. We must marvel at the wonder of the innocence of children, of friendship, of love, of solidarity, of tenderness and of mercy. In addition, if we look at the religious panorama, it is urgent to recover the roots of religion,¹² rediscover the mystery in which we were born and that surrounds us. Or, as X. Zubiri says, the theological experience:

The “and” in “man and God” is not a copulative “and.” God does not include man, but man includes God. [...] Man is formally and constitutively an experience of God. And this experience of God is the radical and formal experience of human reality itself. The real and physical progress towards God is not only a true understanding, but it is an experiential realization of human reality in God.¹³

3. TO SEE, TO LOOK, TO WONDER, AND TO CONTEMPLATE

Progressive steps are taken from seeing, looking, wondering, and contemplating. Few reach the end.¹⁴ Many are content with *seeing*. They open their eyes and see, letting themselves be affected by the spectacle of exteriority. They do not look at what they see and they do not realize what appearances are hiding. Or they perceive only some aspects, when the reality is so complex and rich in what it offers for personal and communal growth. Not in vain did M. Merleau-Ponty say: “It is true that the world is what we see and, nevertheless, we have to learn to see it”.¹⁵

Looking is paying attention to something specific that we see. It takes a new effort to perceive accurately. Reality is something more than what is seen. Above all, it is “what is” that is offered to us as a gift. “God *looked at* everything he had made, and found it very good” (Gen 1:31, NABRE).

Every attentive *look* is charged with the effort of attention, of memory, discernment and of love. Looking is a primordial and profound, significant and eloquent language. When we look, we want to know more and go into depth; to go further and reach other dimensions. We communicate and enter into communion through looking. We are clearly talking about a clean, sincere and generous human gaze. People who look deeply into

¹² X. Zubiri describes it as a “*religation*” and as a “*tensive experience of God*.” “In his religation to the power of the real, man is formally supported by God, founded in God, transcendent in things. By virtue of this, religation is in reality a constituent support of man as I in God, since we have already seen that the power of the real is based on a God who is transcendent in things. This support is a tension—in the sense I have just explained. Hence, the theological essence of reconnection lies in this tension. In the religation there is a dominance of the power of the real with respect to the man who makes his I with that power of the real.” *El hombre y Dios* (Alianza, 1984), 362, translator’s version. [For English edition see: *Man and God*, trans. Joaquín Redondo (University Press of America, 2009).] In previous pages, he explains in detail the basis of these two points of his thought: *man “and” God*.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 379, translator’s version.

¹⁴ To see the journey from wonder to contemplation, cf. J. PLAZAOLA, *Introducción a la estética. Historia, teoría, textos* (BAC, 1973), 305-308.

¹⁵ M. MERLEAU-PONTY, *Lo visible y lo invisible* (Seix Barral, 1970), 20, translator’s version.

reality like this draw into themselves what happens externally and transform it because an authentic gaze communicates life and makes others important. In fact, when people want to show indifference towards others, they “don’t even look at them.”

Power is the language of expediency; poetry the language of wonder. When seeing to expand our knowledge for the sake of gratifying our passion for power, the world turns out to be alien and weird; while the knowledge we acquire in our yearning to invoke appreciation is a way of discovering our unison with things. With information we are alone; in appreciation we are with all things.¹⁶

One of the great tasks of modern man is to learn to look. An attentive gaze is the essence and the result of respect.¹⁷ We live with respect only if we break the circle of the self, decentralize and empathize with those whom we look at with attention or pay attention to.¹⁸ We look and they look at us, unable to remain indifferent to those who suffer and live excluded.

A higher step in feeling or in the scale of emotions or “passions of the soul” (Descartes) is *wonder*. Things are there, people live with us, events happen to us, but who marvels and wonders at the mystery they offer us? People who wonder at things, not only stop in time, but *give preference to their capacity to wonder*. To wonder means, then, to be filled with expectation. People manage to wonder at something because inside of them exists only what is good, pure, clean and necessary.

Wonder is a quality that is built from childhood and becomes a virtue in adulthood. Wonder is filled with appropriate, special and unique contents that make what surrounds us, our everyday life, beautiful and good. “Being in contact with small things and being amazed by simple things is a sign of the greatest clairvoyance. But for that, it is necessary to cultivate attention.”¹⁹ People who wonder at things are made with the same content as the “object” of their admiration.

As long as we see only objects, we are alone. When we begin to sing, we sing for all things. Essentially music does not describe that which is, rather it tries to convey that which reality stands for. The universe is a score of eternal music, and we are the cry, we are the voice. Reason explores the laws of nature, trying to decipher the scales without grasping the harmony, while the sense of the ineffable is in search of the song. When we think, we employ words or symbols of what we feel about things. When we sing, we are carried away by our wonder; and *acts of wonder* are signs or symbols of what all things stand for.²⁰

Contemplation is a sublime state; it is the highest level of looking. Wonder, through a respectful, sensitive and understanding gaze, leads to contemplation. People who contemplate end up forgetting themselves and open themselves to the Other and to everything that surrounds them. They discover that what they contemplate gives rise to heartfelt gratitude. Those who contemplate feel the joy of finding themselves in a

¹⁶ A. J. HESCHEL, *Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion* (Farrar, Straus & Young, 1951), 36-37. See also his work: *Man’s Quest for God* (Aurora Press, 1998).

¹⁷ For an anthropological consideration of this learning to look, cf. J. M. ESQUIROL, *El respeto o la mirada atenta. Una ética para la era de la ciencia y la tecnología*, (Gedisa, 2006), 64ff.

¹⁸ “The act of paying attention is somewhat paradoxical: the effort required by the subjects does not imply an increase in their being present but rather a lessening or emptying of themselves and their openness towards the other. The subjective intensity of attention is providing a space for receiving or letting in the object attended to, that on which the attention is focused. Therefore, not paying enough attention is, in the end, remaining closed off to, or still too impenetrable by, the influence of the other” (*Ibid.*, 77-78, translator’s version).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 87, translator’s version.

²⁰ A. J. HESCHEL, *op. cit.*, 41.

privileged world that exudes beauty and love. Those who contemplate allow themselves to be possessed by love. That is why they seek God, the source of all love.

Contemplation is not a privilege of a few, nor of only Christians. Every person thirsts for the absolute and tends toward contemplation. The great religions offer their signs and methods and cultivate it in different ways. In one way or another, then, we all feel driven to experience the immensity in which we find ourselves immersed without realizing its greatness. Y. Raguin says that “Contemplation is gazing on God; it is the ecstasy of man in the presence of his God, the ecstasy of the creature in the presence of its Creator. All contemplation is based on this essential and natural movement of the creature who, becoming aware of what he is, turns back toward his source.”²¹ On the journey or path of contemplation there is searching, fumbling, letting go, silence, inner emptiness, darkness, setbacks, astonishment and there is also another vision, abandonment into the hands of God, serenity, joy, encounter with light and peace.

Contemplation in Christian life is marked by the excess of love. That is why the “Oh!” so often used by Christian mystics becomes spontaneous.²² Throughout the centuries the Church has not lacked witnesses and masters in contemplation. Attention is focused on Jesus, the Son of the Father and the one anointed by the Holy Spirit. Saint John of the Cross offers this poem *Peak of Perfection*: “All things of the Maker / forgotten - but not Him; / exploration within, / and loving the Lover.”²³

In this journey towards the origin of our being, it is crucial not to be distracted, not to get sidetracked, not to take over and, above all, not to worship the idols of our time, because they neutralize the search, the wonder and the gift of self, which are part of contemplation. No one has more solidarity than contemplative people because they live in perfect communion with the source of life and with all creation.

4. WONDER: DOOR AND PATH TO THE QUALITY OF HUMAN LIFE

J. W. von Goethe once said that “The highest that man can attain in these matters is wonder.” Wonder is an inner emotion that moves us, enriches the quality of human life and opens the door to the veneration of human dignity and the mystery of God. “Poetic reason and aesthetic experience are based on wonder; Einstein refers to it when he points to ‘amazement’ as the root of all authentic commitment to life: the cradle of art, science,

²¹ Y. RAGUIN, *Paths to Contemplation*, trans. Paul Barrett (Abbey Press, 1974), 89. Later he says: “The basis of contemplation is the gift which God gives us of His life, and the continual flowing back of that life towards its Author; without this constant returning to God, human life loses all meaning. In its deepest roots and in its superficial areas, in its essential unity and in its rhythms, life must be in harmony with the relationship to God about which we have just spoken.” (95)

²² “An *Oh!* sprang up at the summit of Love. An *Oh!* rose to the pinnacle of excess. An overflowing sea broke on the shore. The heart, kneeling, surrendered in fullness. Surpassed in grace, overwhelmed in goodness. An *Oh!* responded to something *more*, to something *infinite*. Without borders of height or depth; length and width without measure. And in a growing outpouring, a God in love, a man trembling: You and I, we, the encounter... Upon returning from the summit, the heart yearns to spread the news, to praise the one who came bringing so much love, to express gratitude for the unexpected gift, to collect the overflow and spread it, to explain the whys of a God of excess. The soul wants to sing... and feels that it is not enough.” A. DE PRADO POSTIGO, *Con infinito exceso. La fe cristiana a la luz de un Amor sobreabundante* (Sal Terrae, 2016), 27, translator’s version.

²³ SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS, “Peak of Perfection”, *The Poems of Saint John of the Cross*, trans. Willis Barnstone (Indiana University Press, 1968), 91.

religion, and gratuitousness...”²⁴ Wonder is the driving force of active and procedural pedagogy through contrast that attempts to decipher what is new. And it is the exponent of the culture of life, since in a culture in which no one is astonished, there is no inventiveness, no creativity, no respect, no veneration for the sacred. Wonder has been especially received as a gift by artists, poets and mystics. They are people who have overcome the first contact of primary instincts and face reality with a contemplative gaze. G. K. Chesterton said: “Mysticism keeps men sane. As long as you have mystery you have health; when you destroy mystery you create morbidity.”

There are three transcendental values that give quality to human life: *truth, beauty and goodness*.

4.1. Wonder and the Search for Truth

Wonder does not take the world for granted. Wonder springs from within. To cultivate wonder is to cultivate the deep roots of the soul that face the future with meaning. They are the roots of restlessness and disquiet. They are also the origin of illusions and projects.

Wonder, awe, opens the way to reflection, as philosophers and scientists warned.²⁵ Throughout the history of thought, considerations about the origin and scope of wonder have multiplied.²⁶ Plato put into the mouth of Socrates: “Theodorus seems to be a pretty good guesser about your nature. For this feeling of wonder shows that you are a philosopher, since wonder is the only beginning of philosophy...”²⁷ Aristotle says: “It is through wonder that men now begin and originally began to philosophize.”²⁸ Saint Thomas Aquinas deals in various books with wonder as the origin of philosophy.²⁹

R. Descartes speaks of wonder as the first of the passions of the soul. He defines it like this: “Wonder is a sudden surprise of the soul which makes it tend to consider attentively those objects which seem to it rare and extraordinary.”³⁰

It would be useful to go through the *biography of philosophy*³¹ to discover the scope and limits of wonder. It has not always been understood in the same way which we can see if we look at the philosophies of science, rationalism, and positivism. In the last century, there has been a return to the unveiling of truth according to the encounter where

²⁴ T. GUARDANS, *La verdad del silencio. Por los caminos del asombro*, (Herder, 2009), 13, translator’s version. A. Einstein’s exact words are: “The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. He who knows it not and can no longer wonder, no longer feels amazement, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle.” A. EINSTEIN, *The World As I See It*, trans. Alan Harris (Philosophical Library, 1949), 5.

²⁵ Cf. M. BERSANELLI – M. GARGANTINI, *From Galileo to Gell-Mann: The Wonder that Inspired the Greatest Scientists of All Time* (Templeton Press, 2009); M. GARDNER, *The Whys of a Philosophical Scrivener* (St. Martin’s Griffin, 1999), dedicates a chapter to surprise (wonder); E. SCHRÖDINGER, *My View of the World* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), also dedicates a chapter to wonder.

²⁶ Cf. J. FERRATER MORA, *Cuestiones disputadas. Ensayos de filosofía* (Revista de Occidente, 1955), dedicates a chapter to wonder; *Ibid.*, *Diccionario de Filosofía* (Alianza, 1982).

²⁷ *The Theaetetus of Plato*, 155D.

²⁸ *Metaphysics* A 2, 982 b 11.

²⁹ Cf. *In Metaph.*, lect. 3, 54; *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 41, a. 4 ad 5.

³⁰ R. DESCARTES, *The Passions of the Soul*, trans. Stephen Vozz (Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), art. 70.

³¹ Cf. J. MARÍAS, *Obras completas*, Vol. II, (Revista de Occidente, 1964), 570ff; I. IZUZQUIZA, *La filosofía como forma de vida* (Síntesis, 2005).

reality and its mystery meet with the person, with sentient intelligence, which seeks the meaning of existence and life in the world. M. García Morente expresses himself in these terms:

The frame of mind for philosophizing must consist essentially in perceiving and feeling everywhere, in the world of sensible reality, as in the world of ideal objects, problems, mysteries; to wonder at everything, to feel how profoundly arcane and mysterious it all is; to stand before the universe and one's own human self with a feeling of stupefaction, of awe, of insatiable curiosity, like the child who understands nothing and for whom everything is a problem.³²

We need to recognize the contribution of thinkers who, in one way or another, have illuminated the path of wonder. From French spiritualism and personalism we can cite M. Blondel, M. Mounier, G. Marcel, L. Lavelle, J. Lacroix, M. Nédoncelle, Buber, E. Lévinas, P. Ricœur, J. Wahl, S. Weil, etc. They speak of wonder and awe with different nuances. I highlight, among others, J. Ortega y Gasset,³³ M. Heidegger,³⁴ X. Zubiri,³⁵ M. Zambrano,³⁶ E. Tugendhat,³⁷ E. Trias³⁸ and J. M. Esquirol.³⁹

EXCURSUS: WONDER AND QUESTIONING

I include this digression about “wonder and questioning” because the search for truth includes questioning. On the other hand, questioning takes us back to the condition of the human being capable of asking questions and asking himself questions. Wonder involves mystery, questioning, and invocation. The person wonders at the mystery and questions.

When explaining what happens in the experience of wonder, we must take into account that we are implanted in reality and open to it, as X. Zubiri likes to reiterate, and that this reality is inescapable, resistant, astonishing, intelligible and possessable.⁴⁰ Reality is astonishing:

When it is foreign to us, it resists us and surpasses the limits of our finitude. [...] Now, by surprising us, reality reveals itself as capable of giving us more or something different than what we expected from it. The act of “giving credit” to reality (G. Marcel) has as its immediate cause our awe at it. With our incessant wonder we demonstrate that for us reality “always has credibility.” [...] Let us not forget from now on that the word “credit,” *creditum*, comes from *credere*, “to believe”. If reality is “given credit” it is because it is in

³² M. GARCÍA MORENTE, *Fundamentos de filosofía* (Espasa-Calpe, 1951), 23, translator's version.

³³ Cf. J. ORTEGA Y GASSET, *The Origin of Philosophy*, (W. W. Norton & Company, 1968); J. RUIZ FERNÁNDEZ, “José Ortega y Gasset: justificación de la filosofía,” *Ideas y valores* 6 (2012) 65-90. Throughout these pages we can appreciate what Ortega y Gasset has been expressing in a scattered way about why man philosophizes.

³⁴ M. HEIDEGGER, *What Is Philosophy?* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1956); IBID., *What Is Metaphysics?* (Jovian Press, 2018).

³⁵ Cf. X. ZUBIRI, *Sentient intelligence; Man and God; El hombre y la verdad*.

³⁶ Cf. M. ZAMBRANO, *El hombre y lo divino; Los bienaventurados; Filosofía y poesía*.

³⁷ E. TUGENDHAT, *Egocentricity and Mysticism: An Anthropological Study* (Columbia University Press, 2016).

³⁸ E. TRIAS, *Ciudad sobre ciudad. Arte, religión y ética en el cambio de milenio* (Destino, 2001).

³⁹ J. M. ESQUIROL, *El respeto o la mirada atenta. Una ética para la era de la ciencia y la tecnología* (Gedisa, 2006); IBID., *La resistencia íntima. Ensayo de una filosofía de la proximidad* (Acantilado, 2015).

⁴⁰ P. LAÍN ENTRALGO, *La espera y la esperanza* (Revista de Occidente, 1962), 304.

itself “credible” and “*credenda*,” worthy of being believed. That is why it can be “accredited,” possessing credit.⁴¹

It is true that some people are paralyzed by wonder, but normally it opens us up to new connections, curiosity appears, and a legitimate desire arises to know what is beyond the immediate. From wonder arises the question about the reason for life and its meaning.

In wonder, because what we see, hear or feel surpasses us, questioning arises. We ask questions to know what we are dealing with and to go beyond the mere phenomenon. Our intimate structure reacts to what surprises it. Wonder is the starting point or the open door, not only to one question, but to successive questions until we reach the ultimate questions. The first questions are loaded with emotion, intuition, curiosity. The ultimate questions are about finding the meaning of life and immersing ourselves in the mystery. Wonder, in philosophers, theologians and scientists, also has many intermediate, successive questions that provide new knowledge and research findings.⁴²

Questioning arises in us from our condition as limited, needy and futuristic beings. The first philosophers realized this, and the act of questioning has been the subject of analysis in the different stages of thought, in scientific research, in poetic expressions and in religious experiences. In modern times, phenomenology, the philosophy of existence, personalism and researchers in all areas (physics, chemistry, astronomy, biology, human sciences, etc.) have paid close attention to questioning. With varying purposes, for very different reasons and areas. Leaving aside the gnoseological field, we will focus on the area of the existential in which questioning and reality are affected. Questioning places us on the threshold of mystery, which transcends us, but in which we find ourselves immersed.

Questioning is human and, at the same time, humanizing. “The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existence” (A. Einstein). Humanity has learned much from asking questions about reality and has evolved through precisely formulated questions. Behind every question there is something that is revealed and there is more mystery to discover. Questioning falls within the logic of a world in continuous movement and permanent unveiling. “Questioning builds a way.”⁴³

Questioning is not only legitimate in the face of wonder, but it is also an intrinsic requirement of being human. We are enveloped in the question we ask and envelop that which we ask.

4.2. Wonder, Beauty and Goodness

Beauty exists. Sometimes it is obvious; other times it is hidden and needs to be discovered. Reality, large or small, every day or extraordinary, physical or spiritual, reveals its light, its order, its expressiveness and its harmony. Wonder and beauty enter into dialogue. Beauty inspires wonder and human beings are amazed by beauty. It inspires

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 506, translator’s version.

⁴² Cf. M. HEIDEGGER, *What Is Metaphysics?* (and, before, in *Being and Time*, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008). In the first chapter he speaks of the necessity, structure and primacy of the question about being; cf. P. LAIN ENTRALGO, *La espera y la esperanza*, 504-514; *IBID.*, *Creer, esperar, amar* (Círculo de Lectores, 1999), 164-168.

⁴³ M. HEIDEGGER, “The Question Concerning Technology”, *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (Harper & Row, 1977), 287-317.

wonder, but we have to be sensitive,⁴⁴ tuned in to, in order to be aware of beauty. Of course, it is not reducible to art. It is true that, in the face of beauty, wonder takes on various nuances in the philosopher, the scientist, the poet and the mystic.⁴⁵

Beauty moves human beings and makes us strive towards higher peaks. Marta Medina expresses that: the beauty of the world makes the beauty of God transparent.⁴⁶ It is an appeal to whoever contemplates it. It makes us go out of ourselves to move towards another, towards the other, and makes possible the encounter that elevates us and makes us better:

The wonder of reality is such because human beings feel we are its recipients and at the same time its guardians. Things are for us, and yet they are not ours, because we did not create them nor can we appropriate them to the point of undoing or annulling them. They are both given to us and taken away from us; we are both the recipients and those responsible for them.⁴⁷ In this space of belonging and alienation they make their weight of glory felt, they unleash emotion and create astonishment.⁴⁸

Plato said that “beauty is the splendor of truth.” St. Thomas Aquinas said, “a light that shines on what is well-configured.” F. Dostoyevsky wrote that “beauty will save the world.” Beauty is the radiance of divine fullness that is observed in the harmony of creation and shines in a special way within the human being. In the face of beauty, we experience peace, pleasure and joy, and beauty is linked to truth and goodness. Furthermore, it is the expression of truth and goodness.⁴⁹ In fact, Saint Thomas himself said that “things are called beautiful because they are pleasing to look at.” But the cause of pleasure is beauty. Wonder at beauty breaks the circle of the immanent and sets us on the path to transcendence. By admiring and promoting beauty, we ennoble ourselves and ennoble others.

Insisting on the relationship between beauty and good, G. Thibon wrote:

It corresponds to nobility and heroism to unite beauty and goodness in the heights, and, at the summit, achieve the synthesis of beauty and goodness. Even if one abstracts from the supernatural point of view, the beauty of a heroic and holy life always surpasses in depth

⁴⁴ JOHN PAUL II, in his *Letter to Artists* (04/04/1999), collects this saying from a famous Polish poet, Cyprian Norwid: “Beauty is to enthuse us for work, and work is to raise us up.”

⁴⁵ Cf. J. PLAZAOLA, *Introducción a la estética. Historia, teoría, textos* (BAC, 1973), offers many texts that confirm this.

⁴⁶ M. MEDINA, *Seducidos y transformados* (Editorial Paulinas, 2020), 84.

⁴⁷ “Aesthetic joy takes us away from this world because it has the virtue of revealing to us another, initiating us into a nobler, more exultant, more serene form of existence to which we unconsciously aspire” (J. PLAZAOLA, *op. cit.*, 305, translator’s version). Elsewhere he stated: “Enough centuries of artistic creativity and aesthetic doctrine have passed for us to have to give up a concept of *artistic activity* as distinct from that of *aesthetic sensitivity*. If giving is not the same as receiving, we cannot identify the creative gifts of Handel or Mozart with the sensitivity of thousands of people who have listened to and applauded their music with tears in their eyes. We must maintain that mental clarity to recognize that the aesthetic sensitivity that human beings have and that perhaps marks precisely the threshold of Paleolithic humanization, is not the charisma that destiny grants to certain beings, whose works make the earthly life of humans more pleasant and bearable.” IBID., “Sobresaltos de un cristiano ante el arte contemporáneo secularizado de hoy,” *Arte y parte en la sociedad del espectáculo* (Universidad de Deusto, 2005), 184, translator’s version.

⁴⁸ O. GONZÁLEZ DE CARDEDAL, *Cuatro poetas desde la otra ladera* (Trotta, 1996), 334, translator’s version.

⁴⁹ JOHN PAUL II, in his *Letter to Artists*, no. 3, states: “In a certain sense, beauty is the *visible form of the good*, just as the good is the *metaphysical condition of beauty*.” S. Weil said: “There is a kind of incarnation of God in the world, of which beauty is the sign. Beauty is the experimental proof that incarnation is possible. For this reason, all art of the first order is, by its nature, religious” (quoted by BENEDICT XVI in his *Meeting with Artists* in the Sistene Chapel, November 21, 2009).

and fullness the beauty of the work of art. When virtue, when goodness, is high enough, pure enough, and free enough to make beauty its servant, no other beauty equals its own.⁵⁰

Pope Benedict XVI, speaking to artists in the Sistine Chapel, said:

Dostoevsky's words that I am about to quote are bold and paradoxical, but they invite reflection. He says this: "Man can live without science, he can live without bread, but without beauty he could no longer live, because there would no longer be anything to do to the world. The whole secret is here, the whole of history is here." The painter Georges Braque echoes this sentiment: "Art is meant to disturb, science reassures." Beauty pulls us up short, but in so doing it reminds us of our final destiny, it sets us back on our path, fills us with new hope, gives us the courage to live to the full the unique gift of life. The quest for beauty that I am describing here is clearly not about escaping into the irrational or into mere aestheticism.⁵¹

The question of whether beauty will save the world is asked by F. Dostoevsky himself in his book *The Brothers Karamazov* in the tenderness shown to a dying young man. It means that compassion and mercy, in the style of the Samaritan, will save the world.⁵² It is curious that this same Russian writer felt an inner impulse to visit Raphael's Madonna when relating personal stories shattered by life's misfortunes.

In his *Letter to Artists*, Saint John Paul II told them:

May the beauty which you pass on to generations still to come be such that it will *stir them to wonder!* Faced with the sacredness of life and of the human person, and before the marvels of the universe, wonder is the only appropriate attitude. From this wonder there can come that enthusiasm of which Norwid spoke in the poem to which I referred earlier. People of today and tomorrow need this enthusiasm if they are to meet and master the crucial challenges which stand before us.⁵³

In this 21st century, due to the cultural, social, economic and political challenges, we are urged to explore the *via pulchritudinis* and awaken to the greatest thing that the human heart aspires to: to encounter the most handsome of men (cf. Ps 45:3).⁵⁴

4.3. Wonder and Religious Experience

Religious experience is inherent in the human condition.⁵⁵ Wonder is produced before God, but it depends on the idea or experience that one has of God and the characteristics that one attributes to Him, which qualify wonder. "If God is power:

⁵⁰ G. THIBON, *El Pan de cada día* (Patmos, 1949), 48-50, translator's version.

⁵¹ BENEDICT XVI, *Meeting with Artists* in the Sistine Chapel (November 21, 2009); it is a speech that is very dense in content with references to Pope Paul VI and John Paul II.

⁵² Cf. A. DE MELLO, *Awakening: Conversations with the Masters* (Image Books, 2003). Said: "To a social worker the Master said, 'I fear you are doing more harm than good.' 'Why?' 'Because you stress only one of the two imperatives of justice.' 'Namely?' 'The poor have a right to bread.' 'What's the other one?' 'The poor have a right to beauty.'"

⁵³ JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Artists*, 16; cf. B. FORTE, *The Portal of Beauty: Towards a Theology of Aesthetics* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2008).

⁵⁴ Cf. P. D'ORS, *El estupor y la maravilla* (Galaxia Gutemberg, 2018); C. MARTÍNEZ OLIVERAS (ed.), *La vida consagrada tras las huellas de la belleza* (Publicaciones Claretianas, 2017).

⁵⁵ To study the aspects that this experience implies, cf. J. MARTÍN VELASCO, "Religión (Fenomenología y ciencias de las religiones)", in J. J. TAMAYO (ed.), *Nuevo diccionario de Teología* (Trotta, 2005), 777-789 (where he offers an extensive bibliography).

veneration, fear or panic. If source of help: worship. If benevolent Father: love. If supreme beauty: wonder, delight.”⁵⁶

In trying to cultivate wonder, it is essential to place ourselves in the radical dimension in which we find ourselves when we question and when we raise our mind and heart to invoke the holy, welcoming the mystery in which we find ourselves enveloped.

K. Tilmann presents the *initiation to wonder* as a forgotten task in the field of education and as a preparation for faith:

Whoever is initiated into wonder awakens at the same time the important ability to know how to transcend the visible aspect of the world. And thus, they model a natural capacity, the one needed for faith: the capacity not to be caught up in appearances and external facts... The capacity to glimpse and contemplate the divine in creation... Wonder has a special place within the field of the realities of faith, simply because it is the response to the unexpected and the inconceivable.⁵⁷

J. Ortega y Gasset, in his youth, left these reflections:

Goethe said that men are not productive except when they are religious: when they lack religious incitement they are reduced to imitating, to repeating in science, in art, in poetry. As Goethe must have thought, this seems to me to be very true; the emotion of the divine has been the home of culture and probably always will be. Nothing robust or organic has ever emerged from mere curiosity, from frivolous dilettantism. Strict necessity, on the other hand, hardly creates anything other than what is strictly necessary. Now, great culture is precisely the anticipatory effort of the superfluous.⁵⁸

Later he adds:

Everyone who thinks: “Life is a serious thing,” is an intimately religious person. True irreligiosity is a lack of respect for what is above us, beside us, and below us. Frivolity is impiety... Give me a respectful race and I promise you a flourishing culture; give me at least a handful of people who will pass on, from hand to hand, with secular tenacity, the fruitful tradition of respect.⁵⁹

Religious experience depends on the image we have of God. We Christians have in Jesus the face of God. “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). God is love, light, truth, life, mercy, the word of salvation, etc. In the Gospel passage (Mt 17:1-8; Mk 9:2-8; Lk 9:28-36) in which the transfiguration is narrated, Jesus appears as the Son of the Father enveloped in the cloud, which is the symbol of the Holy Spirit. The religious

⁵⁶ J. A. MOLINA – M. LÓPEZ, *Diccionario de los sentimientos* (Anagrama, 2000), 133, translator’s version. R. OTTO, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational* (Oxford University Press, 1958). This author, despite his limitations, typifies well certain postures before the Holy. For an anthropological-historical reference, cf. L. DUCH, *Antropología de la religión* (Herder, 2000).

⁵⁷ K. TILMANN, *Asombro y experiencia como caminos hacia Dios* (Marova, 1970), 26-27, translator’s version. On p. 9, he said: “When people contemplate Nature, they cannot help but wonder at it. They stumble upon something incomprehensible. They cannot penetrate the mystery of life, much less their own mystery. The more they explore and scrutinize, the wider the circle of inexplicable or surprisingly meaningful realities. But the fullness of meaning, whose deepest reason cannot be found in things themselves, shows itself as something that comes from elsewhere. A person who does not wonder has not come to perceive what is admirable, extraordinary and wondrous. They only consider one aspect of reality. They are caught up in an attitude that seeks to analyze and take advantage of and dominate the world; and everything that falls outside this field of interest is ignored. Consequently, people become blind to an essential aspect of reality and unjustifiably overlook it.”

⁵⁸ J. ORTEGA Y GASSET, *Obras completas*, Vol. I, (Alianza, 1983), 435, translator’s version.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 436, translator’s version; around the time that L. WITTGENSTEIN WROTE, *Movements of Thought (1914-1916)*, (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2022): “To pray is to think about the meaning of life.”

experience of Christians is a mystical relationship of personal —Trinitarian— encounter in the mystery of the covenant and in the Paschal mystery. Our God is the creator and caretaker of all creation, of the constellations, of the lilies of the field and of the birds of the forest. God is completely full of life, harmony, goodness and beauty. His presence amazes us with every little thing that moves, that encourages, that transforms. How many wonders there are in creation and in what poets, artists, and scientists use to put wonder within our reach! We are called to review our mind, sensitivity and freedom regarding how we relate to God, to our fellow people and to all creation.⁶⁰

If we examine the history of salvation, both in the Old and New Testament, it is easy to see how human beings are constantly filled with grateful wonder. A clear example is in Psalm 8. We should be a continuous song of praise: “How majestic is your name in all the earth!” This first wonder, after contemplation, is followed by the question related to wonder: What is man?

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? (vv. 4 and 5).

In these verses of the psalm, the relationship between wonder and religious experience is reflected:

We are God’s “memory” and “occupation,” or a memory that God cares for with deep affection. “Remembering” is one of the pillars of biblical religiosity. First and foremost, and at the origin of everything, is the memory of God. God is mindful of the covenant (Ps 105:8). God does not forget the afflicted (Ps 9:12), God remembers his congregation (Ps 74:2), God remembers me (Ps 106:4), God’s holy promise (Ps 105:42), God’s love (Ps 25:6), etc. Divine memory is the “soil” of all being and existence. If the basis of memory is rooted in divine love, we can well say that “in the beginning was the memory,” the child of God’s fidelity to himself. How can we not be amazed that the memory of God revolves around that fragile being of clay that is man? The memory of God resonates in the memory of man.⁶¹

5. ATROPHIED WONDER

There are many negative things that hinder or atrophy wonder and prevent attention, appreciation, and empathy with the wonderful reality or with the values that sustain and move life toward quality or a higher level. Let’s look at some of them.

If we are not attentive, our culture keeps us entertained in the horizontality of what is happening, fostering routine and indifference. The obvious anesthetizes thought and sensitivity towards the other: the neighbor who suffers, who is excluded, who is denied as a person. Wonder fades in this consumerist and egotistical world where Prometheus, Sisyphus and Narcissus still reign. Where they reign, mercy and justice, love and solidarity do not bear fruit.

⁶⁰ The magazine *Vida Religiosa* devoted two special issues to *Images of God*: 108/2-3 (2010). The accumulation of experiences of God and the diversity of faces that we project when we speak of God, in whom we move, exist and have our being, is surprising. We can appreciate the unity and harmony, the conjunction of facets, his grandeur and our smallness, his majesty and closeness, his transcendence and his presence, his tenderness and mercy and our pettiness.

⁶¹ Á. APARICIO RODRÍGUEZ, *Poemas para el camino. Quince salmos* (Publicaciones Claretianas, 1990), 130, translator’s version.

Blindness and insensitivity to what is true, beautiful and good. In this way, one neither appreciates nor enjoys the surrounding reality, life together, nor the promise that everyday life offers. This blindness and insensitivity are suffered by those who block their imagination; they lose contact with good people, who are more numerous than we think, with the surrounding reality, which is a continuous and surprising offering; and those who lack memory of their emotions and intimate experiences that are full of received gifts.

The obvious and the routine. Indifference places us in that apathy or banality that makes our life irrelevant, dull, vulgar and worn down. There is no disposition to admire innocence, the candor of children, the brilliance of the stars, the aromas, the songs of birds or the presence of those who truly love us. Spaces are non-places, and human relationships are functional ones that spring from dry and hardened hearts. There is no dialogue, no exchange, no encounter. Community becomes impossible. The person does not gravitate towards the interior, towards the one who lives within him and sustains him. He loses his religious fervor and contemplative attitude. From this uprooting and decentering comes the “spiritual worldliness” that Pope Francis spoke of.⁶² Without wonder there is no passion, and the face of the other is disfigured.

Acceleration, utilitarianism and pragmatism. Mobility, sudden changes, overwhelming information, the speed of time, and commercialism drown the deep aspirations and innate attempts of the human person, who is hindered from asking the ultimate questions. In this way, we lose veneration and respect for the sacred and for life, which is a gift. The culture that surrounds us tends toward dispersion, exteriority, excitement and lack of restraint. We are immersed in a time of more radical changes than those we were told about in the Council and after the Council.⁶³ We are all *postmodern*, a little or a lot, according to the descriptions of J. F. Lyotard and J. Braudillard. We are in a digital age that does not require identity. G. Lipovetsky years ago spoke about *The Era of Emptiness*, after *The Ephemeral Era* and now of *The Era of Lightness*; D. Innerarity described us as *The Invisible Society* and not long ago he spoke of *A World of Everyone and No One*; Z. Bauman has filled the shelves with books on *Liquid* society, life, culture, art and love; B.-Ch. Han has offered us suggestive books such as *The Burnout Society*, *The Transparency Society*, *In the Swarm*, *The Scent of Time*. M. Cruz recently wrote: *Ser sin tiempo* [Being Without Time] and *La flecha (sin rumbo) sobre el futuro* [The arrow (without direction) for the future].

Acceleration prevents us from capturing what is marvelous. Even when we go to a museum or a cathedral full of artwork, there is not enough time to contemplate and enjoy them. Everything is programmed, calculated, measured and counted. In a fast-paced society there is no time to stop and perceive the glimpses of the reality that tries to offer everything new, beautiful and good in it, nor to contemplate it calmly.

We have witnessed a shift of ideas about technology and economics. We calculate, measure and weigh everything. Optimism pulls us along in the face of progress and the whirlwind of politics. The value of the intellectual is undervalued in favor of training and gaining money and fame. We are moving from: the real to the virtual (from action to the

⁶² Cf. FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium*, nos. 93-97.

⁶³ Today we talk about the change of era: “Today’s temporal crisis is not a crisis of acceleration. The age of acceleration is already over. What we experience today as acceleration is only *one* of the symptoms of temporal dispersal. [...] Temporal dispersal does not allow us to experience any type of duration. Nothing comports time. Life is no longer embedded in any ordering structures or coordinates that would find duration. Even things which we identify are fleeting and ephemeral. Thus, we become radically transient ourselves. The atomization of life goes hand in hand with an atomization of identity.” B.-Ch. HAN, *The Scent of Time. A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Lingering* (Polity Press, 2017), Preface, Kindle.

keyboard); from the object to the subject; from the whole to the fragment; from the solid to the fluid; from slowness to lightness, from public to private, from security to fear (terror); from disinformation to information saturation; from citizen to consumer; etc.

We have become hypercritical and there is a danger in the excess of this lucidity in deconstruction and denunciation, because we are left without the vital current that makes wonder, creativity and enthusiasm possible. We are great at demolishing, but not at regenerating and building. It is not easy to free ourselves from the culture of exclusion and death. We live unaware of the evolution of creation, which is the song of the Creator.

The society of entertainment, of noise, of consumerism with quick and superficial sensations, of prestige and ambition, leads to a reduction or polarization of wonder. It deprives us from experiencing enthrallment and prevents a deep appreciation of the meaning of reality, of the mystery that things and people carry within them.

Events, even the most enjoyable ones, pile up, are collected, and lose their meaning. Catastrophes are lamented, but they only affect us for a few seconds. Today's culture has encouraged extreme egocentrism, self-referentiality, resignation and victimhood.

6. WE URGENTLY NEED TO RECOVER WONDER

When wonder is rarefied because the essential values of life are denied and joy and hope are not allowed to shine, allowing injustice, hatred, greed, violence and envy to predominate, we urgently need to recover wonder before the truth, before the beautiful and before the good. Ultimately, before God. Giving wonder its place again in our lives requires being reborn and entering the path of conversion.

To regain the capacity of wonder is to return to simplicity, to innocence, to the freshness of childhood, where there is no calculation, and everything is gratuitous and spontaneous.

Who will return us to that state of innocence that is amazed by the unknown, that is moved by the novel, that is in awe before the beautiful and that is enchanted by love? Who will cure blindness and insensitivity to human scarcity and suffering? How many eye drops must I buy?⁶⁴ Who will break the chains of the ethical, aesthetic and religious trap that our society suffers?

Ultimately, it is about embracing what is profoundly human. In the words of Josep Maria Esquirol, being human implies having reached such a high degree of openness that the ascending line of sensitivity, being so high, curves downwards and folds in on itself, giving rise to greater width, greater depth. Sensitivity, therefore, is very high and deep. A heightened sense of feeling: that is what is human.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ "How sad to think of the lives of an awful lot of people that never get lived! They never live because they cannot see. They do not see because they look at the world, its objects, at their relatives, at everybody, with their own eye – whereas to see well, nothing more is needed than to follow each happening, every subject, every person, with God's eye. Those who graft into God see; knowing that God is love, they believe in his love, reasoning with the saints: 'Everything God wills and permits is for my sanctification.' As a result, joys and sorrows, births and deaths, anguish and celebration, failures and victories, meetings, acquaintances, work [...], all of it, all is prime matter for our sanctity. [...] It is a fact that everything cooperates for the good of those who love. With our dim-sighted and incredulous eyes we very often cannot see how each and every one [person] has been created as a gift to us, and we as a gift for them." Ch. LUBICH, *Christian Living Today: Meditations* (New City Press, 1997), 17-18.

⁶⁵ J. M. ESQUIROL, *Humano, más humano* (Acantilado, 2021), 61, translator's version.

The aspiration of the human being is to live in plenitude. We carry within us the mark of Trinitarian love that makes us seek out the source of light, of truth, of love. It dwells in each and every person and, of course, in all Christians, and drives the ideal of configuring our life with love first, which is permanently new, and, therefore, an incitement to wonder. To situate ourselves in this love, we must first strip ourselves, free ourselves, and renounce everything that binds. The Gospel opens many paths for us on this journey: we must be born from above and of the Spirit (cf. Jn 3:1-6); “unless you become like children...” (cf. Mt 18:3); the parable of the prodigal son (cf. Lk 15:11-32). It is about returning to the roots, to the sources of what is permanently new and constant spontaneity.

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We have a special reference point for recovering wonder. It is Mary, the simple woman of the people, the servant of the Lord and the Mother of Jesus. In Mary the link between the divine and the human is realized. In her the Son of God became flesh. The incarnation is the moment of maximum splendor for humanity. Mary offers us the “most handsome of men”, the Love of God made tenderness and mercy, the fullest Truth. At the announcement of such an event, Mary was perplexed (cf. Lk 1:29). What is the scope of this bewilderment when thinking about the need to cultivate wonder in Christian life? I will consider this point in the second chapter of this book.

CHAPTER II

MARY, ICON AND TEACHER OF WONDER

The example of her life, her words and her attitudes trace a path of continuous wonder and prepare those who contemplate her to make their own lives fruitful through simplicity, freedom, recognition, internalization and gratitude. We will not be able to respond to our most intimate desires if our questions are not raised higher, going beyond immediacy, utilitarianism and pragmatism.

These reflections spring from the heart of a believer who contemplates in Mary the mystery of God and discovers in her a maternal and instructional presence. Faith maintains the right atmosphere to speak to and relate to Mary.⁶⁶ The apt words of the Italian writer Erri de Luca can quite properly be applied to Mary: “It is not the lover who knows love, but the beloved, who agrees to be transfigured by the sight of another person’s eyes.” This second part is, therefore, an invitation to focus our attention on the vocation and mission of Mary, upon whom the Almighty looked and filled her with his grace. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was born, true God and true man. Mary is the Mother of the King of the Jews, she is the Mother of the Word that became flesh, she is the Mother of the Messiah, she is the Mother of Christ and Mother of men.⁶⁷ Mary, as virgin and mother, is a type of the Church.⁶⁸

Let us recall the words of the Second Vatican Council on Mary:⁶⁹

Piously meditating on her and contemplating her in the light of the Word made man, the Church with reverence enters more intimately into the great mystery of the Incarnation and becomes more and more like her Spouse. For Mary, who since her entry into salvation history unites in herself and re-echoes the greatest teachings of the faith as she is

⁶⁶ “In our day the faithful need to be helped to see more clearly the link between Mary of Nazareth and the faith-filled hearing of God’s word. I would encourage scholars as well to study the relationship between *Mariology and the theology of the word*. This could prove most beneficial both for the spiritual life and for theological and biblical studies.” BENEDICT XVI, *Verbum Domini*, no. 27. And in paragraph 28 he added: “As we contemplate in the Mother of God a life totally shaped by the word, we realize that we too are called to enter into the mystery of faith, whereby Christ comes to dwell in our lives. Every Christian believer, Saint Ambrose reminds us, in some way interiorly conceives and gives birth to the word of God: even though there is only one Mother of Christ in the flesh, in the faith Christ is the progeny of us all.”

⁶⁷ LG, 54 and 69.

⁶⁸ Cf. LG 63. K. Rahner rightly said: “Mary is only intelligible in terms of Christ.” This is the thesis underlined by the encyclical of Pope John Paul II., *Redemptoris mater* (1987): “Only in the mystery of Christ is her mystery fully made clear” (no.4).

⁶⁹ One of the novel things about the Second Vatican Council was the inclusion of Mary’s vocation and mission in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*. This is stated by theologians such as H. Rahner, K. Rahner, H. de Lubac, H. U. von Balthasar, J. Ratzinger, I. de la Potterie, Joaquín M. Alonso, Augusto Andrés Ortega, D. Fernández, Cándido Pozo, J. Galot, José Cristo Rey García Paredes, Bruno Forte, Stefano de Fiore, etc. It is a topic frequently covered by journals such as *Ephemerides Mariologicae*, *Marianum*, *Estudios Marianos*, *Theotokos*, etc.

proclaimed and venerated, calls the faithful to her Son and His sacrifice and to the love of the Father. Seeking after the glory of Christ, the Church becomes more like her exalted Type, and continually progresses in faith, hope and charity, seeking and doing the will of God in all things. Hence the Church, in her apostolic work also, justly looks to her, who, conceived of the Holy Spirit, brought forth Christ, who was born of the Virgin that through the Church He may be born and may increase in the hearts of the faithful also. The Virgin in her own life lived an example of that maternal love, by which it behooves that all should be animated who cooperate in the apostolic mission of the Church for the regeneration of men.⁷⁰

1. WONDERFUL MYSTERY

Everything great that the Lord does happens in silence. There is creation, the incarnation, the resurrection, the ascension. Perhaps more striking was the coming of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:1-4). No matter how many ways our reason considers the Incarnation – in light of the Resurrection⁷¹ or according to biblical texts – it will always be considered the great mystery of love in which we find ourselves immersed. The Church is the Mother and Teacher of the faith we profess. “God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 Jn 4:9-10).

The liturgy on the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God,⁷² begins its Evening Prayer I and II with this antiphon: “O marvelous exchange! Our Creator has become man, born of a virgin. We have been made sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.” It is the expression of the faith that we Christians have professed for many centuries: I believe in Jesus Christ who “for us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man” (Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed).⁷³

The preface of this solemnity invites us to praise and give thanks to God “For by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit she conceived your Only Begotten Son, and without losing the glory of virginity, brought forth into the world the eternal Light, Jesus Christ our Lord.” She who has not known a man is a mother, and after giving birth remains a

⁷⁰ LG 65.

⁷¹ “Everyone knows that the New Testament was conceived and written in the light of the Resurrection. The gift of certain faith in the Resurrection turned the world upside down. Without it, it would have been pointless to found a Christian community, write a Pauline letter, or compose a Gospel. The Resurrection casts its light backward on the enigmatic, peculiar existence of the man from Nazareth...” HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, “Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary,” *Mary: The Church at the Source* (Ignatius Press, 1997).

⁷² As could not be otherwise, the texts of the solemnity are taken from Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers. The words of St. Hippolytus, St. Augustine and St. Bernard echo in the Mass. Cf. *The Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (The Liturgical Press, 1992).

⁷³ Cf. JOSÉ CRISTO REY GARCÍA PAREDES, *Nacido de María Virgen* (San Pablo, 2001).

virgin. She enjoyed, in fact, two graces: she is in awe because she conceived as a virgin, she rejoices because she gave birth to the Redeemer.⁷⁴

We are in awe and are moved by the mystery of the Incarnation because through it we intuit what God wants to give us, tell us and ask of us.⁷⁵ In the Incarnation, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit come to encounter us and change our way of understanding human beings and our destiny. Jesus offers us his image as the Son of God. We begin to understand that we are sons and daughters, that we are brothers and sisters, and that we are walking towards full communion, one with the entirety of creation, with our Savior. Before such a great Mystery, with Saint John of the Cross, we sing the “Song of the Soul That Delights in Knowing God by Faith”:

“For I know well the spring that flows and runs,
although it is night”...

The Incarnation is the transforming event that makes us think differently about our relationship with God, with creation, with people in our daily lives, with history in its past, present and future. As Saint Paul VI said: “knowledge of the true Catholic doctrine on Mary will always be a key to the exact understanding of the mystery of Christ and of the Church.”⁷⁶

2. MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS, THE CHRIST

Exegetes have carefully examined the scope of the Gospel passages and other New Testament books that refer to the mystery of the Incarnation. They have focused their attention on names, times, and places, especially in Luke and Matthew, thus giving evidence of the *realism* of what happened to a young virgin named Mary in Nazareth.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Preface I of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Roman Missal, Third Edition (ICEL, 2010), 590. This preface is considered by liturgical experts to be the most ancient of those about Blessed Mary. Cf. *The Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, *op. cit.*

⁷⁵ “First, the mystery is somehow linked to God’s design for man, whether as marking the limit of or the means of realizing this destiny. ... The Church is a mystery for all time out of man’s grasp, because, qualitatively, it is totally removed from all other objects of man’s knowledge that might be mentioned. And yet, at the same time, it concerns us, touches us, acts in us, reveals us to ourselves.” HENRI DE LUBAC, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery* (Ecclesia Press, 1969), 14.

⁷⁶ PAUL VI, *Speech* (November 21, 1964).

⁷⁷ Benedict XVI comments: “Karl Barth pointed out that there are two moments in the story of Jesus when God intervenes directly in the material world: the virgin birth and the resurrection from the tomb, in which Jesus did not remain, nor see corruption. These two moments are a scandal to the modern spirit. God is ‘allowed’ to act in ideas and thoughts, in the spiritual domain—but not in the material. That is shocking. He does not belong there. But that is precisely the point: God is God and he does not operate merely on the level of ideas. In that sense, what is at stake in both of these moments is God’s very godhead. The question that they raise is: does matter belong to him? Naturally we may not ascribe to God anything nonsensical or irrational, or anything that contradicts his creation. But here we are not dealing the irrational or contradictory, but precisely with the positive—with God’s creative power, embracing the whole of being. In that sense these two moments—the virgin birth and the real resurrection from the tomb—are the cornerstones of faith.” *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives* (Image, 2012), 56-57.

It is good to remember the principle that Pope Francis frequently emphasized: *Realities are more important*

In their analysis they have tracked the promises,⁷⁸ the course of the covenant, the prophecies, the symbols, the women, the cities and the Old Testament passages that prefigured Mary and predicted the arrival of the one Israel was expecting, the descendant of David who would reign forever, the Messiah, the Liberator, the Prophet, the Savior, the Messenger of Peace. In any case, “Jesus of Nazareth is accessible for us only by way of the faith of the first Christian churches.”⁷⁹

The Magisterium has been clarifying and guiding everything related to the challenges of Christology that have emerged in the post-council period. In Encyclicals and Exhortations, the Pontiffs have stressed the centrality of the mystery of Jesus and the connection of Mary to this mystery. In this regard it is essential to recall “*Marialis cultus*” (1974) from Paul VI and “*Redemptoris Mater*” (1987) from John Paul II. From Benedict XVI and Francis we have abundant catechesis, homilies and speeches in various gatherings.⁸⁰ We have the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992). We have been fortunate to have access to important biblical-theological documents from the International Theological Commission, such as: “*Unity of the Faith and Theological Pluralism*” (1972), *Select Questions on Christology* (1982), “*The Consciousness of Christ concerning Himself and His Mission*” (1985), “*Christianity and the World Religions*” (1997).⁸¹

In Christology in the post-conciliar years, several approaches have occurred simultaneously. Overcoming ontologism, there has been an emphasis on a historical-biblical, existential, transcendental, prophetic, eschatological, aesthetic, political, cultural approach. Theologians, whether they adhere to ascending or descending Christology,

than ideas. “Ideas – conceptual elaborations – are at the service of communication, understanding, and praxis. Ideas disconnected from realities give rise to ineffectual forms of idealism and nominalism, capable at most of classifying and defining, but certainly not calling to action.” *Evangelii Gaudium*, 232. In the Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* he returns to Gnosticism, denouncing what it means to have an intellect without God and without flesh and a doctrine without mystery (cf. nos. 37-42). Hence it is worth remembering the statement of Saint Thomas: “*Fides non terminatur ad enuntiabile sed ad rem*” *Summa*, II-II, q.1. a.2. ad 2.

⁷⁸ Cf. RAYMOND E. BROWN, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (Paulist Press, 1994). The author, in Appendix I, relates *A Brief History of the Development of Royal Messianic Hope in Israel*, 155-161.

⁷⁹ WALTER KASPER, *Jesus the Christ* (Continuum Books, 2011), 26. Cf. JOSEPH A. FITZMYER, *El evangelio según Lucas, II*, (Cristiandad, 1986), 93-108 [For English title see *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, (Doubleday & Co., 1982.)]; RENÉ LUNEAU, *Jesús, el hombre que “evangelizó” a Dios* (Sal Terrae, 1999), 113-114; OLEGARIO GONZÁLEZ DE CARDENAL, *Cristología* (BAC, 2001), 425-428.

⁸⁰ BENEDICT XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives* (Image, 2012); *María. Estrella de la esperanza* (San Pablo, 2014). It contains a selection of texts. MICHELE GIULIO MASCIARELLI, *Il segno della donna. Maria nella teologia di Joseph Ratzinger* (San Paolo, 2007). They are interventions of his Papal Magisterium. Pope Francis published *Ave Maria: The Mystery of a Most Beloved Prayer* (Editrice Vaticana, 2018). Before that, ALVARO GINEL had collected texts from the Pope in *Mes de Mayo con el Papa Francisco* (Editorial CCS, 2014); in addition to having created the feast of Mary, Mother of the Church, and had numerous interventions in homilies.

⁸¹ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Documents*, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_index-doc-pubbl_en.html#Documents.

have an open range of reflections on Jesus, who is the center of the mystery,⁸² on his divine and human origin, on the relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit, on creation in Christ,⁸³ on his condition as Son of Man, on the Messiah announced by the prophets; on his life's journey, his teachings, his miracles, his death and resurrection; on the Kingdom of God and the signs of its coming; on his ambition and the significance of his saving mission as Lord of history, on the Church as the horizon of Christ's redemption, on cosmic echoes, on his mediating role between God and man.⁸⁴

"The treatise on Mary points rather to the *nexus mysteriorum*, the intimate interweaving of the mysteries in their reciprocity and unity."⁸⁵ It is true that not all theologians emphasize the transcendental connection and importance of Mary in the economy of salvation. We speak of Christology without Mariology,⁸⁶ but it may very well be because it is taken for granted or they have other separate studies. Either way, it is healthy to ask ourselves: Can we think of Jesus, true God and true man, without referring to his mother in this world? St. Paul wrote: "We speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory" (1 Cor 2:7). Although he does not speak explicitly of Mary, he has the solemn expression: "When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children" (Gal 4:4-5). This text covers the arc of the origins and eschatological horizons of humanity on its pilgrimage toward fullness in Christ. Mary continues to give us her Son for our liberation and transformation in Him.

⁸² Cf. R. F. BROWN, *op. cit.* GEORGE AUGUSTIN (ed.) *Jesús es el Señor. Cristo en el centro* (Sal Terrae, 2013). Above all, with pastoral guidance, the collaboration of Heiko Merkebach, J. I. GONZÁLEZ FAUS, *El rostro humano de Dios. De la revolución de Jesús a la divinidad de Jesús* (Sal Terrae, 2007). GABINO URIBARRI BILBAO, "Cristología-Soteriología-Mariología," *La lógica de la fe. Manual de teología dogmática*, ed. Ángel Cordovilla (Comillas, 2013).

⁸³ Cf. Jn 1:1ff. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created" (Col 1:15-16a). Cf. XAVIER ZUBIRI, *El problema teológico del hombre: Cristianismo* (Alianza Editorial, 1997), 286. The entire chapter dedicated to the Incarnation is interesting. There are the studies of K. Rahner and Von Balthasar, cf. ÁNGEL CORDOVILLA, *Gramática de la encarnación* (Comillas, 2004). And his article "La novedad de Cristo y su significación universal," *Revista Española de Teología*, 55 (2005): 549-580.

⁸⁴ In addition to the well-known writings of K. Rahner, Y. M. Congar, H. de Lubac, M. D. Chenu, H. U. von Balthasar, etc. cf. ANGELO AMATO, *Jesús el Señor* (BAC, 1988); WALTER KASPER, *Jesus the Christ*, (Continuum Books, 2011); OLEGARIO GONZÁLEZ DE CARDENAL, *Cristología* (BAC, 2001); IBID. *Fundamentos de Cristología*, Dos volúmenes (BAC, 2005); J. I. GONZÁLEZ FAUS, *La humanidad nueva*, "Karl Rahner, more clearly than any other theologian of the twentieth century, freed Mariology from its isolation from the great treatises of dogmatic theology (Christology, soteriology, doctrine on grace, ecclesiology, eschatology)." K. H. MENKE, *María en la historia de Israel y en la fe de la Iglesia* (Sígueme, 2007), 177, translator's version.

⁸⁵ JOSEPH RATZINGER - HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Mary: The Church at the Source* (Ignatius Press, 1997), 29. R. Laurentin speaking about the unity of the mystery of Mary says: "Mariologists are inclined above all to place these dogmas in the unity of the mystery of Mary. This mystery certainly has its coherence, a double coherence. -Mary is God's masterpiece, who chose this woman to introduce his Son into the world, for communion and cooperation with him in the plan of salvation, as the new Eve, prototype of the Church and of every Christian soul in her communion with Christ, her theological life and her charisms. -Mary is also the most perfect response ever given to God, the most free and total adherence and cooperation with his will, even to the cruel test of the death of her Son." RENÉ LAURENTIN; *Un año de gracia con María* (Herder, 1987), 120, translator's version.

⁸⁶ STEFANO DE FIORES, *María. Nuovissimo Dictionario* (EDB, 2006), 929-931.

In the birth of Jesus, the grace of God is manifested, which brings salvation to all people (Tit 2:11). Love, fullness of life, true light, beauty, wisdom, tenderness, mercy, liberation, reconciliation, and peace have appeared along with so many other attributes recognized by patriarchs, prophets, judges and kings and sung about in the psalms. Emmanuel, God with us, comes closer; dialogue is opened and the path of hope is secure forever.

3. MARY, FULL OF GRACE

Considering the object of these reflections, I prefer to focus my attention on the Annunciation to Mary recounted in Luke (1:26-38). For philological analysis, considerations regarding literary genre and vocational parallels, I refer to the experts.⁸⁷ And for more specific theological questions, I suggest some authors.⁸⁸ Amidst the reading of so many and diverse commentaries, the indication from Vatican II remains: “But, since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith” (DV 12). What the story of the Annunciation tells is a real action of God, as Guardini said.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ E.G. MORI, “Anunciación del Señor,” *Nuevo Diccionario de Mariología* (Paulinas, 1988); A. SERRA and I. DE LA POTTERIE, “María” *Diccionario de Teología Bíblica* (Paulinas, 1990); ARISTIDE SERRA, *Maria secondo il Vangelo* (Ed. Queriniana, 1987); RENE LAURENTIN, *Structure et Théologie de Luc 1-2* (J. Gabalda et Cie, 1957); IBID. *Les évangiles de l'Enfance du Christ. Verité de Noël au-delà des mythes* (Descleé, 1982); FRANÇOIS BOVON, *A Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Luke, I* (Lk 1:1-9:50), (Fortress Press, 2013); RAYMOND E. BROWN (ed) *Mary in the New Testament* (Fortress Press, 1978); IBID, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives* (Yale University Press, 1999); J. A. FITZMYER, *op. cit.*; JOSE CRISTO REY GARCIA PAREDES, *Mariología* (BAC, 1995); DOMICIANO FERNANDEZ, *María en la Historia de la salvación. Ensayo de una mariología narrativa* (Publicaciones Claretianas, 1999); KLEMENS STOCK, *Mary, the Mother of the Lord in the New Testament* (Edizioni Carmelitane, 2006); ARISTIDE SERRA, *María nelle sacre Scritture* (Servitium, 2016); ALBERTO VALENTINI, *Maria secondo le Scritture* (EDB, 2007); IGNACE DE LA POTTERIE, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant* (Alba House, 1992); CANDIDO POZO, *María, nueva Eva* (BAC, 2005); STEFANO DE FIORES, “Incarnazione,” *María. Nuovissimo dizionario* (EDB, 2006); CARMELO PELEGRINO, *María di Nazaret, Profezia del Regno* (GBR, 2014).

⁸⁸ It is important to keep in mind the connection between Mariology, anthropology and faith in creation. Cf. JOSEPH RATZINGER – HANS URS VON BALTASAR, *op. cit.* Other authors: LEONARDO BOFF, *The Maternal Face of God* (Collins Publications, 1989); XABIER PIKAZA, *La Madre de Jesús. Introducción a la Mariología* (Sígueme, 1989); ANTONIO M. CALERO, *María, signo de esperanza cierta. Manual de Mariología* (Editorial CCS, 2011); ÁNGEL APARICIO (ed.) *María del Evangelio* (Publicaciones Claretianas, 1994); BRUNO FORTE, *María, la donna icona del Mistero* (Edizioni Pauline, 1988); VV. AA. *Mariología Fundamental. María en el Misterio de Dios* (Secretariado Trinitario, 1995); FERNANDO SEBASTIÁN AGUILAR, *María Madre de Jesús y madre nuestra* (Sígueme, 2013).

⁸⁹ ROMANO GUARDINI, *La Madre del Señor* (Ed. Guadarrama, 1960), 55.

3.1. The Angel's Greeting

A greeting that inaugurates humanity's rejoicing. "Rejoice! This exclamation from the angel—we could say—marks the true beginning of the New Testament... Joy appears in these texts as the particular gift of the Holy Spirit, the true gift of the Redeemer. So a chord is sounded with the angel's salutation which then resounds throughout the life of the Church. Its content is also present in the fundamental word that serves to designate the entire Christian message: *Gospel* — *good news*."⁹⁰

The greeting of the angel Gabriel shows that the initiative in this momentous event comes from above. The greeting assumes what is already a reality: that Mary is full of grace. That's what the Angel calls her. She is *full of grace* by nature, since grace permeates her being. Filled with love since she was conceived. She was destined to be the Mother of the Son of the Father through the work of the Holy Spirit. The mystery of the Trinitarian God envelops her. It makes her Immaculate. Everything happens in silence and without anyone around Mary knowing. Joseph was also left in the dark. In the midst of silence, the Word of God resounds, sustaining creation, illuminating and giving consistency to history.

In this greeting the vocation and mission of Mary is revealed.⁹¹ José Cristo Rey García Paredes highlights three expressions that go together: *full of grace, you have found favor, Behold, you will conceive*. He commented:

These three moments appear as three successive moments in the realization of a single divine project of grace. If Mary has "found favor with God" it is due to a previous action of God that has favored her, and that is why she is "full of grace." But the project of grace still has a future: "you will conceive!" Luke presents Mary under the surprising dynamism of grace, which culminates in virginal motherhood...

Mary has been "graced" by God for the *messianic motherhood*: "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus." She has been chosen and qualified for the great vocation to which she has always been called. This grace will benefit everyone. With this epithet "full of grace", Mary stands out in a particular way in the ecclesial community, called, justified, maintained only by grace, not by works... The name of grace is accompanied by a singular phrase: "The Lord is with you." The Lord would be her strength. By saying "the Lord is with you," the messenger places Mary *among the great saviors of Israel*.⁹²

The angel left Mary fulfilled: full of grace, which is full of love and beauty. The "*via pulchritudinis*" begins with the incarnation and the first to follow it, moved by faith and love, was Mary.⁹³

In becoming man, the Son of God has introduced into human history all the evangelical wealth of the true and the good, and with this he has also unveiled a new dimension of beauty, of which the Gospel message is filled to the brim. Sacred Scripture has thus

⁹⁰ BENEDICT XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, op. cit., 26-27.

⁹¹ For the exegetical study on Luke 1:26-38, ÁNGEL APARICIO RODRÍGUEZ, "*Evangelio de María*". *La vocación de María a la Maternidad* (Publicaciones Claretianas, 1994), 133-180.

⁹² JOSÉ CRISTO REY GARCÍA PAREDES, *Mariología* (BAC, 1995), 82-83, translator's version.

⁹³ STEFANO DE FIORES, *Maria. Nuovissimo Dizionario* (EDB, 2006); translator's version; MICHELE GIULIO MASCIARELLI, "Belleza," *La bellissima. Maria sulla "via pulchritudinis"* (Editrice Vaticana, 2012).

become a sort of “immense vocabulary” (Paul Claudel) and “iconographic atlas” (Marc Chagall), from which both Christian culture and art have drawn.⁹⁴

Mary, the daughter of Adam, the daughter of Zion, shines and makes her mission as mother of Christ and of the Church shine.⁹⁵ This beauty of Mary, Mother of Christ and of the Church, has some challenges and consequences for our Christian life, as we will see later.

3.2. “*For He Has Looked Upon His Lowly Servant*”

Luke puts into Mary’s lips, with the entire background of the historical experience of her people and, in particular, of the poor of Yahweh, the canticle of the Magnificat: My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior *for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant* (Lk 1:46-48).

In this canticle it is clear that the initiative comes from God. Mary confesses her smallness. She is simply the repository of divine favor – he has done great things for me – and expresses her joy at carrying within her the Son of God, the Messiah.

In the *divine gaze* we find the key to her being “full of grace” and her beauty. God looked upon Mary and this look filled her with goodness, beauty, tenderness and gratitude. She sings, praises and gives thanks with all her soul, with all her spirit; that is, from the depths of her being. In her canticle, Mary feels involved in the process of liberation of her people. Her fruitfulness is in solidarity and lasts for all generations. She is the Mother of the Word, she is the Mother of the Church, she is the Mother of all people.

All by the power of *God’s gaze* which, according to different passages of the Old Testament, is creative, merciful, liberating, and saving. It is a gratuitous look of love. Luther went so far as to say that God does not love us because we are beautiful and good, but that we are good and beautiful because he loves us. Saint John of the Cross offers us these verses and his commentary on God’s gaze on the soul. I offer it as an example to glimpse the scope of God’s gaze “on his lowly servant.”⁹⁶

“When You looked at me

⁹⁴ JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Artists* (April 4, 1999), no. 5.

⁹⁵ “Saint Cyprian of Carthage, a bishop and martyr of the third-century Church, said that no one can have God as Father if he does not have the Church as Mother (*On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, 6). And in Mary we see the most beautiful face of the Church-Mother; we see the dream that the Lord has for each one of us and the hope that dwells within us, in spite of the fact that our hearts are still full of contradictions. And thus, Mary, while accompanying us and revealing to us how good the Lord is (cf. 1 Pet 2:3), restores our courage. Her greatest desire is to lead all of us to the Father; thus, although we are often still divided among ourselves, we can truly become one family in Jesus, his Son and our Lord, King of mercy and head of the Body that is the Church. God is our Father and in Mary the Church shows us her most splendid motherly face.” FRANCIS, *Ave Maria: The Mystery of a Most Beloved Prayer* (Editrice Vaticana, 2018), 14.

⁹⁶ Opinions differ widely regarding the attribution of the Magnificat, given its similarities with other biblical hymns or canticles. Some think it comes from a canticle of the *anawim*, the poor of Yahweh. The fact is that the tradition of Israel, the novelty of Christ, the mediation of Mary, and the Church intertwine. In the third century, Saint Irenaeus already stated that Mary prophesies in the name of the Church. The fact is that Luke places the canticle on the lips of Mary, who is the one who lives, feels, praises, and gives thanks.

Your eyes imprinted Your grace in me;
For this You loved me ardently,
And thus my eyes deserved
To adore what they beheld in You.”⁹⁷

And, in his commentary, he adds:

“*When You looked at me.*” That is, with the affection of love, because we have already pointed out that for God to look is for Him to love.⁹⁸

“*Your eyes imprinted Your grace in me.*” By the eyes of the Bridegroom she refers to God’s mercy: He descends upon the soul in mercy, impressing and infusing His love and grace in her, making her beautiful and lifting her so high as to make her a partaker of the very divinity. [2 Pt. 1:4] Seeing the height and dignity in which He has placed her, the soul proclaims:

“*For this You loved me ardently.*” To love ardently is to love very much. It is more than loving simply; it is like loving doubly, for two reasons. In this verse the soul points to the two motives or causes of the Bridegroom’s love for her. He not only loved her in being captivated by her hair, but He loved her ardently in being wounded by her eye.

And she states in this verse that the cause of His loving her so ardently and intimately was His desire, in looking at her, to give her grace by which He could find His pleasure in her. Thus He gave her love, which is her hair,⁹⁹ and He gave her faith, which is her eye, formed with His charity. She says therefore: “*For this You loved me ardently.*”

By infusing His grace in the soul, God makes it worthy and capable of His love. This verse, then, is like saying: Because You have infused Your grace into me, which was a worthy token of Your love, You loved me ardently, that is, You gave me more grace on this account. St. John makes the same affirmation: *He gives grace for the grace He has given* [Jn. 1:16], which is to give more. Without His grace one cannot merit His grace.¹⁰⁰

God *regarding* Mary is the strength of his presence that recreates and asks her to respond in kind. He urges Mary to become aware of what is being done to her and to respond with her grateful and willing gaze. God’s gaze overwhelms the person who looks and appeals to creativity, while urging freedom. This gaze supports and encourages the mission. This is how the entire canticle of the Magnificat is understood.

3.3. Mary’s Concern and Reflection

The evangelist Luke speaks of being troubled in his gospel at different times: Zechariah was troubled when the angel announced to him the birth of John (cf. Lk 1:12); the women were perplexed before the empty tomb (Lk 24:4-5) and the apostles were troubled before the risen Jesus (Lk 24:38).

⁹⁷ ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS, “Spiritual Canticle” in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* (ICS Publications, 1979), Stanza 32.

⁹⁸ He said it in Stanza 19.6. “*When God looks, He loves and grants favors.*”

⁹⁹ See Stanza 31 of the *Spiritual Canticle* of Saint John of the Cross.

¹⁰⁰ IBID, Commentary on Stanza 32, nos. 3-5.

Luke says that Mary was troubled by the angel's greeting and pondered what that greeting might mean (Lk 1:29). It is not because of the presence of the angel, but because of the surprising greeting. His words are what aroused in her shock, confusion, and awe. But not fear or delirium. What she heard brought comfort: "The Lord is with you." But, in her humility, she remains stupefied thinking to herself: Who am I that this greeting should be addressed to me: "full of grace"?¹⁰¹

St. Bernard explains in one of his homilies:

Hence Mary was troubled at the Angel's greeting. She was troubled, I say, but not confounded. "I was troubled," sings the Psalmist, "and I spoke not," but "I thought upon the days of old, and I had in mind the eternal years." In the same way, then, was Mary troubled and she spoke not, but "thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be." That she was troubled came from her virginal modesty; that she was not confounded was due to her fortitude. Whilst it was under the influence of her prudence that she held her peace and reflected. "She was troubled and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be." The prudent Virgin was well aware that the angel of darkness often transforms himself into an angel of light; and as she was humble and simple, she could not believe that any holy angel would greet her thus. And therefore she "thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be."¹⁰²

The surprise that Mary shows is unique. She was shocked. It is wonder in the face of something incomparable.¹⁰³ But it has a *reason*: the inexplicable invasion of the "wonderful Mystery" into her life through the working of the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:31-33). The mystery of the Trinity comes forth in her. She will give birth to the Son of God, the son of David, the Messiah, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The joyful song of Zion becomes a reality (Zeph 3:14-17). God dwells in her. A cloud overshadows her. The issue of virginity is not discussed here¹⁰⁴ nor the mission of Joseph, her husband.¹⁰⁵

What is important to highlight is that this being troubled or marvelous wonder will accompany Mary throughout her life. You could say that it will be present in the "story of her life." The life of the incarnate Word, who dwelt among us (Jn 1:14), is the life of the Son of God, her son according to the flesh, who will not cease to arouse in her wonder through all his deeds, his words, what people say about him. She will not stop wondering at and being amazed by the greatness of God who always works wonders.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ "When the girl is greeted as 'full of grace' by the angel, she is afraid. It casts a light on her own essential nature that she had never reflected on. 'Poverty of spirit' (or, what is the same, humility) is not some verifiable virtue — capability, suitability, competence is something one can be conscious of — but the unconsidered awareness that everything that one is and has is God's loan and gift and is only there to bring the giver into the spotlight." HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Mary for Today* (Ignatius Press, 1988), 69.

¹⁰² SAINT BERNARD, "On the Glories of the Virgin Mother: Third Sermon," *St. Bernard's Sermons on the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Augustine, 1984), 50-51.

¹⁰³ This wonder is not in the face of *something concrete* (an event, a work of art, a monument, a waterfall, a landscape, etc.), but rather *something that requires pondering* because she finds herself involved and wrapped up in it. This kind of wonder arouses shock and *questioning*.

¹⁰⁴ I refer to the texts of *Mariology* already cited as well as PABLO LARGO, "La concepción virginal de Jesús, ¿creación 'ex nihilo'?" *Eph. Mar.* (2006): 41-70.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Custos*.

¹⁰⁶ As I already indicated in chapter one, she witnessed the wonder of the shepherds (cf. Lk 2:18). With Joseph she was amazed at what was said about the child (cf. Lk 2:33). Surely, she also marveled at *what he did* (cf. Mt 8:27; 12:23; 15:31; 19:25; 21:15; Mk 1:27; 2:12; 6:51; 7:37, 16:8; Lk 9:43); at *his words* (cf. Lk

3.4. Mary's "Yes"

After the angel's question and answer, Mary responds: "*Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word*" (Luke 1:38). In this way, with Mary's consent, the Word became flesh and a new era for human history¹⁰⁷ and for creation¹⁰⁸ began. Sometimes we put the emphasis on the fact that the Word became flesh, but we must add that humanity has been elevated towards God. This is the great wonder, the amazement of those who walk in faith in the light of the mystery of the Incarnation.

Saint Bernard dramatizes it in this way:

Behold the Angel now awaits thy answer: "it is time that he should return to the Lord Who sent him." (...) Oh Virgin, delay not to answer. Speak the word, O Lady, speak the word which all on earth, and all in limbo, yea, and even all in Paradise are waiting to hear. Christ Himself, the King and Lord of all, longs for thy answer with a longing equal the ardour wherewith He 'hath desired thy beauty,' because it is by means of thy consent that He has decreed to save the world. Hitherto thou hast pleased Him by thy silence, but now thy speech shall give Him more pleasure. For behold He calls to thee from heaven, saying, "*O fairest among women, let thy voice sound in My ears.*" Therefore if thou wilt give Him to hear thy voice, He will give thee to see our salvation. And is it not for this thou hast been supplicating, and sighing, and pouring out prayers with tears by day and by night? What then? (...). Say the word and receive the Word. Utter thy human word and conceive the Divine Word. Pronounce the transitory word and embrace the Word everlasting. Why dost thou hesitate? Wherefore dost thou fear? Believe, consent, and receive into thy womb the Word of the Father. Let thy humility take courage, let thy modesty be confident. (...) O happy Virgin, open thy heart to faith, open thy lips to consent, open thy bosom to thy Creator. Behold the Desired of all nations is standing outside and knocking at thy door. (...) Arise, therefore, and make haste to open to Him. Arise by faith, make haste by devotion, open by consent.¹⁰⁹

In Mary's "yes," faith and humility intersect. In fact, there is no faith without humility and humility leads to faith. We see this in the expression Luke uses for consent.

4:22; Mt 22:33; Mk 10:26; Jn 5:28) and what was said in the early community as a result of his resurrection (Mk 16:8; Acts 2:12; 3:10, 8:13).

¹⁰⁷ "Mary's yes changed history." BENEDICT XVI, *María, estrella de la esperanza* (San Pablo, 2014), 13, translator's version. P. Y. ÉMERY, from the Taizé community, says: "Mary is the human being found at the center of the history of salvation. Not necessarily so because she accomplished it, but more simply because of her acceptance. Because by her whole being she was totally near God." Quoted by I. DE LA POTTERIE, *op. cit.* p. xl.

¹⁰⁸ FRANCIS, *Laudato Si'. On Care for Our Common Home*. See no. 99.

¹⁰⁹ SAINT BERNARD, *op. cit.*, "On the Glories of the Virgin Mother: Fourth Sermon," p. 70-72. "We should not be surprised that, faced with the angel's exceptional greeting, the innocent young Mary was filled with astonishment, surprise and bewilderment and could not but ask about the meaning of this strange and unexpected visit. Mary was, if not troubled, then confused, because all of this seemed incomprehensible and disproportionate to her. She would be seized by the overwhelming boldness of an unthinkable possibility. It was spiritual agitation in the face of a scandalous announcement, not in the ethical sense, but in the ontological sense. It was the abysmal shock of an unprecedented and inexplicable message, and therefore mysterious; if not traumatizing, then chilling. The proposal to be the mother of the 'Son of the Most High' is a kind of spiritual earthquake that shakes and removes the foundations of the abyss of the being of that innocent young woman." JOSÉ ANTONIO MERINO, *Reflexión antropológica sobre la Anunciación*, Cartaginensia, vol. XX (2004), p. 335, translator's version. See also: PABLO LARGO, "Yo le dije que sí. Existencia responsable. Lectura de Lc 1, 30-33.38 en clave eclesial," *Eph. Mar.* (1999): 129-140.

Mary is the servant and the believer who in her *fiat* anticipates Christ's "I have come to do your will" (Heb 10:7).

What was asked of Mary was to take a step into the unfathomable, pure faith.¹¹⁰ It is her cousin Elizabeth who recognizes that her response to the angel was out of faith and that is why she exclaims: "Blessed is she who believed" (Lk 1:45).¹¹¹

The incarnation of the word cannot be conceived apart from the freedom of this young woman who by her assent decisively cooperated with the entrance of the eternal into time. Mary is the image of the Church in attentive hearing of the word of God, which took flesh in her. Mary also symbolizes openness to God and others; an active listening which interiorizes and assimilates, one in which the word becomes a way of life.¹¹²

I underline this dimension of faith with this borrowed reflection:

Mary's motherhood is a motherhood of faith, of complete trust in God and of loving obedience to his plans. God chose her, but everything was possible through Mary's faith, through her loving surrender to the divine will. With her faith she has opened the way to God's faithfulness and power. Thanks to Mary, not only will all the promises be fulfilled, but since that moment she also became the source and model of our faith. When we believe in Him, God effectively pours out the gifts of His love upon us. Mary's faith is the key that opened the city of humanity to God. With her "may it be done to me according to thy word," Mary made possible the salvation of the world that God had been preparing from the beginning of time. Our sins delay and complicate God's action; our faith facilitates and accelerates it.¹¹³

This poem *Hágase* [Let it Be Done] by Liliana Franco Echeverri brings us closer to the act of faith, which is expressed in "let it be done", the fruit of radical trust in God:

LET IT BE DONE

You taught us, Mother,
to listen in the night
to the echoes of His voice,
how His Word resounds.

You encouraged us to look at Him

¹¹⁰ Cf. ROMANO GUARDINI, *La Madre del Señor*, op. cit., 55.

¹¹¹ This is the first beatitude in the gospels. The last one –coinciding with the first one– appears at the end of the Gospel of John: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (Jn 20:29). "These words can be linked with the little 'full of grace' of the angel's greeting. Both of these texts reveal an essential Mariological content, namely the truth about Mary, who has become really present in the mystery of Christ precisely because she 'has believed.' *The fullness of grace* announced by the angel means the gift of God himself; *Mary's faith*, proclaimed by Elizabeth at the Visitation, indicates *how* the Virgin of Nazareth responded to this gift. As the Council teaches, 'The obedience of faith (Rom. 16:26; cf. Rom. 1:5; 2 Cor. 10:5-6) must be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God.' This description of faith found perfect realization in Mary. The 'decisive' moment was the Annunciation, and the very words of Elizabeth: 'And blessed is she who believed' refer primarily to that very moment." JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Mater*, nos. 12-13. On this topic, cf. JEAN GALOT, "L'itinéraire de foi de Marie selon l'encyclique 'Redemptoris Mater,'" *Marianum*, 11 (1989): 33-55.

¹¹² BENEDICT XVI, *Verbum Domini*, no. 27.

¹¹³ FERNANDO SEBASTIÁN AGUILAR, *María Madre de Jesús y Madre nuestra* (Sígueme, 2013), translator's version.

always and everywhere,
and to let ourselves be penetrated by His gaze.

We saw you,
with no other argument
than trust,
docile and on the move,
willing to take risks,
free to welcome and begin.

You did His Will,
despite doubts,
disarming fears,
overcoming rumors and prejudices,
criticism and hesitation.

You did His Will,
not clinging to your old loves,
defying the times and customs,
laws and assumptions.

(Translator's version)

Mary's response to the angel contains all the spirituality of a people who have been promised a savior and who have no other treasure than that of waiting with humility and confidence because the promise is laden with grace. Mary feels poor, weak, but confident. She converses with God. She is a servant, but she is free. She trusts in God and responds with freedom and complete surrender. And her faithfulness, through her unconditional collaboration, becomes fruitful. The significance of her response is that by being the mother of the Word, she is the mother of us all. After the announcement and confirmation of the presence of the Spirit in her, she does not become conceited, but rather recognizes herself as a servant, available and willing to serve.

From Mary's "yes" the path to freedom and salvation is opened.¹¹⁴ We have Jesus, who, with his life, his message, his death and resurrection, fulfilling the will of the Father, has carved it out for us. He told us: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:5-6). Earlier the evangelist John noted another statement by Jesus: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). The door to permanent wonder is reopened and we walk hand in hand with Mary. It is not the night or the chaos or the absurd that rules; it is the mystery that illuminates, that deciphers the chaos, that reveals order and that appeals to tenderness and mercy in order to understand human life.

¹¹⁴ "Mary's 'yes' is for all Christians a lesson and example of obedience to the will of the Father, which is the way and means of one's own sanctification." PAUL VI, *Marialis cultus*, no. 21.

The Gospel account of the Incarnation continues with Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth, where her wonder is marked by gratitude and praise. The Magnificat is a faithful response and a canticle of grateful wonder.

4. MARY, ICON AND TEACHER OF WONDER

In the Gospel stories, the image of Mary remains, manifesting the splendor and energy of the Spirit. She offers the richness of her interior, inhabited by the Trinity.¹¹⁵

Mary, full of grace, as a virgin, as a disciple, as a mother of the Messiah and as a spouse of the Holy Spirit, becomes an icon and a teacher of wonder. Her fullness of grace is fullness of beauty, harmony, charm and even splendor. Mary is an icon for being full of grace, overflowing with such a gift, dazzling in her beauty and spreading her capacity for wonder.

She is resplendent and indicative of the most sublime. She shines in such a way that it amazes anyone who contemplates her. Mary listens, meditates, and commits. She is the Mother of Christ and the mother of all men. She is complete fruitfulness. From her position as listener of the Word and Mother of the Word, she becomes a teacher and refers us to "the whole mystery of Christ." The people of God, when they set their eyes on Mary, wonder at and discover the merciful face of God and overflow with joy, giving thanks and singing the glory of God.¹¹⁶

Mary, through the example of her life, inspires wonder. She inserts us into the mystery of life. From her vocation and mission, she teaches us that faith does not require proof. Therefore, it is enough for the believer to contemplate the beauty, the goodness, the mercy that shines from the presence of Mary among us as the servant of the Lord, who is the Savior. Their eyes are open and they realize that there is another dimension from which seemingly absurd events can be viewed.

Three testimonies:

1) Saint Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort:

"Oh, incredible mystery!
I carry her with me,
beautiful, splendid, visible,
but in the darkness of faith."

2) Paul Claudel has a poem from which I take these verses:

Mother of Jesus Christ, I do not come to pray.
I have nothing to offer

¹¹⁵ Regarding icon, cf. PAUL EVDOKIMOV, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty* (Oakwood, 1989); STEFANO DE FIORES, "Icône," *María, Nuovissimo Dictionario* (EDB, 2006); BASILIO PETRÀ, "Icona," *Mariologia* (San Paolo, 2009).

¹¹⁶ Cf. RENÉ LAURENTIN, *Mary in Scripture, Liturgy, and the Catholic Tradition* (Paulist Press, 2014); IGNACE DE LA POTTERIE, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant* (Alba House, 1992); BRUNO FORTE, *María, la donna icona del Mistero, Saggio di mariologia simbolico-narrativa* (Ed. Paoline, 1989).

and nothing to ask.
I come, Mother, only to look at you.
To look at you, to weep for happiness,
knowing that

I am your son, and that you are there...

Because you are beautiful,
because you are immaculate,
The woman at last restored in Grace,
The creature in her first dignity

And in her final glory,
Just as she came forth from God in the morning

Of her original splendor.¹¹⁷

3) José Cristo Rey García Paredes has this prayer to *Maria del Asombro* [Mary of Wonder]:

I am amazed, Mary of Wonder.
The power of the Most High has overshadowed you.
The Spirit made you a workshop, a source, a fruitful and blessed womb,
accomplice in love with its masterpiece.

And in a moment of inspiration,
amazed, enlightened, energized,
you conceived the Holy One, the Son of the Most High, your little Jesus.
And you amazed Joseph, forever graced with your company and blessing.

And you amazed history, woman and mother,
essential link in the Life of the unforeseeable Promise fulfilled in you.
And you amaze those who continue to wonder why something so new,
so unique, so incomprehensible, so virginal, virgin mother of Jesus,
the little son of the Most High, not of Joseph.

Amaze us, Mary, and welcome us into the shadow that surrounds you, the Holy Spirit,
luminous cloud that surrounds you like a cloak,
and take us to the heart of the Mystery of the Incarnation of God.¹¹⁸

4.1. Mary, Icon of Wonder and Gratitude

The statement by Saint John of Damascus is proverbial: “Hence, it is rightly and truly that we call holy Mary the Mother of God, for this name expresses the entire mystery

¹¹⁷ Cf. PAUL CLAUDEL, “La Vierge à Midi,” *Poèmes de Guerre* (N.R.F., 1914-1915).

¹¹⁸ JOSÉ CRISTO REY GARCÍA PAREDES, *Santa María del 2000* (BAC, 1998), 65-66, translator’s version.

of the Incarnation.”¹¹⁹ Mary is an icon of the new Eve, of the People of Israel, of the “wife of Yahweh”, of the Daughter of Zion, of the Ark of the Covenant, of so many women of the Old Testament,¹²⁰ the seat of divine wisdom, the disciple and servant of the Kingdom and the victorious woman of Revelation. Above all, she is an icon of the Church that journeys on pilgrimage “amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God, announcing the cross and death of the Lord until He comes” (LG 8).

For centuries, the people have not stopped reciting with faith the antiphon *Alma Redemptoris Mater*. It refers to the Annunciation and the Motherhood of the Redeemer, which become a sign of hope for humanity under the metaphors of “gate” and “star.” The wonderment of heaven and earth is identified with the astonishment of Mary and of all creation before the mystery of a virgin giving birth to her holy creator.¹²¹

Luke, in his gospel, offers enough information to highlight some of the features by which Mary is presented to us as an icon of wonder and gratitude.

Mary under God’s gaze. God’s gaze causes astonishment in Mary and, through her, in us because it comes loaded with the weight of the promises that are fulfilled in Emmanuel, “God with us” (Mt 1:23). Mary, allowing herself to be looked at, challenges us to accept the gift that is offered to us.

For a true gift to exist, it is not enough that someone has the goodness to give it; it is also necessary that someone has the confidence to accept it. Without a doubt, the Father who gives the Son, the Son who obeys, and the Spirit who pours out this gift, all three are infinite, and the poor Virgin who receives it is a humble creature, like nothing before Divinity. But without this poor nothingness, without Mary’s faith, God’s love for humankind would not have become the gift that was manifested in Christ Jesus. *This is the reason why the Virgin, with her “yes,” truly espouses the love that God wants to manifest to men and allows this love to manifest itself. Thus she is, for us, the Mother of all human consent. Her role in the history of salvation is unique and indispensable.*¹²²

There is no room for wonder if we are closed in on ourselves and do not welcome God’s gift. In the scene of the Annunciation there are two verbs, like two parentheses, which are: the angel “came to” where Mary was and the angel “departed from her.” Luke, in recounting what happened, gives us the key that dignifies our lives - interiority and

¹¹⁹ ST. JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* (CreateSpace, 2014), 294. With this statement BRUNO FORTE begins the third part of his study of Mariology: *Maria, la mujer icono del Misterio* (Sígueme, 1993).

¹²⁰ For example, Maria, “prophetess, sister of Moses” (cf. Ex 15:20-21); Deborah, a judge of Israel, a prophetess (Jud 4:4); Judith, who after the victory over Holofernes, sang a canticle of praise and thanksgiving to God for the liberation of Bethulia (cf. Jdt 16:1-17); Hannah, who, after the birth of her son Samuel, sang in gratitude to the Lord who had heard her prayer (cf. 1 Sam 2:1-10).

¹²¹ Saint John Paul II commented on this antiphon: “‘To the wonderment of nature!’ These words of the antiphon express that wonderment of faith which accompanies the mystery of Mary’s divine motherhood. In a sense, it does so in the heart of the whole of creation, and, directly, in the heart of the whole People of God, in the heart of the Church. How wonderfully far God has gone, the Creator and Lord of all things, in the ‘revelation of himself’ to man! How clearly he has bridged all the spaces of that infinite ‘distance’ which separates the Creator from the creature! If in himself he remains ineffable and unsearchable, still more ineffable and unsearchable is he in the reality of the Incarnation of the Word, who became man through the Virgin of Nazareth.” JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 51.

¹²² Pastoral letter of the Bishops of Switzerland on “*The Blessed Virgin Mary in the history of salvation*” (cf. Marianum 36 [1974] 365-369). Cited –with his italics– by ARISTIDE SERRA, *Maria secondo il Vangelo* (Ed. Queriniana, 1987), translator’s version.

decentralization to give ourselves to God and to others. Only he who is moved by the Absoluteness of God eradicates egocentrism and self-sufficiency.

Mary lives in the presence of the Lord. As a good daughter of the people of Israel, she is aware of her poverty and her smallness. She is surrounded by the natural and simple. In silence she prays and savors the psalms. She hopes that the promises will be fulfilled. She praises and blesses her holy creator, “the first and the last” (Is 41:4; 44:6; 48:12). There is no need to resort to imagination. It is enough to turn to the experience of Elijah: “As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand” (1 Kings 17:1; 18:15; 19:11). To live in the presence is to worship, to pray, to praise. According to this attitude, often repeated by Mary, we understand the firmness and density of her faith and how she surrenders to the divine will. To say “let it be with me according to your word,” she must have maintained such intimacy with the Lord. It is logical, then, that Mary is for us, believers and non-believers, the authentic, free and responsible woman.

Mary, icon of gratitude and praise. We need only meditate on the Magnificat that Luke puts in Mary’s mouth in response to the praise of her cousin Elizabeth.¹²³ There is a tradition in the Old Testament of songs of praise for creation, for mercy, for the help and protection of the people. Whenever something touches us inside and unleashes joy, we sing, we express ourselves, we share. It is the logic of rejoicing. In the Magnificat the People of Israel, Mary and all of humanity join hands. The great event of grace runs from the first promise to the end.

John Paul II left us this beautiful summary of Mary’s canticle:

The words used by Mary on the threshold of Elizabeth’s house are an inspired profession of her faith, in which her response to the revealed word is expressed with the religious and poetical exultation of her whole being towards God. In these sublime words, which are simultaneously very simple and wholly inspired by the sacred texts of the people of Israel, Mary’s personal experience, the ecstasy of her heart, shines forth. In them shines a ray of the mystery of God, the glory of his ineffable holiness, the eternal love which, as an irrevocable gift, enters into human history.¹²⁴

Mary had experienced, imbued with inherited spirituality, the Lord’s abundant and full blessing.¹²⁵ Surely she enjoyed intensely in her heart the goodness and mercy of the Lord and could not keep quiet about it. She felt within herself the liberating revolution of love, which is not linked to material goods but to pure, disseminative generosity. Her

¹²³ To study exegetically this precious canticle of the Magnificat, I refer to ELIO PRETTO, “Magnificat,” *Nuevo Diccionario de Mariología* (Ed. Paulinas, 1888), 1224-1237; ARISTIDE SERRA, *Maria secondo il Vangelo* (Ed. Queriniana, 1987).

¹²⁴ *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 36.

¹²⁵ “Mary’s canticle captures and expresses the intimate joy of the Church and of humanity at the saving mercy of God. Her words echo the enthusiastic hymns and grateful prayers of the prophets: ‘Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you...your heart shall thrill and rejoice... I will glorify my glorious house... to bring your children from far away... for the Holy One of Israel... they shall call you the City of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel... I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God... you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married... Say to daughter Zion: See, your salvation comes... For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth... Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her... They shall bring all your kindred from all the nations... to my holy mountain Jerusalem’ (cf. Is 60-66).” FERNANDO SEBASTIÁN AGUILAR, *Maria, Madre de Jesús y Madre Nuestra* (Sígueme, 2013), 42, translator’s version.

canticle reveals unattainable degrees of intimacy, union, and transformation. Mary thanks and sings of God's mercy, not justice. A mercy that reaches all generations.

The Magnificat, which responds to the immense gift of the incarnation, opens the arc of intense relationships - of God with Mary and through Mary with all people. Mary feels like a daughter, mother and wife to the persons of the Trinity and, at the same time, she makes fertile our relationships of filiation, fraternity and mission. Mary makes her faith transparent and becomes an icon of the new evangelization. She is the cause of joy. She is the star of the new evangelization, constantly renewed. Announcing the wonders that God has done in her, she is the great servant of the Gospel of her Son.¹²⁶

4.2. Mary, Teacher of Wonder

4.2.1. Mary Is Complete Receptivity and Giving.

Ever since the Council,¹²⁷ the instructional mission of Mary has been highlighted.¹²⁸ Pope John Paul II made this summary in an audience:

Although occurring by the work of the Holy Spirit and a Virgin Mother, the birth of Jesus, like that of all human beings, went through the phases of conception, gestation and delivery. In addition, Mary's motherhood was not limited to the biological process of giving birth, but as it happens with every other mother, she also made an essential contribution to her son's growth and development. A mother is not only a woman who gives birth to a child, but one who brings him up and teaches him; indeed, we might well say that, according to God's plan, the educational task is the natural extension of procreation.¹²⁹

Mary's *generativity* and *fruitfulness* has its origin and strength in the presence of the Holy Trinity.¹³⁰ Mary is connected to the source of life and the ultimate goal of life.

¹²⁶ "The Virgin Mother is constantly present on this journey of faith of the People of God towards the light. This is shown in a special way by the canticle of the 'Magnificat,' which, having welled up from the depths of Mary's faith at the Visitation, ceaselessly re-echoes in the heart of the Church down the centuries." *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 35.

¹²⁷ Cf. LG 63: "By her belief and obedience, not knowing man but overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, as the new Eve she brought forth on earth the very Son of the Father, showing an undefiled faith, not in the word of the ancient serpent, but in that of God's messenger. The Son whom she brought forth is He whom God placed as the first-born among many brethren (cf. Rom 8:29), namely the faithful, in whose birth and education she cooperates with a maternal love."

¹²⁸ Popes PAUL VI and JOHN PAUL II made two important references. In the exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (1974) no. 28. And in the *Redemptoris Mater*, nos. 6 and 44. Biblical scholars, theologians and educators have been quick to extract motivations and pedagogical proposals. Cf. STEFANO DE FIORES, "Educatrice," *Maria. Nuovissimo Dizzionario* (EDB, 2006), 637-667, includes an extensive bibliography from the biblical perspective.

¹²⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *General Audience* (December 4, 1996), accessed May 12, 2025, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/blessed-virgin-is-model-of-perfect-love-8840>.

¹³⁰ Cf. JOAQUÍN MARÍA ALONSO, "Maternidad divina y Cristologías recientes," *Eph.Mar.*, 30 (1980): 7-68; I DE LA POTTERIE – X. PIKAZA – J. LOSADA, *Mariología Fundamental. María en el Misterio de Dios* (Secretariado Trinitario, 1995). It is a collaborative book on Mary and the Holy Trinity, with contributions from the Bible, history, liturgy and theology. Other contributors include Salvador Muñoz Iglesias, Augusto Andrés Ortega, José Antonio de Aldama, José Losada, etc. See also STEFANO DE FIORES, "Maria,"

“The Son whom she brought forth is He whom God placed as the first-born among many brethren (cf Rom, 8:29)” (LG 63). Christ, who presents himself as Life, takes shape in Mary’s womb and she continues to accompany him in his human growth. Together with Mary and Joseph, Jesus grew in age, wisdom and grace before God and before men (cf. Lk 2:40 and 51-52).

She also continues to accompany her Son’s disciples. They are her children and “this maternity of Mary in the order of grace began with the consent which she gave in faith at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, and lasts until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect.”¹³¹

The backdrop to Mary’s motherhood is the wonder that will accompany her throughout her life. And she will educate Jesus in the presence and fear of God as she lived it. Mary will never forget the awe caused by the angel’s words and her consent. She remained in constant awe, as indicated above, at what the shepherds, Simeon and Anna, the community of followers and the women in front of the empty tomb said about the Child. Above all, thinking about who Jesus himself was and what he said. Mary is intimately inhabited by the Trinity¹³² and her relationships with each of the three persons leave their mark, both on the education of Jesus and on the education of his disciples.¹³³ Mary’s motherhood, on the one hand, is surrounded by freedom, beauty and splendor. She gives birth to the most handsome of the sons of Adam (Ps 45:2). But on the other hand, she is linked to the labor pains of human history (cf. Rom 8:18- 23). She is the Mother of Jesus, a sign of contradiction, and a sword will pierce her soul (cf. Lk 2:33-35).¹³⁴

Nos. 43 and 44 of *Redemptoris Mater* explain how the Church becomes a Mother by accepting the Word and keeping it faithfully, as well as the exemplary role that Mary plays in the development of her sons and daughters. The Synoptics report these words of Jesus: “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it” (Lk 8:21; Mk 3:34-35; Mt 12:49-50).

The most appropriate area of instruction is the permanent wonder before the mystery of life: the wonder that is aroused by creation that leads to the Creator and the love that surrounds all men for the glory of the Trinity.

Nuovissimo Dizionario (EDB, 2006), which provides an extensive bibliography on Mary and Trinitarian relationships.

¹³¹ LG, 62. There is a detailed explanation in *Redemptoris Mater*, nos. 20-24. Cf. T. F. OSSANNA, “Madre nuestra,” *Nuevo Diccionario de Mariología* (Paulinas, 1986); I. DE LA POTTERIE, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant* (Alba House, 1992).

¹³² Cf. ARISTIDE SERRA, *Maria nelle sacre Scritture* (Servitium, 2016). See chapter dedicated to “María e l’educazione ai valori del Regno, Le coordinate biblico-theologiche,” pp. 347-390. In the first part he talks about how Mary educates Jesus and Jesus learns from Mary. In the second, how Jesus educates Mary and Mary learns from Jesus. And in the third, how Mary educates the Church and the Church learns from Mary.

¹³³ IBID. *op. cit.*, 369ff.

¹³⁴ What sword is this that will pierce the Heart of Mary? It has been said that Simeon’s announcement is the second announcement Mary received, after the Archangel Gabriel. In the first, her vocation to be the Mother of God was announced to the Virgin. In the second, the elderly Simeon refers to the concrete way of living this unique vocation. She will accompany her son in faith,—in permanent discernment—experiencing the pain and suffering of incomprehension, contradiction, persecution and death on the cross. (cf. Una explicación en *Redemptoris Mater*, 16). ARISTIDE SERRA, *Maria en el Evangelio*, *op. cit.*, 105-111. X. PIKAZA. *La Madre de Jesús*, *op. cit.*, 187ff.

4.2.2. *Mary's School, a Place for Listening, Questioning and Making Firm Decisions*

a) *Listening.* It is not the space; it is the person who creates the school. According to Saint Luke, three verbs describe Mary's life: listening, believing and keeping. Before being a mother, she has been a *disciple*. She is blessed for having heard the Word and for fulfilling it (cf. Lk 8:4-21), which are the two conditions of the true disciple. Saint Augustine, commenting on the Annunciation, makes this memorable statement: "When the angel said this, she was so full of faith that she conceived Christ in her mind before doing so in her womb, and said, *Behold the maidservant of the Lord; may it happen to me according to your word.*"¹³⁵ And in another sermon, he had said: "Yes of course holy Mary did the will of the Father. And therefore, it means more for Mary to have been a disciple of Christ than to have been the mother of Christ. It means more for her, an altogether greater blessing, to have been Christ's disciple than to have been Christ's mother."¹³⁶

Mary, like a good Israelite, heard to the word of God in the synagogue. She recited the psalms many times and listened to God's feats of mercy in freeing his people. We can imagine what she would feel when reciting the verses of Psalm 8: "O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!", or 19: "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork." She knew the attributes of the divine word as holy, great, almighty, upright, true; close to humankind, to the poor and the oppressed; a lamp that illumines and heals, that consoles and comforts. She was accustomed to blessing, thanksgiving and praising her Lord.

In the post-conciliar years, the figure of Mary as a disciple of Christ has been given special prominence, emphasizing the moments of listening to what Jesus said and did.¹³⁷ For some, discipleship is the foundation of Mariology. But Mary's condition as a disciple is *atypical*.¹³⁸ Indeed, one can go through all the texts of the Gospels and Acts and see the path by which her condition as disciple of Jesus is affirmed or deduced. From the perspective of discipleship, the figure of Mary is exalted. But her existence is only understandable according to her vocation and mission as Mother of the Messiah, and, therefore, at the culminating moment of the dialogue of salvation (Heb 1:1-4). "When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman..." (Gal 4:4). Mary is thus *constituted in existential dialogue*: always open to listening to the Word¹³⁹ and, from the free acceptance of the Word, always responding - committed - to the plan of salvation.

¹³⁵ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Sermon 215*, 4.

¹³⁶ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Sermon 72A*, 7.

¹³⁷ PAUL VI and JOHN PAUL II spoke of this title. Among the formulas of the Masses on the Virgin Mary, it appears in no. 10 *Saint Mary, Disciple of the Lord*. Cf. JOSÉ CRISTO REY GARCÍA PAREDES, "María Primera discípula y seguidora de Jesús," *Eph. Mar.*, 47 (1997): 33-56; A. MARTÍNEZ SIERRA, "María, discípula del Señor," *Est. Mar.*, 63 (1997): 203-218; ANTONIO M. CALERO, "María: de Madre a discípula," *Est. Mar.*, 64 (1998): 153ff; CARLOS G. ÁLVAREZ, *Maria, discípula de Jesús y mensajera del Evangelio* (Ed. Paulinas, 2007); MICHELE G. MASCHIARELLI, "Discepola," *Mariologia* (San Paolo, 2009), 410-418.

¹³⁸ STEFANO DE FIORES, "Discepola," *Nuovissimo Dizionario*, *op. cit.*, 495. In successive pages he addresses how Mary is an authentic disciple of Jesus, reviewing the response to her vocation, examining her permanent and progressive mystagogy and her testimony. He pays special attention to Mary as a protodisciple in relation to the disciples of Jesus due to her eminent representation, her links with Christ and her being a moral model of discipleship.

¹³⁹ Cf. M. J. MARIÑO, "K. Rahner: María oyente de la Palabra, Madre del Señor y hermana nuestra," *Eph Mar.* 62 (2012): 5-30.

It is beautiful to contemplate the number of works of art, statues or paintings, which reflect the attitude of recollection, of internalization, of listening that the image of Mary presents. This is how the faithful see her and how the artists see her, always listening to the voice – the Word – of God, always listening to the prayers of the people.

In Mary's school, the spirituality of listening and meditation is encouraged. The first commandment resounds: "Hear, O Israel" (Dt 6:4), words with which the covenant is sealed. It is not just about keeping quiet, but about listening and allowing ourselves to be inhabited by the transforming Word, by the mystery of God in us. Mary opens the way for us to obedience (ob-audiens) and to be faithful until the end, even to the cross.¹⁴⁰

b) In Mary's school, *questioning* has a primary role. As it had in her. "*How can this be?*" Wonder awakens questioning and seeks to bring the extraordinary closer to the everyday. Also, the other way around: discovering the extraordinary in the everyday; in the small, the wonderful and sublime. Mary teaches us the grammar of the incarnation and includes questioning in it. A far-reaching question of enormous significance.

In the first chapter of this book, I wrote an *excursus* on "wonder and questioning". I refer to what I said in it. I just want to insist that, as Rainer M. Rilke said, it is necessary to "live the questions."¹⁴¹ We must return to the ultimate questions and allow ourselves to be illuminated and moved by what is coming. Saint Augustine was a master in this art of asking questions and wondering. "I spoke to all the things that are about me, all that can be admitted by the door of the senses, and I said, 'Since you are not my God, tell me about him. Tell me something of my God.' Clear and loud they answered, 'God is he who made us.' I asked these questions simply by gazing at these things, and their beauty was all the answer they gave."¹⁴² An appearance that does not remain on the outside, but is "unveiled" – as Heidegger would say – and leads us to beauty.

Questioning arises from the mind and heart that are seeking. "Already in the Old Testament the meaning of this search is portrayed in an expression of outstanding beauty and extraordinary spiritual content: 'To seek the face of the Lord.' There will not be faithfulness if it is not rooted in this ardent, patient, and generous search; if there is not in man's heart a question to which only God gives an answer, or rather, to which only God is the answer."¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ "In summary, we are in the presence of a spirituality of listening, of which Mary is the typical exemplar. The Word heard generates in her a seer. The Word accepted makes her fruitful in a womb, not of paper, but of the flesh of the Logos. Her presence to the Churches awakens in their conscience how they are to exist: to whom they are to listen, to rise as Word from the reading of Scripture, to make readers-hearers rise to a good and eternal life. In the awareness that the ear is the origin of man, who is born from hearing; listening makes seers and opens eyes. In the clear awareness that without foundation and outlet, a religiosity of the visual and the miraculous without hearing, and in the emphasizing that the very category of the optical can be recovered by listening: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory" (1John 1:1-4). The Word has made itself visible to eyewitnesses, the word hidden on the page, and not only that, makes itself audible to his constituents today by making them his legible letter (2 Cor 3:2-3) and icon of his face (Acts 6:15), his vision." GIANCARLO BRUNI, "Perspectives de spiritualité mariana," in ITALIAN THEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, *Maria. Un caso serio per la teologia* (Glosa, 1919), 355.

¹⁴¹ RAINER M. RILKE, *Letters to a Young Poet*. Letter Four.

¹⁴² SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, Book X, 6.

¹⁴³ JOHN PAUL II, *Homily* (Mexico City, January 26, 1979). A careful reflection on the search, cf. JOSEF OTÓN, *Búsqueda* (San Pablo, 2019).

Mary teaches us to see the relationship between questioning and attention. Questioning opens us up and, if we are not attentive to reality, we will not discover the mystery it contains. In the face of the various situations in life, Mary continues to suggest to us the question that was key in her life and mission: “How can this be?” In connection with this, she had to mature in her response to other questions that Jesus asked her: “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Lk 2:49). “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?” (Jn 2:4). “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” (Mt 12:48).¹⁴⁴

When Luke says that Mary “kept all these things,” he adds that “she reflected on them in her heart” (2:19). The verb translated as reflected on literally means “to put together” and therefore suggests an effort to bring the events together and synthesize them. She is faced with events that are difficult to understand. Mary tried to explain them one to the other.¹⁴⁵

Mary teaches us more than to store words or recount the wonders that amazed people, to work with the words from the perspective of gratitude, internalization and the harmony that comes from the search for truth, goodness and beauty.

c) As a teacher, Mary teaches us to *make decisions*. She was aware of what it meant to fulfill the law (cf. Lk 2:22-27). No one in history has been offered a greater proposition than that of being the mother of God. Mary, alone before the mystery, accepts it with courage and responds: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord” (Lk 1:38). This decision, full of availability, docility and generosity, included many other decisions. Mary places herself at the service of the person and the cause of her Son: the Kingdom of God.¹⁴⁶ Pope Francis recalled this at the beginning of his pontificate: “Mary as a good mother teaches us to be, like her, capable of making definitive decisions... in the full freedom with which she said ‘yes’ to the plan God had for her life.”¹⁴⁷

At the foot of the cross, Jesus welcomes the beloved disciple and reaffirms her motherhood over all people. If the hour had not yet come in Cana, at Calvary the Paschal hour was fulfilled – the hour of boundless love, of the surrender of the Spirit,¹⁴⁸ and of being reborn through the water and blood that flowed from the open side.¹⁴⁹ It is also “the hour” of the disciple and mother. At Calvary she receives the last lesson of Jesus fulfilling

¹⁴⁴ JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 17: “The Mother of that Son, therefore, mindful of what has been told her at the Annunciation and in subsequent events, bears within herself the radical ‘newness’ of faith: the beginning of the New Covenant. This is the beginning of the Gospel, the joyful Good News. However, it is not difficult to see in that beginning a particular heaviness of heart, linked with a sort of ‘night of faith’—to use the words of St. John of the Cross—a kind of ‘veil’ through which one has to draw near to the Invisible One and to live in intimacy with the mystery. And this is the way that Mary, for many years, lived in intimacy with the mystery of her Son, and went forward in her ‘pilgrimage of faith,’ while Jesus ‘increased in wisdom...and in favor with God and man’ (Lk. 2:52). God’s predilection for him was manifested ever more clearly to people’s eyes. The first human creature thus permitted to discover Christ was Mary, who lived with Joseph in the same house at Nazareth.”

¹⁴⁵ JEAN GALOT, *La fe de María y la nuestra* (Mensajero, 1975), 144, translator’s version. Cf. HANS URS VON BALTAHSAR, *Mary for Today* (Ignatius Press, 1988), 37-38.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. LG, no. 56.

¹⁴⁷ FRANCIS, *Address* (May 4, 2013).

¹⁴⁸ Mary on Calvary is the universal Mother by virtue of the Spirit given by Jesus. Cf. ARISTIDE SERRA, *Maria nelle sacre Scritture*, op. cit., 381.

¹⁴⁹ “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (Jn 13:1). His love went to the extreme because “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13). Jesus gave of himself in the most complete way, in the midst of suffering and humiliation. Thus death grants him the greatest glory. In fact, there is no glory more authentic than that of loving. “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8).

the will of the Father and his last will for his Mother: “Woman, here is your son” (cf. Jn 19:25-27). The extent of her compassionate motherhood is made evident. She has compassion on her Son and compassion on her new sons and daughters.¹⁵⁰ But in holy silence. A fruitful silence. Mary’s spiritual and eschatological motherhood begins. She shows us the One who is Truth, Beauty, Life. Not to fascinate us, but to transform our hearts according to the will of the Father and to announce the joy of salvation. Mary makes us sons and daughters, with the spirit of disciples and missionaries of the Kingdom.

4.2.3. *Teacher Through Exemplariness and Mystagogue*

Mary instructs through who she is. The chosen one, full of grace, the blessed one, the one filled by the Holy Spirit. The people sing to her: “Hail! thou root, hail! thou gate, from whom unto the world, a light has arisen.” Her beauty is that of a woman fully realized according to God’s plan: woman, virgin and mother. She is faultless and completely holy, overflowing with joy and generating hope.¹⁵¹ She is the “Star of the Sea” loaded with eschatological meaning, as Saint Bernard cried out.¹⁵²

The clearest expression of her exemplariness is her faithfulness. The first trait of her exemplariness is faith. Not in vain is she called *she who believed* (cf. Lk 1:45). Mary sought the will of God, listened to the Word and put it into practice (cf. Lk 11:28). This was her consistency and her exemplariness. Her listening and speaking are marked by transparency and authenticity. Of complete exemplariness. As Pedro Casaldàliga says:

If the Word becomes true flesh,
I do not believe in the word that adulterates.
I make a profession of clarity.¹⁵³

Mary’s exemplariness is rooted in openness and welcome, in simplicity and humility, in purity of heart and in availability.

When Christ, in the Sermon on the Mount, repeatedly called the *anaw*, the poor, blessed in the eight Beatitudes, he did not have any abstract Christian ideal in mind. He had already experienced the concrete realization of this ideal, in the house in Nazareth, in the persons of Mary and Joseph. The “eight” Beatitudes, inspired by the Holy Ghost, are not unattainable Christian ideals. They constitute Christ’s canonization of his mother Mary and of all who live according to her example.¹⁵⁴

She cultivated interiority, remained fully available, meditated in her heart, lived with great discretion and was attentive to the surrounding reality in order to realize the needs of others: “They have no wine” (Jn 2:1-11). The faithful people recognize in her the type and symbol of the tenderness and mercy that her Son embodies and preaches.

¹⁵⁰ I refer here to no. 24 of *Redemptoris Mater* and the entire third part of the encyclical.

¹⁵¹ GREGORIO PALAMAS comments: “[Mary] is the cause of what came before her, the champion of what came after her and the agent of things eternal. She is the substance of the prophets, the principle of the apostles, the firm foundation of the martyrs and the premise of the teachers of the Church. She is the glory of those upon earth, the joy of celestial beings, the adornment of all creation. She is the beginning and the source and root of unutterable good things; she is the summit and consummation of everything holy.” “Homily on the Dormition,” *Patrologia Graeca* (PG), 151. 473A.

¹⁵² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 6.

¹⁵³ PEDRO CASALDÀLIGA, *Sonetos neobíblicos precisamente* (Ed. Lascasiana, 1996), 21, translator’s version.

¹⁵⁴ EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX, *Mary, Mother of the Redemption* (Sheed and Ward, 1964), 31.

Mary's best teaching is her *faithfulness* to the presence of the Trinity within her. She was consistent throughout her life. It is enough to review her journey. She was always adherent to Christ and identified with Him. Jesus came to do the will of the Father and Mary affirmed her "fiat" in response to the words of the angel. She abided in love (cf. Jn 15:9-10). She was always looking towards Christ and his mission. She was constant in love. She did not care about the poverty in the manger of Bethlehem (Lk 2:1-20); she risked emigration to Egypt (Mt 2:13-20); she faced Simeon's prophecy with fortitude (Lk 2:33-35); she accepted the mysterious words of Jesus with patience when he remained in the temple (Lk 2:50); she accepted with dignity the incomprehension and contempt for Jesus on the part of her fellow citizens (Mk 3:21-22) and she assumed with magnanimity the mission Jesus gave her on the cross (Jn 19:26-27).

This faithfulness to the mission of Jesus' work is indicated by Luke in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:14). After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, there she is in the midst of her Son's disciples, praying and waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The One who had covered her in the incarnation of the Word descends upon Mary and the Apostles. As Jesus had promised: "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (Jn 14:26). Mary, who "kept everything in her heart," was able to find an explanation for some of her questions and reposition what she had experienced and learned with her Son. She, who had such a close connection with the Spirit, became the seat of wisdom, mother of good counsel and queen of the apostles.

Mary took a mystagogical path, of initiation into the experience of God. In the words of Marta Medina, these types of paths "must begin by facilitating people being attracted by Him and having an encounter with His beauty."¹⁵⁵ Under the action of the Spirit, this mother reveals what is inside her and initiates the nascent Church into the mysteries of her Son's life: the group of the Twelve, the women, the brothers of Jesus. She exercises her mission as a mystagogue¹⁵⁶ in the early community according to her condition as disciple and mother. Who better than the Mother of Jesus could illuminate and explain the mysteries of salvation to the disciples? Who better than her can accompany us on the path of following Jesus? Mary, being a woman in the Church, a disciple, becomes a teacher and educates from the perspective of proximity, simplicity and tenderness.¹⁵⁷ She who summarizes the mysteries in her heart, spreads the seed of the Word, helps us to see all the flowers and cultivate them so that they bear fruits of filiation and fraternity. "Sinful humanity flowered in Mary, the All-Beautiful!" (Chiara Lubich).

¹⁵⁵ M. MEDINA, *Seducidos y transformados* (Ed. Paulinas, 2020), 106, translator's version.

¹⁵⁶ MARCELLA FARINA, "Educazione-mistagogia," *Mariologia* (San Pablo, 2009), 475-472.

¹⁵⁷ "In Mary the Lord rejects the temptation to make protagonists of the force of intimidation and power, of the cry of the strongest or of the practice of imposing oneself on the basis of lies and manipulation. With Mary the Lord safeguards believers so they do not harden their hearts and may constantly know the renewed and renewing power of solidarity, capable of listening to God's pulse beating in the heart of the men and women of our peoples." FRANCIS, *Homily* (December 12, 2018). "As some exegetes note, the 'revelation at Cana' (see Jn 2:1-12) was also written with the 'theophany of Sinai' in mind (see Ex 19:1-9). It would be difficult not to see the special affinity which exists among the promise of Israel ('Everything the Lord has said, we will do; in Ex 19:8), the command of the risen Lord to the Eleven (to teach disciples to carry out all that he had commanded in Mt 28:20a) and the words addressed by Mary to the servants at the wedding at Cana ('Do whatever he tells you' in Jn 2:5b)." ORDER OF SERVANTS OF MARY, *Do Whatever He Tells You* (General Curia, Rome, 1983), no. 47.

4.2.4. *Do Whatever He Tells You*

We know that this expression of Mary, considered her testament, since it is the last time she speaks in the gospels, contains something more than her mediating and intercessory role. It has a lot to do with “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” It is opening wide the window to the mystery of Christ, our savior. The wonder that the birth of Christ causes is aroused at the beginning of the revelation of Christ through signs, according to the fourth Gospel.

Many considerations have poured forth from exegetes and theologians about the story of the wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-12). Because of the relationships that exist between Jesus, Mary and the disciples; the dialogue that is established between them and, in particular, with Mary, whom he calls woman;¹⁵⁸ the expressions that refer to Sinai and the New Covenant; the reference to Jesus’ “hour”; the significance of turning water into wine as the first sign or epiphany pointed out by John; the parallelism with the text of John 19:25-27; the allusion to the “third day” – which has so many resonances for a new beginning and the resurrection; the mysticism of the wedding of the Bridegroom, etc., one can appreciate the richness of the content of the story, full of symbolism and complexity, which makes a concise explanation difficult.¹⁵⁹ Fr. Ignace de la Potterie goes so far as to say that “The sign at Cana is the ‘archetype’ of all those which will follow, it is the key which permits us to read and to understand the rest of the Fourth Gospel.”¹⁶⁰

Once John’s account has been reread in the light of the Paschal Mystery and the teaching of the Spirit, what happens there has greater power for understanding our salvation. Mary occupies a central place alongside Jesus. She is at the origin and accompanies Jesus in his redemptive mission. She acts as a mother who gives birth to a new birth. The first sign opens the path of revelation until his hour is fulfilled. The end of Jesus’ hour is the beginning of Mary’s hour in accepting the beloved disciple. Starting with what happened at the wedding at Cana, we must emphasize several aspects of Mary’s educational mission that lead us to the mystery and place us between the nostalgia of first love and the joy of full participation in the wedding of the Bridegroom.

Mary’s request. Open to their needs, she realizes that they have no wine. But her indication goes beyond the material coincidence that the groom does not have the wine to continue the party. She is attentive to the wine of joy for a world that lacks hope. She becomes a server of the wine of life. The wine is the sign of the new covenant.

¹⁵⁸ This epithet “woman” evokes Eve (Gen 2-3), the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:21) and the one who was at the foot of Jesus’ cross (Jn 19:27). Cf. JOSÉ CRISTO REY GARCÍA, *Mariología, op. cit.*, 139-141.

¹⁵⁹ I refer, first to the Pontifical Magisterium: PAUL VI, *Marialis cultus*, no. 57; JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Mater*, nos. 21-24; BENEDICT XVI, *María estrella de la esperanza* (San Pablo, 2014), 37-44; FRANCIS, *Catechesis* (June 8, 2016); IBID, *Homily to Families* (July 6, 2015); IBID, *Angelus* (20 January 2019). I refer to Aristide Serra, who deals with this topic in several of his works. To authors already cited: Ignace de la Potterie, José Cristo Rey García Paredes, Domiciano Fernández, Xabier Pikaza, Bruno Forte, Cándido Pozo, Klemens Stock. I add: MAX THURIAN, *Mary, Mother of Lord, Figure of Church* (Faith Press Ltd, 1963); RAYMOND E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John* (Anchor Bible, 1966); RUDOLF SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Crossroad Pub Co, 1980); MERCEDES NAVARRO, “La mujer en las bodas de Caná. Un relato de los orígenes,” in ÁNGEL APARICIO (ed) *Maria del Evangelio* (Publicaciones Claretianas, 1994), 295-326; “Le nozze di Cana,” in special edition of the magazine *Theotokos*, (1999): 1; LUIS DíEZ MERINO, “Bodas de Caná: esperando contra toda esperanza,” *Estudios Marianos*, (2015): 51-90.

¹⁶⁰ IGNACE DE LA POTTERIE, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant* (Alba House, 1992), 176.

At Cana in Galilee there is shown only one concrete aspect of human need, apparently a small one of little importance (“They have no wine”). But it has a symbolic value: this coming to the aid of human needs means, at the same time, bringing those needs within the radius of Christ’s messianic mission and salvific power. Thus, there is a mediation: Mary places herself between her Son and mankind in the reality of their wants, needs and sufferings. She puts herself “in the middle,” that is to say she acts as a mediatrix not as an outsider, but in her position as mother. She knows that as such she can point out to her Son the needs of mankind, and in fact, she “has the right” to do so.¹⁶¹

The wine comes in abundance. They filled the jars to the brim (v.7). The *fullness* of salvation comes. Without limitations on time or quality. Every man and woman is invited to a joyful encounter with the Father.

Unshakable faith in Jesus. In the indication that Mary makes to Jesus and in the response that Jesus gives her calling her woman,¹⁶² two ways of seeing things intersect, which are resolved when he accepts his mother’s request. The lesson that Mary offers us is that she places herself as a believing woman who does not put herself at the center, but rather thinks based on Jesus’ actions.¹⁶³ Mary, with her faith, enters into Jesus’ “hour”, which is the hour of his passion, death and resurrection, and prompts us to believe in Him and to proclaim to people that He is alive.

Two imperatives for the Church on the journey. These are Gospel imperatives: “Listen to him!” (Mt 17:5) and “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). Jesus opens his ministry with the sign of the conversion of water into wine, which is a great invitation to the feast of the Kingdom. “What John places on the lips of the Mother, Matthew presents as a task given by Christ to the apostles, to the Church: Mary and the Church are united in leading men and women to obedience to the gospel of Christ. Both Mary and the Church refer back to the only Law that saves: the words of Jesus (see Jn 6:68).”¹⁶⁴

Mary, icon and teacher of wonder, leads us to Jesus. I echo this passage from Aristide Serra:

At the top of the scale of beings we find Christ, “the most handsome of men” (cf. Ps 45:2). The beauty of Jesus is in his always fulfilling the will of the Father. He is the “beautiful” shepherd (Jn 10:11,14), because he gives his life for the sheep, in accordance with the command received from the Father (Jn 10:15,17-18). “Beautiful” is the wine given by him at Cana (Jn 2:10), as a symbol of his word which is the definitive revelation of the Father (Jn 14:6-11). “Beautiful” are the works done by Jesus (Jn 10:32, 33), because they reveal the Father’s love for the world (Jn 10:32; cf. 3:17; 10:14-15; 14:10, 11). In a phrase: in Jesus the face of the Father shines (Jn 14:9).

¹⁶¹ JOHN PAUL II. *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 21.

¹⁶² Scholars get carried away in looking at the significance of Jesus’ response to his mother calling her “woman.” It is not noted whether Mary was troubled or confused by Jesus’ words. Many state his response as a question and, therefore, it is easy to understand that there is a lot between the two, since she has given him a body. He is her Son. The most important thing is to see that the text makes us think about Mary’s ability to listen and trust in her Son. It is clear that Jesus depends on *the hour* that the Father has indicated to him. On the other hand, no one doubts the crucial role that Jesus’ Mother plays in the wedding at Cana.

¹⁶³ “In her act of faith and in her prayer, Mary appears as one who represents humanity in difficulty and Judaism in its messianic hope; she is the type of humanity and of Israel which are awaiting their deliverance, a mysterious deliverance for humanity, a messianic but still very human deliverance for Israel.”, MAX THURIAN, *Mary, Mother of Lord, Figure of Church* (Faith Press Ltd, 1963), 136.

¹⁶⁴ ORDER OF SERVANTS OF MARY, *Do Whatever He Tells You* (General Curia, 1983), no. 47.

Against the backdrop of these premises, it will not be difficult to discern the “beauty” of Mary, as “the face that unto Christ / Hath most resemblance” (Dante, *Paradiso*, 32, 85). The formal reason for her splendor is the perfect consonance of her being with the word of the Lord. The fiat of the Annunciation and the “do whatever he tells you” of Cana are the two poles that attract the rays of divine beauty to her person. The two scenes (several exegetes assure, starting from the patristic tradition) are ideally related to the ratification of the covenant on Mount Sinai. If there Israel was “the most beautiful among the nations,” the “pure bride,” what can we say of Mary, who is the perfective term of ancient Israel and the archetype of the holy Church?

“Do whatever the Lord tells you” is the principle of supreme beauty. Following Saint Mary, the Church (heart of the world) moves to meet Christ dressed as a bride “in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle... holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27).¹⁶⁵

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Jean Guitton went so far as to say: “I am convinced that this is the hour of Mary and that the Holy Spirit is blowing strongly in this direction. In the 21st century, Christians will understand Mary within the Trinity... The 21st century will be the century of Mary.”

These reflections call for some guidance on how to cultivate wonder at the mystery in which we find ourselves rooted. They will be developed in the third chapter.

¹⁶⁵ ARISTIDE SERRA, *Maria secondo il Vangelo*, *op. cit.*, 136-137, translator’s version.

CHAPTER III

CULTIVATING WONDER BY WAY OF HUMILITY

1. NEW INVITATION

On February 2, 2020, Pope Francis emphasized the wonder of the characters who appear in the Gospel from the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (cf. Lk 2:22-40).

Mary and Joseph: “marvelled at what was said about him” (v. 33-621). Wonder is also an explicit reaction of the aged Simeon, who sees with his own eyes in the Child Jesus the redemption of God for his people: that redemption which he had awaited for years. And the same is true of Anna who “gave thanks to God” (v. 38) and went about pointing Jesus out to the people. (...) These figures of believers were wrapped in wonder because they allowed themselves to be captivated by and involved in the events that occurred right before their eyes. The ability to be amazed at things around us promotes religious experience and makes the encounter with the Lord more fruitful. On the contrary, the inability to marvel makes us indifferent and widens the gap between the journey of faith and daily life.¹⁶⁶

This new invitation from Pope Francis to cultivate wonder to dignify our Christian life encourages us to look to Mary, the prototype and teacher of wonder. We must turn to her, the one who is “full of grace,” as the “dawn of salvation” and as the great mystagogue who introduces us to the great Mystery of love.

To go to Mary is to go to the school of Christianity; to understand her is to possess the grammar to understand humanity and speak the language of life. She is the first of the long entourage of this regenerated humanity, fallen but regenerated, prodigal but regenerated; in her is the alphabet of life.

We could compare her to the role DNA plays in the living cell. DNA contains all the genes, which in turn contain all the functions of the future organism. The whole in the minimum, the map of the future, in the present. There is a face and a body in the first cell, and a life force that will never end.

The genetics of the first cell already contain a plan, the energy and the codes for the future person to achieve all their beauty, their potential and the characteristics that will make them unique.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ FRANCIS, *Angelus* (February 2, 2020).

¹⁶⁷ ERMES RONCHI, *Las casas de María. La acogida en lo cotidiano* (Paulinas, 2012), 133, translator's version.

This same author, a little further on, says:

The image of DNA can help us understand how Mary's presence operates: not as a model of passive reference, nor as simple merciful intercession, but as a vital force that germinates. Her motherhood is not over, she continues to care for us in God's today; she guides us from within, pushing us towards her same destiny with a continuous work, a creative dynamic, a perennial germination, similar to the invisible and persistent work that the genetic information of my first cell continues to develop in me, in my organism, in my growth and maturation, if I welcome it among my 'beloved things', like John, in my home, like in Jerusalem.¹⁶⁸

In the Magnificat, Mary, the humble servant and joyful believer, reveals the fullness of the love that God has for her and the love that he has for people. For this reason, she proclaims the greatness of the Lord (cf. Lk 1:46-48). Maria Ko Ha Fong gives this richly nuanced description:

The canticle of the Magnificat is the poem of *tota pulchra*, of the most beautiful creature, sung in a moment of poetic rapture; it is a revelation of the mystery of God that is hinted at in Mary's experience, a hymn of praise and thanksgiving, a creed that expresses Mary's faith in God, her Savior, a reminiscence or memorial that evokes again and again the great works that the Lord has done for her and for the world, good news that fills with joy and exultation, an anticipation of the evangelical beatitudes, a celebration of the mystery of God's encounter with humanity, a prayer in spirit and truth, a prophecy, a penetrating reading of history and the world, a song of God's victory, a paschal *exsultet*, a song to life, a song of the pilgrim Church. In short, it is the mirror of Mary's soul, the reflection of the "great works" that the Lord has accomplished in her and throughout history. It is the synthesis of salvation history.¹⁶⁹

In order to recover or foster wonder before the mystery of God we have to let ourselves be surprised and affected, just like we have to start searching and allow ourselves to be invaded by the presence of beauty, truth and joy in everyday life. To this end, I invite you to explore the way of humility and simplicity.

2. THE WAY OF HUMILITY AND SIMPLICITY

In ordinary language the word humility seems to be absent. It is very difficult to value and even more difficult to live humility in a society in which people idolize themselves and are carried away by self-sufficiency; in which they become arrogant and full of presumption; in which they do not recognize their limits and want to acquire everything through their own efforts. Humility and simplicity are virtues that are little appreciated in our times. There are even writers who, when listing virtues, do not include humility and

¹⁶⁸ IBID. *op. cit.*, 132, translator's version.

¹⁶⁹ MARIA KO HA-FONG, *Magnificat. El canto de María de Nazaret* (Sígueme, 2005), translator's version. Cf. RENÉ COSTE, *The Magnificat: The Revolution of God* (Claretian Publications, 1988); ARISTIDE SERRA, *Maria secondo il Vangelo* (Ed. Queriniana, 1987), 45-95; ALBERTO VALENTINI, *Maria secondo le Scritture, Figlia di Sion e Madre del Signore* (EDB, 2007), 133-164; IBID. "Magnificat," in STEFANO DI FIORES-VALERIA FERRARI- SALVATORE M. PERELLA, *Mariologia* (San Paolo, 2009), 785-790.

simplicity.¹⁷⁰ Appearances and sensitive emotions count more. It is obvious that wonder is muffled and astonishment does not emerge. But people, even today, just like always, are restless. They seek the face of God, even if they do not say it or are unable to express it. Rilke, the great master of the process from the visible to the invisible; from the unsayable to the sayable; from silence to the word, rightly said:

Happy are those who know
that behind all words
stands the Unsayable.¹⁷¹
(translator's version)

2.1. Your face, Lord, do I seek (Ps 27)

Throughout history, humanity has not lacked men and women who seek God. With a different name, but always in tension towards the Absolute. They seek the truth, they seek peace, and they all walk towards the Mystery, towards the Eternal. In reality, all things, even those that go unnoticed, speak of God.

Creation is there singing, in uninterrupted silence, the glories of its Creator (Ps 8, 19, 33, 104, 135, etc.). We men and women have been endowed with senses to see them, to hear their voices of praise and to enjoy their wonders. Above all, we have been given the intelligence and heart to recognize and be grateful for them.¹⁷² “Search, and you will find,” says Jesus (Lk 11:9).

¹⁷⁰ To counter this statement, I would like to quote two authors who highlight them: André Comte-Sponville and Carlos Díaz. There will be references to humility, I will include this praise on simplicity in advance: “Simplicity means forgetting oneself, forgetting one’s pride and fear: tranquillity versus restlessness, joy versus worry, lightness versus seriousness, spontaneity versus reflection, love versus self-love, truth versus pretense. The self persists, but as if lightened, purified, liberated (‘unfettered,’ Bobin says, ‘bound no more to any kingdom;’). (...) Mercy takes the place of innocence for him, or perhaps it is innocence that takes the place of mercy. He does not take himself seriously or give tragic dimensions to himself or his life. He goes his merry way, lightheartedly and peacefully. No goal before him, he feels no longing for the past, no impatience about the future. The world is his kingdom, the present his eternity, and that is enough for him. He has nothing to prove, since he does not seek to impress. He seeks nothing at all, since everything is there for him. What could be simpler than simplicity? What could be lighter? Simplicity is the virtue of wise men and the wisdom of saints.” ANDRÉ COMTE-SPONVILLE, *A Small Treatise on the Great Virtues* (Henry Hold and Co., 1996), 156.

¹⁷¹ Cf. JOSE MANUEL CUESTA ABAD - AMADOR VEGA, *La Novena Elegía. Lo decible y lo indecible en Rilke* (Siruela, 2018), 22.

¹⁷² “Every worldly being is epiphanic... This phenomenal form of the entity is the way it expresses itself; it is a kind of voiceless, yet not inarticulate, speech. It is the way in which things express not only themselves but the whole of reality existing in them as well, a reality that, as *non subsistens*, points to the subsisting real: ‘The heavens are telling the glory of God... Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world’ (Ps 19:2-4). Or with the poet: ‘A song slumbers inside all things/And there they dream on and on;/The world begins to sing./Hearken but to its magic word!’ Now it is the poet who ‘can express what each thing wants to say’ (Clausen). Goethe would be more reserved, only averring that everything presents a ‘figure’ that the trained eye knows how to read as a ‘molded form that develops organically’. Again the paradox of veiling in the act of unveiling is at play here... The freer, the suppler the shaping form is, all the more articulately and in a uniquely personal way does it express itself. This is clearest in human language. But as language also testifies, the form’s very freedom of expression also allows the expressing being to hide itself all the more deeply: freedom as such cannot be seen directly [*herzeigt*], however much it can point to itself [*angezeigt*]. ...astonishment is the first reaction...” HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Epilogue* (Ignatius Press, 2004), Part II. 5, Kindle.

If wonder disappears from our lives, irrelevance and monotony emerge. There is no place for truth, beauty and meaning. Fellowship becomes sterile and boring. Nothing matters. The scale of values evaporates.¹⁷³ The quality of life is fading and science is not advancing nor is culture enriched.

Only those who marvel and are amazed enjoy good human and spiritual health. That is to say, they feel free, they are able to notice what is around them and to reflect on the signs and meaning of what they perceive. The author of Psalm 19 concludes: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer” (v. 14). Hence, cultivating wonder is a conscious exercise that there is something, a mystery, that sustains us and lives within us. No one can undertake this task if they are distracted by things, if they let themselves be carried away by events, if they have lost curiosity and have put aside all concern for the ultimate meaning of everything around them.

“Seek the Lord and live” (Am 5:6). “Let the oppressed see it and be glad; you who seek God, let your hearts revive” (Ps 69:32). Humility in the seeking. Beyond our desire and at the depths of our deepest longing is the face of God who looks upon us with benevolence and recreates us. Listen to the inner cry and set out with the humility of the prodigal son (cf. Lk 15:18-21). With good reason, St. John of the Cross, in no. 40 of his *Sayings of Light and Love*, says: “What you most seek and desire you will not find by this way of yours, nor through high contemplation, but in much humility and submission of heart.”

Let’s get back to the wonders of the universe. Jesus offers us his example. He is filled with wonder as he contemplates the creatures of the earth and raises his mind and heart to the Father: “Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?... Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these” (Mt 6:26-29).

Saint Paul VI, in his meditation in the face of death, expressed himself this way:

No less worthy of exaltation and of happy amazement is the canvas that surrounds the life of man: this immense, mysterious, magnificent world, this universe of so many forces, so many laws, so many beauties, so many depths. It is a lovely view. It seems like extravagance without measure. Looking back retrospectively, I am overcome by the pain of not having admired this canvas enough, of not having observed how much the wonders of nature, the surprising riches of the macrocosm and the microcosm, deserved. Why have I not studied enough, explored, admired the dwelling in which life develops? What an unforgivable distraction, what reprehensible superficiality!¹⁷⁴

That is an example of wonder, recognition, and gratitude. Deep down, it is an example of humility and simplicity of heart. Not all Christians reach this level of awareness and spiritual maturity in their search. They suffer confusion and bewilderment. There are those who manage to turn to prayer, like Manuel Machado, who said:

¹⁷³ Cf. JOSEP OTÓN, *Búsqueda* (San Pablo, 2019).

¹⁷⁴ PAUL VI, “Mediación ante la muerte,” *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in Spanish, XI, no. 32 (August 12, 1979):1 & 12, translator’s version.

I don't know, I don't know, Lord, where I'm going
running after your shadow... Anywhere I go
searching for you I become distressed and wiped out.

Give me your hand, Lord, for I am blind!
Put me on the path where I can find you:
My Life, my Truth and my Way!
(Translator's version)

St. Anselm, in the first chapter of the *Proslogion*, asks:

And you, O Lord, how long? How long, Lord, will you be unmindful of us? How long will you turn your countenance from us? When will you look upon us and hear us? When will you enlighten our eyes and show your countenance to us? When will you give yourself again to us? Look upon us, Lord; hear us, enlighten us, show yourself to us. (...) Teach me to seek you, and reveal yourself to me as I seek, because I can neither seek you if you do not teach me how, nor find you unless you reveal yourself. Let me seek you in desiring you; let me desire you in seeking you; let me find you in loving you; let me love you in finding you."

After asking so many questions, with such humility and simplicity, about the things he saw, he realized that what he was looking for lived inside him. Later, he makes this confession: "I am lost in wonder when I consider this problem. It bewilders me. Yet men go out and gaze in astonishment at high mountains, the huge waves of the sea, the broad reaches of rivers, the ocean that encircles the world, or the stars in their courses. But they pay no attention to themselves."¹⁷⁵

His famous exclamation was an explosion of joy:

I have learnt to love you late. Beauty at once so ancient and so new! I have learnt to love you late! You were within me, and I was in the world outside myself. I searched for you outside myself and, disfigured as I was, I fell upon the lovely things of your creation. You were with me, but I was not with you. The beautiful things of this world kept me far from you and yet, if they had not been in you, they would have no being at all. You called me; you cried aloud to me; you broke my barrier of deafness. You shone upon me; your radiance enveloped me; you put my blindness to flight. You shed your fragrance about me; I drew breath and now I gasp for your sweet odour. I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am inflamed with love of your peace.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, Book X, 8. Petrarch refers to it in one of his letters (Fam. IV, I) to his confessor Dionigi di Borgo San Sepolcro. One day Petrarch, having climbed with his younger brother to the summit of Mont Ventoux, not without great fatigue, after delighting his eyes with the magnificent panorama that he discovered, and having contemplated the Alps, the province of Lyons and the course of the Rhone and the Bay of Marseilles, took out the copy of St. Augustine's *Confessions* that he always carried with him, and happened to open them at this chapter and paragraph. He closed the book, and, angry with himself for going to contemplate earthly things, having in his soul so many wonders to admire, he came down from the mountain without speaking a word to his brother.

¹⁷⁶ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, Book X, 27. This text evokes other experiences, although from another perspective, such as that of ETTY HILLESUM, when she said: "There is a really deep well inside me. And in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there, too." *An Interrupted Life*, Washington Square Press, New York, 1984, p. 44. This is also the case with Simone Weil. She always sought the truth and ended up falling into the arms of Christ. Cf. CARLOS ORTEGA, "Espejismo y silencio. La experiencia mística de Simone Weil," *La conciencia del dolor y de la belleza* (Ed. Trotta, 2010), 239. Also, ROBERTO RONDANINA, *Simone Weil. Mística y revolucionaria* (San Pablo, 2004), 7-8.

2.2. Wonder “and” Mystery

This “and” reflects the correlation between wonder and mystery. Mystery gives light and wonder is a source of knowledge.¹⁷⁷ There is contrast and harmony. We are children of wonder.

Saint Gregory of Nyssa famously said: “Concepts create idols; only wonder comprehends anything.” The human person is inserted in the mystery and oriented towards the mystery.¹⁷⁸ But when we talk about mystery, it is important to clarify what we are referring to. It is true that this word admits many meanings and has diverse repercussions in the religious, scientific, philosophical and theological fields. There is an underlying common denominator that refers to what is hidden, arcane, unknown, sacred and not accessible by human reason.¹⁷⁹

In any case, “mystery is not, properly speaking, the unintelligible, but rather what human intelligence cannot fully understand, since it refers to realities that are not primarily incomprehensible, but rather unencompassable. And we must be careful not to confuse mystery with absurdity, because the latter is repugnant to reason; but this is not the case with mystery, which is, strictly speaking, what shows the limits of reason by surpassing it, without being repugnant as contradictory *per se*.”¹⁸⁰

Gabriel Marcel is probably the author who has most highlighted the value of the mystery of being. “Without mystery, life would be unbreathable.” When he speaks of mystery, he is referring to that which gives reason and meaning to everything that exists. Mystery does not oppose us humans, who have been created in the image of God, but rather it envelops us; it gives an account of our origins, of our reciprocal relations and of our ultimate destiny.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Cf. SILVANO PETROSINO, *El asombro* (Ed. Encuentro, 2001). I find the second part particularly interesting, in which he analyses the relationship between luminosity and immediacy, surprise and visitation, splendor and the answer as a question.

¹⁷⁸ “The mysteries of the faith are not a proper object for the intelligence considered as a faculty permitting affirmation or denial. They are not of the order of truth, but above it. The only part of the human soul which is capable of any real contact with them is the faculty of supernatural love. It alone, therefore, is capable of an adherence in regard to them. The role of the remaining faculties of the soul, beginning with the intelligence, is only to recognize that the things with which supernatural love is in contact are realities... and to become silent as soon as supernatural love actually awakens in the soul.” SIMONE WEIL. *Letter to a Priest* (Routledge, 2014), 49.

¹⁷⁹ “Science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature. And that is because, in the last analysis, we ourselves are a part of the mystery that we are trying to solve” (Max Planck). Many authors have explained the word “mystery.” See dictionaries of philosophy, the Bible, theology, and ministry, and works on the history of religions, the phenomenology of religion, theological anthropology, treatises on liturgy, ministry, and catechesis.

¹⁸⁰ MARIANO MORENO VILLA, “Misterio,” *Diccionario de pensamiento contemporáneo* (San Pablo, 1997), 794, translator’s version. I add Mounier’s quote: “The value of a mystery is not its opaqueness, as is believed, often for and against it, but because it is the diffuse sign of a reality richer than clarities overly immediate. Its dignity is completely in its diffuse positivity, in the presence it announces. It is not strong enough to be safe from danger.” MANUEL MOUNIER, “Revolución personalista y comunicativa,” *Obras completas, Vol. I* (Sígueme, 1992), 203, translator’s version.

¹⁸¹ Cf. ANA MARÍA SANCHEZ LÓPEZ, “Gabriel Marcel: La experiencia del misterio,” *Mística y filosofía* (CITEs, Universidad de la Mística, 2009), 257-268, translator’s version. The author defends the value and consistency of Marcel’s thinking about access to mystery through experience and approximation with these words: “Showing this, describing the concrete situations in which it is discovered, is not a mystical experience, but the result of a philosophical effort, of what Marcel calls metaphysics. Now, affirming Being

There is a time in our lives when we try to outline mysteries, to give them a precise conceptual or open symbolic shape. We strive to understand them, we read writings dedicated to elucidating them. Over the years our profiles become blurred. Not because we understand less, but the opposite, because we understand more. Investigating with intelligence we defined (*fides quaerens intellectum*), contemplating with faith we penetrated. And so we began to glimpse that the hidden face of the mystery, the abysmal depth beneath its surface, was much greater than what was showing. We understood how little we understand. And not with a sense of frustration, but with the joy of knowing that we are on the shore of an immense and pulsating sea that barely whispered to us the voice of its marginal waves. Sir 43:32: “Many things greater than these lie hidden, for I have seen but few of his works.” Job 26:14: “These are indeed but the outskirts of his ways; and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?”¹⁸²

In revelation and theology, mystery acquires the depth of faith, which illuminates with another light and appreciates the unveiling that God makes of himself as creator, savior and sanctifier.¹⁸³ God is the only mystery. God as such is a mystery and God for us is also a mystery for us. He reveals himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; as absolute reality in three persons and as lord of history. The incarnation, death and resurrection, the realities of the kingdom, the Eucharist, and the forgiveness of sins are mysteries. Those who ask and seek feel vertigo and wonder before the depths of God in their souls. They move within the realm of gratuitousness.

Gratuitousness is perhaps the least inadequate word if we want to express the mystery of man and the mystery of God. It includes in its meaning purity of love, freedom, absence of calculation. Grace and gratitude have the same root. Grace is gratuitousness, gratitude is response of gratuitousness and homage.¹⁸⁴

Faced with this revelation,

wonder and fascination with the mysterious arise. (...) This experience makes our being reveal itself to us as mysterious, something that does not end in us, something that is in me, but that is much more than me. Although in ordinary life we move as masters of our world, from time to time we perceive the dazzlement of mystery. We perceive the dark

and not taking refuge in Having, living the Mystery and not degrading it into a problem, recognizing the Absolute You in any other you, this could indeed come close to what we have presented as a mystical experience. It is in this sense that these words are profound and revealing which he wrote on March 30, 1931 in *Being and Having*. “I am sure of this, anyhow: of the hidden identity of the way which leads to holiness and the road which leads the metaphysician to the affirmation of Being; also that it is necessary above all, for a concrete philosophy, to realise that here is one and the same road.” G. MARCEL: *Being and Having* (Dacre Press, 1949), 84-85.

¹⁸² LUIS ALONSO SCHÖKEL, *Esperanza. Meditaciones bíblicas para la Tercera Edad* (Sal Terrae, 1991), 233, translator’s version [For the English title see *In the Autumn of Life: Biblical Meditations on Hope for the Elderly* (St. Paul Publications, 1991).]

¹⁸³ “God is an incomprehensible mystery in himself due to the excess and fullness of reality, because He is full and inexhaustible life. God is a mystery not only, nor primarily, as a reality that is beyond our knowledge, but as a reality that sustains and grounds us; as a reality that encompasses us and gives us shelter; as a reality that permanently surpasses and overwhelms us. Understanding God as a mystery means placing him at the center of human existence as the founding reality of life, being a reality that overwhelms us (immanence), and surpasses us in gratuitousness and transcendence.” ÁNGEL CORDOBILLA, *El misterio de Dios*, in *La lógica de la fe. Manual de Teología Dogmática* (Comillas, 2015), 97, translator’s version. Cf. LUIS LADARIA FERRER, *The Living and True God: The Mystery of the Trinity* (Convivium Press, 2010); RICARDO FERRARA, *El misterio de Dios: Correspondencias y paradojas. Una propuesta sistemática* (Sígueme, 2005).

¹⁸⁴ FRANÇOIS VARILLON, *The Humility and Suffering of God* (Alba House, 1983), 10-11.

luminosity of mystery. In the face of the grandeur of a sunrise or a sunset, in the face of the vastness of the horizon that we can see from the top of a mountain, in the face of the pain of the death of a loved one or the exultation of life, we receive a message from beyond what we see, beyond what we are. Faced with an experience of this nature, we perceive, we intuit, that this wonder of being is greater than ourselves. We feel that the fact of being is greater than all that exists. Nothing we see is the owner of its being, but it exists. This perception makes us think that reality does not end with what we see, but that there is a depth, a thickness, a beyond that is there even though we cannot grasp it; it envelops us, it sustains us, but always from beyond ourselves. The being that we are implies the presence of an indeterminate being which we do not know where it begins or where it ends. We are more than what we see. We are more than what we are. We have a depth within us that we can never fully explore. We perceive ourselves as a mystery.¹⁸⁵

Therefore, when speaking of mystery, we must point to that reality, which is

transcendent and immanent at the same time, which surrounds the life of human beings and is present in their conscience - as an indispensable condition to be able to grasp religious realities in their condition as such, to be able to enter into the specific world of the sacred. This attention awakens in the consciousness of the subjects feelings of wonder, awe, fascination, which predispose the subject to the experience of God, the basis of every journey of faith.¹⁸⁶

St. John of the Cross' verses about ecstasy during high contemplation are well-known. The refrain is:

I entered into unknowing,
yet when I saw myself there,
without knowing where I was,
I understood great things;
I will not say what I felt
for I remained in unknowing
transcending all knowledge.”*

Only those who live in wonder can witness the mystery. And whoever truly lives in the mystery will always be amazed. The light of truth, the ardor of love and the splendor of beauty make us fall into the stupor of the “burning bush,” of the God who speaks (Ex 3).

¹⁸⁵ FERNANDO SEBASTIÁN AGUILAR, *La fe que nos salva. Aproximación pastoral a una teología fundamental* (Sígueme, 2012), 27-28, translator's version.

¹⁸⁶ JUAN DE DIOS MARTÍN VELASCO, “Misterio,” *Nuevo diccionario de Teología* (Ed. Trotta, 2005), 616, translator's version. Elsewhere he wrote: “The experience of God is rather the result of the journey, the itinerary that people follow when, consenting to their origin, they embody that consent in their lives and thus acquire the harmony, the connaturality, the familiarity, the ‘acclimatization’ of their own beings to God, which allows them to discover him in all the realities of the world, in all the events of history and in all the experiences of their own lives.” *La experiencia cristiana de Dios* (Trotta, 1995), 57, translator's version.

* *Stanzas Concerning An Ecstasy Experienced In High Contemplation*, ICS Publications, accessed May 17, 2025, <https://www.poetseers.org/spiritual-and-devotional-poets/christian/the-works-of-st-john-of-the-cross/stanzas-concerning-an-ecstasy-experienced-in-high-contemplation>.

2.3. *Humility, the Most Sure Path*

Only the simple, the humble and the wise marvel. Ernest Hemingway said: “The secret of wisdom, power, and knowledge is humility.” Human intelligence has reached very high levels in the unraveling of the surrounding reality, of the cosmos in which we live, of the forces that govern life. In the prologue to the Spanish edition of the book by M. Bersanelli – M. Gargantini, nourished by testimonies of great scientists, Dr. César Nombela makes this comment:

Scientific knowledge takes us into an unfathomable world in all its totality; the conquest of particular elements opens up new spaces for exploration, or, as has always been said, any answer to scientific questions based on well-founded hypotheses allows us to formulate new questions in order to continue advancing. In short, science inevitably coexists with mystery because delving into the mystery is also something inherent to human activity; it is a challenge and a stimulus. Scientific activity is also punctuated by moments of gratitude and joy (...). Nor has there been a lack of clarity among scientists who have formulated research as an activity imbued with humility, in order to perceive the limits of one’s own condition, something essential for finding the truth.¹⁸⁷

Humility is always an open path, but there are those who have closed it by mistake¹⁸⁸ or out of pride.¹⁸⁹ Others falsify it and enter into servility or reduce it to a mere ascetic practice. Fortunately, there are those who, according to the reality of the person, discover the dimension of transcendence¹⁹⁰ and, therefore, a human prerogative full of dignity and simplicity.¹⁹¹ For those who look at the world and their own existence according to faith, humility and simplicity become evident as authentic virtues.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ CÉSAR NOMBELA, Prologue to the work of MARCO BERSANELLI – MARIO GARGANTINI, *Sólo el asombro conoce. La aventura de la investigación científica* (Ed. Encuentro, 2006), 16, translator’s version. Then he added: “But the book invites an even deeper reflection on scientific knowledge. Once again, through so many testimonies from researchers, we see how, through Science, we can also feel challenged about the meaning of our lives, as transcendent beings. It is a question that goes directly to the most fundamental questions, those that man must answer according to the acceptance of his freedom” (16-17).

¹⁸⁸ There are systems of thought in which humility has no place. Let us think about rationalism, voluntarism, materialism and positivism, etc. The historical, philosophical and even religious analysis of humility made by ANDRÉ COMTE SPONVILLE, *A Small Treatise on the Great Virtues* (Henry Hold and Co., 1996). Even though the author feels he cannot kneel because he is agnostic. (cf. p. 148).

¹⁸⁹ The Gospel of John denounces it: “He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him” (Jn 1:11).

¹⁹⁰ The sensible person, overcoming all negative feelings, comes to realize their limits, that they are not God. Humility makes them think of their origin (*humus*) and take their neighbor into consideration.

¹⁹¹ And so, humility reflects “naturalness, absence of all calculation, of all artifice, of all complication, of all narcissism, of all self-sufficiency. It is the antithesis of always composing one’s expression in front of the mirror, to the point of appearing careless. Truthfulness, candor, innocence, joy, peace, spontaneity, immediate agreement with oneself, even with what we do not know about ourselves, joyful improvisation, selflessness, disdain for showing off, for gain, for appearances; forgetting oneself, detachment from oneself. Worrying too much about yourself, even for good reasons, is the opposite of simplicity.” CARLOS DÍAZ, *Repensar las virtudes* (Ed. Internacionales universitarias, 2002), 218, translator’s version.

¹⁹² DALMAZIO MONGILLO, “Humildad,” in STEFANO DE FIORES- TULLO GOFFI- AUGUSTO GUERRA (Eds): *Nuevo Diccionario de Espiritualidad* (Ed. Paulinas, 1979), 665-674; M. MAGRASSI, “Humildad,” in L. BORRIETO. E. CARUANA. M.R. DEL GENIO. N. SUFFI (Eds), *Diccionario de la Mística* (San Pablo, 1998); O. SCHAFFNER, “Humildad,” in HEINRICH FRIES, *Conceptos fundamentales de Teología* (Ed. Cristiandad, 1979). On humility in Ignatian spirituality, cf. LISA A. FULLAM, “Humildad,” *Diccionario de espiritualidad ignaciana* (Mensajero-Sal Terrae, 2007), 957-965; ERICH PRZYWARA, *Humildad, paciencia, amor. Tres virtudes cristianas* (Herder, 1964).

How many turn their gaze to the one who is Truth, Light and Life? He is the Son of God made man, who passed through this life as one of many and humbled himself to the point of death on the cross (cf. Phil 2:6-8). A real mystery of love! The humility of God,¹⁹³ the humility of Jesus.¹⁹⁴ “The humility of God proved to be the pledge of our redemption.”¹⁹⁵ Here is the authentic reference point for humility and, for this reason, humility is an essential characteristic of the Christian lifestyle. It is something deeper than a mere ascetic practice. Humility is a reflection of the humility of God, of the “humble Jesus,” of the love that God has for us and has shown us by becoming man in the womb of a virgin, being born in a manger, exiled in Egypt, living hidden for 30 years, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, persecuted, insulted, washing the feet of his apostles, scourged, crowned with thorns, condemned to death and dying on a cross. St. Hilary of Poitiers, following Saint Paul, invites us to put Christ at the center: “*Humilitas eius nostra nobilitas est*”.¹⁹⁶ And St. Bernard says: “*Magnus Dominus et laudabilis nimis, parvus Dominus et amabilis nimis*”.

The path of humility is marked by the conviction that man is not God, but that he has left his mark on each one of us, because we have been made in his image and likeness. This is the smallness and greatness of man. Opening oneself to this mystery, according to faith and total availability, helps to better understand the dignity of the human person. It is, at the same time, entering into a continuous stupor that leads to the song of praise.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Cf. RÉGINALD GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, *Las tres edades de la vida interior, Vol. II* (Ed. Palabra, 1995), 685 [For the English title see *The Three Ages of the Interior Life, Vol. II* (TAN Books, 1989); ROMANO GUARDINI, *The Lord* (Gateway Editions, 1996), 374-382. After citing the text from Philippians, he indicates: “This then the humility of God - a stooping towards that which in his eyes hardly exists - Humility possible only because he is everything that exists. Herein lies his ultimate glory. (...) God then is the humbly loving One. What a reversal of all existing values - also divine! In truth, this God destroys everything that man in the pride of his revolt constructs of his own inspiration. (...) Christian humility though mirrors God’s humility. It means above all that man accept his role: not Creator, but creature - and of a humble God. Man is not a noble being, not a beautiful soul or exalted spirit, but sinner, *peccator*. (...) This is the foundation and point of departure of Christian humility, never to be confused with the weakness of self-surrender or with ruse that purposely makes itself less than it is; still less with an inferiority complex. Humility and love are not virtues of degeneracy. They spring from that creative gesture of God which ignores all that is purely natural and are directed towards the new world in the process of creation. Thus a man can practice humility only to the extent that he is conscious of the grandeur, both actual and latent, that God has planted in him.” (pp. 381-382).

¹⁹⁴ Cf. St. Augustine tells us of his wonderment at the humble Jesus, *Confessions*, Book VII, 18 and 19. St. Francis of Assisi in the “*Praise to God Most High*” says: “You are love. You are wisdom. You are humility. You are endurance. You are rest. You are peace. You are joy and gladness. You are justice and moderation. You are all our riches, and You suffice for us. You are beauty. You are gentleness. You are our protector. You are our guardian and defender.” (<https://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=180>).

¹⁹⁵ ST. GREGORY THE GREAT, *Pastoral Care* (The Newman Press, 1950), 142. Before, Pope LEO THE GREAT, in his letter 28, no. 3. to Flavian, had written: “Lowliness was taken up by majesty, weakness by strength, mortality by eternity. To pay off the debt of our state, invulnerable nature was united to a nature that could suffer; so that in a way that corresponded to the remedies we needed, one and the same mediator between God and humanity the man Christ Jesus, could both on the one hand die and on the other be incapable of death.”

¹⁹⁶ HILARY OF POITIERS, *De Trinitate*, 2, 25; ST. TERESA OF JESUS says to her daughters: “We should fix our eyes on Christ our only good, and on His saints; there we shall learn true humility,” *The Interior Castle, The First Mansions* (Evivinity Publishing Inc, 2009), ch. 2, no. 12. In no. 10 she had said: “I believe we shall never learn to know ourselves except by endeavouring to know God, for, beholding His greatness we are struck by our own baseness, His purity shows our foulness, and by meditating on His humility we find how very far we are from being humble.”

¹⁹⁷ You just have to read the first chapter of the *The Story of a Soul*, by ST. THERESE OF LISIEUX, Cf. Third Edition (ICS Publications, 1996), 13-16. Regarding humility she says: “I understood, too, that Our Lord’s love is revealed as perfectly in the most simple soul who resists His grace in nothing as in the most excellent

This is how the entire Christian tradition and great saints such as St. Augustine, St. Benedict, St. Bernard, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Teresa of Jesus, St. John of the Cross, St. Therese of Lisieux and many others have understood it. In fact, we become humble when we bow down before God and worship him; when we recognize and serve his image – which is each one of our brothers and sisters.

Humility, faith and availability are communicating vessels. St. John of the Cross does nothing other than remind us of the naked gospel: “If you desire to be perfect, sell your will, give it to the poor in spirit, come to Christ in meekness and humility, and follow him to Calvary and the sepulcher.”¹⁹⁸ It is quite admirable and astonishing to realize how the greatest thing that nothing else can contain is contained in the smallest thing.¹⁹⁹

I end this point with this reflection by Urs von Balthasar referring to the saints:

Allowing oneself to be led is an essential part of the humility or simplicity of the Christian faith, which leaves the way open to the self-manifestation of God, with a “clean heart” (Mt 5:8), leaving all the space to the light of God and therefore perceiving that simple totality that is proper to it, being the light of the simple and candid God. Such a “vision of God”, as is promised to these very hearts, makes it easier to arrange the peripheral around the center of gravity, to integrate the particular into the totality mentioned above, and to achieve in divine self-giving that which surpasses everything. Instead of having the “proof”, they “are” the reflection in their own existence. As they reflect the glory of God in their responses, God radiates his light not only to them but also to others. The truly holy man (in the sense of Luke 11:44ff.) is, according to the spirit of revelation, the best “proof of the truth.”²⁰⁰

3. MARY, THE HUMBLE SERVANT, MYSTAGOGUE OF THE MYSTERY

Mary is the first of believers, the first Christian and the first missionary. Mary is the humble servant of the Lord who, with her journey of faith, availability and involvement in the history of salvation, is the richest source of inspiration and the best mystagogue to arouse and cultivate wonder and to initiate, guide and lead Christians into the mystery of God. No one like her can introduce and accompany in listening, in accepting and in understanding the Word of God and the mysteries –sacraments– of the Church. She is a continuous evocation of the paschal mystery of Jesus.

soul; in fact, since the nature of love is to humble oneself... It is to their hearts that God deigns to lower Himself. Just as the sun shines simultaneously on the tall cedars and on each little flower as though it were alone on the earth, so Our Lord is occupied particularly with each soul as though there were no others like it” (14).

¹⁹⁸ SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Sayings of Light and Love*, no. 165.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. FRANÇOIS VARILLON, *The Humility and Suffering of God* (Alba House, 1983),. 47. Inspired by the phrase of a young Jesuit of the 17th century: “*Non coerceri maximo, contineri tamen a minimo, divinum est.*” Pope Francis frequently referred to this expression with his usual dialectical style. On December 14, 2017, he used it to explain the tenderness of God and to show that we should not be afraid of big things and that we should take into account the small things where the greatest things are found.

²⁰⁰ HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Teodramática. Vol II, Las personas del drama: el hombre ante Dios* (Ed. Encuentro, 1992), 116, translator’s version [For English title see *Theo-Drama: Vol II, The dramatis personae: Man in God* (Ignatius Press, 1990).]

In Mary, the small and the great merge.²⁰¹ “Mary’s humility is a fruit of God’s *fascination* with her. It springs from her awareness and experience of how, after knowing and feeling that she is looked upon and ‘well-loved’ by God, there is no choice but to look at Him before and more than at herself. That is the only way to measure the abyss that separates the finite from the infinite.”²⁰²

3.1. *The Humble Servant of the Lord*

Mary defines herself as “servant” of the Lord (Lk 1:38 and 1:48). Exegetes make their connotations to texts and contexts of the Old Testament. In her person, Mary embodies the faith and aspirations of Israel, servant of the Lord, who listens to and accepts his word in humility and obedience. But Mary’s statements spring from divine gratuitousness, from the gift of grace that constitutes her as the great servant of the Mystery of Salvation.²⁰³ Mary shows that she is free for consent and for service.²⁰⁴ Mary is linked by divine design to Christ who is stripped of his divine condition and is linked to all the poor of history.

The Second Vatican Council said of Mary that she “stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently hope for and receive salvation from Him” (LG, 55). And it added that she is “on this earth the virgin Mother of the Redeemer, and above all others and in a singular way the generous associate and humble handmaid of the Lord” (LG 61). While she lived in this world, she led a life like that of others (cf. AA, 5). Since Mary identified herself with Jesus, who said he was “gentle and humble of heart” (Mt

²⁰¹ On the feast of the Assumption this poem by Didier Rimaud is recited in France, of which only these stanzas are offered here:

There is nothing told about this woman, but that she had once become engaged...

There is nothing told about this woman, but that she had brought into the world, in the land of Judea, her son...

There is nothing told about this woman, but that she had searched for three long days for her child...

There is nothing told about this woman, but that she at Cana was a guest...

There is nothing told about this woman, but that she was standing by the cross...

There is nothing told about this woman, but that she was one in prayer...

²⁰² MACARIO DIEZ PRESA, *María, mujer de ayer y de siempre* (Publicaciones Claretianas, 1992), 45, translator’s version.

²⁰³ It is enough to recall the content of Luke’s account of the Annunciation, where Mary’s vocation and mission are made clear. She is the humble servant of the Lord and Mother of Jesus and of all people. Cf. ADRIENNE VON SPEYR, *Handmaid of the Lord* (Ignatius Press, 1985), 11-22. ANGEL APARICIO comments: “Mary designates herself as a servant not in a prayerful context, but in a vocational context. God entrusts her with a particular mission, and she, like the heroes of holy history (especially Moses), declares herself available; she assumes the mission entrusted to her. These are the motifs that we already know in Mary’s final words: the affirmation of God’s sovereignty—who manifests himself to whomever he wants, whenever he wants and however he wants—his power—since for him nothing is impossible—the mutual relationship between God and Mary and Mary’s belonging to God—she is the Favored One, invited to join in the messianic joy—and finally, divine protection, as assured to her in the angel’s greeting (“the Lord is with you”), ratified to her shortly afterwards (“you have found favor”) and confirmed in the angel’s response to Mary’s question (v. 35). The self-designation “servant of the Lord” places Mary among those called, throughout holy history, and taken to the service of the salvation of the people. The only big difference is that now we are at the origins of the true people.” “La vocación de María a la maternidad (Lc 1,26-38),” *María del Evangelio* (Publicaciones Claretianas, 1994), 158-159, translator’s version.

²⁰⁴ Cf. CLODOVIS M. BOFF, *Mariologia social. O significado da Virgem para a Sociedade* (Paulus, 2006), 418-425.

11:29), we can guess that she was a simple woman.²⁰⁵ Two major documents that came later, *Marialis Cultus* (1974)²⁰⁶ and *Redemptoris Mater* (1987)²⁰⁷ have highlighted the condition of the humble servant of the Lord. In the Magisterium and in theology, given the biblical resonance they contain, terms such as *servant*, *humble*, *poor*, *little* and *disciple* are commonly exchanged.

Mary, in whom everything is grace, is the servant of the Lord, poor and simple; she is the Disciple and servant of the Kingdom; the Teacher in listening and obedience and she is the most splendid icon of the pilgrim Church in the third millennium.²⁰⁸ Mary, by the presence of the Spirit in her, lends her service to the Church. And “in the light of Mary, the Church sees in the face of women the reflection of a beauty which mirrors the loftiest sentiments of which the human heart is capable: the self-offering totality of love; the strength that is capable of bearing the greatest sorrows; limitless fidelity and tireless devotion to work; the ability to combine penetrating intuition with words of support and encouragement” (RM 46).

Benedict XVI, on the 40th anniversary of the conclusion of the Council, spoke these words:

[The Marian orientation of the Council] refers us, as it referred the Council Fathers at that time, to the image of the Virgin who listens and lives in the Word of God, who cherishes in her heart the words that God addresses to her and, piecing them together like a mosaic, learns to understand them (cf. Lk 2: 19, 51). It refers us to the great Believer who, full of faith, put herself in God’s hands, abandoning herself to his will; it refers us to the humble Mother who, when the Son’s mission so required, became part of it, and at the same time, to the courageous woman who stood beneath the Cross while the disciples fled.²⁰⁹

When we think about how Mary leads us to wonder at the mystery, she shows us what she is: the first and most humble servant of the Lord. She precedes, like the dawn, the humble King, once foretold (Zech 9:9), who comes riding on a donkey (cf. Mt 21:5). Mary maintains within herself her total emptiness and full availability to God’s plan.

We can understand that at a key moment, such as the Annunciation, Mary experienced the convergence of wonder and mystery. But we can well think that all her life she was combining these two poles because she was full of grace and the humble

²⁰⁵ “Simple people live as they breathe, without further effort or glory, without further consequences or disgrace. Simplicity is not a virtue that is added to existence. It is existence itself to the extent that nothing is added to it. Therefore, it is the lightest of virtues, the most transparent and the rarest. It is the opposite of literature: it is life without phrases and without lies, without exaggeration, without grandiloquence. It is the insignificant life and it is the true life.” CARLOS DÍAZ, *Repensar las virtudes. op. cit.*, 219, translator’s version.

²⁰⁶ In the Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus*, cf. nos. 6, 18, 22, 28, 33, 37, 48, 56, 57. In the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, cf. nos: 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 37, 41, 46. I would underline no. 37 of *Marialis cultus*.

²⁰⁷ Cf. *Redemptoris Mater*, 18.

²⁰⁸ Cf. SALVATORE M. PERELLA, *La Madre di Gesù nella coscienza ecclesiale contemporanea* (Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationale, 2005); XABIER PIKAZA, *La Madre de Jesús* (Sígueme, 1989); EDUARDO F. PIRONIO, *La humilde servidora del Señor* (Publicaciones Claretianas, 1988), 31-40; JOSÉ CRISTO REY GARCÍA PAREDES, *María en la comunidad del Reino* (Publicaciones Claretianas, 1988); IBID. *Mariología*, (BAC, 1995).

²⁰⁹ BENEDICT XVI, *Homily* (December 8, 2005). He expressed himself in similar words in the *General Audience* of December 19, 2012.

servant of the Lord and because she lived her faith responsibly as a perfect believer.²¹⁰ Mary always sought the face of the Lord (Ps 26). For this reason, she was blessed: first, her cousin Elizabeth calls her blessed because she has believed (cf. Lk 1:39-45), and Mary responds: “my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant” (Lk 1:47-48) and then Jesus adds that she is blessed because she hears the Word of God and obeys it (cf. Lk 11:27-28).

3.2. *Mystagogue of the Mystery*

The Christian people turn to Mary and pray: “*Show us Jesus, blessed fruit of your womb.*” She knows how united she is to her Son and knows how to make transparent his mystery, his beauty and his saving power. This prayer shows the confidence she has in her maternal service as mystagogue of the mystery, which had been hidden until,²¹¹ of the Savior who gives life. Mary does not lead us to speculate. She shows us the Son of the Father, the Word made flesh by the Holy Spirit. She initiates us and accompanies us on the descending journey of Jesus, who opens the door to the mystery of salvation according to the most admirable humility. Her pedagogy is that which springs from her condition as a servant of the Lord who experienced, first in her heart, then in her womb and throughout her life, that her son was the Son of God.

Contemplating her life and paying attention to what she says and what Jesus says about her, we can see that, in addition to her exemplary nature,²¹² her mission is to lead us into silence, into listening to the word of God, into doing what He tells us and into making her our mother.²¹³

²¹⁰ “The Virgin Mary is its most perfect embodiment [of obedience of faith].” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 144. No. 17 of *Marialis cultus* by Paul VI is very beautiful and rich: “Mary is the attentive Virgin, who receives the word of God with faith, that faith which in her case was the gateway and path to divine motherhood, for, as Saint Augustine realized, ‘Blessed Mary by believing conceived Him (Jesus) whom believing she brought forth.’ In fact, when she received from the angel the answer to her doubt (cf. Lk. 1:34-37), ‘full of faith, and conceiving Christ in her mind before conceiving Him in her womb, she said, “I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me” (Lk. 1:38).’ It was faith that was for her the cause of blessedness and certainty in the fulfillment of the promise: ‘Blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled’ (Lk. 1:45). Similarly, it was faith with which she, who played a part in the Incarnation and was a unique witness to it, thinking back on the events of the infancy of Christ, meditated upon these events in her heart (cf. Lk 2:19, 51). The Church also acts in this way, especially in the liturgy, when with faith she listens, accepts, proclaims and venerates the word of God, distributes it to the faithful as the bread of life and in the light of that word examines the signs of the times and interprets and lives the events of history.”

²¹¹ Cf. Eph 1:9-14; 3:2-19; Col 1:25-27; Rom 11:25; 16:25; 1 Cor 2:7. Heb 1:1-14.

²¹² The Gospels offer traits to describe Mary’s exemplary nature: “The Blessed Virgin’s exemplary holiness encourages the faithful to ‘raise their eyes to Mary who shines forth before the whole community of the elect as a model of the virtues.’” It is a question of solid, evangelical virtues: faith and the docile acceptance of the Word of God (cf. Lk. 1:26-38, 1:45, 11:27-28; Jn. 2:5); generous obedience (cf. Lk. 1:38); genuine humility (cf. Lk. 1:48); solicitous charity (cf. Lk. 1:39-56); profound wisdom (cf. Lk. 1:29, 34; 2:19, 33; 51); worship of God manifested in alacrity in the fulfillment of religious duties (cf. Lk. 2:21-41), in gratitude for gifts received (cf. Lk. 1:46-49), in her offering in the Temple (cf. Lk. 2:22-24) and in her prayer in the midst of the apostolic community (cf. Acts 1:12-14); her fortitude in exile (cf. Mt. 2:13-23) and in suffering (cf. Lk. 2:34-35, 49; Jn. 19:25); her poverty reflecting dignity and trust in God (cf. Lk. 1:48, 2:24) her attentive care for her Son, from His humble birth to the ignominy of the cross (cf. Lk. 2:1-7; Jn. 19:25-27); her delicate forethought (cf. Jn. 2:1-11); her virginal purity (cf. Mt. 1:18-25; Lk. 1:26-38); her strong and chaste married love.” PAUL VI, *Marialis cultus*, no. 57. *Redemptoris Mater*, nos. 43 and 44 also speak of this exemplarity.

²¹³ Seen from the educational perspective, cf. MARCELLA FARINA, “Educazione/Mistagogia,” in STEFANO DI FIORES- VALERIA FERRARI- SALVATORE M. PERELLA, *Mariologia* (San Paolo, 2009), 465-462.

I will include two texts from the Magisterium of Pope Benedict XVI. The first one, from a speech in Czestochowska:

Faith is the gift, given to us in Baptism, which makes our encounter with God possible. God is hidden in mystery; to claim to understand him would mean to want to confine him within our thinking and knowing and consequently to lose him irremediably. With faith, however, we can open up a way through concepts, even theological concepts, and can “touch” the living God. And God, once touched, immediately gives us his power. When we abandon ourselves to the living God, when in humility of mind we have recourse to him, a kind of hidden stream of divine life pervades us.²¹⁴

The second, in Loreto:

Here, we think spontaneously of the Holy House of Nazareth, which is the Shrine of humility: the humility of God who took flesh, who made himself small, and the humility of Mary who welcomed him into her womb; the humility of the Creator and the humility of the creature. Jesus, Son of God and Son of man, was born from this encounter of humility. “The greater you are, the more you humble yourself, so you will find favour in the sight of the Lord. For great is the might of the Lord” (3: 18-20) says the passage in Sirach; and in the Gospel, after the Parable of the Wedding Feast, Jesus concludes: “Every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Lk 14: 11). Today, this perspective mentioned in the Scriptures appears especially provocative to the culture and sensitivity of contemporary man. The humble person is perceived as someone who gives up, someone defeated, someone who has nothing to say to the world. Instead, this is the principal way, and not only because humility is a great human virtue but because, in the first place, it represents God’s own way of acting. It was the way chosen by Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant, who “being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2: 8).²¹⁵

Pope Francis expressed this mystagogical mission of Mary with these reflections evoking the Magnificat:

Mary journeyed with the joy of one who sang the wonders that God had achieved with the lowliness of his handmaiden. As she walked, as a good Mother, a song arose, giving voice to those who, in one way or another, felt they could not sing. She gives voice to John — who leapt for joy in his mother’s womb — she gives voice to Elizabeth — who begins to bless her — to the elderly Simeon — and enables him to prophesy and dream — she teaches the Word to babble his first words.

At the school of Mary we learn that her life is marked not by protagonism but by the capacity to enable others to be protagonists. She offers courage, teaches people to speak, and above all encourages people to live the boldness of faith and hope. In this way she becomes the transparency of the Lord’s face who shows his power by inviting and calling people to participate in building up his living temple.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the Men and Women Religious, Seminarians and Representatives of Ecclesial Movements* (Częstochowa, May 26, 2006).

²¹⁵ BENEDICT XVI, *Homily* (Loreto, September 2, 2007).

²¹⁶ FRANCIS, *Homily* (December 12, 2018, Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe). In that same year, he had written: “Mary is thus the universal Mother who gives total attention, care, closeness to each son, to each daughter. In her we see in fact the heart of a woman that beats *like* that of God, a heart that beats for all, without distinction. She is truly the human face of God’s infinite goodness. Mary is the Mother of Jesus, the God-man. In her Son she encounters both God and man; when she speaks with him, she is addressing

Mary's humility evokes, more than the insignificance of "humus", the fertile soil that gives life and makes us grow in Christ. In Mary, the great and the small go hand in hand. She is the ark of the new and eternal covenant. "Mary is a model of totality; she let Jesus Christ enter fully into her life with all his mystery, with his quality of surprise, of novelty, of adventure. And she is the one who will dare to enter fully into the life of Jesus. Both expressions: *let enter and dare to enter*, make us understand that Mary was a woman of faith, hope and charity."²¹⁷

Her humility and simplicity are reflected in this "allowing to enter and welcoming."²¹⁸ *Allowing to enter*: That is, to welcome. It is the attitude of the poor, of people who believe that they cannot buy anything, no matter how much they have, who accept gratuitousness and live in gratitude. To welcome does not mean to use the person you welcome, but rather to let him use you, with all his mystery; that is, just as he is. Perhaps that is what is most frightening, because it leads to the unexpected, to the novel."²¹⁹ Mary is an icon of hospitality because of her tenderness and care.²²⁰ She keeps reciprocity active. She accepts the angel's announcement, she accepts the Word of the Father, she allows herself to be accepted as a wife by Joseph, she accepts the words and actions of Jesus' life and meditates on them in her heart, she allows herself to be accepted as a mother and she accepts John as a son.

Mary's *mystagogical role* is imbued with the action of the Holy Spirit in her, which makes her the Mother of Jesus and the Mother of the Church. She reveals the mystery of Christ; she is the memory of Christ in the Church and she is the sign of the certainty of the future world.²²¹ Mary welcomes and gives life; she inspires, accompanies, encourages, comforts, intercedes and assists at the hour of death.²²² Her presence is

both God and man. So in her we see that it is really true that loving the Lord means truly loving humanity, and vice versa. And so, when we are looking at her, Mary constantly helps us and teaches us to turn to the Lord. (...) Christians have always turned to her as their refuge, as the one who always points the way to the Lord and invites us to entrust to him unconditionally the people dearest to us, the most delicate problems, the most convoluted situations. When it seems there is no way out, Mary is 'our hope,' because—as Dante said (cf. *Paradiso*, 33, 14-15)—if one wants a grace and does not turn to Mary, one is like a bird that wants to fly without wings." *Ave Maria: The Mystery of a Most Beloved Prayer* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2018), 12-13.

²¹⁷ MIQUEL ESTRADÉ, *Shalom Miriam. Apuntes sobre la más mujer de las mujeres* (Narcea, 1999), 87, translator's version.

²¹⁸ In the Gospel, welcome and rejection are signs of acceptance or hostility towards Jesus. This is what he experienced in his life. Jesus was welcomed by his Mother, Joseph, Simeon, Zacchaeus, Martha and Mary, etc. "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12). "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me" (Mt 10:40). "He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him" (Jn 1:11). Saint Paul exhorted Christians: "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you" (Rom 15:7).

²¹⁹ MIQUEL ESTRADÉ, *op. cit.*, 88, translator's version.

²²⁰ Welcome, tenderness and care are authentic traits of human existence. They are exponents of proximity. "Gentleness and care create the universe of excellences, existential meanings, all that is of value and importance and because of which it is worth sacrificing one's time, energies, and life itself. The basic root of our cultural crisis resides in the terrifying lack of gentleness and care of each other, of nature, and of our own future." LEONARDO BOFF, *Francis of Assisi: A Model for Human Liberation* (Orbis Books, 2006), 13.

²²¹ SERGIO GASPARI, *Celebrare con Maria l'anno di grazia del Signore. Mistagogia cristologica mariana* (Ed. Monfortane, 1988), 57ff.

²²² It is enough to review the hymns and prayers that the Church addresses to her: *Hail Mary*, *Ave*, *Regina caelorum*, *Salve Regina*, *Sub tuum praesidium*, *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, *Regina coeli*, or the hymns of the Liturgy of the Hours of the Virgin Mary, which are an indicator of Mary's mystagogical role. The Church, in its Eucharistic celebrations, particularly highlights this presence and mystagogical role of Mary.

dynamic and multi-faceted.²²³ As a mother, she cares for each individual and the entire human community. She is the new Eve and the victorious Woman, full service through mediation. She begins with the acceptance of the origins, sustains the journey, cultivates growth (listening to the Word and participating in the Eucharist) and prepares the final encounter with the Redeemer, the Lord of life. Mary's gaze is maternal, compassionate and merciful. If we allow Mary to look at us, she will fill us with tenderness and spread her wonder at what her Son is, does and says.

4. RETURN TO THE SIMPLE AND BE AMAZED

According to her exemplarity and mystagogical role, Mary invites us to return to the simple. She, so discreet in her life, urges us to reconcile ourselves with everyday reality by reading the events of our own lives as an expression of God's passage through our history. Which means becoming aware of our surroundings and that we are always on the move, exposed to insecurities and bewilderment. We live in the midst of realities that demand our attention. The reality of every day is emergent. It offers us its surprises. Sometimes it makes us uneasy. Other times it is provocative and urges to search. Therefore, it encourages us to look at it, contemplate it and be ready for discernment. The realities want to introduce us to their reason for being and their meaning. A mystery! Because they are nothing but the trace of a light, of a love made into humility and service.²²⁴

"Show him some simple thing," says Rainer M. Rilke in the Ninth Elegy. Good advice for those who are open and look for what is close, what is ordinary, what is not complicated, and do not allow themselves to be subjugated by fantasy or nostalgia or by aspirations that end in disenchantment. We are suffocated by the desire for accumulation and domination, by the obsession with security. The quantitative and controllable suffocates our freedom.²²⁵ There are too many altars to little gods in our hearts. Oddly enough, trends enslave. Calculation leaves no room for life's surprises that arise when we least expect it. Often, in small things, something new suddenly appears, a new light, a new song of hope, fruit of the source of life and the fresh exercise of freedom and love. Who will be willing to capture it, to welcome it, to elevate it? Even in the most desperate situations, one can say:

Maybe a very small miracle will happen.
Some ant will go by.²²⁶

Mary concentrates in her person and in her life the most sublime and the most human. She is the Mother of God and daughter of the people. Everything about her is

²²³ RENÉ LAURENTIN, *La presencia de María* (San Pablo, 2014). [For the English title see *Mary in Scripture, Liturgy, and the Catholic Tradition* (Paulist Press, 2014).] On p. 253 he concludes: "Mary received maternal grace not only to help us, with Christ and in Christ, to realize in us the image of God in love, but also to promote with him our availability and our cooperative capacities, so that the identity of God, who is all in all, may be consummated in humanity (Jn 17:21-22)." (Translator's version)

²²⁴ PEDRO CASALDÁLIGA wrote this poem with the title "*Misterio*" [Mystery]: "You will be left without life/ if you take away the mystery." *El tiempo y la espera* (Sal Terrae, 1986), 75, translator's version.

²²⁵ GABRIEL CELAYA, in one of his poems, accurately summed up what happens to us: "I achieved the use of reason. I lost the use of mystery."

²²⁶ JESÚS TOMÉ, *Poesía completa* (Editorial Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2010), 358, translator's version.

normal, and yet she embraces and guards the Mystery of life; she is the ark of the New Covenant. Everything happens in her from a different parameter than the one we use. Mary is a humble and poor woman. It is not her “self” that matters, but the will of the Father, like Jesus. She is at the full service of the plan of salvation traced from the beginning by the Holy Trinity. This attitude of decentralization and forgetting oneself makes her simple and willing to serve.

Mary sheds her light on our lives and allows us to glimpse how mystery resides in the simple, the apparently normal. She does so from her life in Nazareth, walking towards the house of her cousin Elizabeth, in Bethlehem, at the presentation of Jesus in the temple, in the flight to Egypt and her return to Nazareth where for so many years the mystery that that house contained went unnoticed (cf. Lk 2:39-52), in her discreet presence during the public life of Jesus, her steadfastness on Calvary and participation in the early Church.

Each of these moments is woven in silence, prayer, listening. She conjugates the verbs: question, internalize, walk, serve, share, praise and bless.²²⁷ There is, therefore, a density of human and spiritual life. Mary is in contact with Jesus, with his body, for much longer than with his speeches to the people. In Nazareth, in everyday life, the Gospel was germinating. It is not surprising that at the wedding they attend together, through Mary’s mediation, Jesus reveals himself as the Messiah and his disciples believe in Him. That is why it is a reliable benchmark when it comes to dealing with what we encounter on a daily basis.

Mary frees us from the complicated and shows us the simple in her own Son, the most handsome of men, Word of truth, source of life, the light that illuminates the world... She places us on the wave in which she moves: gratuitousness and service. And in the grammar she teaches: the realism of the incarnation. She thus invites us to shed our self-sufficiency, our banality and our lack of solidarity. And she places us in the triple task: knowing how to situate ourselves in the world, dignifying time and cultivating proximity.²²⁸ Everyday life revolves around these three axes. Mary is the woman of the *home*, of the *hours*²²⁹ and of the *encounters*.²³⁰ And she is a friend of the poor, because of her grateful memory, because she is in tune with them, because she was a marginalized

²²⁷ There are crucial moments in Mary’s life. In addition to the annunciation and the birth of Jesus, the encounter with Simeon and Anna in the temple is surprising; the trips to Jerusalem at Passover, particularly the one in which Jesus stays talking with the teachers and, when asked why he has done this, Jesus answers that he had to attend to his Father’s affairs. The evangelist adds that “Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.” In Nazareth Jesus grew in wisdom, stature and grace. It is worth noting that they came and went *together* to Jerusalem. It is foreseeable that, in such a long time living together, there was a constant dynamic of *listening and asking* in that model home of *prayer, work and family life*.

²²⁸ These are three great revolutions of Jesus. The Gospel cannot be read from this triple dimension: space, time, proximity, without listening to the call to be reborn, to live in another way. 1) Being in the world without being of the world (cf. Jn 17:11-17). Being with Jesus has its risks, because he has nowhere to lay his head (cf. Mt 8:20). 2) The mystery of Jesus’ “hour,” the value of his stay among us and his return to the Father after his sacrifice for our complete liberation (cf. Jn 12:27; 13:1). 3) The washing of the feet and the new commandment (Jn 13).

²²⁹ Mary’s hours are the hours of waiting, of joy and of hope. Mary’s hours are inscribed in the “today” of God in Christ. All of them are synchronized with the “hour” of Jesus in the different steps of his life, death and resurrection. Then she has been synchronized with the Church in permanent Pentecost.

²³⁰ Proof of this are the apparitions, the sanctuaries, the pilgrimages. How much wonder does she inspire in encounters with Her and among those who make pilgrimage? Cf. STEFANO DE FIORES, “Apparizioni,” *Maria nuovissimo Dizionario, Vol. I*, (EDB, 2006), 21-69. With extensive bibliography.

mother in Bethlehem and because she knows about the “peripheries” in Egypt and Calvary.

Teaching the simple in everyday life involves “intimate resistance.” Josep Maria Esquirol compares it to electrical resistance that “gives light and heat to those nearby; a light that illuminates one’s own path and serves as a beacon for others, guiding without blinding. Not a light that reveals the supreme values in the heaven of truth, nor the hidden meaning of the world, but a light for the path, which protects us from the harsh night, illuminates us, makes nearby things accessible to us and comforts us.” And he says intimate because he assimilates it to what is close and nuclear. “The ‘internal dialogue’ that I am, the friend, the plate on the table, the house, etc. are elements of a philosophy of proximity whose opposite is not distance, but abstraction disconnected from life.”²³¹

The resistance fronts also lead from one level to another, sometimes without a solution of continuity. The resilient resists mass contentment. The resistant resists the domination and victory of selfishness, indifference, the empire of the present and the blindness of destiny, rhetoric without words, absurdity, evil and injustice.

A person who goes to the desert is not a deserter. A person who becomes a hermit, even though they live in the wilderness, is by no means sterile. Life can be perfectly profound from marginality, because what counts is being able to be the beginning; that each one be the beginning. Only if we do not give up a single step is it possible to maintain hope in the sense and open, in the midst of enormous confusion and multiple reliefs, the clearing of peace.²³²

When we notice reality, the everyday, and we notice the contrasts²³³ and nuances between solitude and coexistence, nature and technology, spontaneity and calculation, gratuitousness and utility, leisure and work, well-being and illness, enjoyment and hunger, wealth and poverty, peace and war, birth and death, etc. -because our life is made of all this-, Mary makes herself present, not only to Christians, but to all people, and whispers to us her great question: “How can this be?” (Lk 1:34). And she helps to confront with the words of her Son: “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will” (Mt 11:25-26).

²³¹ JOSEP MARÍA ESQUIROL. *La resistencia íntima. Ensayo de una filosofía de la proximidad* (Acantilado, 2015), 16, translator’s version.

²³² IBID., 17-18, translator’s version.

²³³ Perhaps it is appropriate to consider how wonder appears in processes and contrasts: Night and day, dawn and dusk, birth and death, growth and decline, childhood and adulthood, rootedness and unfolding, appearing and disappearing, spring and autumn, centering and decentering, walking and standing still, simple and complex, invention and destruction, integration and disintegration, permanence and transformation, peace and war, etc. It also appears before sadness and joy, gratuitousness and egocentrism, sin and forgiveness, the abyss and the summit, darkness and light, the volcano and the chasm, before the garden and the tiny grass that sprouts between two stones, etc. The Christian mysteries take us from Bethlehem to Calvary, from the grain in the ground to the ear of corn, from the tomb to the resurrection. Thinking about the course of our lives, it is worth recalling this beautiful observation: “Where the poor river ends/ the immense sea awaits us.” ANTONIO MACHADO “Soledades,” *Poesías completas*, 85, translator’s version.

CHAPTER IV

CULTIVATING WONDER BY WAY OF CHILDHOOD

Recovering childhood is a lifelong task. It's not about back to being a few years old, but about eliminating everything that has made us lose all those qualities and, above all, trust. It is not about being children but about becoming like children.

“Unless you change and become like children.”

Children always remain open to wonder and mystery. This path crosses one of the great evangelical paradoxes, full of wisdom, proposed to achieve salvation. Jesus, through contradictions, wants to lead us to faith and to embrace God's plan. As Saint Paul said: “For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength” (1 Cor 1:25). It is a constant invitation to walk the path where losing is winning, giving up is moving forward, giving is receiving, and dying is living. The journey from childhood to adulthood is painful. Yes, there are great efforts to be made, but no less are the efforts that adults must make to become children and be able to enter the Kingdom since this requires conversion and docility to the Holy Spirit.

The reference point is Jesus because “all his words and deeds reveal that he abides in looking up to the Father with eternal childlike amazement: *‘The Father is greater than I’* (Jn 14:28).”²³⁴

1. JESUS MADE THE PROPOSAL

A second way to cultivate wonder is to “live like children.” Jesus, as a teacher on the move, having become a child, proposes entering the Kingdom of Heaven by becoming like children.²³⁵ The Synoptics agree in their expressions about Jesus' appreciation for children. Let us remember these texts from the three Gospels, which are certainly charged

²³⁴ HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Unless You Become Like this Child* (Ignatius Press, 1991), 44.

²³⁵ “Our Redeemer, remaining great above all things, deigned to become little among all.” ST. GREGORY THE GREAT, *Pastoral Care*, *op. cit.*, 142. “Of all the things Jesus turned upside down, none was more surprising and unexpected than his depiction of a little child instead of an adult as the model we should imitate and learn from. The image he put forward as the ideal to strive for was not the image of some great heroic figure, a person of great strength and power, a superstar, or even a wise old man or woman or a Buddha-like contemplative. The image of true greatness that he put before his disciples and lived up to himself was the image of a little child. For Jesus, personal transformation means becoming like a child.” ALBERT NOLAN, *Jesus, Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom* (Orbis Books, 2006), 119. Cf. JOACHIM JEREMIAS, *New Testament Theology, Vol. I*. (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 108-121; 180-182.

with messianic meaning.²³⁶ Children are the little ones, the helpless, the recipients of the Kingdom.

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:1-4).

“Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me’” (Mk 9:36-37).

And in another passage:

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly, I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them (Mk 10:13-16).

People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it” (Lk 18:15-17).²³⁷

The tenderness that Jesus shows towards children is not the result of naivety. The impertinences, whims and impulses of children were not hidden from him.²³⁸ “Infancy assumes an almost extraordinary place in Jesus’ preaching because of its being what corresponds most profoundly to his most personal mystery, his Sonship. His highest dignity, referring back to his divinity, is, after all, not power possessed by himself; it is

²³⁶ We cannot forget Yahweh’s predilection for children. It is reflected in his care when Israel was a child, during the exodus from Egypt (Hos 11:1-4). Children are called to worship (Joel 2:16) and God prepares praise for their mouths (Ps 8:2). The author of Psalm 131 found no better image to express his abandonment into the hands of God than that of the child in the arms of his mother. The pinnacle of messianic prophecy, the birth of Emmanuel, falls upon a child, a sign of liberation. (Is 7:14ff; 9:1-6). Cf. X. LEON-DUFOUR, “Child”, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Desclee Co., 1967), 57-58.

²³⁷ These three texts and other parallel ones have given rise to great exegetes and commentators of the gospels to develop a profound reflection on Jesus, the kingdom and children. The verbs to approach, to welcome, to receive, to embrace, to bless, to enter the kingdom are significant... And with regard to Jn 3, being born again... cf. HORST BALZ – GERHARD SCHNEIDER, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans Pub Co., 2004).

²³⁸ FRITZLEO LENTZEN-DEIS comments: “Children disrupt and inconvenience the teaching, in addition to occupying the last position in society, so they do not deserve attention,” *Comentario al evangelio de Marcos* (Verbo Divino, 1998), 307, translator’s version. It is enough to recall the judgment of their generation, “like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance...’” (Mt 11:16-17, Lk 7:31-32). And we have the realism of Saint Paul who speaks of childhood as an imperfect and provisional stage that we must overcome to reach adulthood: “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways” (1 Cor 13:11). Writing to the Ephesians he warns them: “We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming” (Eph 4:14; cf. 1 Cor 14:20).

based on the fact of his being turned towards the Other — God the Father.”²³⁹ What stands out is his *divine Sonship* and the trust that He has in the Father, similar to that which a child has in his own father. The child is the weakest and most defenseless of all human beings and the one who experiences the most needs. That is why he says: “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). The child is a reference point for the recognition of the Kingdom of God in this world and the primacy of grace. In the child we see Jesus welcomed and accepted, recognized. The grammar of the incarnation leads us to understand the great in the small and to value the small as great. “God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God” (1 Cor 1:27b-28).

The Popes have shown a particular predilection for children and, when addressing them, have commented on the Gospel texts mentioned above.

1.1. Wonder Before the Mystery of the Kingdom

The Second Vatican Council, speaking of the mystery of the Church, drew attention to the relationship between the kingdom of God and the Church (LG 5). The post-Council reflection on this topic has been broad and intense.

The People of Israel awaited the arrival of the Kingdom of God. John the Baptist taught that it had arrived: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Mt 3:1). And Jesus begins his ministry, “filled with the power of the Spirit” (Lk 4:14), saying: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mk 1:15). Jesus, during his visit to the synagogue in Nazareth, after reading Isaiah (Is 61:1-2), says to his fellow countrymen: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). The existence of Jesus is mystery and revelation. Throughout his public life he will reveal the scope of the mystery of the Kingdom, which is the central content of all his preaching. His saving mission is to show his fellow men and women the path they must follow to encounter God. The Kingdom of God is never defined, but it excites the crowd. It is good news for the poor.²⁴⁰ It is a message of salvation for a people who, on the other hand, have to purify their motivations.²⁴¹ The Kingdom points to a few favorites: the poor, the sick and children. Jesus, in revealing the Kingdom of God, does so through parables²⁴² and healings;²⁴³ expresses it in the beatitudes²⁴⁴ and at meals or dinners with excluded people.²⁴⁵ It is a gift and a demand. It has a growing dynamic and a clear orientation: the total liberation of people and fullness of life.

²³⁹ JOSEPH RATZINGER, *Journey Towards Easter*, Crossroad, New York, 1987, p. 72.

²⁴⁰ Cf. JOSÉ CRISTO REY GARCÍA PAREDES, *María en la comunidad del Reino*, pp. 204ff.

²⁴¹ The disciples of Emmaus confessed: “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel” (Lk 24:21).

²⁴² Let us remember the seed that grows, the yeast, the fish, the mustard seed, the tree where the birds of the sky nest, the hidden treasure, the precious pearl, the small flock to which the kingdom has been given, etc.

²⁴³ “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people” (Mt 4:23; 9:35).

²⁴⁴ Cf. Mt 5 and Lk 6.

²⁴⁵ Cf. Mt 9:10-13; Mk 2:15-17; Lk 5:29-32.

When John sends his disciples to ask Jesus: “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus answered them: “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me” (Mt 11:3-6).

Jesus’ preaching and his amazing signs show the wonderful presence of God. The Kingdom of God is new life, freedom, mercy and love. Jesus identifies himself with the Kingdom and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Lk 6:45). At the resurrection of the son of the widow of Naim, “Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has risen among us!’ and ‘God has looked favorably on his people!’” (Lk 7:16). The Kingdom comes to be polarized in the person of Jesus, the Son of the Father and the One anointed by the Holy Spirit. It is not surprising that the people are astonished at the words and deeds of Jesus (cf. Jn 5:20; 7:21). He is the mystery that causes wonder. All who met Jesus were amazed. To welcome the Kingdom is to welcome Jesus. It is to welcome his person and his way of seeing and proceeding in the transformation of the world.²⁴⁶

Let us think about the vision of authority as service or the washing of the feet of his disciples where he acts as a servant. The greatest becomes the least, the servant, and sets an example to follow: loving God and serving out of love of one’s brothers and sisters. “Revelation happens through figures of service and humility.”²⁴⁷

The mystery surrounding the years of the so-called hidden life of Jesus will never cease to amaze. We can refer to the customs of a Jewish family and emphasize how Jesus was educated by Mary, Joseph and the synagogue.²⁴⁸ In any case, the mystery of *kenosis* always remains with us, which includes much more than his words or actions offered in his public life.

But not everyone understands and accepts this mystery in which there is an immense disproportion between the divine mission and the humble human appearance. Among the unbelievers are his fellow countrymen (he is the carpenter’s son), the Pharisees, the rich and the self-sufficient and the malicious.²⁴⁹ Jesus ends up having to tell them: “If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (Jn 10:37-38).

It is thus explained that only those who have faith, who are simple of heart, can marvel and enter the Kingdom of Heaven. It takes someone who is poor in spirit (Mt 5:3, Lk 6:20) who seeks the Kingdom and its justice (Mt 6:33) with the ability to endure persecution (Mt 5:10). It is necessary to have the spirit of a child to praise and bless the Son of David. Jesus, in front of those who persecuted him, reminds them of Psalm 8:2:

²⁴⁶ On the theological, eschatological and soteriological content of the Kingdom, on the recipients and Jesus as a figure of the Kingdom, cf. OLEGARIO GONZÁLEZ DE CARDEDAL, *Cristología*, 47-54.

²⁴⁷ Cf. GABINO URIBARRI BILBAO, *La mística de Jesús. Desafío y propuesta* (Sal Terrae, 2017), 176-179, translator’s version.

²⁴⁸ Cf. JOACHIM JEREMÍAS, *Abba. El mensaje central del Nuevo Testamento* (Sígueme, 1981), 75ff. [For the English title see *The Central Message of the New Testament* (Fortress Press, 1981).]

²⁴⁹ Sinners who do not repent of their evil will not inherit the kingdom of Christ and of God. 1 Cor 6:9ff.; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5; Rev 22:14ff.

“Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself” (Mt 21:16).

1.2. Becoming a Child

In children, innocence, candor, fantasy, naivety, simplicity, receptivity, spontaneity and the capacity for wonder and awe shine forth. They have pure minds and hearts. They believe and trust. And they have their own energy. All the senses are always predisposed to experience something new. There is no duplicity or deception. They are not hypocrites. At every new thing they are surprised: they smile or cry. They also experience pain, especially in the lack of affection and abandonment. This lack is the cause of the greatest suffering for children and keeps their wounds open for a long time.

But children are the neediest human beings. More than the poor and sinners. They depend on others. They are always open and receptive and attentive to what anyone wants to offer them.

Wonder is innate in children. The candor with which children look at the world around them surrounds them in constant wonder.²⁵⁰ Einstein said: “The ideals which have lighted my way, and time after time have given me new courage to face life cheerfully, have been kindness, beauty and truth.”

Recovering childhood is a lifelong task. It’s not about returning to being a few years old, but about eliminating everything that has made us lose all those qualities and, above all, trust. Because it is not about being children, but about becoming like children. Saint Augustine recommends: “Let your old age be childlike, and your childhood like old age; that is, that neither may your wisdom be with pride, nor your humility without wisdom.”²⁵¹

Years ago, the poet-priest Jesús Tomé wrote a Christmas carol entitled “Nací para niño, Niño, y me quieren hacer hombre” [I was born to be a child, Child, and they want to make me a man.]²⁵² It is a ballad that attempts to show how children resist entering the world of adults, which is often interwoven with deception and twisted intentions. Later he wrote this verse:

Of all the creatures
of the earth, only the soul
can accommodate the All
because it can become nothing.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ Cf. CATHERINE LÉCUYER, *Educación en el asombro* (Plataforma Editorial, 2012). Cencini, footnote 16, p. 169. [For the English title see *The Wonder Approach: Rescuing Children’s Innate Desire to Learn* (Robinson, 2019).]

²⁵¹ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, Ps 113:2.

²⁵² JESÚS TOMÉ, *Poesía completa* (Ed. Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2010), 268-269, translator’s version. PEDRO CASALDÁLIGA has written: “Every poet is a child/ who refuses to be an adult./ His beard may grow/ out of anger or pride./ And his already mature heart / may fall into pieces. But he keeps his eyes/ dazzlingly pure.” *El tiempo y la espera* (Sal Terrae, 1986), 118, translator’s version.

²⁵³ JESÚS TOMÉ, *Ibid.*, 790, translator’s version.

The secret to becoming a child is to *detach* and *trust*. It is necessary to humble oneself (cf. Mt 23:12), to free oneself from a self-sufficiency. Jesus asks those who follow him to “deny themselves” (Mk 8:34). We become children when we recognize that we cannot do it alone and need the Father’s kind welcome and protection. We become children, and become small, when we abandon ourselves into the arms of the Father and ask for his protection.

When humans reach adulthood, they feel a certain nostalgia for their childhood.²⁵⁴ Could it be because of what they remember or the charm of seeing happy, naive, and trusting children who are amazed by everything around them? The truth is that there are many poets and writers who express the desire to re-experience the simplicity and love of their early years. Here are some testimonies, starting with this curious statement by Nietzsche: “The child is innocence and forgetfulness, a new beginning...”²⁵⁵

It is easy to understand in this context the famous verse by Rilke: “God waits in other places; he waits beneath everything. Where the roots are. Down below.”

Antonio Machado said that “we only sing about what has been lost.” He died in exile, without a home, with nothing around him, and in his vest, they found this verse: “These blue days and this sunshine of childhood.”²⁵⁶

Federico García Lorca asked Christ “to return me my child’s soul, / ancient, ripened with legends.”²⁵⁷

Gerardo Diego, in a beautiful poem, entitled *Creer* [Believe], wrote this verse-prayer:

Give me back those pure
transparencies of faithful air,
Give me back those girls
With those eyes of yesterday.
I want to believe.²⁵⁸

Gabriel Celaya in his poem *El niño que ya no soy* [The Child I Am No Longer]:

The child I was remembers.
It works on me like a void.
The child I was calls to me
With silent screams.
(translator’s version)

Everyone could make Pedro Casaldáliga’s radical confession their own:

²⁵⁴ MARIO BENEDETTI, said: “Childhood is a privilege of old age. I don’t know why I remember it more clearly now than ever.”

²⁵⁵ FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Penguin Classics, 1961), 54.

²⁵⁶ ANTONIO MACHADO, *Poesías completas* (Espasa Calpe, 1987), 417, translator’s version.

²⁵⁷ FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA, “Ballad of the Small Plaza,” *Poems of Love & Death*, Poetry in Translation, accessed May 17, 2025, <https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Spanish/LorcaPoemsLoveDeath.php>

²⁵⁸ GERARDO DIEGO, *Obra completa: Poesía, Vol. II*, (Aguilar, 1989), 579, translator’s version. This poem, not in its entirety, is recited as a hymn at Lauds on Tuesday of the Second Week of the Liturgy of the Hours in Spanish.

Under the lands without memory
the river of my childhood perseveres. ...
I remain, over the years, the same child.²⁵⁹

It is common to remember our early illusions and regret that, with the passage of time, our innocence, capacity for wonder and sincerity were interrupted; as if malice had accumulated, suspicion had been fueled, ego had grown and duplicity had increased. As if we had been prevented from becoming adults with that freshness of life of our early years. Miguel de Unamuno, in 1928, wrote this poem:

Enlarge the door, Father,
because I can't get through;
you made it for the children,
I have grown up despite myself.
If you don't enlarge the door for me,
shrink me, for pity's sake;
return me to the blessed age
in which living is dreaming (...)²⁶⁰

These words have greater strength if his reflections are reread from the perspective of his Christian experience.

Christ did not come down as an apparition; he did not take on mortal flesh in a miraculous way and appear as a mature man to accomplish his work. He would have been a ghost and not a reality. He was born; he was born as a child and lived as a child; he lived thirty years in obscurity, a hidden, human life, doing nothing but living it. *The childhood of Christ is one of the most instructive mysteries.* Within the work of redemption, what does this *childhood* mean? To be saved in Christ we have to become one with him. And to do this, we start by *making ourselves children* and living a human and obscure life, with humble patience. Your redemption does not need to be marvelous, a sudden resurrection and ascension into glory, but rather a slow life, an obscure life, a life that begins in *childhood* ignorance. Sudden breaking of the cocoon and appearing as a butterfly, bathing in the sunlight and flying through the open air, would be a fantasy, pure appearance, not reality. Suffer your pains and expect from them spiritual birth. One must be born in Bethlehem and live in humility, obscurity and obedience, then pass through Calvary, be crucified in Christ, and be buried with Him. This is how one is resurrected and ascends to glory.²⁶¹

What is it, then, that makes us recover the spirit of childhood and helps us to open our eyes and broaden our hearts to maintain constant wonder before the mystery of God, present within us and present in our world?

²⁵⁹ PEDRO M^a CASALDÁLIGA, C.M.F., "Confesión radical," *Uriel*, 16 (1964): 17, translator's version. Other testimonies: "The best smell, that of bread; the best taste, that of salt; the best love, that of children" (Graham Greene). "I know at last what I want to be when I grow up. When I grow up I want to be a little boy." (Joseph Heller) In the introduction to Hans Urs von Balthasar's book, cited above, Novalis's phrase is included: "To be childlike: that is the best of all. Nothing is more difficult than bearing one's own weakness. God helps with everything" (Novalis, shortly before his death). And Holderlin's: "O, would that I were as children are!"

²⁶⁰ MIGUEL DE UNAMUNO, *Poesía completa, Vol. III*, (Alianza Editorial, 1989), 89, translator's version.

²⁶¹ MIGUEL DE UNAMUNO, *Diario íntimo* (Alianza Editorial, 1978), 109-110, translator's version.

We are called to be born again: of water and the Spirit (cf. Jn 3:5). Of water, which purifies from sin; of the Spirit, which is a pledge of new life.²⁶² And it is possible because it is a gift of the Spirit (cf. Jn 3:8). It is true that “to the giving of God’s Spirit there must correspond on the part of the believer an acceptance in faith and a new way of life. But the gift of the Spirit of God is primary, for it is that Spirit, the Spirit of truth, that enables men to know and believe in Jesus’ revelation (14: 26; 16: 14-15).”²⁶³

This rebirth, therefore, means allowing the Spirit to act so that it may repair the image of God in each one of us. This implies, in the believer, openness, renunciation, detachment, purification, and polishing. Everything is grace and everything is effort.²⁶⁴ We will have to buy eye drops to see (Rev 3:18) so that we will not lack the light that the life-giving Spirit gives. And if a ray of light appears and we feel the fresh breeze moving the leaves of the trees or hear the delicate trill of birds, it is because mystery has arrived and prepared us for wonder. This is how gently the awakening of the child within us is, and of those who become like children who “find God in all things,” as Nadal said of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. And that is how simple it is for someone who, in old age, only has words of recognition, gratitude and praise. Who is not moved by the life, songs and sayings of St. Francis of Assisi, by the considerations of St. Teresa of Jesus or the stories of the little way of St. Therese of Lisieux or the spiritual writings of Fr. Charles de Foucauld?

Jesus makes us a proposal for change, for conversion. He invites us to follow a path of fatigue and Easter joy. When we delve deeper into the Kingdom of God, into the person of Jesus, the need spontaneously arises to adopt the filial spirit and the deep love of the Father and for the Father;²⁶⁵ humility, poverty and availability; prayer, the spirit of the Beatitudes and the works of mercy; obedience and submission to the will of the Father; patience in the face of contradictions and suffering;²⁶⁶ and, above all, the serenity that surrounds the apparitions of the Risen One.²⁶⁷

²⁶² Cf. ST. BASIL THE GREAT, *On the Holy Spirit*, Ch. 15, nos. 35-36. (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), 57-60.

²⁶³ RAYMOND F. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John, Vol. I*, (Garden City, 1966), 140. See the special commentary on the passage, pp. 137-149.

²⁶⁴ “The childlike mind is the one that sees the heavenly Father in everything that comes into his life. To do this requires a great effort: wisdom must be sucked from the naked continuation of cause and effect; love from the accidental. To do this is sincerely difficult. It is the ‘victory that overcomes the world’ of which St. John speaks. To become a child in Christ’s sense is to reach Christian maturity.” ROMANO GUARDINI, *The Lord*, *op. cit.*, 315.

²⁶⁵ “The road is long from the smugness of a ‘good Catholic’ who ‘does his duty,’ reads a ‘good newspaper,’ ‘does the right thing,’ etc. but on the other hand does what he pleases, to a life in God’s hand, in the simplicity of a child and the meekness of the tax collector (Lk 18:13). But whoever has once walked it, will not go back again. Being a child of God implies becoming little and grown-up at the same time. To live in accord with the Eucharist means to let go of one’s own body voluntarily and grow into the broad expanse of life in Christ.” EDITH STEIN, “The Mystery of Sacrifice,” in *Plough*, accessed May 17, 2025, <https://www.plough.com/en/topics/culture/holidays/easter-readings/the-mystery-of-sacrifice>.

²⁶⁶ It is the counterpoint to those who seek to pursue a career, who want to dominate others, demand material security, cannot bear contradictions, reject diversity, are incapable of forgiving, etc. Those who become children change their way of thinking and acting and, above all, allow themselves to be led by the hand of the Father. This is what Jesus did on the way to Jerusalem and to the Cross.

²⁶⁷ The Resurrection of Jesus is not surrounded by the grandeur of the Transfiguration (Mk 9:2-7). Mt 17:1-8, Lk 9:28-36.) Jesus is confused with the gardener, he is considered a stranger, a companion on the journey, the Master. The great mystery of the Resurrection is surrounded by simplicity and normality, but with great depth and transcendence.

In a culture like ours, full of diversion and escaping, we are unable to realize that we are missing out on what is essential in our lives. We are eager *to have, to appear, to be worthy and to be able*, but little effort for *being*. Amid so many possessions, knowledge and power, we find ourselves lost. With so much offered and so little discernment, we have become insensitive to the call of the deep, which is a call to fullness in the search for truth and in the exercise of freedom. We have entered the civilization of fast as a value, an ideal, an imperative of our society.²⁶⁸ And we do not appreciate the height and depth in which the human being moves, which—as Victor Hugo would say—*was defeated by his conquest*. Our life is like a compass²⁶⁹ that needs to “grow and move away from itself.”²⁷⁰ We must therefore undertake the task of making a pilgrimage into ourselves, letting ourselves be enlightened by the Word of Jesus and trained as his docile disciples. For this inner journey we must turn to the great mystics. We will surely be reborn, relive our childhood and walk in wonder. As Hans Urs von Balthasar recalled: “Enough that he strives to regain, in the spirit of the gospel, the principle, the origin from which he fell—how he does not know—to find himself in a strange land, by ‘becoming a child for God’ (*repuerescat Deo*: St. Augustine); enough if he opens the light of his eyes again to the vision of the eternal light.”²⁷¹

Jesus, in his proposal of rebirth, shows us the passage from death to glorification. The text of John 12:20-32 can be read in this key. The evangelist narrates the visit that some Greeks come to pay Jesus. Due to their culture, Greeks think about success, strength, and triumph. Jesus makes them a completely different proposal from the perspective of “his hour” as he moves toward the Father. “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (v. 24). He continues with the other two paradoxes. Jesus, faced with his approaching hour, feels troubled, but he recognizes that this is why he has come into the world. Therefore, he exclaims: “Glorify your name” (v. 28). Reading the entire text, it is clear that it is a journey of a man who, open to the Spirit, will reach glorification through fidelity. It is, at least for me, the Gospel text that best expresses the process of authentication involving one who becomes a child for the Kingdom of Heaven.

Adults, particularly Christians, cannot be slaves to their reason, ambition, or laziness; they must remain with their eyes and hearts open to the Spirit. Later John adds these words of Jesus: “Walk while you have the light” (v. 35). There are many rays of light, messages that are received, caresses that are offered to you from the divine presence.

²⁶⁸ Cf. GILLES LIPOVETSKY, *De la ligereza* (Anagrama, 2016). It is a good analysis of today’s world, so quick, fluid and mobile. It is a challenge that calls for discernment. This tendency towards frivolity, towards living without restrictions in the use of freedom, is the breeding ground for a “light” life and, in the long run, a distressing and unhappy one.

²⁶⁹ ST. ANTHONY MARY CLARET said: “Each Christian should be like a compass, one leg of which is fixed firmly in the center, while the other travels about it, describing a perfect circle.” “The Temple and Palace of God our Lord,” *Selected Spiritual Writings* (Claretian Publications, 1991), 178.

²⁷⁰ REMO BODEL, *Imaginar otras vidas. Realidades, proyectos y deseos* (Herder, 2014), translator’s version.

²⁷¹ HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Part Two, Vol. 2* (Ignatius Press, 1984), 106.

1.3. *Become Poor, Humble Yourself, and Serve*

The evangelical path of childhood does not lead to puerility, infantilism, or psychological regression, but rather points to spiritual maturity.²⁷² It refers not to the first years of existence but to a simple and unified life achieved by awakening, detachment and prioritization,²⁷³ marked by faith, obedience and complete trust.²⁷⁴ It refers to the joy and happiness that no one can take away (cf. Jn 16:22) and from which gratitude arises spontaneously.

The terms disciples, poor, and little ones (children) are frequently equivalent in Jesus' message. Becoming poor, humbling ourselves, and serving are part of the process of being believers, becoming Jesus' disciples, who grow personally and decrease to enter the Kingdom.²⁷⁵ Believers have an unavoidable reference point: the person of Jesus who

²⁷²“Childhood is openness. Human childhood is infinite openness. The mature childhood of the adult is the attitude in which we bravely and trustfully maintain an infinite openness in all circumstances and despite the experiences of life which seem to invite us to close ourselves. Such openness, infinite and maintained in all circumstances, yet put into practice in the actual manner in which we live our lives, is the expression of man's religious existence. Now this infinite openness of existence which we maintain, and which is childhood in the developed sense, can have its counterpart in our experience in the form of an infinite and loving self-bestowal on God's part. We can experience the fact that it is because of this self-bestowal of God that we do maintain our basic openness. And this openness of ours as men is an infinite openness, which we accept from God, which is upheld by his act of self-bestowal and basically made possible by him. Now it is this openness that constitutes the very essence of childhood in the mature sense, and it is nothing else than what is called in theological language childhood of God, the grace of divine sonship in the Son.” KARL RAHNER, “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” in *Theological Investigations, Volume 8, Further Theology of the Spiritual Life* (Helicon Press, 1961), 48-49.

²⁷³ This is the instruction that Jesus gives to his disciples: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it” (Mt 16:24-25). “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Mt 10:37). The same lesson can be learned from the parables of the pearl of great value or the field with hidden treasure (Mt 13:44-46). Or from the path followed by Paul: “Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith” (Phil 3:7-9).

²⁷⁴ Trust that gives security, without paying attention to calculations, because one feels the love of the Father who knows what we need (cf. Mt 6:32). Faith, obedience, and trust go hand in hand in following Jesus. This is how W. Kasper portrays adult faith: “The first fundamental attitude of faith is to listen and perceive, to be open and receive. Faith cannot be created or carried out; it must be perceived and received. Only people who are open and open themselves to the different and new aspects of the mystery of God, only those who do not consider their vision of reality and their attitudes to be immovable, will be able to reach faith. Secondly, faith is linked to conversion from habitual ways of thinking and acting. Faith does not come about without letting go of old certainties, without conversion and change. This can be a very painful process; it may mean giving up cherished concepts and being open to disappointment and conflict. Those who believe do not simply dance to the tune of the world; they do not go where the wind blows or let themselves be carried away by the current. To these attitudes are added hope, trust, patience and serenity. WALTER KASPER, *El evangelio de Jesucristo* (Sal Terrae, 2012), 202-204, translator's version. [For the English title see *The Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Paulist Press, 2015).]

²⁷⁵ “God has wanted to make salvation easy for us. He has not made salvation depend on knowledge, intelligence, wealth, extensive experience, or rare gifts that not everyone would receive; he has made it depend on something that is in everyone's hands—young and old, people of all classes, of all minds and fortunes—a little good will, a little humility: to be like a child, to obey, to seek the last place... just as elsewhere he says of poverty, of purity of heart, of love of justice, of the spirit of peace... Let us hope! For

continues to tell us: “Learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Mt 11:29). The echo of his words resonates after the washing of the feet: “So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them” (Jn 13:14-17). This way of life that Jesus adopts as a humble servant is not a gesture for effect but an expression of the one who “became flesh” to free us from sin and death and make us children of the same Father.

When we become small, we become poor and helpless, and our trust in the Father increases. At the same time, we experience *littleness*, which is linked to fraternity. Francis of Assisi has remained a model in the history of the Church. Littleness was not his starting point but a consequence of his constant contemplation and imitation of Jesus—annihilated, poor, humble, obedient, and a servant. He chose littleness as a lifestyle and a way to reassess his relationship with his brothers and sisters. He became prophecy in action from the perspective of no power and not having anything. (“*Sine proprio*”). The question continued to assail him: Who am I before you, Lord? Littleness and obedience are the work of the Spirit of the Lord. They are the fruit of the transformation in Christ the Servant, who became incarnate and became one among many. Littleness, being the fruit of the Trinity, becomes, at the same time, filiation, fraternity and mission. Only after a long path of conversion and penance did he propose littleness to his brothers. Fixing his eyes on the crucifix, he allowed himself to be crucified. He built up the Church by word and example.²⁷⁶

The Word of God—the Gospel—enlightened Francis’ soul and inspired him to identify with Christ and to love and serve people. The influence of the Gospel texts already cited is considerable (Mt 18:2-3; 20:26-28; Mk 9:35; 10:43-45; Lk 22:26-27; Jn 13:14). The culmination of his experience is in the text to the Philippians 2:5-9: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore, God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name.”²⁷⁷

Becoming children and serving. “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). Service, as followers of Jesus, frees us from self-centeredness. It is the most distant thing from triumph and the desire for prestige. Those who serve, like Jesus, always descend. Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa evokes St. Francis, who compares water to humility, and observes that water never

by the mercy of God, salvation is so close to us.” CHARLES DE FOUCAULD, *Escritos espirituales* (Sígueme, 1981), 142-143, translator’s version.

²⁷⁶ Thomas of Celano says of St. Francis: “Francis, the servant of God, was small in stature, humble in attitude, and lesser by profession.” *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, 2C, 18-19. To see the entire process of references to littleness in St. Francis, cf. F. OSSANA, “La minoridad propuesta por Francisco a sus hermanos,” *Sel. Fran.*, 73 (1996): 79-108; MICHEL HUBAUT, “La minoridad según san Francisco,” *Sel. Fran.*, 60 (1991): 451-461; JULIO MICÓ, “Menores al servicio de todos. La minoridad franciscana,” *Sel. Fran.*, 60 (1991): 427-450; ROMÁN MAILLEUX, “La minoridad en la Regla y en las Constituciones generales,” *Sel. Fran.*, 62 (1992): 195-212.

²⁷⁷ Cf. SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI, *Letter to the Faithful*, II, 2.

“rises,” never “ascends,” but always “descends,” until it reaches the lowest point. Steam, however, rises and that is why it is the traditional symbol of pride and vanity.

St. Peter exhorts us: “Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Pet 2:1-3). The path to follow in decreasing or “becoming like children” has these stages: 1) *Waking up* from the lethargy or alienation caused by the bombardment of sensations and start searching. 2) *Detachment* from everything that ties us down and deprives us of a joyful exercise of freedom. We must free ourselves from everything that manipulates and imprisons us. 3) *Theological life* that gives us light, instills hope and keeps the fire of love alive. As G. Bessi re said: “In the depths of our existence we become grateful to those who love us.”

We must not forget that “becoming a child and serving” is inherent to those who “enter the kingdom” or those who “enter life”; it is being with Jesus and in a relationship with the Father; it is being members of God’s family and sharing Jesus’ mission. For the same reason, if only those who serve live, becoming a child will be a continuous desire to serve others. Leonardo Boff wrote: “We are born whole, but we are never completed... We are always in genesis. We start being born, we continue being born, by stages throughout life until we finish our birth. Then, we enter the silence. And we die.”

The Holy Spirit takes the initiative in helping the adult become small. In the process that enlightens us, there is the dynamic of reconciliation with the paradoxical: first and last, wise and foolish, pride and humility, small and great. Those who follow Jesus must die if they want to live; they must deny themselves to reaffirm themselves; they must give to receive; they must decrease to grow; they must radically detach themselves to fully commit themselves. The question returns: “How will this be possible?” “For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible” (Mt 19:26). In the humanity of Christ, the world has been regenerated and reconciled. In his personal life, St. Paul exclaims: “Whenever I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10). And a little earlier, he had said: “If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness” (2 Cor 11:30).

I conclude this section with these observations on “*becoming like children*”:

Adults who become children exchange their sterile nostalgia for the past with an unconditional openness to the future. Old and tired people become children when one morning they feel the joy of living again. Skeptical people become children when they suddenly regain their capacity for wonder. Sinners become children when they move from fear to trust. Believers with routine faith become children when one day they perceive the absolute novelty of the Gospel. And those honorable, practicing Catholics, who sought security in their religious practices and found only boredom, become children when they are violently shaken by the wind of the Spirit, which no one knows where it comes from or where it goes. What about legalistic Christians, enslaved by the letter of the law? Suddenly they discover the freedom of the children of God and become children; they too have moved from fear to trust. Unless you change and trust like children...²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸ JOS  MAR A CABODEVILLA, *Hacerse como ni os*, op. cit., 202, translator’s version.

2. MARY WANTS US SMALL

The Logos “is always being born anew in the hearts of his saints,” says the Epistle to Diognetus (2nd century). For St. Gregory of Nyssa, the Christian life is the growth of the child Jesus in people’s souls. For St. Maximus the mystic, it is in people that the birth of the Lord is best manifested. “If, according to the flesh, one only is the Mother of Christ; nevertheless, according to the mind, Christ is the fruit of all,” says St. Ambrose.²⁷⁹

We have the model for following this path of spiritual childhood in Jesus and his Mother. Jesus is always the Son of the Father and Mary is always the servant of the Lord and Mother of Jesus. The Virgin Mary, with her humble, simple, open, available life, with her *fiat* of total adherence to the divine will and with her *Magnificat* of recognition and grateful praise to God for all his gifts, shows her perfect exemplarity. Indeed, Jesus and Mary lived a mystery of childhood throughout their lives, because their whole life was filial obedience, unlimited trust, loving and unconditional submission to the will of the Father.²⁸⁰

In her life, Mary embodies and explains the greatest paradoxes that make up the history of salvation: small and great; troubled and resolute; Virgin and Mother; servant and Queen, poor and full of grace; handmaid and Lady; simple and Seat of wisdom; disciple and Teacher; contemplative and serving. She is a sorrowful mother on Golgotha and a joyful mother in the Easter of the nascent Church. According to this experience of integration and dynamism in contrasts, she makes us small and great in her Son.

At the Annunciation, Mary gives her consent with a “fiat” (Lk 1:38). Jesus in Gethsemane pronounces his “fiat” before his passion (Mt 26:42). Despite the differences in who pronounces them and the contexts, there is a deep connection through the plan of salvation. And from this “let it be” of the mother and the Son, we understand Paul’s blessing and thanksgiving in his letter to the Ephesians: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” (Eph 1:3-6).

There is also a deep connection between the “woman” of Cana (Jn 2:1-12), the “woman” at Calvary (Jn 19:25-27) and the victorious woman of Revelation (Rev 12). Mary appears as the Woman of the New Covenant, who is the Mother of Jesus, mother of the beloved disciple and mother of all the redeemed; Mother of the Church.²⁸¹ We must

²⁷⁹ In ST. BONAVENTURE, *The Mirror of the Blessed Virgin* (B. Herder Book Co., 1932), 174.

²⁸⁰ “Behold, I am the Lord’s handmaid. Let it be done to me according to his word”: Such a statement presupposes a pure childlike attitude that entrusts everything to the Father, even when he wills to interfere in her relationship with Joseph, to whom she is engaged. In what results from this assent there becomes visible for the first time in God’s story with man something extraordinary, and a perfect archetype: the spontaneously trusting child’s word—which expects everything from the heavenly Father and is spoken with untrammelled freedom—at once makes fruitful the Word of God implanted within itself, the Word of God which is God’s eternal Son.” H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Unless You Become Like this Child*, *op. cit.*, 69-70).

²⁸¹ Cf. LG 53, 54 and 55; RM, 23 and 24 “At Golgotha we will have found the fulfillment of the sign of Cana, the realization of what we are and the prophecy of what we are called to be in fullness. In Jn 19:25-27 we rediscover Mary as a woman, as the mother of Jesus and the mother of all believers. Mary, figure of a Church united like a seamless tunic that does not tear; animated by the self-giving spirit of Jesus; washed

not forget the connection between the moment of the incarnation and Pentecost. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, Mary becomes the mother of the Messiah and Mary is present at the birth of the Church.

Mary exercises full motherhood because she gives birth to us in Christ,²⁸² makes us children of the Father, and keeps our senses and our hearts open to his plan of salvation. She wants us to be small so that we go through the door that leads us into the Kingdom.²⁸³ She knew that no one goes to the Father except through Jesus (cf. Jn 14:6). Only Mary could perceive the profound feelings of her Son's heart regarding the Father. She who had prayed with Him for so long in Nazareth of the pagans, who had shared so many secrets, was able to glimpse the depth of His parables and teachings and the background of His power in miracles, as well as the suffering of rejection, gossip, persecution, abandonment, betrayal and death. The prophecy of Simeon accompanied her throughout Jesus' life: "a sword will pierce your own soul" (Luke 2:35).²⁸⁴

Only Mary could appropriate the statements with which the First Letter of John begins:

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 Jn 1:1-3).

Only she could add to these words of witness: this servant of the Lord conceived him by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, at the foot of the cross, in continuity with the beatitude of "those who hear the word of God and do it" (cf. Lk 8:20-21; Mk 3:34), she welcomed the word of Jesus and assumed the responsibility of making us her children.

Mary wants to feel her call to be "mother."

by water and nourished by the blood that flows from his open side. At the foot of the cross we feel like beloved disciples, called to become loving disciples, without turning our eyes or our hearts away from 'the one they pierced.'" JOSÉ LUIS CELESTINO MONGE, "La mujer al pie de la cruz," ÁNGEL APARICIO (ed) *María del Evangelio* (Publicaciones Claretianas, 1994), 338, translator's version.

²⁸² "Jesus is thus the fruit of God's creative action and of Mary's receptive offering; salvation is entirely the fruit of God's self-giving in his Son and of humanity's consent in Mary. There is no self-salvation: Salvation is God, and Christ is God himself revealed and given as Emmanuel, the one who saves from sin, by granting a new beginning of existence. The result of this action of the Spirit and the collaboration of Mary is the Mediator. He belongs entirely to God because the Father extends the intradivine relationship to his personal human expression; and he belongs entirely to Mary, because she is the conscious and gestating subject of that new existence of the eternal Son, who in her womb begins his journey as man. Jesus turns to Mary with the same filial relationship with which he turns to the Father. Human motherhood, with its creative care, is the means by which the determinations regarding the Father are awakened and expressed in the soul of Jesus." OLEGARIO GONZÁLEZ DE CARDENAL, *Cristología*, *op. cit.*, 428-429, translator's version.

²⁸³ "If we too want to pass through the narrow door, we must work to be little, that is, humble of heart like Jesus, like Mary his Mother and our Mother. She was the first, following her Son, to take the way of the Cross and she was taken up to Heaven in glory, an event we commemorated a few days ago. The Christian people invoke her as *Ianua Caeli*, Gate of Heaven. Let us ask her to guide us in our daily decisions on the road that leads to the 'gate of Heaven.'" BENEDICT XVI, *Angelus* (August 26, 2007).

²⁸⁴ Cf. ARISTIDE SERRA, *María nelle sacre Scritture*, *op. cit.* 233-257.

To be children means saying “Mother”. If we remove this possibility we eliminate in fact the human element from the childhood of Jesus, leaving only the Sonship of the Word, which is revealed to us precisely by the *human* childhood of Jesus. Hans Urs von Balthasar has formulated this concept admirably; so it is worth our while to quote him at length. “*Eucharistia* means rendering thanks: how wonderful that Jesus gives thanks, by offering himself and giving himself without end to God and to human beings. Who is it he is thanking? Certainly he is thanking God the Father, prototype and source of every gift... But he thanks also the poor sinners who have willingly received him, who have let him enter under their unworthy roof. Does he also thank anyone else? I think so: he thanks the humble maiden from whom he received this flesh and this blood when the Holy Spirit overshadowed her... What does Jesus learn from his mother? He learns her ‘yes’. Not any yes, but the ‘yes’ which goes on always without wearying. Everything you ask, my God... ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to your word’... This is the catholic prayer that Jesus learnt from his earthly mother, from *Mater Catholica*, who was in the world before him and was inspired by God to be the first to pronounce these words of the new and eternal covenant...” (H. U. von Balthasar, *Hans des Gebetes*, in W. Sedel, *Kirche aus lebendigen Steinen*, Mainz 1975, p.25ff).²⁸⁵

Mary wants to see us “small,” with our eyes wide open, our ears attentive, and our hearts sensitive to everything that surrounds us and happens to us. She helps us discover Jesus and his message in all its splendor and become intimate with Him. It is difficult to know and not love Him; it is impossible to love and not proclaim Him. In this way, she wants to see us grow in innocence, wisdom, and grace, being like the Child Jesus who was amazed and blessed by the Father. She teaches us to be faithful disciples, followers of Jesus, as the Son of the Father, and to proclaim his glory. As a Mother, she trusts in us and expects us to be docile and committed to spreading the Kingdom. She doesn’t need big speeches and messages. The instruction given at the beginning of Jesus’ public life is sufficient and valid forever: “Do whatever he tells you.”²⁸⁶

This instruction is not a cold indication like the sign before a new road. It is the expression of a life that becomes the loving presence of a mother who helps us grow and be in tune with the beats of the Heart of Christ.²⁸⁷ She wants us to tune into everything that is calling for tenderness and mercy.

Mary wants us to be in intimate communion with Jesus²⁸⁸ in order to be able to say with authenticity: “*Our Father*” and to express without conditions: “*Thy will be done.*” The “*Our Father*” must evoke what is indescribable by human reason: what Jesus’ “*Abba*” could mean²⁸⁹ when he addresses the Father. But Mary, by making us children of her Heart, gives us the key to tune in, through faith, which is openness, simplicity, abandonment, trust and gratitude, with the words and feelings of Jesus, her Son.

²⁸⁵ JOSEPH RATZINGER, *Journey Towards Easter*, op. cit. 73-74.

²⁸⁶ Cf. A. ESCUDERO CABELLO, “*María, Madre del Buen Consejo*, Eco de una Mariología de la acción escatológica,” *Eph. Mar.*, 63 (2013): 259-275.

²⁸⁷ Cf. RENÉ LAURENTIN, *Mary in Scripture, Liturgy, and the Catholic Tradition* (Paulist Press, 2014).

²⁸⁸ “It — was, then, simply because they are small that you used children to — symbolize humility when, as our King, you commended it by saying that the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, Book I, 19). The saint from Lisieux learned this lesson very well: “I am *too little* to have any vanity now, I am *too little* to compose beautiful sentences in order to have you believe that I have a lot of humility. I prefer to agree very simply that the Almighty has done great things in the soul of His divine Mother’s child, and the greatest thing is to have shown her her *littleness*, her impotence.” SAINT THERESE OF LISIEUX, *Story of a Soul*, op. cit., 210.

²⁸⁹ Cf. JOACHIM JEREMÍAS, *Abba. El mensaje del Nuevo Testamento* (Sígueme, 1981), 19-73, above all, 65ff.

Thomas Merton recounts a personal experience from his time as a deacon that helps us understand how Mary cares for us and establishes close communion with us. He said:

Since the diaconate Our Lady has taken possession of my heart. Maybe, after all, she is the big grace of the diaconate. She was given to me with the book of the Gospels which, like her, gives Christ to the world. I wonder what I have been doing all my life not resting in her heart which is the heart of all simplicity. All life, outside her perfect union with God, is too complicated. (...) And believe me, Lady, that is all I want. Because everything that is yours is perfectly united to God in pure simplicity.²⁹⁰

And Miguel de Unamuno recited this poem:

You, My Lady, who made God a child,
make me a child when I die
and cover me with the ermine cloak
of your moon, hearing me
with your smile.²⁹¹

Mary prefers the poor and the children. Let us remember her preference for Juan Diego, in Tepeyac, Mexico; for Bernadette Soubirous, in Lourdes; for the three little shepherd children in Fatima.

The best disposition to cultivate wonder is silence in which everything else makes itself present as a constant revelation, as a free offering. In silence other presences come together and their communion is recognized. Isn't this love?²⁹²

3. AND WHAT GREATER WONDER?

Although the Word of God has always been relevant throughout the history of the Church, the emphasis on one or another aspect of its message has been diverse. The ideals of holiness have varied successively. Each age has looked at Jesus and his gospel, highlighting one aspect or another. In our day, the return to the origins, as a source of renewal, has highlighted the divine initiative and the gratuitousness by which we Christians move and exist. Before the commandment is the gift: "Just as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34-35). This is how Mary experienced and expressed it because first, she was full of grace. From the beginning, the Trinity was present and the Holy Spirit made her the Mother of Jesus and continues to make her our mother. Therefore, we can pray confidently, "Show us Jesus."

²⁹⁰ THOMAS MERTON, *The Sign of Jonas* (Harcourt, 1981), 171, note from March 27, 1949. St. Augustine has a simile, which can be applied equally to the Church and to Mary as mothers: The mother "incarnates the food and produces milk from it. She produces for us what we are capable of taking. In the same way the Word became flesh (Jn 1:14), so that we little ones might be nourished on milk, being babies still with respect to solid food." Saint Augustine, *Sermon* 117, 16.

²⁹¹ MIGUEL DE UNAMUNO, *Poesía completa*, Vol. 2, (Alianza Editorial, 1987), 198, translator's version.

²⁹² Cf. MARIÀ CORBÍ, *El conocimiento silencioso. Las raíces de la cualidad humana* (Fragmentos, 2016), 5.

The great wonder is to experience that God loves us.²⁹³ St. John says: “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us” (1 Jn 4:10). Those who as adults become children are placed once again in innocence, in candor, in “first love.” That love with which God loves us (cf. 1 Jn 4:19). It is like returning to the image of God imprinted in our hearts, which reveals the gratuitousness from which we begin in the new way of living according to faith. We start seeing without calculations or pretensions. We are open to novelty, to surprise, to delight. We return to pure authenticity in our gaze and in our heart. What we see is affirmed and what we feel is said, but with purified intention and the gentleness of charity.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1 Cor 13:4-7).

A distinctive feature of adults who have become children is their ability to ask wholeheartedly: “*Thy will be done*” because they feel loved, because they feel inhabited and the Spirit prays within them, because they know that they only give what they receive. What Jesus said is fulfilled in them: “It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (Mt 10:20). St. Paul confirmed: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” (Rom 8:14).

Those who have become children stand out because of their vision and understanding of the world and life.²⁹⁴ They manage to put things in their place and to correctly situate themselves in their context (whether it be family, social, cultural, economic, or political). They are small, but they are great because of their trust and transparency; they are humble but will be exalted for their availability and commitment to service; they are the last, but they will be the first because they have loved unconditionally. They are open to the unpredictable and avid explorers of conquests who are not afraid to embrace new things. Isn’t it amazing to meet people who, amid ups and downs, setbacks, slander and persecution, exude and spread peace, serenity and joy? There are still martyrs and other men and women who silently give their lives so that others may eat and drink. Are these not signs that inspire wonder? There are many signs of holiness within families and religious communities, like those “saints next door” to whom Pope Francis referred.

Those who become children cause wonder and live in wonder because they see people, contemplate nature, and become involved in events according to another mysterious dimension. Reconciliation with their first love has restored to them the value and truth, the beauty of everything they contemplate. Behind their smile they reveal a tremendous strength.

I conclude with these words of Pope Francis:

She is that woman who rejoiced in the presence of God, who treasured everything in her heart, and who let herself be pierced by the sword. Mary is the saint among the saints, blessed above all others. She teaches us the way of holiness and she walks ever at our

²⁹³ ST. IRENAEUS OF LYONS said: “For the glory of God is a living man,” *Adversus haereses*, IV, 20, 7.

²⁹⁴ “Wonder should not be lost — the capacity, that is, to marvel and to listen, to ask not only about what is functional but equally to perceive the harmony of the spheres and to rejoice precisely that it is of no obvious use to us.” JOSEPH RATZINGER. *Journey Towards Easter*, *op. cit.*, 73.

side. She does not let us remain fallen and at times she takes us into her arms without judging us. Our converse with her consoles, frees and sanctifies us. Mary our Mother does not need a flood of words. She does not need us to tell her what is happening in our lives. All we need do is whisper, time and time again: “Hail Mary...”²⁹⁵

²⁹⁵ FRANCIS, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, no. 176.

CHAPTER V

CULTIVATING WONDER BY THE “*VIA PULCHRITUDINIS*”

The third proposed way to cultivate wonder is *via pulchritudinis*. People assume that talking about beauty is just babbling. No matter how much we talk about it, the best and most important things are always left to say. But there is one agreement: Beauty always provokes wonder. The Christian life is beautiful, very beautiful. Beauty is everywhere. What a pity that we cannot see it and enjoy it!

The man who does not wonder is no longer a man. But in order to wonder, man needs a beauty before him, a beauty that he does not produce, that he does not possess, that is, a donated beauty. The true mystery of beauty that man has identified since the beginning is its gratuitousness. Man is made to perceive and accept beauty as a gift, to reflect and therefore manifest beauty as a given gratuitousness, as the gratuitousness of the Other.²⁹⁶

The “*via pulchritudinis*” refers to the *philokalia* (the love of beauty), a set of teachings so often evoked by the Eastern Fathers and with which they indicated the path towards harmony in living and its full realization in Christ. Every Christian must be a burning bush, a lamp that burns and illuminates; a work of art, crafted in everyday life, and a living icon of beauty.²⁹⁷

Beauty has been at the center of life in the great cultures of China, India, and Greece. It has been, in a special way, in the history of the Israelite people, where, in the story of creation, God gives names to all things and they are “beautiful.” Adam and Eve, man and woman, were created in his image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:27 and 31). But beauty has not always shone in all its splendor in people’s lives and cultures. Dark clouds have eclipsed or delayed its proper condition and purpose.²⁹⁸

During the Council, because concern had been felt for some time, there was a clamor for beauty.²⁹⁹ It was uttered by the Pope himself, Paul VI (May 7, 1964), and

²⁹⁶ MAURO-GIUSEPPE LEPORI, *Heridos por la belleza*. Conference given in “Encuentros Madrid, (April 22, 2017), 4, translator’s version.

²⁹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, in his *Letter to Artists*, no. 2, states: “All men and women are entrusted with the task of crafting their own life: in a certain sense, they are to make of it a work of art, a masterpiece.”

²⁹⁸ LUIS CENCILLO, *Paradojas de la belleza* (BAC, 2003), 23ff and 81ff. There is excellent agreement recognizing that aesthetics has been little attended to or marginalized in theology, giving greater importance to truth and goodness. This gap was addressed by Professors Claus Westermann and Gerhard von Rad in articles from 1950 to 1957. In the early 1960s, HANS URS VON BALTHASAR drew attention to the role of beauty in theology. *Gloria. 1. La percepción de la forma* (Ed. Encuentro, 1985), 22-23. [For the English title, see *The Glory of God, 1: Seeing the Form* (Ignatius Press, 1982).] See also JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN, *Sobre la libertad, la alegría y el juego* (Sígueme 1972), 29. [For the English title, see *Theology of Play* (Harper & Row, 1972).]

²⁹⁹ Let us remember F. Dostoevsky, E. Przywara, J. Maritain, E. Coreth, Paul Claudel, Pavel Florensky, Paul Evdokimov, R. Guardini, Hans J. Moltmann, U. von Balthasar, etc. There are many thinkers, writers, poets, and musicians who, after the World Wars, encouraged us to wake up, get up, and continue singing

repeated at the closing with the message to the artists (December 8, 1965). Years later, John Paul II wrote them a letter (April 4, 1999), and Benedict XVI held a meeting with them (November 21, 2009). In his teachings, Pope Francis did not cease to praise the value of beauty, as I will indicate.

These have been considered as sources of beauty: *nature*, *people* and *art*.³⁰⁰ They are linked to the way beauty manifests, perceives and expresses itself. What God created and what people have made is beautiful: music, poetry, sculpture, architecture, etc., and all representative art. But we cannot forget, from the perspective of faith, that beauty shines in the face of Christ, of his Mother, and of the saints. For Christians, creation is inseparable from recreation.³⁰¹ And, in liturgical celebrations, lived in faith, they contemplate the beauty of the Mystery. Liturgy is beautiful when it elevates us, encourages contemplation, and allows us to enjoy the divine. *O sacrum convivium!*... (St Thomas).³⁰²

Beauty,³⁰³ Beautiful,³⁰⁴ and Glory³⁰⁵ become synonyms when we refer to the mystery of God, a mystery of love, and the one who causes wonder. “Beauty is a key to

of beauty. For a good study of aesthetic essays, cf. ALFONSO LÓPEZ QUINTÁS, *El enigma de la belleza* (Desclée De Bouwer, 2015).

³⁰⁰ Cf. VITO MANCUSO, *La via della bellezza* (Garzanti, 2019), 23-50. See the extensive bibliography provided. Nobel Prize winner in physics Carlo Rubbia said: “When we observe nature, we are always impressed by its beauty, its order, its coherence... It is clear to me that this cannot be a result of coincidence, a combination of chance. There is clearly something or Someone making things the way they are. We see the effects of that presence, but not the presence itself.” Max Planck thought the same: “Science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature... the progress of science consists in the discovery of a new mystery the moment one thinks that something fundamental has been solved.” He added: “The question unites men; the answer separates them.” Cf. JUAN PLAZAOLA, in (Various Authors.) *Arte y parte en la sociedad del espectáculo* (Universidad de Deusto, 2005), 186-187.

³⁰¹ Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE, *Via Pulchritudinis: Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue*, Part III: The Ways of Beauty, Concluding Document of the 2006 Plenary Assembly.

³⁰² “Liturgical beauty is never mere external *pulchrum*, but rather the very expression of the meaning of the sacraments, that is, the expression of the *verum* of that sacramental reality that human words cannot express. The liturgy invites us to enter and participate in a mystery that surpasses us. And Christ, through symbols, gestures, words and melodies, helps us by reaching out his hand.” EDUARDO CAMINO, *A Dios por la belleza. La via pulchritudinis* (Encuentro, 2016), 122, translator’s version.

³⁰³ It is the revelation of truth and love. The good and the beautiful are at the summit. “At the highest degree of synthesis, that which is found in the Bible, truth and goodness offer themselves for our contemplation. Their living union, symbiosis, denotes the integrity of being from which beauty springs forth.” PAUL EVDOKIMOV, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty*, Oakwood Publications, Redondo Beach, Calif., 1990, p. 1. For a semantic study of beauty in the Old Testament, cf. GIANCARLO CAMISASCA, *La bellezza e il suo artefice. Alcuni termini del vocabolario della bellezza in ebraico biblico*, Cantagalli eu Press FTL, Lugano, 2017; XABIER PIKAZA, “Teología de la Belleza. Experiencia bíblica y estética cristiana”, in *Arte y fe: Actas del Congreso de “las Edades del hombre”*, Salamanca, 1994, pp. 313-374; JOHN NAVONE, *Verso ua teología della Bellezza*, San Paolo, Milano, 1998. On pp. 98-104, this author offers a compendium of presuppositions of the theology of beauty.

³⁰⁴ “This, the one Good and Beautiful, is uniquely Cause of all the many things beautiful and good. (...) all things existing are from the Beautiful and Good, and in the Beautiful and Good, and turn themselves to the Beautiful and Good.” PSEUDO DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, *The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, Caput. IV, sec. VII and X, accessed May 17, 2025, <https://ccel.org/ccel/dionysius/works/works.i.iii.iv.html>. In the *Spiritual Canticle* (B), Stanza 36, comment no. 3 on “And let us go forth to behold ourselves in Your beauty,” Saint John of the Cross repeats the word “beauty” almost twenty times, referring to the love of God. For the Saint, prayer consists “in considering the beauty of God and in rejoicing that He has such beauty.”

³⁰⁵ Glory, in Hebrew “kabod” and in Greek “doxa”, is the manifestation of the majesty of God. Glory radiates luminosity, sublimity, sovereignty and splendor of the beauty of Yahweh. In revelation, God integrates man into his glory, making him a participant in his life and light. “For with you is the fountain

the mystery and a call to transcendence. It is an invitation to savour life and to dream of the future.”³⁰⁶ And it is that “beginning with the simple experience of the marvel-arousing meeting with beauty, the *via pulchritudinis* can open the pathway for the search for God, and disposes the heart and spirit to meet Christ, who is the Beauty of Holiness Incarnate, offered by God to men for their salvation.”³⁰⁷ Ultimately, it is about: “May the splendor of your majesty, O Lord, we pray, shed its light upon our hearts, that we may pass through the shadows of this world and reach the brightness of our eternal home.”³⁰⁸

Mary is “*Tota Pulchra*” and the mother of “Beautiful Love.” She knows about the gift and the response; she has traveled the “*via pulchritudinis*” and takes us by the hand so that our lives may be beautiful, and we may travel until we encounter Beauty in the Trinitarian Homeland.

Everything we can say about the Beauty of Mary will always be a pale reflection of reality. She is all Beautiful, Immaculate, and Holy, full of grace, and Mother of Christ and the Church. Where can there be greater human beauty after Christ, and where can we find greater realism? Why are we surprised that prophets have prophesied about her, poets have praised her, painters have immortalized her, musicians have sung about her, the Holy Fathers have exalted and glorified her, and the Shepherds have blessed her and placed the faithful of all centuries under their protection?

Mary is there as “radiant gratuitousness” and “luminous gratuitousness”;³⁰⁹ always within reach of our gaze and our prayer to awaken us, help us rise, show us the way, listen and intercede. She shows us the path of Beauty: that of Jesus and her own; her own and that of Jesus. They are inseparable. The Spirit dwells in us (cf. Rom 8:9). It is the same Spirit who cries out in our hearts and hopes that we can say like Jesus: “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants” (Mt 11:25).

1. CONTEXT IN WHICH THE PROPOSAL IS MADE

We are immersed in a time of even more radical changes than those we were told about in the Council and immediately after the Council. This movement, time, and relationships take on greater proportions today, with multiple opportunities never experienced before. They influence the way we see, feel and act. We are offered many more and broader opportunities.

of life; in your light we see light” (Ps 36:9). Saint John of the Cross, in the *Spiritual Canticle* and *The Living Flame of Love*, constantly evokes the glory and greatness of the Divinity in which the soul delights.

³⁰⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Artists* (April 4, 1999), no. 16. In this same paragraph, he said: “May the beauty which you pass on to generations still to come be such that it will stir them to wonder! Faced with the sacredness of life and of the human person, and before the marvels of the universe, wonder is the only appropriate attitude.”

³⁰⁷ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE, *op. cit.*, Part II.1. Accepting the Challenge.

³⁰⁸ ROMAN MISSAL, *Collect for the Mass of the Epiphany*.

³⁰⁹ Cf. ILDEFONSO MURILLO, “El camino de la belleza,” *Mariología*, EphMar, 65 (1995): 193-205; JESÚS CASÁS OTERO, *Tota pulchra. María, esplendor de la belleza divina* (Secretariado Trinitario, 2015); SALVATORE M. PERRELLA, “‘Tota pulchra es Maria’. L’Immacolata: Frutto segnoe riverbero della bellezza e dello splendore di Cristo Redentore dell’uomo”, *Il dogma dell’Immacolata Concezione di Maria. Problemi attuali e tentativi de ricomprensione* (Marianum, 2004), 463-623.

At this moment, multiple social, economic, and political situations subjugate us, exposing our false security and urging us to cultivate faith in the goodness of the Creator and in the beauty of his creation.

François Cheng begins his first lesson on beauty with these words:

In these times of universal suffering, random violence, and natural and ecological disasters, to speak of beauty could seem incongruous, improper, even provocative — almost scandalous. But that is precisely why we can see that beauty, as evil's opposite, really is situated at the other extreme of the reality we must face. I am convinced that it is our urgent and ongoing task to take a hard look at these two mysteries, which constitute the two poles of the living universe: at one end, evil; at the other, beauty.³¹⁰

Pope Benedict XVI asked the artists: “What is capable of restoring enthusiasm and confidence, what can encourage the human spirit to rediscover its path, to raise its eyes to the horizon, to dream of a life worthy of its vocation — if not beauty?”³¹¹ Pope Francis also described the present moment in the first two chapters of the encyclicals: *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*. Review them to discover “*what is happening to our common home*” and the “*dark clouds over a closed world*”. The analyses he makes start from the praise for the beautiful Mother Earth that embraces us³¹² and point to the ideals of a beautiful and dignified life.³¹³

In this context, it is urgent to become aware again of the Beauty that sustains us and to which we strive. We have forgotten, hidden, the Beauty that animates creation and by which every creature aspires to be intoxicated.

2. TOWARDS THE HIDDEN MYSTERY

The great Nobel Prize winner, Albert Einstein, made these two statements: “The most beautiful and deepest experience a man can have is the sense of the mysterious.” “The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of true art and true science.”

We carry within us, by our condition as creatures, an insatiable thirst for beauty. Simone Weil writes: “The soul's natural inclination to love beauty is the trap God most frequently uses in order to win it and open it to the breath from on high.”³¹⁴ Men of every race, culture and religion, and above all, the saints,³¹⁵ confirm that the tendency towards beauty and mystery, the mystery of love, accompanies every human being. St. Basil the Great indicates in his rule:

³¹⁰ FRANÇOIS CHENG, *The Way of Beauty: Five Meditations for Spiritual Transformation* (Inner Traditions, 2009), 5-6.

³¹¹ BENEDICT XVI, *Meeting with Artists* (November 21, 2009).

³¹² Cf. FRANCIS, *Laudato si'*, no. 1.

³¹³ Cf. FRANCIS, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 55. See also the CICLSAL analysis in its Letter *Proclaim*, no. 3.

³¹⁴ SIMONE WEIL, *Waiting for God* (Harper & Row, 1951), 163.

³¹⁵ How can we not be amazed by the beauty of Mother Teresa of Calcutta welcoming people experiencing poverty, discarded by society, or Fr. Damien embracing the lepers? Who is not amazed by the forgiveness that martyrs offer to those who take their lives?

Every human being desires all that is good, and we are drawn by a kind of natural disposition towards all that we think to be good. Indeed, without being taught, we are drawn in love towards blood relatives and those closest to us in the flesh, while we are attached with our whole affection and good services to those from whom we receive benefits. But what greater good can we have than God? Indeed, *what other good is there but God alone?* What loveliness, what splendour, what beauty which we are naturally moved to love is of such a kind as is in God and more claims our confidence?³¹⁶

After going through strange twists and turns and long discussions, anyone interested in beauty will end up with Plato remembering the proverb: “Beautiful things are difficult.”³¹⁷ No one who has experienced beauty will forget it because of the mark, the wound that its brilliance produces in those who contemplate it.³¹⁸ A mark that, on the other hand, as Hölderlin says, leaves inner peace, because the divine resides in beauty. Simone Weil adds something else: “The love of the order and beauty of the world is thus the complement of the love of our neighbor.” And a few lines later, she adds: “The beauty of the world is the co-operation of divine wisdom in creation. (...) Beauty is the only finality here below.”³¹⁹

Plotinus, who wrote such suggestive pages about beauty, makes this recommendation: “We must, then, ascend to the Good, which every soul desires. If someone, then, has seen it, he knows what I mean when I saw how beautiful it is. For it is desired as good, and the desire is directed to it as this, though the attainment of it is for those who ascend upward.”³²⁰ And then he asks to put one’s soul towards one’s homeland. Beauty fascinates us, shocks us and overwhelms us. It also transcends us. It escapes our calculations and reasoning. We are caught up in it, and it pulls us towards higher goals. It arouses in us nostalgia for the absolute.

Our limitation becomes evident when we talk about beauty. We babble. Recognizing its objective reality, we do not find adequate words to express what we feel, what we perceive and what we want to say. D. M. Turolido rightly says:

Beauty is contemplated, not defined. Silence suits it more than words. We can only get close to it by approximation. Beauty does not even bear comparisons. There is a primacy of beauty with which good and truth are also combined. (...) It is no coincidence that when we discover a truth, filled with wonder, we exclaim: “How beautiful!” This is what

³¹⁶ SAINT BASIL, *The Rule of St. Basil*, Q2, R1.12-15, trans. Anna M. Silvas (Liturgical Press, 2013), 59.

³¹⁷ PLATO, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 9, trans. W. R. M. Lamb (Harvard University Press, 1925), section 304e. Evoking Plato, F. DOSTOEVSKY said: “It is difficult to judge when such beauty is concerned, I have not prepared my judgment. Beauty is a riddle.” *The Idiot* (London, Vizetelly & Co., 1887), 72. Dostoevsky himself, in his novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, left in Mitia’s mouth: “Beauty is a terrible and awful thing! It is terrible because it has not been fathomed and never can be fathomed, for God sets us nothing but riddles.” *The Brothers Karamazov* (Random House, 1950), 127.

³¹⁸ Cf. ST. TERESA OF JESUS “Oh Beauty exceeding / All other beauties! / Paining, but You wound not / Free of pain You destroy / The love of creatures.” *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, Vol. 3, (ICS Publications, 1985), 381. ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS, *The Living Flame of Love*, Stanza 2. “Oh, sweet burn!”; BROTHER LUIS DE LEÓN, *Serene Night*: “When I study the round / dome of the sky decked with unbounded light / and glance back at the ground / surrounded by the night, / oblivious in dream, confined from sight, / then love and pain awake / a bonfire and a craving in my chest. / My eyes, a fountain, make / a stream flow without rest.” In *The First Elegy from the Castle of Duino* RILKE expresses: “For beauty’s nothing but the birth of terror, / Which we endure but barely, and, enduring / Must wonder at it, in that it disdains.”

³¹⁹ That is why the author liked the Gospel of St. John so much. The pages she wrote about “Love of the Order of the World” are admirable, in *Waiting for God* (Harper & Row, 1951), 158-181.

³²⁰ PLOTINUS, *The Enneads*, I, 6.7 (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 99.

happens when we stand before a sunset as if before a theophany; this is what happens when we stand before a gesture of forgiveness through the work of love.³²¹

Beauty is not everything, but without beauty, it is difficult to appreciate what is true and good. Without beauty, there is no harmony or communion; there is no unity.

From the depth of desire, we have this testimony from St. Gregory of Nyssa, who, in *The Life of Moses*, after going through his journey of intimacy with God, says:

He shone with glory. And although lifted up through such lofty experiences, he is still unsatisfied in his desire for more. He still thirsts for that with which he constantly filled himself to capacity, and he asks to attain as if he had never partaken, beseeching God to appear to him, not according to his capacity to partake, but according to God's true being.

Such an experience seems to me to belong to the soul which loves what is beautiful. Hope always draws the soul from the beauty which is seen to what is beyond, always kindles the desire for the hidden through what is constantly perceived. Therefore, the ardent lover of beauty, although receiving what is always visible as an image of what he desires, yet longs to be filled with the very stamp of the archetype.³²²

Beauty — a reflection of the beauty of the created universe — impacts us, inspires admiration, causes surprise, and wonder.³²³ It is true that sometimes we are dazzled by appearances rather than by the apparition. Appearance seduces, it is deceptive, and the apparition introduces us to the mystery.³²⁴ However, what we are concerned about is the recovery of the person. Silvano Petrosino, speaking of wonder, says:

Just as there is no wonder without surprise, similarly there is no wonder without questioning. The recovery of the subject and his progress beyond the impression of fascination occurs in questioning, or as a question, and precisely through the question, the person intervenes, going forth to encounter and, in a certain sense, animating the splendor that animates him and that comes his way. These “two” traits are mutually related; in the experience of wonder, surprise is always accompanied by a question, and the question always imposes itself as a form of surprise.³²⁵

Wonder, insofar as it arouses a new awareness in the subject who experiences it, tends toward the recognition of something different and wonderful in the small events of ordinary life.³²⁶ It is, as Petrosino himself says, a *resumption*,³²⁷ a regaining of awareness and responsibility for what we see and feel that contains so much wonder.

Beauty is capable of reaching and penetrating the hardest or most scorched hearts, those that are momentarily distant from truth and goodness and, therefore, from authentic reality. Today there are still many who listen without understanding and look without perceiving, “For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and

³²¹ D. M. TUROLDO, “Belleza,” *Nuevo Diccionario de Mariología* (Paulinas, 1988), 290, translator's version.

³²² GREGORY OF NYSSA, *The Life of Moses*, nos. 230-231 (Paulist Press, 1978), 114.

³²³ To expand on this point, cf. FRANÇOIS CHANG, *Cinco meditaciones sobre la belleza* (Siruela, 2015), 21.

³²⁴ “The shining that is set into the work is the beautiful. Beauty is one way in which truth as unconcealment comes to presence.” MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Off the Beaten Track* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 32.

³²⁵ SILVANO PETROSINO, *El asombro* (Encuentro, 2001), 80, translator's version.

³²⁶ Cf. ANSELM GRÜN, *El asombro. Descubrir las maravillas en el día a día* (Sal Terrae, 2019).

³²⁷ *IBID.*

they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them” (Mt 13:14).³²⁸

Given the cultural panorama that surrounds us, Pope Francis’ advice is wise and timely:

Every form of catechesis would do well to attend to the “way of beauty” (*via pulchritudinis*). Proclaiming Christ means showing that to believe in and to follow him is not only something right and true, but also something beautiful, capable of filling life with new splendour and profound joy, even in the midst of difficulties. Every expression of true beauty can thus be acknowledged as a path leading to an encounter with the Lord Jesus. This has nothing to do with fostering an aesthetic relativism which would downplay the inseparable bond between truth, goodness and beauty, but rather a renewed esteem for beauty as a means of touching the human heart and enabling the truth and goodness of the Risen Christ to radiate within it.³²⁹

3. BEAUTY CALLS AND ESTABLISHES A PERMANENT DIALOGUE

Since Plato, beauty and goodness are linked to the word “kalein” because beauty calls all things to itself. “Beauty calls to ecstasy, while its act of love opens in us the possibility of awareness, of a journey, of a known and embraced vulnerability.”³³⁰ Romano Guardini, in his study of Dostoevsky’s religious universe, comments: “Beauty is the way a being takes on a face in a heart and makes it eloquent. In beauty, the being becomes powerful through love, and by moving the heart and blood, it also moves the spirit. That’s why beauty is so powerful. She reigns and dominates, movingly, without ever tiring.”³³¹ In fact, beauty is always surprising, it energizes, it exalts, although it also disorients.

Correlating Chinese and Western culture, F. Cheng makes this reflection:

The beauty of the world is a “call” in the most concrete sense of the word, and men and women, those beings of language, respond to it with all their souls. Everything happens as if the universe, in thinking to itself, was waiting for them to speak. Is all this a dreamlike illusion, an “oriental” whim? Do humans, the more rational and skeptical “masters and possessors of nature,” give in to this “illusion”? The French expressions “this tells me about such a thing,” “it pertains to me” or “it doesn’t tell me anything” seem to reveal the need for an exchange of gaze and word with the world.³³²

Beauty is a gift and a call. It is revelation and permanent dialogue.³³³ The way of beauty shows us the path that leads to the surprising and amazing, through *seeing*, *hearing* and *tasting*.³³⁴ With its hints and flashes it awakens us and makes us shudder before the

³²⁸ EDUARDO CAMINO, *A Dios por la Belleza. La via pulchritudinis* (Encuentro, 2016), 14, translator’s version.

³²⁹ FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 167.

³³⁰ CICLSAL, *Contemplate: To consecrated men and women on the trail of Beauty* (2015), no. 25.

³³¹ ROMANO GUARDINI, *El universo religioso de Dostoyevski* (Emecé, 1954), 272, translator’s version.

³³² FRANÇOIS CHENG, *Cinco meditaciones sobre la belleza*, *op. cit.*, 69, translator’s version.

³³³ “From the very circumstance of his origin, man is already invited to converse with God. For man would not exist were he not created by God’s love and constantly preserved by it...” *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 19.

³³⁴ Cf. ERMES RONCHI, *El desafío de creer hoy. La belleza de la fe y la esperanza* (Paulinas, 2013), 95.

luminosity, harmony, proportion and integrity.³³⁵ The encounter with beauty throws us off our routine and makes us delve into our roots. Beauty invites us to listen carefully and look at things differently. It calls for concentration and contemplation and, beyond the enjoyment of what is pleasant,³³⁶ it heals us, encourages us and takes us out of our self to praise, to love and to make life more charming and beautiful. The *via pulchritudinis*, therefore, is a pathway of openness, discernment, acceptance and enjoyment.

Since the beginning of time, human beings have felt challenged and seduced by beauty.³³⁷ According to St. Albert the Great, it is proper to beauty to “call to itself” (*vocare ad se*).³³⁸ Centuries earlier, St. Basil, as has been indicated, had said that “by nature men desire the beautiful” and that “he contemplates, in himself, the Wisdom of God, the beauty of the poetic *logoi* of the universe.”³³⁹ Pseudo Dionysius the Areopagite, commenting on Good, Light and Beautiful, had expressed himself in this way:

But the Super-Essential Beautiful is called “Beauty” because of that quality which It imparts to all things severally according to their nature, and because It is the Cause of the harmony and splendour in all things, flashing forth upon them all, like light, the beautifying communications of Its originating ray; and because It summons all things to *fare* unto Itself (from whence It hath the name of “Fairness”), and because It draws all things together in a state of mutual interpenetration. And it is called “Beautiful” because It is All-Beautiful and more than Beautiful, and is eternally, unvaryingly, unchangeably Beautiful...³⁴⁰

Beauty becomes open dialogue, full reciprocity, in love. This is reflected in the Song of Songs: “Ah, you are beautiful, my love; ah, you are beautiful” (Song 1:15). And the bride answers: “Ah, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly lovely” (Song 1:16). This reciprocity and mutual belonging are reiterated later: “My beloved is mine and I am his” (Song 2:16), “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine” (Song 6:3).

³³⁵ Brother Luis de León expresses it in Ode VIII, *Serene Night*: “Whoever sees the great/ concert of this eternal brilliancy,/ its movement straight/ with steps so oddly free/ yet all in concordant symmetry.”

³³⁶ When Saint Thomas Aquinas says “*Pulchra sunt quae visa placent*” (*Sum. Th.* I, q. 5, a.4, ad 1. *Ibid.* I-II, q. 27, a. 1, ad 3 and elsewhere), he is not pointing to a subjective dimension of beauty, but to the purpose or mission for which it has been created. Cf. HUGO COSTARELLI BRANDI, “Pulchrum: origen y originalidad del ‘quae visa placent’ en Santo Tomás de Aquino,” *Cuadernos de Anuario Filosófico*, no. 228 (Navarra, 2010): 17. This study by Costarelli seems to me to be very accurate in placing the figure of Saint Thomas before beauty. The author further clarifies his position on what Saint Thomas contributes to the understanding of beauty by comparing his Master, Saint Albert the Great, and his fellow student Ulrich of Strasbourg. Cf. “Lecturas dominicas de lo bello: Alberto, Tomás y Ulrico,” *Revista Chilena de Estudios Medievales*, no. 6, (2014): 61-76.

³³⁷ BROTHER JUAN DE LOS ÁNGELES, in his *Spiritual Considerations upon the Book of the Song of Songs of Solomon*, frequently uses expressions of ancient philosophers. In a single paragraph, he uses 10 authors: “Xenophon says that the beauty of the face is a *real gift*, given by nature. Luciano... says: *The appearance of beautiful things has the greatest power of attraction*. Aristotle calls beauty the *letter of favor*; Socrates, *gentle tyranny*; Plato, *privilege of nature*; Theophrastus, *misleading*; Theocritus, *deceptive ivory*; Carneades, *lonely kingdom*; Origins, *triumph of the brave*; Plotinus: *Beauty conquers the beloved. Beauty captivates enemies; those who are invincible in war are defeated by beauty*.” CC, L. 13, 1, 285, translator’s version.

³³⁸ SAINT ALBERT THE GREAT, *Super Dyonisium. De divinis nominibus. De pulchro et bono*, q. 6, a. 1. (Fragment of the notes of his disciple Saint Thomas).

³³⁹ Cf. PAUL EVDOKIMOV, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty* (Oakwood, 1989), 10 and 11.

³⁴⁰ PSEUDO DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, *On the Divine Names*, caput. 4, sec. 7 (Macmillan Co., 1920), 95-96. HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, in volume II of his magnum opus *The Glory of the Lord*, says (p. 145 in Spanish edition): “In the entire history of the spirit, Dionysius represents the unique case of a man of the highest order and of incalculable influence.” (translator’s version).

This is obvious to us if we recall the beginning of the Gospel of John: “In the beginning was the Word... All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being” (Jn 1:1 and 3). In the incarnation of the Word appear Light and Life, Love and Beauty. The most sublime and permanent dialogue of salvation is established. St. Paul says, referring to the pagans: “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made” (Rom 1:19-20; cf. Acts 14:15, 17; 17:27-28; Wis 13:1-9). And the book of Revelation later concludes:

the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” (Rev 4:10-11).³⁴¹

Men and women, created in the image of God,³⁴² with the ability to name things (Gen 2:19), carry within them the longing for God. No wonder the psalmist says. “O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water” (Ps 63:2). “‘Come,’ my heart says, ‘seek his face!’” (Ps 27:6). God has left in our hearts his seal, his image, his glory which is, ultimately, his goodness and his beauty. And it is there, even though sometimes we hide it, push it aside, forget it.

The power of divine love contains the universe and from chaos it made the Cosmos, that is Beauty. Normally every living thing reaches out and rises up toward the Sun of divine Beauty. St. Basil says that “by nature men desire the beautiful” and in his essence, man is created with a hunger for the beautiful; he is that very hunger because as “image of God” and being “of God’s race” (Ac 17:29), man is “related” to God. It is in being “in his likeness that man manifests the divine Beauty.”³⁴³

³⁴¹ “The first Sabbath – when God, looking upon what had been made, with the impression that everything was just and good – represents a calm distancing from immediate action. The great Sabbath of the end, to which everything tends (Heb 4:1-10), will be participation in the divine contemplation of his works – not only a gaze directed toward God, but rather a gaze directed, precisely with God, toward what God has accomplished.” HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, “Revelación y Belleza,” *Ensayos Teológicos I, Verbum Caro*, (Ediciones Guadarrama, 1964), 151, translator’s version. In this regard, we have the words of Pope Benedict XVI: “He [Balthasar] made the mystery of the Incarnation the privileged subject of his study, seeing the *Easter triduum* - as he significantly entitled one of his writings - as the most expressive form of God’s entrance into human history. In Jesus’ death and Resurrection, in fact, the mystery of God’s Trinitarian love is revealed in all its fullness. The reality of faith finds here its matchless *beauty*. In the *drama* of the Paschal Mystery, God lives to the full his becoming man, but at the same time renders man’s action significant and gives a content to the commitment of Christians in the world. Von Balthasar perceived in this the *logic* of revelation: God becomes man so that man can live the communion of life with God. In Christ, the ultimate and definitive truth is offered in answer to the question that everyone asks himself or herself. The theological aesthetic, dramatics, and logic constitute the trilogy where these concepts find ample room and a convinced application. I can testify that von Balthasar’s life was a genuine quest for the truth, which he understood as a search for true Life. He sought everywhere for traces of God’s presence and truth: in philosophy, in literature, in the religions, always managing to break those circuits that make reason a prisoner of itself and opening it to the spaces of the infinite.” *Message to the International Congress on the theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar* (October 6, 2005).

³⁴² Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), no. 41.

³⁴³ PAUL EVDOKIMOV, quoting St. Gregory of Nyssa, *op. cit.*, 10-11.

4. OVERCOMING AMBIGUITY AND EMBRACING THE PARADOXES OF BEAUTY

The histories of aesthetics recount the great milestones, the diverse forms of expression, the different understandings, and the different attitudes towards beauty. The aesthetic universe is complex and makes it difficult to understand beauty because it shows a multitude of facets, is full of enigmas and modalities, and raises many problems when it comes to differentiating between beauty and aesthetics, natural beauty and beauty in art. *Validities* and *paradoxes* often lead to confusion.³⁴⁴

There are many beautiful things, not all true and good. There are seductive but deceptive, beautiful things that make us succumb. “God is not the only one who ‘clothes himself in Beauty.’ Evil imitates him in this respect and thus makes beauty a profoundly ambiguous quality.”³⁴⁵ Dostoevsky, in his novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, puts these words into the mouth of Dimitri Karamazov: “The awful thing is that beauty is mysterious as well as terrible. God and the devil are fighting there, and the battlefield is the heart of man” (p. 127).³⁴⁶ The beauty we behold is derived from splendor and is therefore not unequivocal and can be manipulated, falsified, and used.

The Pontifical Council for Culture notes:

Although accessible to all, the *Way of Beauty* is not exempt from ambiguity, deviations, errors, detours, etc. Always dependent on human subjectivity, it can be reduced to ephemeral aestheticism and let itself be instrumentalised and made servile to the captivating fashions of consumer society.³⁴⁷

Beauty contains this double movement: 1) the attraction from its seductive energy and 2) the taste for the pleasure of living. It is full of nooks and crannies. It brings a joyful exultation of happiness. But no one is unaware of the ambiguity shown by created beauty, which is capable of offering an explosion of charm and provoking the crudest of deceptions. Charm and disenchantment frequently follow one another. Many of the joys and disappointments are experienced there. We could say that “beauty is a consequence of the gravitation of the whole on the part.”³⁴⁸

³⁴⁴ It is enough to review the immense literature that, since the Greek and Latin classics, has attempted to clarify the questions raised by beauty. Cf. JUAN PLAZAOLA, *Introducción a la Estética* (BAC, 1973); PAUL EVDOKIMOV, *The Art of the Icon*, *op. cit.*; RAYMOND BAYER, *Historia de la estética* (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993); UMBERTO ECO, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, *op. cit.*; by the same author and under his charge, *History of Beauty* (Rizzoli, 2004); REMO BODEI, *La forma de lo bello* (Visor, 1998); ANTONIO RUIZ RETEGUI, *Pulchrum. Reflexiones sobre la Belleza desde la Antropología cristiana* (Rialp, 1998); GEORGE SANTAYANA, *The Sense of Beauty: Being the Outline of Aesthetic Theory* (Dover Publications Inc., 1955); LUIS CENCILLO, *Paradojas de la belleza* (BAC, 2003); BRUNO FORTE, *The Portal of Beauty*, *op. cit.*; WLADDYSLAW TATARKIEWICZ, *A History of Six Ideas: An Essay in Aesthetics* (The Hague, 1980); UMBERTO CASALE, *Percorsi della bellezza: Per un'estetica teologica* (Lindau, 2014); VARIOUS AUTHORS, “Mariologia estetica per il nostro tempo,” *Theotokos*, XIV (2006), no. 1; ANSELM GRÜN, *La belleza. Sobre la alegría de vivir* (Sal Terrae, 2016); VITO MANCUSO, *La via della bellezza* (Garzanti, 2019); JOSÉ MARÍA FERNÁNDEZ MARTOS, *Mirar, estremecerse, asombrarse* (Sal Terrae, 2020).

³⁴⁵ PAUL EVDOKIMOV, *op. cit.*, 38. He dedicates the entire chapter to “The Ambiguity of Beauty”. (pp. 37-43).

³⁴⁶ CHARLES BAUDELAIRE, in his hymn to beauty, says: “Did you spring out of heaven or the abyss, / Beauty? Your gaze infernal, yet divine, / (...) Your eyes contain both sunset and aurora: / You give off scents, like evenings storm-deflowered.” ROY CAMPBELL, *Poems of Baudelaire* (Pantheon Books, 1952).

³⁴⁷ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE, *Via pulchritudinis*, no. 1.

³⁴⁸ LUIS CENCILLO, *Paradojas de la belleza* (BAC, 2003), xiii, translator’s version. POPE BENEDICT XVI, in his *Meeting with Artists* (Nov. 21, 2009) commented: “The way of beauty leads us, then, to grasp the

Sometimes the causes of this ambiguity are pointed out as frivolity, snobbism, falsehood, immorality, vanity, ambitions, ideological propaganda, etc. Going to the heart of the matter, we find the relativization of values and the dissociation between beauty, truth, goodness and unity.³⁴⁹ This happens when beauty is not valuable in itself, but rather as an ornament of sensual attraction or a utilitarian element.

One can only emerge from ambiguity in the face of beauty by allowing oneself to be illuminated and by embracing goodness, truth, and unity. Beauty is recognized in the luminosity of life, in its inspiring and uplifting energy, in a clear gaze, in gratitude, in an understanding and compassionate heart, in benevolence, in solidarity, in the harmony that seeks unity and peace. In friendship, beauty is revealed when, despite our differences, a union is achieved that envelops and transforms us.³⁵⁰ Beauty and virtue go hand in hand. Hence, aesthetics and ethics should go hand in hand. St. Thomas, following Dionysius, expresses it this way:

Beauty or comeliness results from the concurrence of clarity and due proportion. For he states that God is said to be beautiful, as being “the cause of the harmony and clarity of the universe.” Hence the beauty of the body consists in a man having his bodily limbs well proportioned, together with a certain clarity of color. In like manner spiritual beauty consists in a man’s conduct or actions being well proportioned in respect of the spiritual clarity of reason.³⁵¹

Being aware of the ambiguity of beauty is already beginning the process of entering into it and recovering the interior. It is a way to leave the turmoil and acquire the serenity that comes from having found the value that radiates peace and harmony.

Alongside our technological civilization, highly practical and utilitarian, there is another culture growing, the Culture of the Spirit, and there “useless” and seemingly “gratuitous” values are cultivated. In this spiritual culture, values grow until we arrive at the moment when the category of useful-useless is left far behind. We then discover the one thing which, according to the gospel, is “useless” but absolutely “necessary.”³⁵²

The Catechism of the Catholic Church invites us to leave behind ambiguity:

Whole in the fragment, the Infinite in the finite, God in the history of humanity. (...) Hermann Hesse makes the point even more graphically: ‘Art means: revealing God in everything that exists.’”

³⁴⁹ See in this regard what the Document *Via Pulchritudinis* says in no. 11. What is striking about these transcendentals is their insistence on the origin and the end. They constantly refer to plenitude, to the absolute and, ultimately, to mystery. “Truth, beauty, goodness and language do not dwell in the triviality of existence, but break through it towards a horizon of our origin, which is emanation and transparency at the same time. We cannot accept that *things simply are*, that beings simply exist, that human life arises, endures and runs out without anything more. Because that ‘without anything more’ would be an absolute ‘anything but’, it would be total diminishment and the anticipation of death.” OLEGARIO GONZÁLEZ DE CARDEDAL, *La entraña del cristianismo* (Secretariado Trinitario, 1997), 131, translator’s version. ALFONSO LOPEZ QUINTAS expresses himself in a similar way in: *La belleza de la fe. Romano Guardini en su plenitud* (Desclée de Brouwer, 2018), 118.

³⁵⁰ PAVEL FLORENSKY writes: “In friendship, the irreplaceable and incomparable value and originality of each person is revealed in all its beauty. In another, a person discovers his own actualized potential, made spiritually fruitful by the other.” *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 313. To see the relationship between ethics and aesthetics, cf. VITO MANCUSO, *La forza di essere migliori* (Garzanti, 2019).

³⁵¹ SAINT THOMAS, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 145, a. 2.

³⁵² PAUL EVDOKIMOV, *The Art of the Icon*, op. cit., 43.

We must also face the fact that certain attitudes deriving from the mentality of “this present world” can penetrate our lives if we are not vigilant. For example, some would have it that only that is true which can be verified by reason and science; yet prayer is a mystery that overflows both our conscious and unconscious lives. Others overly prize production and profit; thus prayer, being unproductive, is useless. Still others exalt sensuality and comfort as the criteria of the true, the good, and the beautiful; whereas prayer, the “love of beauty” (*philokalia*), is caught up in the glory of the living and true God. Finally, some see prayer as a flight from the world in reaction against activism; but in fact, Christian prayer is neither an escape from reality nor a divorce from life.³⁵³

Beauty is full of *paradoxes* for those who walk restlessly between lights and shadows and want to satisfy their condition as seekers of the synthesis of this world that has not yet been made.³⁵⁴ Beauty is paradoxical when the negative side appears: evil, ugliness, corruption; but there is always a glimmer of light that leads to fulfillment through the struggle against evil. Beauty, combined with truth and goodness, prevents all idolatrous temptations and puts an end to any type of selfishness. Not only does it seduce, but it also puts order into our hierarchy of values. It not only arouses wonder and awe, but it also attempts to transfigure us, because it refers us, at the same time, to our roots and our fulfillment: in short, to Beauty. The Word — who descends from the Father, becomes man, lives as one of many and dies for us — is the one who beautifies, orders and contains all things.

The beauty of Jesus’ life and ministry is described by Saint Luke, both in his Gospel and in Acts, with great sensitivity, pointing out the words and deeds that move us and help to transform us; that reflect and arouse *wonder* at the incredible things he said and did, and that, in the midst of events, he reveals the *glory* of the Father. Jesus’ message is full of paradoxes. Four examples from the four evangelists: to live, one must die (cf. Jn 12:25); to receive, one must give (cf. Lk 6:38); to him who has, more will be given, and from him who has nothing, even what he thinks he has will be taken away (Lk 8:18); to be first, one must be last (cf. Mk 9:35); he who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted (cf. Mt 23:12). There are many more.

But the great paradox is Jesus himself, the Son of the Father made man out of love for men and women. It is the evangelist Saint John who most emphasizes weakness, fragility, the cross, splendor, glory, and grace: “We have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14).

This is reflected in Christ:

The Cross of Beauty is raised on Calvary hill. In this world, the Word speaks the truth about himself in the ultimate “self-emptying,” thanks to that act by which — in no way coerced by the One who is infinitely great — the Son lets himself be contained by the

³⁵³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2727. ALFONSO LOPEZ QUINTAS says: “Our great task at this time remains to counteract the tendency toward that which is superficial – which is often allied with the ugly – by committing ourselves to what is deep and valuable, which is the foundation of the most endearing forms of beauty.” *El enigma de la belleza*, *op. cit.*, 244, translator’s version.

³⁵⁴ HENRI DE LUBAC, *Paradojas y nuevas paradojas* (Ed. Península, 1966), 6. [For English title, see *More Paradoxes* (Ignatius Press, 2002).] When I refer to paradoxes, I am thinking, in addition to Fr. de Lubac, of the scope given to them by the Gospels, the writings of G. K. Chesterton, R. Guardini, G. Thibón, J. Leclercq, Gaston Fessard. And, in particular, what Pope Francis said, cf. EG nos. 221-237.

infinitely small. Becoming little in this way is truly divine: “*Non coerceri maximo, contineri tamen a minimo, divinum est.*” At the same time, this ecstasy, this “going out” of God is for us the mightiest conceivable call to live our own going forth from the world, towards the mystery that enthralls us by its saving beauty, present in the “abbreviation” of the Word in the flesh. The Whole dwells in the fragment, the infinite erupts into the finite: the Crucified God is the form and splendor of eternity in time. On the cross, the “*Verbum abbreviatum*” — the self-emptying of the eternal Word — reveals beauty as “tiny Infinity”!³⁵⁵

Looking at Jesus, thinking of his beauty, the liturgy applies these two references from Revelation to him: “You are the most handsome of men; grace is poured upon your lips” (Ps 45:2)³⁵⁶ and the words of Isaiah describing the appearance of the servant of Yahweh: “He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity” (Is 53:2b-3a). These words evoke the moment of Jesus’ passion.³⁵⁷ The transfiguration is a synthesis of the paradox of Jesus’ beauty; he announces his death and is transfigured before the disciples in all his splendor and glory (Cf. Mt 17, Mk 9, Lk 9). When analyzed, the texts of the evangelists exude the beauty of Christ, his glory and the fulfillment of the covenant. The cloud represents the Spirit and the Father who lets his solemn voice be heard: “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” (Mt 17:5).

“*Listen to Him.*” This solemn phrase from the Father to the Son is the authentic path to the recovery of beauty, which passes through the cross. On Calvary appears the splendor of the beauty of Jesus, the beauty of the greatest love, which is manifested in his death on the cross for humankind. How can we not be astonished by the figure of Jesus praying, sweating blood, in the Garden of Gethsemane? What wonder does the story of the two men from Emmaus arouse? With good reason the Church sings in the Easter liturgy: “*Victimae Paschali laudes...*” With his death and resurrection, he makes all things new (cf. Rev 21:5). This is the beauty that will save the world (Dostoevsky). In short, “the glory of God is a living man” (Saint Irenaeus).

³⁵⁵ BRUNO FORTE, *The Portal of Beauty*, op. cit., vii-viii. The author concludes this work with these words: “The beauty of all that passes is the threshold that opens out on the horizons of the Beauty that does not pass. The Whole offers itself in the fragment; the fragment opens itself towards the Whole through the door of Beauty.” p. 121.

³⁵⁶ Commenting on Psalm 45, Saint Augustine says: “He was beautiful in heaven, then, and beautiful on earth: beautiful in the womb, and beautiful in his parents’ arms. He was beautiful in his miracles but just as beautiful under the scourges, beautiful as he invited us to life, but beautiful too in not shrinking from death, beautiful in laying down his life and beautiful in taking it up again, beautiful on the cross, beautiful in the tomb, and beautiful in heaven. Listen to this song to further your understanding, and do not allow the weakness of his flesh to blind you to the splendor of his beauty. The supreme and most real beauty is justice: if you can catch him out in any injustice, you will not find him beautiful in that regard; but if he is found to be just at every point, then he is lovely in all respects.” *Essential Expositions of the Psalms* (New City Press, 2015), 131.

³⁵⁷ “Where then in Scripture do we find Jesus uncomely and deformed, as we have found Him comely and ‘beauteous in loveliness surpassing the sons of men?’ Where find we Him also deformed? Ask Esaias: ‘And we saw Him, and He had no form nor comeliness.’ There now are two flutes which seem to make discordant sounds: howbeit one Spirit breathes into both. By this it is said, ‘Beauteous in loveliness surpassing the sons of men:’ by that it is said in Esaias, ‘We saw Him, and He had no form nor comeliness,’ By one Spirit are both flutes filled, they make no dissonance. Turn not away thine ears, apply the understanding.” ST. AUGUSTINE, *Commentary on the First Letter of John*, IX, no. 9 (Eerdmans, 1956), 518. JOSEPH RATZINGER, *La bellezza. La Iglesia* (Ed. Encuentro, 2005), 13-14.

Mauro Lepori gives voice to Jesus, crucified for love, with these words:

You don't want to recognize me, you have denied me, but I am here! I am not anywhere else. And I am here for you, I see you, I love you, I desire you, your beauty, my Beauty reflected in you, and from you in those who do not see me, do not know me, and do not know that my gaze is the source of all beauty, of the beauty of every man and woman.

But this beauty that you shun, that you despise, I am creating now, because now I am the seed that dies to be not only Me, but a multitude of children of God, a companion to humankind, also in the depths of the hells of today, as of all times, which is the only source of all beauty that man can desire, welcome and express.

Do you not see that my gaze has already fallen upon the faces of this mass of people of whom you only see their appearance? Do you not see that my companionship circulates among the people, as well as towards you, more than in your most perfect, orderly and clean cities? Do you not see how they encounter each other, how they smile, how they die to themselves for those they love, those they serve?³⁵⁸

When we embrace the paradox of the mystery and look at Jesus, our eyes and ears are purified, as it happened to the apostles Peter, James and John on Mount Tabor. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, the Beautiful Shepherd, shines with his unconditional love (cf. Jn 10:11-18). The crucified one seduces not by his appearance but by the love he transmits and, thus, he destroys all frivolity, selfishness, and ugliness. Jesus had promised: "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Mt 13:43) and, on the eve of his passion, he announced: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (Jn 12:32). Now, with an open heart, he welcomes us and redeems us (cf. Rom 8:22-32).

Two classics of our spirituality, which knew so much about beauty, express these paradoxes of love. St. Teresa of Jesus: "I live, yet no true life I know,/ And, living thus expectantly,/ I die because I do not die." And St. John of the Cross, on Mount Carmel, recommends: "To reach satisfaction in all/ desire satisfaction in nothing./ To arrive at being all/ desire to be nothing./ To come to possess all/ desire the possession of nothing."³⁵⁹

5. BEAUTY THAT WOUNDS AND WOUNDED BEAUTY

Among the polarities of beauty is its condition of wounding and being wounded. The film *King Kong*, directed by Peter Jackson, concludes: "It was beauty [that] killed the beast." In the face of beauty, we discover our limitations, poverty, indigence and vulnerability, but also our strength and the ability to rise to the highest of heights. When we are wounded by beauty it makes us think about our true destiny. It is true that, as Lepori says: "Beauty wounds because it makes us humble, it takes away the security that we claim to rely on to feel safe and calm. Beauty makes us beggars, and beggars of something ungraspable, of something we could not hold in our hands."³⁶⁰ It has a

³⁵⁸ MAURO LEPORI, *op. cit.*, translator's version

³⁵⁹ See also the poem whose stanzas end: "transcending all knowledge." *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* (ICS Publications, 1979), 718-719.

³⁶⁰ MAURO-GIUSEPPE LEPORI, *op. cit.*, 4, translator's version.

cathartic, purifying power; it eliminates passions. It elevates us to the sublime, where feelings of amazement, magnificence and enthusiasm become evident. The sublime, on the one hand, makes smallness evident and overwhelms us; on the other hand, it expands feelings towards extreme beauty.³⁶¹

Beauty shakes us up. It takes us out of a state of lethargy and makes us get out of ourselves. It stirs us and places us before the ultimate questions; before the mystery of God.³⁶² It destroys boredom and disappointment. It hurts our sensitivity in many different ways. In short, Beauty wounds us when it breaks our comfortable indifference, when it undoes the twisted knots of lies and selfishness; when it awakens us from the dream of indolence, when it bursts forth into the vein of creativity. Even when death visits us unexpectedly.

Sometimes, suddenly, Beauty wounds and a song emerges as beautiful as the one expressed in the book of Song of Songs, the exclamation of Saint Teresa,³⁶³ the “Living Flame of Love” of Saint John of the Cross or Ode VIII by Brother Luis de León.³⁶⁴ Who does not feel wounded by so many icons or paintings of Mary showing the Child to the shepherds or by Michelangelo’s *Pietà* (Vatican), by *El Doncel* (Sigüenza Cathedral), by Velázquez’s *Christ Crucified* (Prado Museum, Madrid) or by Rembrandt’s *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (in the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)?

Other times, surprised by the power of evil within us, we ask ourselves: what have we done to the beauty of nature or human life to mistreat it in this way? To what extreme can our evil — the fruit of selfishness, pride, power and pleasure — reach?³⁶⁵ There is so much vulnerability and insensitivity! In this double route, sight, sensation, inner hearing, direction and meaning are involved, frequently influenced by the distortion of values.

But what happens when we wound beauty? Mystery becomes enigma, admiration and wonder become flight and fear. We enter into chaos. Insecurity surrounds us because we lack light, proportion and harmony. And above all, because we subvert truth, goodness and unity.³⁶⁶

³⁶¹ For a more extensive explanation of the sublime, cf. UMBERTO ECO, (editor), *History of Beauty* (Rizzoli, 2004), 275ff.

³⁶² The already cited text by SAINT AUGUSTINE is well known, *Confessions*, Book X, 27, 38.

³⁶³ “Oh Beauty exceeding/ All other beauties!/ Paining, but You wound not/ Free of pain You destroy/ The love of creatures.”

³⁶⁴ When thinking of these men and so many other women like St. Catherine of Siena, St. Bridget, etc., these words resonate as a confirmation: “When men [and women] have a longing so great that it surpasses human nature and eagerly desire and are able to accomplish things beyond human thought, it is the Bridegroom who has smitten them with this longing. It is He who has sent a ray of His beauty into their eyes. The greatness of the wound shows the dart which has struck home, the longing indicates who has inflicted the wound.” NICHOLAS CABASILAS, *Life in Christ* (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 90.

³⁶⁵ The line separating pleasure and pain in contemplating the sublime is almost imperceptible. It is verified by reading classical works, listening to music, and looking at paintings. Examples are Goya’s *The Disasters of War*, Picasso’s *Guernica*, and Munch’s *The Scream*.

³⁶⁶ “If the beautiful is the real presence of God in matter, and if contact with the beautiful is a sacrament in the full sense of the word, how is it that there are so many perverted aesthetes? Nero. Is it like the hunger of those who frequent black masses for the consecrated hosts? Or is it, more probably, because these people do not devote themselves to what is genuinely beautiful, but to a bad imitation? For, just as there is an art which is divine, so there is one which is demoniacal.” SIMONE WEIL, *Gravity and Grace* (G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1952), 155.

Beauty is wounded when wonder is hindered. In reality, the ones who are wounded are those who blind themselves and hinder themselves, making admiration impossible. Beauty is wounded when it is used, when it is commercialized, when nature is mistreated, when the image of God is obscured in children, women, the elderly, and the poor who are robbed of their dignity.

When the Council Fathers of Vatican II addressed artists, they did so with these words: “This world in which we live needs beauty in order not to sink into despair. It is beauty, like truth, which brings joy to the heart of man and is that precious fruit which resists the wear and tear of time, which unites generations and makes them share things in admiration.”³⁶⁷

Whatever goes against truth and goodness wounds beauty. There are many ways in which beauty is wounded: every time the image of God is marred in a child or a woman; every time nature is exploited; every time we close our eyes and ears to all that shines and sparkles and to the splendor of song and music; every time we become insensitive and ignore the whisper of the flowing spring and running water and we stop being amazed by sunrises and sunsets, etc.

Therefore, the most serious wounds we inflict on Beauty are, without a doubt, sin, forgetfulness and indifference. Probably the greatest sin against beauty is to forget³⁶⁸ which sounds like carelessness and unconsciousness, because, being enveloped by the beauty of nature, surrounded by the tenderness of people, urged to contemplate works of art, we do not even allow ourselves to be impressed. We only have one reference point: the self, which monopolizes everything and measures everything. Thus, we have become insensitive to the other and to others. Two days after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986, Elie Wiesel spoke of indifference and said: “If there is one word that describes all the problems and threats that exist today, it is ‘*indifference*.’” In an interview on Oct. 27, 1986 he exclaimed: “The opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it’s indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it’s indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, but indifference. Because of indifference, one dies before one actually dies.”

Hence, humanity needs visionaries and people who awaken consciences, who illuminate the future of our land and our history, which is full of beauty, but overshadowed by selfishness.³⁶⁹

The redemption of beauty is linked to the purification of the hearts of men and women, as the beatitudes suggest to us: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Mt

³⁶⁷ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Closing Speech, To Artists*, (4).

³⁶⁸ On forgetting beauty, cf. RICHARD HARRIES, *Art and the Beauty of God* (Mowbray, 1994), 1-18. As a counterpoint, cf. GIOVANNI FIGHERA, *La bellezza salverà il mondo*. Ed. Ares, Milano, 2009.

³⁶⁹ That is why this reflection by Fr. Turollo is so valuable and helpful: “The mystery of the beautiful! Until truth and goodness have become beauty, truth and goodness seem to remain in some way alien to man, they are imposed on him from outside; man adheres to them, but does not possess them; they demand of him an obedience that in some way mortifies him. When he has really attained truth and goodness in full and peaceful possession, then all mortification and all effort disappear; then his whole being, his whole life are nothing but a testimony, a revelation of the perfection attained. This testimony and this revelation are precisely beauty.” (D. Barsotti), in DAVID M. TUROLLO, “Belleza,” *Nuevo Diccionario de Mariología*, p. 292, translator’s version.

5:8), they will see the beauty of God. The beauty that will save the world will do so through the hearts of men and women who have made the attraction of beauty into love.³⁷⁰

6. MARY, ICON OF THE “*VIA PULCHRITUDINIS*”

As already indicated, Saint Paul VI invited us to travel the *via pulchritudinis* to get closer to Mary. He considered that, in addition to the path of biblical, historical and theological research,

there is another way, accessible to everyone, even to those of little education: a way which we call *the way of beauty*. It is a way in which we are led by the mysterious, admirable and very beautiful doctrine of *Mary and the Holy Spirit*, which will be the topic of this Marian Congress. Indeed, Mary is “all beautiful” (*tota pulchra es!*): She is “the spotless mirror.” She offers the supreme and absolute ideal of perfection to which artists of all times have endeavored to give expression; she is the “Woman clothed with the Sun” (Apoc 12:1) in whom the purest rays of human beauty merge with those of heavenly beauty which are of a higher order but can still be perceived.³⁷¹

On the feast of the Immaculate Conception of that same year, during the homily, he spoke of Mary as a model and ideal figure of the Church with these words:

“*Tota pulchra es, María.*” You are beauty, true beauty, holy beauty! This should be the real and ideal image of the Virgin... This feast day is eminently theological and eminently ecclesial. It is theological because we take it from revelation and from the most vigilant and loving reflection... It is ecclesial because it is a mirror of divine perfection, and it is offered to us as a mirror of human perfection, which the Church, in venerating the Virgin, contemplates in her with joy as in a most pure image, ... without spot or wrinkle (Eph 5:27).³⁷²

Biblical scholars, theologians, Mariologists, liturgists and pastoralists took this invitation seriously and, based on it, many books and articles have been written — some of them cited above — in magazines such as *Marianum*, *PATH*, *Theotokos*, *Ephemerides Mariologicae*, *Estudios Trinitarios*, *Studium Legionense*, *Isidorianum*, etc. The Pontifical Council for Culture, as already indicated, out of concern for evangelization and dialogue, published the document *Via pulchritudinis* (2006), which, in turn, has given rise to numerous and in-depth commentaries.

In the reflections that follow, attention is focused not so much on how to approach Mary in order to know her better and exalt her beauty,³⁷³ but rather on how Mary induces, inspires and encourages our search and encounter with the Mystery. The beauty of Mary,

³⁷⁰ SEGUNDO GALILEA, *Fascinados por su fulgor: para una espiritualidad de la belleza* (Narcea ediciones, 1998), 45, translator’s version. See also CARDINAL CARLO MARTINI, *¿Qué belleza salvará el mundo?* (Carta Pastoral, 1999-2000).

³⁷¹ PAUL VI, *Address to the Participants in the International Mariological and Marian Congresses* (May 16, 1975), Address translated in PSp 20 (1975) 199-203.

³⁷² PAUL VI, *Homily* (December 8, 1975), translator’s version. Cf. SALVATORE M. PERRELLA, “‘*Quella bellezza inusitata que ha nomearia*’. Contributo del Magistero di Giovanni Paolo II,” *Tehotokos*, XIII (2005): 275-401. Pages 309-323 are dedicated to Mariology and the “way of beauty” of Paul VI.

³⁷³ Cf. MIGUEL IRIBERTEGUI ERASO, *La Belleza de María. Ensayo de teología estética* (San Esteban, 1997); FRANCO MANZI, *La belleza de María. Reflexiones bíblicas* (San Pablo, 2006); MICHELE GIULIO MASCIARELLI, *La bellissima* (Lib. Ed. Vaticana, 2012); JESÚS CASÁS OTERO, *Tota Pulchra. María, esplendor de la belleza divina* (Secretariado Trinitario, 2015).

the exponent of a new creation, is not an inert reality, as if it were a high-priced jewel, but is *dynamic* and *fertile*. Of course, it is not an illusion, an abstraction.³⁷⁴ It has as its real, historical subject, the simple woman from Nazareth: the Virgin, Immaculate, Mother of the Word, Mother of the Church and the one Assumed into heaven. Her beauty inspires deep respect and admiration (*tremendum et fascinans*); it does not leave us indifferent; it enlivens the imagination and makes us think about our origin and our destiny; it arouses feelings of joy and hope; it provokes inner transformation and introduces us into Trinitarian and ecclesial communion. The life of Mary, beyond her geographical displacements, which are emblematic,³⁷⁵ is an open path to the encounter with God, with his Son, with the Holy Spirit, and with all his children. She is the new Eve and she is the mother of the Church.³⁷⁶ The motherhood of Mary and the motherhood of the Church have the same agent: the Holy Spirit.

The Second Vatican Council spoke of Mary in *Lumen Gentium* because there is no Church without Mary, nor Mary without her Son and the Church, as we well know from ecclesial tradition. The more exegetes study the text of “his hour” (Jn 13:1) and the words of Jesus on the cross addressing his Mother and the beloved disciple (Jn 19:27), the more they emphasize the close link between Mary and the Church.

And in Mary we see the most beautiful face of the Church-Mother; we see the dream that the Lord has for each one of us and the hope that dwells within us, in spite of the fact that our hearts are still full of contradictions. And thus, Mary, while accompanying us and revealing to us how good the Lord is (cf. 1 Pet 2:3), restores our courage. Her greatest desire is to lead all of us to the Father; thus, although we are often still divided among ourselves, we can truly become one family in Jesus, his Son and our Lord, King of mercy and head of the Body that is the Church. God is our Father and in Mary the Church shows us her most splendid motherly face.³⁷⁷

Mary’s fruitfulness — thanks to which we can go through the life of beauty towards the full Mystery — springs from her being full of grace: “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you” (Lk 1:28). “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God” (Lk 1:35). And “To the wonderment of nature, - the Church sings - you bore your Creator, yet remained a virgin after as before” (*Alma Redemptoris Mater*).

³⁷⁴ K. Rahner, in a letter to Cardinal Suenens on the cause of the Mariological crisis, told him: “Many Christians tend to turn Christianity into an ideology, into an abstraction. And, naturally, abstractions have no mother.” Cited by FRANCISCO LÓPEZ MELÚS, *María de Nazaret la verdadera discípula* (PPC, 1991), 20, translator’s version.

³⁷⁵ Many times in the Gospel of Luke Mary sets out on a journey: “Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country” (1:39); “Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea...He went to be registered with Mary” (2:4); “they brought him up to Jerusalem” (2:22); “now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover” (2:41), etc. Cf. JOSÉ CRISTO REY GARCÍA PAREDES, *Mariología* (BAC, 1995), 72-73; BRUNO FORTE, *María, la mujer icono del Misterio* (Sígueme, 1991), 225-234.

³⁷⁶ Let us recall the Marian principle of H. U. von Balthasar, expounded by an Irish theologian: “Mary personifies the Church in two ways. Firstly, the whole countenance of the Church is a Marian transparency to Christ. Secondly, as the mother who generated the Word from which the Church is born, and as the bride who co-operates with Christ in the event of redemption, Mary is the all-embracing principle of the Church, the point where all the other profiles of the Church find their fundamental point of internal unity.” BRENDAN LEAHY, *The Marian Profile in the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New City Press, 2000), 66.

³⁷⁷ POPE FRANCIS, *Ave Maria*, *op. cit.*, 14.

Mary's way of beauty is identified with the journey of her vocation to the motherhood of the Savior.³⁷⁸ It reveals the journey of a blessed and believing woman who receives the great mission in the fullness of time to give birth to the Savior (cf. Gal 4:4).³⁷⁹ She makes us share in her joy and solidarity in her beautiful confession of faith: the *Magnificat*. Her presence is beautiful in the "hour" of Jesus and in the offering of the new wine. She accompanies her Son, in complete fidelity, until the moment of giving up his spirit (cf. Jn 19:30). Her fruitfulness becomes evident at Pentecost, the birth of the Church, and is fulfilled in her coronation, as reflected in the Book of Revelation.

Mary's way is beautiful because it is based on the gift of the Trinity and invites us to follow it by adopting her way of acting. The Holy Spirit made his dwelling in Mary. And we know that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things" (Gal 5:22-23). It is no wonder that she is shown to us to be a simple, humble, open woman, who listens, who welcomes and who is faithful. She reveals to us the mystery of God, who becomes man in her womb, and, before that, in her heart: "Blessed is she who believed" (Lk 1:45-47). She is blessed because she hears the word of God and observes it (cf. Lk 11:28). Following her life, we enter into the communion of the redeemed who share the same destiny.

From the perspective of these attitudes, she leads us to wonder and places us before the Beauty of God, the source of all beauty. First, she makes a way through the darkness, offers us her radiance and shatters all insensitivity and any kind of ambiguity. She breaks the coldest indifference and returns joy to the those who are sad. Mary, who is pure reception and complete self-giving, offers us the Son of God as Beauty, who is truth, love - all goodness -, life, light, and the way to the Father. Mary is the New Eve and the victorious woman of Revelation who restores beauty to all that is created.

Many poets, painters, and saints have wondered whether Mary was beautiful in her physical form. It is gratifying to review the collections of poems praising the beauty of Mary, visit the galleries of museums, and see the feelings displayed by those who contemplate the face of Mary within themselves, as well as, in a special way, Marian hagiography. St. Ambrose went so far as to write: "that the very appearance of her outward being might be the image of her soul, the representation of what is approved."³⁸⁰

³⁷⁸ After a serious study of the story of the Annunciation, ÁNGEL APARICIO RODRÍGUEZ concludes: "Lk 1:26-38 should be titled 'Mary's vocation to motherhood,' rather than the 'Annunciation to Mary.' In this way, Mary enters into holy history not only as a character comparable to the great characters of the past, who were entrusted with a singular mission, but she is even above Moses - the prophet par excellence and the leader of the ancient People of God - because in Mary the Savior of all peoples will take flesh. The service of Mary's motherhood continues, in a certain way, the saving services of the ancient calls, but surpasses them: Mary has been called to be the Mother of the Lord (Lk 1:43)." "La vocación de María a la maternidad (Lc 1,26-38)" in *María del Evangelio* (Publicaciones Claretianas, 1994), 160, translator's version. See also pp. 82, 90.

³⁷⁹ The *Catechism of the Church* offers this summary: "Mary, the all-holy ever-virgin Mother of God, is the masterwork of the mission of the Son and the Spirit in the fullness of time. For the first time in the plan of salvation and because his Spirit had prepared her, the Father found the dwelling place where his Son and his Spirit could dwell among men. In this sense the Church's Tradition has often read the most beautiful texts on wisdom in relation to Mary (cf. Prov 8:1-9:6; Sir 24). Mary is acclaimed and represented in the liturgy as the 'Seat of Wisdom.' In her, the 'wonders of God' that the Spirit was to fulfill in Christ and the Church began to be manifested" (no. 721).

³⁸⁰ ST. AMBROSE, *De virginibus*, book II. Ch. 2, no. 7. "Mary's beauty - it is necessary to insist on this - does not allude to her physical features, about which the Bible remains cautiously silent. In contrast to such

The seven references to Mary's words in the Gospels reveal the splendor of Mary's beauty³⁸¹. 1) Lk 1:34; 2) Lk 1:38; 3) Lk 1:40; 4) Lk 1:46-55; 5) Lk 2:48; 6) Jn 2:3; 7) Jn 2:5. They are the true portrait of a surprised, graceful, confident, grateful, attentive to the needs of others, supportive, and fully available woman. The key moments, referred to by Luke, are the annunciation³⁸² and the visitation,³⁸³ where Mary appears graceful and grateful, blessed and exultant. As are the scenes, narrated by St. John, of the wedding at Cana, and of Calvary. Or, equally, the evocation that is made of Her in Revelation as a victorious woman.

7. FOLLOWING THE WAY OF BEAUTY WITH ELEGANCE

In this time of darkness and relativism, when so many dreams have been shattered and we find ourselves under the pressure of pandemics,³⁸⁴ reactions against emptiness, doubt, indifference, triviality, dissatisfaction and meaninglessness continue to occur. There is a desire to make a qualitative leap and become more human, freer, more supportive... and to make life more beautiful. In the human heart beats the deep and intense longing to recover lost innocence. We experience a deep desire to be elevated and to tune into beauty and to express the rhythm towards love.³⁸⁵ That is why we cry out: "Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved" (Ps 80:3). And so, out of faith, we bless the Father because "he destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:5-7).

cautious reserve, interest in a detailed depiction of her human silhouette has not ceased to arise as a delirium in the minds and imaginations of some daring authors. Her beauty looks, above all, to the work of God's grace, which has unfolded in her most freely, in such a way that it makes her the Virgin-Mother of the Son of God, Jesus, whom she welcomes with all humility." FRANCISCO CONTRERAS MOLINA, *María, belleza de Dios y Madre nuestra* (Verbo Divino, 2004), 34, translator's version.

³⁸¹ ST. ALPHONSUS DE OROZCO wrote in 1556: *Tratado de las siete palabras de María Santísima*, Cf. Edition prepared by LAURENTINO HERRÁN (Ed. Rialp, 1966).

³⁸² Cf. SAINT SOPHRONIUS, *Sermon on "Mary, Blessed are You Among Women!"* in *Patrologia Graeca* 87, 3, 3242, 3250. He highlights "the Lord is with you" and "you are blessed among women." See the Liturgy of the Hours in the Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

³⁸³ Cf. SANTIAGO RODRÍGUEZ GARCÍA, "El magnificat, himno de la comunidad cristiana," in ÁNGEL APARICIO, (Ed.) *María del Evangelio* (Publicaciones Claretianas, 1994), 229-240; MARÍA KO HA-FONG, *Magnificat. El canto de María de Nazaret* (Sígueme, 2005); SERVANTS OF MARY, *Servants of the Magnificat: The Canticle of the Blessed Virgin and Consecrated Life* (1996); JOSE TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, dedicates a chapter to the Magnificat as the most beautiful poem in *Encontrar y poseer el tesoro escondido*, (Paulinas, 2011), 121-131 [For the English title see *The Hidden Treasure: The Art of Searching Within* (Alba House, 2014).]

³⁸⁴ Cf. FRANCIS, *Fratelli Tutti*, ch. I.

³⁸⁵ A few years ago, Fr. Amedeo Cencini asked himself: Have we lost our senses? He gave his answer in a work made up of two well-defined parts: 1) From the Senses to Sensitivity and Vice Versa, and 2) The Formation of the Senses and Sensitivity. Professor Caterina Cangia concludes the prologue with this reflection: "The temptation of the virtual world, the culture of appearances, the challenges of everyday life can be successfully faced if we root our senses and sensitivity in intelligence and mature affectivity. If we cultivate them because we want to refine community and family life. If we form ourselves and others in the production of Beauty. Therefore, never 'turned off.' And praising God for our senses and for sensitivity. He is with those who 'feel' in his name; with those who dispense attention and care in his name; with those who weave bonds of solidarity, communion and deep compassion in his name. With the one who loves in his name." AMEDEO CENCINI, *¿Hemos perdido nuestros sentidos? En busca de la sensibilidad creyente* (Sal Terrae, 2014), translator's version.

Sometimes we forget that “he first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). It is good to remember this because, when we are invited to follow the way of beauty, seeking the face of the Lord (cf. Ps 27:8), we must look within ourselves and let his call resonate and his splendor shine, which are traces of the beauty that the Trinity left imprinted on us.³⁸⁶

The way of beauty through Mary leads us to Christ. He is the Truth, Goodness, Beauty, and, ultimately, the Unity desired and requested by Himself (Jn 17:20-26). Where Mary is, the total Christ shines, the Beauty that redeems and saves. The key question is how to follow this *via* to lead us to wonder and welcome the Mystery of God? In Mary we have a completely unique icon. She is for us an example of a woman, sister, disciple, guide, teacher and mother. Jesus proposed her as a model of a blessed woman who listened to the word of God and obeyed it (cf. Lk 11:27-28).

This way of beauty must be traveled with *elegance*. I say with *elegance* because the word is derived from *eligere* which means to choose or select with care. It’s not about showing off the latest fashion style but about exercising true freedom. Mary was free and affirmed her freedom in an uninterrupted *yes* of continuous fidelity to the mission entrusted to her and taken on by her as the Mother of Christ and the Mother of the Church. Is there anything more elegant than the answer she gives to the Angel? “Here am I; the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Is there anyone who would not be astonished to see in this consent the conjunction of the almighty Word, in which all things were made (cf. Jn 1:3) and the free “yes” of a humble maiden?³⁸⁷

The dialogue that is established between God and his chosen one, who calls herself a servant, is concentrated on the Word.

In Mary’s “yes” the Word of God is established with plans of love. By saying “yes” to the Word, she is filled with the Word and the Word acquires a human freedom, a freedom, the only created area, wrapped in respect from the first moment. In this “yes” the interlocutor is installed, his entire person, his entire gospel. It is a “yes” to the Covenant (Ex 19:8, LG 56-58). A mature “yes” in which the human community pronounces itself, an anthropological event, “besought in lieu of that of the entire human nature” (St. Thomas, Sum. Th., III, q. 30, a.1). It is an innocent “yes,” full of responsibility, a “yes” that dignifies the human subject who supports the creative work of God.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁶ ST. AUGUSTINE reminds us: “Seek therefore the highest agreeableness. Do not go abroad. Return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth. If you find that you are by nature mutable, transcend yourself. But remember in doing so that you must also transcend yourself even as a reasoning soul. Make for the place where the light of reason is kindled.” *De vera religione* (Henry Regnery Co., 1959), xxix, 72.

³⁸⁷ On the extent and depth of Mary’s “yes,” cf. PAUL VI, *Marialis cultus*, no. 37. “The beauty of Mary’s act of faith lies in the fact that it is the nuptial yes of a bride to her bridegroom, uttered in total freedom. Mary is the sign and the first flowering of the nuptials between God and his people, foretold by the prophets. Therefore, the prophet’s words are applied to her: ‘I will betroth you to me for ever... I will betroth you to me in steadfast love’ (Hos 2:16f). Faith is the wedding ring of these nuptials and God’s corresponding part is faithfulness.” RANIERO CANTALAMESSA, *Mary: Mirror of the Church* (Liturgical Press, 1992), 43. Cf. also: MICHELE GIULIO MASCIARELLI, *La Bellissima. Maria sulla “Via Pulchritudinis”* (Lib. Ed. Vaticana, 2012), 36-38.

³⁸⁸ MIGUEL IRIBERTEGUI ERASO, *María. Un don de Dios y una existencia de fe* (San Esteban, 2005), 26, translator’s version. A little further on he makes this reflection: “The yes is an emission, but in the ‘yes’, in the emission of ‘let it be done’, Mary is filled. It is a poor woman’s ‘yes’, but God takes her ‘yes’. The entire discourse of the Trinity is based on the brief ‘yes’, on the servant, on her womb. She, as a poor woman, only has a womb, but all of creation is reissued from her moist womb, like it had sprung from nothingness before, from the waters over which the Spirit hovered. The category of revelation rises in tone in Mary, with respect to the first creation. In creation the Word gave rise to many joyful words, ‘and saw

It is clear that the *way of beauty* is not a mere external and immobile indicator, but rather a route that must be followed, allowing ourselves to be seduced and becoming involved in our own journey. It is “*ordo amoris*.” With this Augustinian expression³⁸⁹ I want to emphasize how Mary is immersed in divine love – full of grace – and, therefore, in Beauty. She receives everything from the Trinity and maintains active relationships with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Mary manifests the Glory of God. What is why she is only understood in this *order of love* in which there is harmony between the Creator and the creature, between the descending and the ascending, between the intensive and the extensive; as well as between the visible and the invisible; between the remains and the foundation; between the finite and the infinite; between manifestation and recognition, between the exterior and the interior. Mary’s presence in our lives is active and intense, revealing and transforming. We need to be open and support her “do whatever He tells you” (Jn. 2:1-12), which is the key to enjoying Beauty and entering the Mystery of the Kingdom (of life, of light, of peace and of love).

However, there are some conditions or requirements for following this route. They are linked to the basic attitudes of the believer and, therefore, of the free person. Each of the attitudes must be marked by elegance.

1. *Be awake and integrated*. These are two phrases that I take from María Zambrano in her book “*Esencia y hermosura*.” For her, *estar despierto* [to be awake] “seems to consist in subjects being present to themselves; in their immediate feeling as *beings*.”³⁹⁰ (...) “To be awake, properly speaking, is to be alert, and attention acts like a guard in the night where the unlimited space of reality and the immensity of life appear; of all life, exposed.”³⁹¹ She writes about *incorporarse* [being integrated] in the sense of “entering into one’s own body, and entering into that other body of life; a strange body that has no outline, no entirely visible figure, whose presence is to flow, whose primary manifestation is to follow itself. The meaning of being integrated transcends the action of taking possession of one’s own body, because it is becoming part of a totality which is only present in its flow, in following it; a totality that only allows us to see a fragment of it, which is itself fragmentary.”³⁹²

that it was good, beautiful’, a lyrical profusion poured out in psalms, while He remained hidden. But in the incarnation, He Himself came as Word, made His first worldly stammer on the lips of Mary, became a human YES, the first translation of the divine Trinitarian YES, then passed to Joseph, to Mary Magdalene, to Peter who ‘took the Word’, ...to the liturgies of the bride, to the emotional hymns of the faithful. That is why Christians do not know what to think of Mary, they do not know how to give her full credit when they hear her call herself a servant, because they have to convince themselves that her word is the same as that of the Father, and that is so incredible... Immaculate Mary has the power to speak and say yes, because before that she was able to hear” (pp. 27-28, translator’s version).

³⁸⁹ For St. Augustine, virtue is the *order of love*. “Love itself is to be ordinally loved, because we do well to love that which, when we love it, makes us live well and virtuously. So that it seems to me that it is a brief but true definition of virtue to say, it is the *order of love*.” *De civitate Dei*, Book XV, Ch. 22. According to him, it is not enough to know the law, but one must love it, and love is shown in its fulfillment. The same could be said about beauty, that it is not enough to make a judgment of truth about it, but to be involved in it through love. Emmanuel Mounier, linked to the Augustinian current and the father of contemporary personalism, changes this *ordo amoris* in another broader axiom saying: “I love, therefore I am.” For a broader perspective, cf. REMO BODEI, *Ordo amoris. Conflitti terreni e felicità celeste* (Il Mulino, 1991).

³⁹⁰ MARÍA ZAMBRANO, *Esencia y hermosura. Antología* (Galaxia Gutenberg, 2010), 564, translator’s version.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, op. cit., 567, translator’s version.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, op. cit., 570, translator’s version.

These references suggest that only those who live and coexist can open themselves to the beauty of creation and humanity. Only those who are awake and integrated are subjects of aesthetic sensitivity. Those who stay asleep, distracted, carefree, lack aesthetic sensitivity; they do not live or coexist, because life is beautiful.³⁹³ They let themselves be carried and dragged, but they are not the masters of their direction and meaning.³⁹⁴ Beauty is there to be contemplated and loved and, therefore, shared. Only those who are alive, who are “awake and integrated,” and who share life, can be amazed by the greatness in the small things that surround us or by the sublime things that come to us and surprise us. Only from this experience can we let the glory of the Lord shine through us.

2. *Let ourselves be seen and see.* This is Mary’s twofold attitude in which she wants us to get involved. The Trinity fixed its gaze on her and we can contemplate the most beautiful woman, the “Tota Pulchra”. It is not so easy to let ourselves be seen, because we are in a hurry, we are focused on the immediate and we seek our own interests. Allowing ourselves to be seen is a sign of transparency, of recognition of our own poverty and of appreciation of what surrounds us; it is being open to the beauty that surrounds us and making room for others, for the Other; it is being available to welcome the word that speaks to us in his Son and in the events of history of which we are part and agents. Above all, allowing ourselves to be seen by God is allowing ourselves to be loved. Romano Guardini prayed: “Unceasingly, your eye rests upon me, and I live by your gaze.” Mary looks at us and helps us discover our own beauty and leads us to be amazed by the treasure we carry within: eternal love.³⁹⁵ This Mother’s gaze reveals to us the face of her Son, “Beauty above all beauty,” as Saint Catherine of Siena exclaimed.³⁹⁶

St. John of the Cross wrote: “When God looks, He loves and grants favors.”³⁹⁷ It is common to think about and value Jesus’ gaze (on the rich young man: Mark 10:21; on Peter who denied him: Lk 22:61-52; on his Mother at the foot of the cross: Jn 19:26), etc. We know that, every time we look at Him, He is telling us: “I love you.” And when do we think about Mary’s gaze? We can easily imagine the scope and strength of this gaze.³⁹⁸ We know of her “encounters” with the Angel Gabriel, with her cousin, with Jesus himself “lost” in the temple, with the bride and groom in Cana, with Jesus on Calvary, etc. Mary’s gaze is clear, because she is Immaculate; she is tender and caring because she is a Mother; she is compassionate and merciful because she takes on the mission of caring for us, as is the testament that her Son left her. She looks upon us and sings us a “new song,”³⁹⁹ she

³⁹³ Cf. JOHN-MARK L. MIRAVALLE, *Beauty: What It Is and Why It Matters* (Rialp, 2019); IÑIGO PIRFANO, *Ebrietas. Descubrir el poder de la belleza* (Ed. Encuentro, 2012).

³⁹⁴ Cf. PIERANGELO SEQUERI, “La bellezza di Dio e i suoi segni ci conservano il mondo,” *Avvenire*. (Nov. 18, 2009): 2.

³⁹⁵ The Ignatian invitation to collect ourselves at the beginning of prayer and think about how God looks upon us is wise. *Spiritual Exercises*, 75.

³⁹⁶ SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA, *Dialogue on Divine Providence*, Ch. 163.

³⁹⁷ ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS, *op. cit.*, Stanza 19. 6.

³⁹⁸ It is not only when praying the Salve (“turn then... your eyes”), but in many other prayers and songs where the desire is expressed that her gaze be directed towards us, towards her people. One of Pope Francis’ most frequent petitions to Mary is to look upon her people, the Church, and families.

³⁹⁹ Cf. ANTONIO LLAMAS, *Las miradas de María* (San Pablo, 1999). The author analyzes the history of salvation that is populated by “a gaze that taste like songs of love and memories, and enters into every home, every child, young person or adult. God’s gaze is always reflected in Mary’s clean and transparent gaze. (...) God perceived her smallness and fragility, her grace and her virginity, her fears and her troubles, her struggles and achievements. God was filling the maiden’s heart with smiles and songs. She was to interpret the pentagram of the encounter between God and the sons of men. She saw and whispered, Mary’s gaze and God’s words were in tune with the joyful melody of an endless music” (p. 14, translator’s version).

looks upon us and invites us to joy by reminding us of the Magnificat; she looks upon us and shows us Jesus, the blessed fruit of her womb; she looks upon us with eyes of mercy and shows us how she has defeated evil and opens the doors of salvation for us. She is the woman crowned with twelve stars.

The light and splendor that her gaze transmits makes us see the realities that surround us and the events in which we find ourselves involved, with different eyes and perceive the presence of beauty that nourishes and gives consistency to our lives.⁴⁰⁰ When we allow ourselves to be seen, our hearts soften and our way of seeing and appreciating things changes.

At this moment in society and the Church we need the strength and encouragement of Mary's gaze to discover and value the gift of life, its dignity and its capacity for happiness. Mary transmits the liberating energy of the gaze to discover beauty in the night, illness, the desert, persecution, the burning bush, and everyday life.⁴⁰¹ She can free our gaze, cure our blindness, return to us the light and splendor of what surrounds us. If we pay attention to our gaze,⁴⁰² we will feel seduced by the beauty that exists, but sometimes we deny it due to a misalignment in our gaze. We cannot forget what St. Paul said to the Romans: "What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them" (Rom 1:19). However, to appreciate all his splendor and beauty, we must practice asceticism or the purification of our gaze. Blessed are the pure in heart (Mt 5:8).

3. *Seek, listen and contemplate.* These are three attitudes inherent to aesthetic sensitivity – which we are called to cultivate – inspired and moved by Mary's maternal influence. She knew how to seek, listen and contemplate. In her was concentrated all the aspiration of the People of Israel to seek God.⁴⁰³ Psalm 63 reflects this attitude: "O God, you are my God, I seek you..." Being attentive and waiting for the promised Messiah, it is easy to imagine her praying saying: "Your face; Lord, do I seek, do not hide your face from me" (Ps 27).⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁰ Antonio Llamas adds: "The gaze of Mary, the Virgin, have the notes of love, the song of happiness, the smile of hope, the brightness of children's pupils, the fragrance of youth. Our mother's gaze generates other gazes, ours, those of all men and women. They are the tired, loving eyes of the elderly, the eyes of children, of artists, the fascinating gaze of workers and the tender hands and eyes of mothers. The eyes of the Virgin are those of so many sick men and women, the poor and abandoned, who penetrate with delight into the maternal heart of Mary. God has the maternal face of love, made visible in her." *Op. cit.*, 15, translator's version.

⁴⁰¹ It is the saints who have taught us to see, to look, to purify our gaze and to discover the mystery of God in what is apparently absurd. I am thinking of Moses, Elijah, Job, Samson, the Apostles and St. Paul, the founders and foundresses, St. John of the Cross and Brother Luis de León, the martyrs of all times. Closer to us I think of St. Maximilian Kolbe, Etty Hillesum, D. Bonhoeffer, Simone Weil, etc.

⁴⁰² Cf. BENJAMIN GONZÁLEZ BUELTA, "*Ver o perecer*". *Mística de los ojos abiertos* (Sal Terrae, 2006); XAVIER QUINZÁ LLEÓ, *Pasión y radicalidad* (San Pablo, 204), especially pp. 197-207; AMEDEO CENCINI, *Desde la aurora te busco* (Sal Terrae, 2019).

⁴⁰³ Cf. X. LEÓN DUFOUR, "Seek," *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Desclée Co., 1967), 467-468; OLEGARIO GARCÍA DE LA FUENTE, *La búsqueda de Dios en el Antiguo Testamento* (Fund. Juan March, 1971).

⁴⁰⁴ Seeking is a basic structure of human beings. It is not a useless or vain projection, but the desire to encounter the face of the one who fills us with life. Seeking is inherent to the condition of the human being who is a pilgrim. St. Augustine and St. Benedict are two classic references when talking about seeking. From an anthropological perspective, Spanish philosopher Xavier Zubiri delves deeper into the subject. In today's spirituality, there are various authors who deal with seeking according to the need we experience to reset our lives and reorient them, while trying to discern correctly.

Jesus, at a moment in his public life, after praising what God does for his people, invites us to “strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mt 6:33). Is there anyone more experienced than Mary in seeking the kingdom of God? She spent her life in this endeavor and continues her mission as a mystagogue so that her sons and daughters, through beauty, may participate in her Son’s kingdom.

To listen is another natural attitude of the Chosen People. “Hear, O Israel”: this is the echo that the pious Israelite keeps in his memory. Mary is the great listener of the Word at the Annunciation, at the Visitation, in the adoration of the shepherds, at the Presentation, at Cana, in the public life of Jesus and at the foot of the Cross. Listening permeated her entire life. An example of how she listened to the word of God can be seen in the Magnificat, which is made up of many references to the books of revelation.⁴⁰⁵ Mary listens in the synagogue and hears the voice of God within her. She listens to the Angel Gabriel, to Elizabeth, to the shepherds and the angels, to Simeon and Jesus. We have references in the Gospels (Lk 1:28; 1:30-33; 1:42-45; 2:34-35; 2:49; Jn 19:26). How she listens is essential: with simplicity, admiration and trembling, with gratitude and joy, with pain and hope. She is the perfect believer: “Whoever is from God hears the words of God” (Jn 8:47). She is beautiful in listening, and there is beauty in what she hears! It is the Mystery, the plan of salvation, which envelops and steeps her in light, truth and goodness.

To contemplate is another attitude that is typical of the great men and women of Israel, Moses, Isaiah, David, etc. Mary enters the saga of the contemplatives of the Chosen People. Mary is contemplative in Nazareth and throughout her life as the Mother of God.⁴⁰⁶ Jesus, explaining the parables, said: “Pay attention to what you hear” (Mk 4:24). Mary teaches us how to be contemplative. Only those who are open and keep their capacity for wonder active can listen well. St. Benedict asks his monks to listen “*attonitis auribus*”, with attentive ears, capable of being amazed. Contemplating in silence enables receptivity, safeguarding wonder and being welcoming and creative.

Josep Maria Esquirol gives us a beautiful definition of contemplation: “Contemplative people match their calm breathing with the equally calm breathing of the world... contemplative people have heard the yes of the world as an echo of the world itself.”⁴⁰⁷

I conclude with four statements, which are, in turn, indications for reviving and cultivating wonder through the way of beauty.

1) Beauty is a gift that illuminates (gives light), elevates and frees us from all slavery because it purifies every desire for power and selfishness. It has cathartic power.

2) Beauty urges us to move from the phenomenon to the foundation, from the visible to the invisible.

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. JOSÉ LUIS CABRIA ORTEGA, *Virgo audiens. María, oyente de la Palabra de Dios*. Inaugural lecture of the 2008-2009 academic year at the Faculty of Theology of Northern Spain. Burgos Campus. 65 pages. It is a very complete study with extensive bibliography.

⁴⁰⁶ MICHELE GIULLIO MASCIARELLI, *La Bellissima*, *op. cit.*, 49ff.

⁴⁰⁷ J. M. ESQUIROL, *La Escuela del Alma* (Ed. Acantilado, 2024), 130, translator’s version.

3) Beauty recalls what is eternal in the Liturgy because, in it – in the sacramental life of the Church – Beauty is the agent and protagonist.

4) Beauty strengthens the bonds of communion in love and encourages us – following the example of Mary and the saints – to enjoy the community of the redeemed.

Beauty, with its transfiguring energy, always leads to “what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9).

EPILOGUE

Every ending is a new beginning. A chance that life gives us to start over.

After following the paths along which we are invited to “cultivate wonder” with Cardinal Aquilino Bocos, a privileged opportunity opens up before us to exist fully and consciously, to marvel at the certainty of the permanent and unfinished action of God who strives to surprise us, to turn our gaze to what is fundamental in order to allow the goodness of children to move us, the humility of the little ones to convert us, the beauty of creation to seduce us.

Perhaps, all that remains is for us to decide, to open ourselves to grace and cultivate wonder:

CULTIVATING WONDER,
is to open oneself to the gift that is generously lavished,
on our fragile earth;
is to sense the hand that caresses our clay,
repairing cracks
and impregnating everything with the Spirit.

CULTIVATING WONDER
is to welcome the time of pruning,
that anticipates the flower,
recognizing that the night without stars,
hides a dawn,
and wandering through the desert,
indelible footprints are discovered.

CULTIVATING WONDER
is to feel an unshed tear,
on the edge of
vulnerability and the miracle;
is to contemplate a womb that becomes fertile,
amidst sterility and confusion.

CULTIVATING WONDER
is to intuit a presence, yours,
to hear a whisper and your Word,
to be embraced in the house of the poor,
by the surprise of a smile
and make the journey through every corner of history
feeling the brushstrokes of life and abundance

that nature lavishes.

CULTIVATING WONDER

is to mobilize when faced with the parrhesia of the prophet,
to be moved by the adamant going forth of the missionary,
and happily losing ourselves in the generous embrace of a friend.

It is to welcome love
which arrives abundant and free,
to put tenderness,
in the deepest
and indecipherable part of our hearts.

CULTIVATING WONDER

is to allow life to be transformed by the echo of a voice,
and with Mary agree to what is most human and radical:
Let it be done!

(Liliana Franco Echeverri, translator's version)

Cardinal Aquilino Bocos Merino, CMF

Cardinal Aquilino Bocos Merino, CMF, was a spiritual director of the Maronite College (Salamanca); a formator at the Claretian Theological College (Salamanca and Madrid); director of the magazine *Vida Religiosa*; initiator of the National Weeks of Religious Life; Provincial Superior of Castile; President of the FERE; General Consultor and Superior General (1991-2003).

He has been a member of the Council of the Union of Superiors General and of the Council of 16 of the CICLSAL. In 1994, Pope John Paul II appointed him a member of the Sacred Congregation for Religious.

He has participated in three Synods of Bishops and was made Cardinal of the Roman Church by Pope Francis in 2018.

He is the author of many books (some translated into several languages) and numerous specialized articles in magazines from different countries.

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